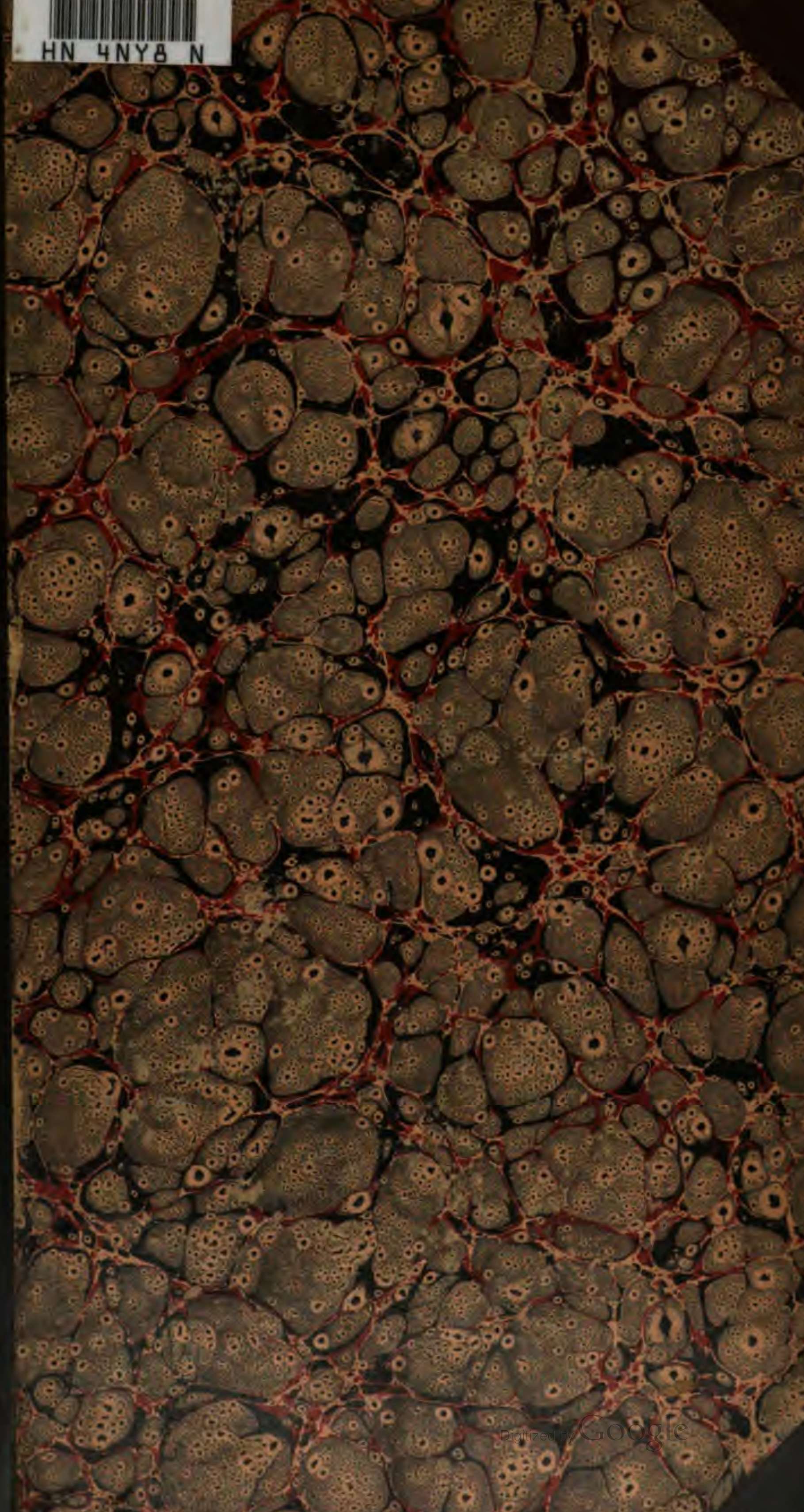
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Marcus M. Kimball

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KISSING THE ROD.

A Novel.

BY EDMUND YATES,

AUTHOR OF

"LAND AT LAST," "BROKEN TO HARNESS," "RUNNING THE GAUNTLET,"
ETC., ETC.

"The heart knoweth its own bitterness."

NEW YORK:
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,
FRANKLIN SQUARE.
1866.

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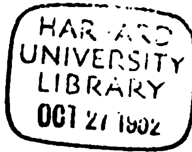

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Inscribed to

THE COUNTESS OF FIFE.

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KISSING THE ROD.

CHAPTER I.

DAZZLED.

There was no name on the door-posts, nothing beyond the number—"48"—to serve as a guide; and yet it may be doubted whether any firm in the city was better known to the postman, the bankers' clerks, and all who had regular business to transact with them, than that of Streightley and Son. The firm had been Streightley and Son, and it had been located at 48 Bullion Lane, for the last hundred and fifty years. They were money-brokers and scrip-sellers at the time of the South-Sea bubble, and were among the very few who were not ruined by that disastrous swindle. So little ruined were they that they prospered by it, and in the next generation extended their business and enlarged their profits; both of which, however, were considerably curtailed by rash speculations during the French Revolution and the American War. Within the first quarter of the present century the business of Streightley and Son recovered itself; and, under the careful management of old Sam Streightley and his head clerk, Mr. Fowler, the house became highly esteemed as one of the safest bill-broking establishments in the City. It was not, however, until young Mr. Robert, following the bounden career of all the eldest sons of that family, joined the business, and, after close application, had thoroughly mastered its details, that fortune could be said to have smiled steadily on the firm. Young Mr. Robert's views were so large and his daring so great, that his father, old Mr. Sam, at first stood aghast, and had to be perpetually supplicated before he gave permission to experiment on the least hazardous of all the young man's suggestions; but, after the son had been about two years a partner in the firm, it happened that the father was laid up with such a terrible attack of gout as to be incapable of attending to business for months; and when he at length obtained the physician's grudging assent to his visiting the City, he found things so prosperous, but withal so totally changed, that the old gentleman was content to jog down to Bullion Lane about three times a month until his death, which was not long in overtaking him.

Prosperous and changed! Yes; no doubt about that. Up that staircase, hitherto untrodden save by merchants' clerks leaving bills for acceptance or notices of bills due; by stags with sham prospectuses of never-to-be-brought-out companies; or by third-rate City solicitors giving the quasi-respectability of their names to impotent semi-swindles, which, though they would never see the light, yet afforded the means for creating an indisputable and meaty bill of costs—up that staircase now came heavy magnates of the City, directors of the Bank of England, with short, ill-made Oxford-mixture trowsers, and puckered coats, and alpaca umbrellas; or natty stock-brokers, most of them a trifle horsy in garb, all with undeniable linen, and good though large jewelry, carefully-cultivated whiskers, and glossy boots. In the little waiting-room might be found an Irish member of Parliament; the managing director of a great steam-shipping company; a West-end dandy, with a letter of introduction from some club acquaintance with a handle to his name, who idiotically imagined that that handle would serve as a lever to raise money out of Robert Streightley; a lawyer or two; and occasionally the bronzed captain of a steamer arrived with news from the Pacific; or some burnt and bearded engineer fresh from the inspection of a silver mine in Central America. A long purgatory, for the most part, did these gentlemen spend in the little waiting-room, or in the clerk's room beyond it, where they were exposed to the sharp fusilade of Mr. Fowler's eyes and the keen glances of the two young men who assisted him. The only people who were shown by the messenger at once into Mr. Streightley's presence were the City editors of the various newspapers, and a very prettily-appointed young gentleman, wise withal beyond his years, who occasionally drove down to Bullion Lane from Downing Street in a Hansom cab, and who was private secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Robert Streightley had done all this by his own talent and exertion—"on his own hook," as the Stock Exchange men phrased it. The keenness of his business intellect was astounding. He seemed to sift a proposition as it was being laid before him; and as soon as the proposer ceased speaking, Robert Streightley closed with or pooh-poohed the offer, with incontrovertible reasons for his decision. He spoke out plainly and boldly before the oldest and the youngest who sought his advice; he was neither deferential nor patronizing; and never sought to please—simply for the sake of pleas-

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ing—any of his clients. The young men looked up to him in wonder, and spoke of him over midday chops and sherry as a "cool card," a "long-headed chap," "just about one," and in other complimentary slangisms. The older men scarcely knew what to make of him; they hated him for his daring and success, for the dashing manner in which he was passing them all in the race for wealth and distinction; and they would have well liked to have shrugged their shoulders and hinted about his being "fast," and "going ahead," and finally making a grand smash of it; but they had no pretext. So long as Robert Streightley's business relations were thoroughly sound and wholesome, it would have been against that *esprit de corps* which largely prevails among City men to breathe a word against him; and as for his private life, they could scarcely bring a charge of reckless extravagance against a man who went home to a seventy-pound-a-year house at Brixton in the "Paragon" omnibus, and there indulged in the dissipation of a "meat-tea" in the society of his mother and sister. So they found another vent for their spleen, and talked of him as a "doosid close-fisted fellow," a "mean, narrow-minded hunks," and a "niggardly screw." He merited none of these appellations. He was a straightforward, honorable business-man, bred in a narrow circle, which his own innate business habits were narrowing year by year. As a boy he had had instilled into him the value of money and the secret of money-getting; as a young man the whole scope of his faculties had been directed to this end. Such little fancy as he possessed —and with such a father the smallness of that fancy could be easily divined — had been ruthlessly eradicated, and all the nascent tendencies of his mind had been directed into one strong channel of fact. That Jack had ever found giants to slay, that glass slippers were ever worn by cinder-wenches, or pumpkins could by any possibility become carriages, were fictions not to be found in Bonnycastle and ignored by Walkinghame; but that two and two made four, or that a talent of silver hid in a napkin remained an unproductive talent of silver, whereas a hundred pounds invested in Consols produced yearly three pounds as interest to its holder, were as demonstrable as the light and heat of the sun at noonday.

He lived but for his business—nothing else. He was in his office at ten o'clock, and he never left it, save on some business errand, until six. He never took a holiday except on Christmas-day and Good Friday, when the newspapers proclaimed all business suspended; he never dined out save twice or thrice a year at the anniversary banquets of the directors of some of those companies in which his stake was large. His enemies wronged him when they said he had no heart. He had sincerely grieved for the old father who had brought him up and loved him deeply in his own peculiar way; his purse-strings were always at the command of those good Samaritans on the Stock Exchange who do so much in such a quiet and unassuming manner; and the clergyman at Brixton knew he might always count upon Mr. Streightley for a handsome subscription to any charity brought under his notice. His manner was odd and *brusque*, arising partly from his preoccupation, partly from his having never mixed in society; but there was nothing pretentious or vulgar, fast or underbred in him: he might have been thought an oddity; he never could have been set down for a snob.

See him now as he sits at his desk, poring over his diary, a tall, strongly-built man, with long limbs lacking in due amount of muscular development from want of exercise; with a high forehead, a head prematurely bald, but surrounded with a thick fringe of brown hair; with sharp gray eyes looking out from overhanging brows, a thinly-cut aquiline nose, and rather full lips. He has a full whisker, after the ordinary respectable "mutton-chop" outline, and might, if he so pleased, have a large beard, as you can tell by the dark blue outline round his chin; but Robert Streightley would as soon think of coming up to town outside the Paragon omnibus in a turban as of committing any such unbusiness-like atrocity as growing a beard. One other person is in the room with him just now—Mr. Fowler, his chief clerk, known in the City as Downy Fowler; an old gentleman, who is looked upon as the essence of knowingness, and to whom the fortunes of Streightley and Son are not a little attributable. When this is hinted at, old Mr. Fowler smiles enigmatically; but only in strictest confidence, and to one or two very old friends, declares that, whatever he might have been to the old gentleman, he does not pretend to hold a candle to Mr. Robert, "whose head, my dear sir, is some-thing won-der-ful!" A short, sleek, gray-headed man, Mr. Fowler; with a high-collared coat much too long in the sleeves, a waistcoat with traces of by-gone snuff-pinches lingering in the creases, gray trowsers, and gaiter boots—a silent little man, rarely speaking, but in the habit of calling his principal's attention to matters under consideration, such as letters, invoices, and share-lists, with his pointed forefinger. That forefinger was at work at the very moment when they are first presented to the reader. It rested on an entry in the diary, and Mr. Fowler looked up into his principal's face inquiringly.

"Well?" said Robert Streightley, "I see. Markwell, £1350; Baxter, £870; Currie and Tull, £340; Guyon, £180 17*s*. 3*d*.; Banks, £97 6*s*. Total, £2888 3*s*. 3*d*.—paid to us by Davidson—due to-day—what of that?"

Mr. Fowler did not answer, but placed his forefinger more decidedly on one of the items of the account.

"Oh, I see," said Streightley; "Guyon's acceptance! Ay, ay; I recollect now. You called my attention to that, and declared that it was doubtful at the time that Davidson paid it in. Of course you made inquiries?"

Mr. Fowler nodded.

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"And they were unsatisfactory? Well, that's no matter to us. The usual notice has been served, of course? Very well, we look to Davidson; but let Boswell's people have the usual instructions to proceed. So Tierra del Fuegos stand the same, do they? All right, then; hold on. Ocean Marine have gone up; so that advance to Walton and Pycroft is well covered. Let Brattle step round to—well, what is it, Brattle?" this to the junior clerk, who, after knocking at the door, entered the room.

"A lady, sir, to speak with you," said Mr. Brattle, in whom his brother lunch-*convives* at the Bay Tree would scarcely have recognized the youth who now stood blushing before his principal.

"A lady! to speak with me?"

"With Messrs. Streightley and Son, sir, she said, and in private, sir."

"Must be some mistake," said Robert Streightley. "Never mind. Show the lady in through the private door, Mr. Brattle. Leave me, Fowler, and don't let any one in till I ring."

If Mr. Fowler could have expressed astonishment, he would have done so, for never had woman entered that sanctum since he had been connected with Streightley and Son. But his training did not admit of any such vagary; so he retired without a word, and the door closed behind him as Mr. Brattle admitted the visitor into Robert Streightley's presence.

Robert Streightley, who had been pretending to be absorbed in the diary, looked up, and carefully scrutinized his visitor. She was a girl of about twenty, above the ordinary height, slightly and gracefully built. She threw up her veil as she entered, without the smallest sign of coquetry, and showed a strikingly-handsome face, very pale, with greenish-gray eyes, delicate Grecian nose, small white forehead, over which her dark brown hair was drawn in flat bands, short upper lip, and small rounded chin. She was dressed in a dark brown silk, with a black lace cloak; and Streightley—usually unobservant of such things—noticed the wonderful fit of her lavender gloves. Streightley rose as she entered, and, pointing to the usual client's chair, begged her to be seated. She bowed, and seated herself. Then there was a little pause, and Robert said, "You wished to see me, I believe?"

"You are Messrs. Streightley and Son?" said the lady, interrogatively, in a musical but slightly timid voice.

"I am Mr. Streightley, the representative of the firm."

"That is what I wished to know," she replied, a little haughtily. "Of course I—what I would ask is—I am not accustomed to business terms— You are the—the person—who sent this?"

She laid her parasol on the table as she spoke, and took from the purse which she carried in her hand a small printed paper. Glancing at it, Robert Streightley saw that it was an ordinary commercial document, intimating to Edward Scrope Guyon, of 110 Queen Anne Street, that a bill for £180 17*s*. 3*d*., drawn on him by Davidson Brothers, lay due at Streightley and Son's, 48 Bullion Court, Lombard Street. As he returned it to her he said, "It is quite right; it was sent out by this house. It is the usual notice given in such cases, stating where the money is to be paid."

She was very pale as she said, "It means then that money—that the amount stated—must be paid?"

"It does indeed."

"And at once?"

"This is the day for payment," said Streightley. Then noticing her deadly pallor, and the trembling of her lips, he said, "May I ask how this came into your hands?"

With a visible effort at self-control, the young lady replied, "I—I should have mentioned it before. I am Miss Guyon, daughter of Mr. Guyon, to whom that paper is addressed."

She hesitated for a minute, and Streightley, whose eyes were fixed intently on her face, said,

"Ye-es! I think I understand; and he has sent you here to—"

"My father is not in the habit of sending me about on his business-errands, sir!" interrupted Miss Guyon, flushing scarlet. (Robert thought that in his life he had never seen any thing so lovely as she looked, with heightened color, swelling nostril, and curved lip.) "Mr. Guyon is out of town on—on very important and pressing business; and as he will not be back until late at night, I thought it best to come here to explain his absence, which will account for the money not being ready."

"Which will account for the money not being ready!" repeated Mr. Streightley, absently. "Oh, of course, of course. Pray do not say another word about it, Miss Guyon. I am very sorry that you should have had the trouble of coming here, except that it—it has procured me the—the great pleasure of seeing you!" (Robert had never before paid a woman a compliment, and was horribly awkward in his first attempt.) "I'll call on Mr. Guyon to-morrow morning about eleven, and—"

"And you'll bring your bill with you, will you?" said Miss Guyon, with supreme *hauteur*.

The word "bill" was in itself always disagreeable to her; but she had no idea but that this was an ordinary tradesman's account, and thought Robert Streightley was the tradesman to whom it was owing.

"Ye-es!" said he; "I'll bring the bill with me, and—"

"There is nothing more to be said, I think," interrupted Miss Guyon. "Good-morning."

"Good-morning, Miss Guyon. Permit me to see you down stairs."

She did not speak, but he construed a very slight bow into a gesture of assent, and proceeded down the staircase. Arrived at the door, he called the cabman, who was slumbering on his box; but the man's movements being slow, Streightley opened the cab-door himself, and,

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bareheaded, held it as Miss Guyon, with just the style of acknowledgment that she would have given to the shop-walker who handed her a chair at a linen-draper's, passed in. Old Mr. Pommylow, chairman of the West India Plantation Company, who was crossing the street at the time, gave him a great nod and a sly wink, and made them all laugh at the Board five minutes afterward by telling them he'd seen Bob Streightley "doing the polite to a doosid fine gal."

She was gone; but Robert Streightley still stood on the pavement, gazing after the cab that had carried her off. Then, after a minute, he turned slowly round and retraced his steps up the staircase, pondering over the interview.

After remaining for about half an hour in a brown study, he touched the small hand-bell by which he was accustomed to summon Mr. Fowler, and, without raising his head, said to that worthy gentleman when he entered,

"Give me that acceptance we were speaking of, please."

"Guyon's acceptance do you mean, sir?"

"Mr. Guyon's, if you please," said Streightley rather sternly, the familiarity jarring on his ear.

"Will you want the others, sir?" asked the old man. "Markwell's and Bankes are paid; but they haven't sent about the others yet."

"Only Mr. Guyon's, thank you, Fowler. I—I want to make a few inquiries about it."

"I don't expect you'll hear much good of the acceptor, sir," said old Fowler, with twinkling eyes. "I suspect it's one of Davidson's private discounts, and we know what they are—he, he!" and the old gentleman laughed quietly.

"Let me have the letters, if you please, Mr. Fowler, and any thing else there may be for signature. I shall be going soon."

"Going, sir!" said old Fowler, in the greatest astonishment. He had never known Mr. Robert leave before six o'clock since he had been in the business, and now it was only four.

"Yes. I'm not very well. I think I want a little fresh air, so I shall go and get it. And I shall probably not be here till twelve to-morrow, Mr. Fowler."

"Very well, sir." He said it most mechanically. If the equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington had descended from its pedestal and cantered up Threadneedle Street, Mr. Fowler would have been scarcely more astonished.

Mr. Robert Streightley went in search of fresh air through Holborn and Oxford Street to the West End. He so rarely quitted the City, he was so seldom out any where in the daylight, that the bright sun and the splendid shops, the pleasure-seeking crowds idling through the streets, the handsome carriages, and the general life and bustle, amazed, and, under any other circumstances, would have amused him. Even now he felt that he was wasting his life, letting his days pass by without any adequate enjoyment, and he determined that to a certain extent he would remedy that for the future by curtailing the hours devoted to his business, which had hitherto had his every energy. At the Regent Circus he paused and asked his way to Queen Anne Street, for he had determined to see the house where dwelt his lovely visitor of the morning. How lovely she was, and how confused and ridiculous she must have thought him; how different in manner to those with whom she was in the habit of associating; and how delightfully ignorant she was of all business matters! He wondered whether he should see her the next day when he called on her father. He would like to see her again, he thought; and what would he not give to be able to talk to her, and to get her to talk to him unreservedly, as no doubt she did to—to those of her own class! Yes, there was some good in his money and his business, after all. They had brought him in contact with this lovely girl, and in his transactions with her father he might perhaps be able to get to know her on other terms than those of mere business acquaintance. That was the house, No. 110, with traces of her presence in the lovely flowers in the balcony, and in the splendid Indian work-box standing on the gilt table in the drawing-room window. A handsome house, looking like the expenditure of two thousand a year at least, Streightley thought to himself; the expenditure, mind, not the income—his business education had taught him to look at those matters in their right light; and he remembered what Fowler had said about Mr. Guyon, and knew that the old clerk never spoke at random. A carriage was at the door of No. 110; and a footman standing by it said to his mistress as Streightley passed, "Not at home, my lady. Ridin' with Miss Wentworths and the Major in the Park." Not at home! that of course meant the lady of the house. But was there a Mrs. Guyon, or did the young lady whom he had seen do the honors of her father's house? He should imagine so; for she had come alone, and mentioned nothing of her mother. Riding in the Park, eh? Then he might have a chance of seeing her again! The Park was free to all; any one might go there, and—and the Major! who was the Major? Robert Streightley's spirits fell to zero again as he remembered Miss Guyon's manner to him that morning, and reflected how wide was the gulf between them.

He asked his way to the Park, and took up his position by the railings near the Achilles statue, gazing round him in wonder at all he saw and heard. The easy familiarity of the conversation between the ladies in the carriages or on the chairs, and the gentlemen attendant on them, was very different from the prim politeness of Peckham, or the boisterous *bonhomie* of Brixton; and he was particularly struck with the general acquaintance that nine tenths of the people lounging about seemed to have with each other. Robert felt painfully out of his sphere; he imagined that he was stared at as an interloper. For a long time he could not muster up

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courage to take his place at the railings, until he saw two carpenters, returning from work in their flannel jackets, stop for a minute to look at the passing pageant, and take up their position at the railings next to an old gentleman with a very blue coat and a very red face, who turned round and muttered something about "d—d impudence," which delighted the carpenters immensely. When they moved off, with grins at the old gentleman which reduced him to the verge of apoplexy, Robert slipped into the place they had left vacant, and remained there for some time, gazing in wonder at all he saw, and wishing—oh how fervently wishing!—to see *her* again.

At last his perseverance was rewarded. In the midst of a large cavalcade which came sweeping out of the Row, turning their horses' heads toward the Marble Arch, sat Miss Guyon, looking, in her neat hat, with her hair drawn off her face and gathered into a large knot behind, even more lovely than she had looked in the morning. Streightley's heart beat hard, and his mouth grew dry as he recognized her. As she rode past her glance fell upon him, but she did not take the smallest notice of him, merely shifting her whip as she held out her pretty little gauntleted hand to a young man riding between her and the railings, and who, as he lifted his hat in adieu, said, "Will you be at the Opera to-night?"

She replied, "At the Opera! Oh yes; box No. 70. Shall we see you?"

"Delighted!" he replied, bowing low, and turning his horse's head. "Good-day, Major!" and as the old gentleman on the other side of Miss Guyon acknowledged his salute, the young man turned his horse's head and rode away.

"At the Opera! she was going to the Opera!" Robert Streightley found himself vaguely repeating these words as he hurried down Piccadilly. He left the Park so soon as the cavalcade of which Miss Guyon formed part had passed out of sight. Good heavens, how lovely she was! how unlike any thing he had ever seen before! how elegant and graceful! He remembered noticing how closely her dark blue riding-habit fitted her, and he could see the pretty dogskin gauntlet as she put out her hand to—Ay, who was that she shook hands with? Not the Major; he was the old gentleman. Who was that who asked her if she were going to the Opera, and—? What on earth was it to him? He was nothing to Miss Guyon; very probably he should never see her again, and—Yes. He stopped suddenly in his hurried walk. Yes; he would see her again, and that night too. He had never been to the Opera; but any one could go there by paying; and, if he could not speak to her, he should at least be able to gaze upon her lovely face. He was a fool, and was losing his senses. What would they say in the City if they knew of this egregious folly? Here was a man of six-and-thirty running about, like a school-boy in his calf-love, after a girl whom he had only seen that morning, and had scarcely spoken to! It was very ridiculous, he acknowledged, and he would give it up. He would just call on Mr. Guyon in the way of business in the morning because he had promised to do so, and the affair would be at an end. But he thought he would go to the Opera that night. You see, he had never been there, and had often wanted to know what the place was like.

He went into a well-known dining establishment and had some dinner, and—an unusual thing with him—drank a pint of wine. He had learned of the waiter what time the Opera commenced; and as soon as the clock-hands reached half past seven, he hurried off and presented himself at the pit entrance, where, on account of his morning costume, he was refused admittance. He was told, however, that there would be no obstacle to his admission into the amphitheatre, and he accordingly climbed into that wild region, and there secured a front seat. He had hired a glass from the check-taker, and with it he now proceeded to scan the house, as yet cold and nearly empty. Miss Guyon was not there. The Opera commenced, and still she did not arrive. Streightley, plying his glass at two minutes' intervals, at length saw her advance to the front of a box on the first tier and take the seat with her back to the stage. With her was the lady whom he had seen in the carriage at the door in Queen Anne Street; and they had scarcely been seated ten minutes before they were joined by the young man who had been of Miss Guyon's party in the Park. Streightley recognized him in an instant, and hated him for his easy manners and his good looks; for he was a good-looking young fellow of six-and-twenty, with fair hair parted in the middle, regular features, and brilliant teeth. Other men visited the box during the evening, but this young fellow only went away once, and then Streightley saw him in the stalls with his glass riveted on Miss Guyon, who, as he also remarked, attracted a great deal of attention. Then he returned to the box and remained there during the rest of the evening, until nearly the close of the opera, indeed, when Streightley saw the party preparing to move. Robert instantly seized his hat, and, rushing down stairs, arrived at the door in time to hear loud shouts of "Lady Henmarsh's carriage stops the way!" and to see the visitor of the morning on the arm of an old gentleman, and Miss Guyon closely escorted by the fair-haired equestrian. As she stepped into the carriage, Miss Guyon looked up at her attendant cavalier with a smile that Robert Streightley would at that instant have sacrificed all his wealth to have had directed at him. He was mad with rage and jealousy, and could have struck down the simpering fool, who muttered something inaudible under his breath, and raised his hat as the carriage drove off.

What had he said in return for that look? That Robert Streightley could never know. Who was he who created the first pang of jealousy that had ever rankled in Streightley's heart? That he would learn at once; he

would follow the man, and see where he lived, and learn who he was.

The young man lit a cigar and strolled leisurely eastward. Following him at a little distance, Streightley never took his eyes from him, saw him stop at the Temple Gate, and reached the door as it closed behind him. To the porter Mr. Streightley gave the name of an acquaintance who resided in Brick Court, and on being admitted saw his quarry just ahead of him. He needed caution now, for theirs were the only footsteps that echoed through the courts; but the young man, without looking round, made his way to Crown-Office Row, and entered one of the end houses nearest the river. Streightley entered after him, and remained at the bottom of the staircase listening to his ascending footsteps, which paused when they reached the topmost story, and then the listener heard the grating of a key in a lock, and afterward the clanging of a closing door. He waited a few minutes, and then crept softly to the highest story, where were two sets of chambers. One set, as announced by a painted tin placard, was to let; over the other were painted the names of Mr. Gordon Frere and Mr. Charles Yeldham.

CHAPTER II.

A MORNING CALL.

At nine o'clock the next morning, an hour later than his usual time, Robert Streightley entered his little dining-room and sat down to breakfast. He looked pale and fatigued, and there was an unnatural and unusual brightness in his eyes that at once attracted the notice of old Alice, who had been the nurse of his childhood, and was now the housekeeper and confidential servant of the little family. The old lady was jealously careful of the health of "her boy," as she always spoke of him, and was accustomed to use the license of tongue allowed her in many caustic remarks. She came into the room just as Robert seated himself at the table, and at once commenced to address him in her least conciliatory manner.

"Oh, you have got down at last, have you, Master Robert? I thought you was never coming, and there you might have lied before I'd have come up to help you! That's what I say, and what I mean."

"What's the matter, Alice? you don't seem pleased this morning."

"Pleased? Who should be pleased, and a lovely steak and mushrooms left to burn itself away to a cinder, and you never coming home to dinner! To dinner, indeed! not coming home till all hours of the night. I heard your key in the lock, though you thought I was asleep, as all good Christians ought to have been at such an hour; but I heard you. And not foreign-post night either, nor West Indy mail, nor one of them City dinners, else you'd have been home to dress, or took your bag with you to the office. Well, it's not for an old woman like me to say, but there's no doubt you're doing too much, slaving like no blackamoor that ever I read of, and all for what? All for— It's as good bacon as ever was cured, though you do push your plate away in that fashion. Try a bit, Master Robert—come, now!"

"I can't, Alice. My mouth's out of taste. I've no appetite this morning; give me a cup of tea—there's a dear soul—and let me be quiet."

"Let you be quiet! You don't think I'd bother you, do you? Cup of tea, indeed! You'll want more than a cup of tea if you go on in this way, sitting up till all hours and fagging yourself over your business. I'm sure your 'ma and Miss Ellen will think you looking quite ill, when they come back from York; and it's all that dratted office as is doing it. I should like to see any body else who sticks to it as you do, and all for what—that's what I want to know? All for what? If you was a struggling on with nine children to educate and do for, you couldn't grind at it harder than you do; and you'll find it out sooner than you expect. Ah! Robert," exclaimed the old woman, suddenly softening in her tone, and coming up close to him, "Robert, my own dear boy, don't be so headstrong, deary; don't work your life away in this fashion. There's no one knows you so well as I do, and I see you're doing too much, and you're beginning to show it. Don't work so hard, my boy, my own dear boy!"

Robert Streightley put up his big arm and pulled down the old woman's head, and pressed her hard rough cheek, down which the tears were flowing silently, close to his own. Then, with an affectation of cheerfulness, he said,

"Why, Alice! why, nurse! you must not fancy such foolish things, old lady. I am perfectly well and hearty; only a little done-up this morning, perhaps, after an extra pressure of business yesterday, which kept me up rather later than usual, but otherwise all right."

"I'm a foolish old woman, I know, Robert; but I love you very dearly, and you're all I've left to love; and when you don't come home I get frightened and nervous, and fancy you're doing too much, and that you ought to be here, in the dining-room, reading your newspaper, or having your little nap, as usual, in the evenings, instead of working away at that horrible office to all hours. And you won't be home to-day again, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, indeed I shall! What made you think that?"

"Why, you've got on that blue frock-coat, and a white waistcoat, and your best cravat, just for all as you dress yourself when you go to them ship-launches, or Greenwich dinners of your companies, or other places which keep you away from where you're best—at your own home."

Streightley smiled, rather a ghastly smile, as he said, "Oh no! I'm only going to call on

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some rather particular people, who—it's best to—at all events—I mean, who are accustomed to something different from us—City fellows, you know!"

It was feebly said, and feebly received by old Alice, who looked very grim, and only remarked, "Ay, ay—ay, ay!"

He made but a very poor apology for a breakfast, and said not a great deal more to his old friend, who stood by, vainly hoping for that "chat" with her boy which was the prime event of her day. But this morning Robert Streightley was preoccupied; he sat over the table long after he had finished eating, idly playing with the crumbs, and evidently buried in thought. At length he roused himself, and, after referring several times nervously to his watch, he started for town.

It was his habit to go by omnibus; and from his long residence at Brixton he was known to all the coachmen on the road, each of whom, on passing, gave him a semi-respectful, semi-inviting salutation. But Robert Streightley was not inclined for an omnibus-ride this morning; he felt somehow that such a mode of conveyance would not accord with the world a glimpse of which he had had on the previous day, nor with the errand on which he was proceeding; so he hailed the first disengaged Hansom, and was driven rapidly to Queen Anne Street—so rapidly, that when he alighted from the cab at the corner of the street he found it yet wanted twelve minutes of eleven, the hour he had named for his interview with Mr. Guyon. He could not be before his time; that would be as much against the strict business rule in which he had been brought up as being behind it would argue either leisure or a strong interest in the matter then on hand, and neither supposition he thought advisable in respect to him. So he determined to eke out the time, and for that purpose strolled up a side street, and found himself gazing vacantly on the dressing and exercising of horses and the washing of carriages in a mews, at the entrance to which he stood for some little time. After walking round and round, and circling a very narrowed square, he found that the back part of Mr. Guyon's house looked into this mews; and then he busied himself with wondering which was Miss Guyon's room, and whether she were there at that time, and whether she had thought of him since the interview in the City, and what she had thought of him, and— And then, looking at his watch, he found the eventful hour had arrived; so he walked boldly round, and, ringing the bell, demanded to see Mr. Guyon.

A colorless footman, with light hair and weak eyes, in a very washed-out lilac-striped jacket and dusty gray trowsers, answered the bell, and showed Streightley into the dining-room. This was a cheerless apartment, painted salmon-color, with a dozen Cromwell chairs in faded American cloth and spurious oak ranged round the room, but with some genuine ancestors, a Lely, a couple of Knellers, a Reynolds—such a conception of female childish purity and grace!—and a Lawrence, hanging on the walls. The Turkey carpet was faded and patched; the green table-cover was stained and torn; the window-blinds were yellow, and damp-stained; and every where there was a *laissez aller* which generally bespeaks the absence of female government. The mantel-piece was covered with purple velvet blurred with sticky rings made by overflowing glasses; in the centre of it lay an oxydized-silver cigar-ash holder in the form of an open-spread leaf, in which still remained the ends of a couple of half-smoked cigars; and in the looking-glass, between the glass and the frame, were invitation-cards, photographs of boxers, and ladies of the Parisian theatres, all wearing the same scanty drapery and leering the self-same leer—applications for payment of queen's taxes, and notices that the "collector had called" for the water-rate. Robert Streightley had gazed round him; and with the power of appreciation innate in him, had remarked these various objects and indications, when the door opened quickly, and Mr. Guyon entered the room.

Mr. Guyon, none but he; no mistaking him. In the bold face that flashed upon him Streightley recognized a coarser and stronger rendering of Miss Guyon's every feature—the delicately-cut, slightly aquiline nose, the small rounded chin, the vivacious green-gray eye. Mr. Guyon's hair, which was rather sparse and thin, was of a different color from his daughter's; was, indeed, in itself of two distinct hues, being very black and glossy in certain lights, and very purple and lustreless in others. His complexion, too, was peculiar—mottled and speckled, something like a plover's egg, save just under the eyes, on the top of the cheek-bones, where it had a very roseate hue. He was dressed in a loose blue silk jacket, with a red collar and red sleeve-linings, and wore a pair of Turkish trowsers, tied round the waist with a cord like a bell-rope. His turn-down collar was cut very low, showing a great deal of bony throat; his wrist-bands were long, fastened with elaborate carbuncle studs, and coming far down over his white, well-shaped hands. He wore striped-silk socks of the rather loud pattern—which, seen at the theatre under the loose garb of the mandarin, enables us to make a tolerably accurate guess at the identity of the person in the pantomime who is to be "afterward clown"—and natty red morocco slippers. He came into the room with a rush, had Robert Streightley by the hand in an instant, and forced him into a chair as he said,

"Mr. Streightley, this is kind indeed! This is an honor I can never forget!"

Streightley, rather taken aback at the warmth of his reception, said, "It is nothing, Mr. Guyon. I can assure you I merely called because—"

"I know, my dear sir, I know. My daughter explained to me what she did yesterday, and how generously you received her." Robert's eyes brightened as he listened. "Women, you know, my dear sir, are all impulse. You are a

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married man, my dear Mr. Streightley? No! well, still, my dear sir, I dare say—ha, ha!—that you have thorough experience of the other sex. When a man is young, and pleasing, and rich—oh yes, by George, rich—ha, ha!—he has opportunities of studying the other sex, even if he be not married. Not married? Let me see, what was I saying? Oh, my daughter—who is the prop and sunshine of my life, the dearest and most devoted creature in the world—my daughter has told me of the document which caused her such fright. It was—it was merely the—usual notice, I suppose?"

"It was the usual notice."

As Streightley said this, a loud peal at the door-bell attracted his attention.

"And the amount?"

"A hundred and eighty pounds odd—stay, I have the bill with me;" and, drawing out his pocket-book, Robert produced the document. As he did this, he heard the street-door opened, and the sound of a man's footsteps passing the dining-room and going up stairs. His heart sank within him. He would swear to that footfall—swear to it any where; had he not heard it twelve hours before echoing up the hollow staircase in Crown Office Row? It was that man; and he was going up stairs to see Miss Guyon, doubtless in fulfillment of some appointment made during the exchange of bows and glances at the carriage-door last night. He turned deadly pale, and his lips trembled.

"Will you allow me to look at that bill?" said Mr. Guyon, in his most mellifluous tones. "Thank you. How your hand trembles!—a little chill, perhaps. Draw closer to the fire. We seem to have begun the cold weather already. For my own part, I could always endure a fire—oh, this is really very bad of Davidson—very bad indeed!" He had been surveying the document which Streightley had handed to him through a pair of gold double eye-glasses perched on the bridge of his nose; and he now looked over them at Streightley as he repeated, "Very bad indeed!"

"I—I beg your pardon—my attention was diverted. What did you say?"

"I said, Mr. Streightley," said Mr. Guyon, with increased sternness, "that this is a very bad business of Davidson's. I gave him this acceptance, sir, to help him in—the what do you call it?—the hour of need, under the full understanding that he would meet it. It was for his convenience, not for mine. I never had a shilling of the produce; and now he leaves me to discharge it at a time when he knows that—"

"That it will be inconvenient to meet it?"

"You anticipate my words, sir. What with paying calls on shares, and investments in certain other affairs which I have authority—almost as good as yours, my dear sir—for believing in, my balance at my banker's is at its lowest permissible ebb."

"If it will be any accommodation to you, Mr. Guyon, I'll send my check to meet this acceptance, and I'll take another from you at three months," said Streightley, nervously. If he were ever to be received up stairs, it must be through the father's influence.

"My dear sir, a thousand thanks! I'm really very much obliged to you—very much obliged. I'm sure any terms which—"

"I think the Bank rate is three and a half just now," interrupted Streightley, with a slight smile; "we money-brokers charge one per cent. in advance of that; so that you see I make something off you, after all."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Guyon, advancing toward him with outstretched hand, "you endeavor to make light of an obligation, but I'm too much of an old soldier not to know the service you have rendered me. And I thank you for it—I thank you for it! In these leveling days, when a gentleman meets a gentleman, they should close ranks and march together, by George! Give me your hand, sir. I'm proud to make your acquaintance. I hope to renew it. There are not many that Ned Guyon sees at his table, because, perhaps, he's infernally particular, and does not choose to mix with cads. But those who come are of the right sort, and he'll be proud to see you among them."

"You're very good, I'm sure," said Streightley. "Perhaps you'll give me a call in the City in a day or two, and we'll put this matter on a business footing. And now I must be off. I shall be delighted to come whenever you ask me — and — my compliments to Miss Guyon. Good-day!" and with a warm shake of his new acquaintance's hand—a shake which was enthusiastically returned—Robert Streightley took his departure.

Left to himself, Mr. Guyon plunged his hands into the pockets of his Turkish trowsers and strode several times up and down the room, finally stopping in front of the looking-glass and soliloquizing: "A rum start—a devilish rum start! I thought I'd seen every variety of discounters, but I never met one who behaved like that before. What the devil was his motive? he had one, of course; but what the devil was it?"

Meanwhile a very different scene was being enacted in the drawing-room. Robert Streightley's prescience had not deceived him. The ring at the bell, which acted with such electrical effect on Streightley's nerves, was given by the young man whom he had followed to his chambers on the previous evening; the footstep passing up the staircase was his footstep; and the colorless footman, throwing open the drawing-room door, announced him as "Mr. Gordon Frere." Miss Guyon looked up from the flowers she was tending, and her cheek slightly flushed. The flush was very becoming to Miss Guyon—at least Mr. Frere approved of it highly, as he did of her high-cut, mouse-colored plush dress, her neat linen collar fastened with a handsome dead-gold brooch, her long cuffs, and her simply-arranged hair.

"You are early, Mr. Frere," said Miss Guyon, as she extended her hand to her visitor;

but she made the remark in a tone which marked her approval of the circumstance.

"Yes," he replied; "I feared you might have gone to the Park if I came later."

"I don't ride to-day," said Katharine, with a bright smile; "papa is busy, and I did not make any other arrangements."

She moved away from the table over which she had been bending as she spoke, and seated herself in a low chair, happily placed in the shade of the window-curtain. Gordon Frere took his seat upon an ottoman near her, and contemplated the lining of his hat with close attention. Not that he was at all awkward—awkwardness was not in Mr. Frere's nature, certainly not in his habits—but he was not a particularly ready talker, and under the circumstances this seemed the correct thing to do. Katharine Guyon's manners were, in certain respects, perfect; they were, indeed, rather too perfect and independent; she presented too complete a contrast to the drooping-lily style of girl; and she never suffered from a sense of embarrassment. It was not, therefore, shyness which lent her downy cheek that beautiful flush it had worn at the entrance of her visitor, and continued to wear, or that softened glance which darkened the color and deepened the expression of her eyes. She was very glad to see him, and she showed her gladness; and there was a pleasant gleeful ring in the tone in which she talked to him of the various but trivial events of the preceding day, of their common acquaintances, and of the delights of last night's opera.

Her voice and accent were remarkably refined, and the tone of her conversation, though its matter was only of the ordinary kind, was far removed from the commonplace. She touched her topics lightly and easily, let them go without too much handling, and gradually infused into her companion some of the brightness and buoyancy which animated herself. Gordon Frere had seen her sufficiently often to be familiar with most of her moods, and with all the variations of her appearance, for hers was by no means the "beauty forever unchangingly bright," which is also undeniably uninteresting; but he began to think that he had never seen her to so much advantage as on this occasion, and to discover new charms in her, as she sat and talked to him, in her clear fresh voice, and her low, happy laughter broke every now and then the tenor of their dialogue.

What did they talk about? That would be difficult to tell; and the discourse, written down, which suffices to charm and engross two young persons, already very well disposed to regard each other as the most bewitching and delightful individuals in the world, would have singularly little attraction for a third party outside that enchanted pale, which incloses within a magic circle the sayings and doings of those under the spell. The pleasantest "talks" are those which have the least in them; the best-remembered interviews are frequently those in which there have been no salient features, of which it would be hardest to render an account —those in which acquaintance passes into knowledge, and grows into friendship after a strange fashion, distinctly felt, but not to be described. When the transition is not from acquaintance to friendship, but from liking to love, the process is even more difficult of description; and a transition of this kind was taking place in the pretty, if not particularly neat drawing-room which formed so striking a contrast to the apartment beneath it, in which Mr. Guyon and Robert Streightley had held a parley, destined to influence the future fate of Katharine and her visitor very materially.

What did they not talk of? that is to say, within the wide range of topics possessing interest for their young light hearts—the festivities performed during the past week, and anticipated for that to come; the prospects of a charitable bazar, at which Miss Guyon had kindly consented to take a stall (Mr. Frere was very happy in his anticipation of the unqualified success of the speculation); the Opera *répertoires* for the season; the last new varieties of flowers at the Botanical (Miss Guyon loved flowers and understood them); the last new novel, and the forthcoming poem by the Laureate. Then they discussed Tennyson in general, and Katharine quoted him in particular—an achievement in which Gordon Frere could not imitate her, his appreciation being vague, though genuine; and Katharine "tried over" one or two of the airs which they agreed to prefer among those in fashion just then; and time flew, and the young people felt decidedly happy.

Miss Guyon played brilliantly; her music had a great deal of the "dash" about it which characterized her appearance and her general demeanor. She was one of those women who do every thing well which they undertake at all, and the finish of her manner extended to all she did. She had another peculiarity; perhaps not a safe or advantageous one in the end, but pleasant and effective then. She could do certain things with impunity which girls in her position, however effectually "come out," could not have attempted. She set conventionality aside when it suited her to do so, but the boldest and most ill-natured critic would never have accused her of outraging it. The men who tempt women into departure from the rules, made and appointed for their conduct and customs by a society more remarkable for suspicion than for intelligence, are precisely those who most severely condemn them for yielding to the temptation. But there was neither guidance nor following in Miss Guyon's case. She was an exceptional woman, placed in circumstances which are, fortunately, not very common; and she went her own way, and kept to it unmolested; and if not uncriticised, criticised as little as any one possessing youth, beauty, talent, and individuality of character could expect to be.

So Miss Guyon talked to Gordon Frere, and played for his delectation, and quoted poetry to him, and made herself most agreeable; and his

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stay prolonged itself much beyond the customary limits of a morning visit; and yet she never felt that this was any thing unusual, or was conscious that her self-possession was beyond that of other girls, or her manner more assured than theirs. She never thought about it at all; she enjoyed the present time and the young man's society; she accredited him with all sorts of social talents and bright congenial tastes, and no suspicion ever occurred to her that he was merely reflecting some of her own readiness, brilliancy, and versatility. And Gordon Frere, was not "he too in Arcadia?" Over the girl's whole bearing an indescribable softness, a winning grace was thrown—the subtle, all-powerful charm created by the desire of pleasing; perhaps the most potent, and frequently the most unconscious, in a woman's possession. She looked her best, she talked her best, the animation of her manner never passing the bounds of perfect refinement, but ever spontaneous and unsubdued; the simple grace of her figure, the sensitive beauty of her face must have touched and warmed a duller man than Gordon Frere. There was a delicious flattery in her undisguised pleasure in his society which he felt with a subtler sense than he had ever before experienced; for there was no one to share it here. She was shining, she was sparkling for him alone. This was something different, something much more delightful than the ride in the Row, or the dance in the ballroom, to which he was tolerably well accustomed, and which he might have gone on enjoying for some time longer without being inspired by the intense admiration which began to possess him as he looked at her and listened to her, as he recognized the genuine charm of her manner, unspoiled by the faintest tinge of self-consciousness or coquetry.

"Do you know much of the City?" Katharine said, after a slight pause in their conversation; "do you often go there?"

"No, indeed," said Frere; "I seldom have occasion; and my rambles eastward rarely extend beyond the Temple. But why do you ask? Do you take an interest in the City?"

"I do," she returned, thoughtfully; "I should like to explore it thoroughly for the sake of its present and its past. I have never seen any thing of it since I was a child, and they took me to the Tower, and Guildhall, and the Thames Tunnel all on the same day; and I remember nothing but a hideous figure of Queen Elizabeth, the block—which frightened me—Gog and Magog, and my own fatigue. I was horribly tired when I came home; and when, on another holiday, they wanted to take me to St. Paul's, and told me about the winding stairs and the whispering gallery, I positively declined the proposed diversion. So I have never really seen the City. I drove through a part of it yesterday, and a very dingy part it was too; and I thought how much I should like to see it all and think over it all."

"I don't suppose many people think of it in that way," said Mr. Frere; "to the world at large it's only a huge counting-house, a busy bee-hive, a crowd of places where money is to be made, and of men intent on making it."

"But even in that aspect it is very interesting," said Katharine; "and in that aspect I was considering it when I looked at the great warehouses and offices, and saw the names whose very sound is golden, the names famous all over the world. But, after all, these people must lead horribly stupid lives, forever toiling at money-getting. I don't suppose they have time to enjoy spending it when it is made. Only fancy how dreadful to have to go to these dingy places every day, and stay there all day long."

"That is true," said Gordon Frere. "The lives of City men do not seem very enviable, or indeed bearable to us; but there must be a compensation in them. Some of them must absolutely *like* plodding, for they go on with it long after they need not, as a matter of choice."

"Do they?" asked Katharine, in a tone of surprise. "I saw a 'City man' when I was there—I had a little business to attend to for papa, as he was not at home—and he had such a settled, business-like look, though he was not at all old. I could not fancy him ever taking any pleasure or amusement, or being like other people—of course, I mean," she added, explanatorily, "any of the pleasures of his class."

"Oh, I suppose not," said Frere; "a regular grub, who will be what he will be content to call rich when he's gray and gouty. But they have one consolation, Miss Guyon: as their business and their pleasure alike consist in money-getting, the one is not purchased at the expense of the other."

"Like ours," she said, with a laugh, "when we have any business." Then she went on again, thoughtfully as before: "I should like to go all through the City; not for the sake of seeing the places where all the money that I have nothing to do with is made, but because so much of our old history was acted out there. I suppose in the City one can get a sight of the old landmarks; and they are certainly not to be found outside it. It is rather odd that every thing that is most dignified connects itself in one's mind with City places, and every thing that is most vulgar with City people. If one could only see it after all the money-grubbers are gone away, and when it is still and quiet in the evenings, as they say it is—"

"And when, accordingly, the most ingenious and charmingly-sensational robberies are perpetrated," said Gordon Frere, laughing. "Well, that is a wish easily gratified. Who was the man who always said, when any place was mentioned, 'Let's make a party and go'? No matter, we will echo him. I know a man who knows lots of City men, who would be delighted to show you every thing worth seeing; and then there are books, you know, which tell one the history—I was going to say the pedigree—of every place. But I suppose Mr. Guyon has City acquaintances also?"

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Gordon Frere asked the question inadvertently, and felt rather guilty when he had done so; for he had heard certain rumors which left him in no doubt at all as to the nature of Mr. Guyon's acquaintance with the far east.

"I dare say he has," replied Katharine, carelessly, "but I don't know any thing of them. My business was only with a tradesman, a person named Streightley, and I have never heard papa mention his business friends."

And then the conversation drifted to other topics, and Gordon Frere shortly after took his leave. This morning visit had been unlike the ordinary events of his days, and he felt toward Katharine Guyon as he left her as he had never felt before. And Katharine? She had reseated herself at the piano as he left the room, and her fingers had strayed for a few moments over the keys; then her hands fell idly into her lap, and, in the sunshine of the summer day, unbroken by the stir and noise in the street, there came upon the fair young girl that wonderful waking trance whose vision is "love's young dream."

The trance was broken by the entrance of her father. Mr. Guyon's manner, always light and airy, was on this occasion lighter and airer than usual. He walked up to the piano, bent over his daughter, and giving her a paternal kiss, said, "Who was your visitor, Kate?"

Not without a repetition of the blush, Katharine said, "Mr. Frere, papa."

"Mr. Frere!" repeated Mr. Guyon—"ay, ay, a good fellow, Gordon Frere—a good fellow! Wants ballast, perhaps!" added he, reflectively, as though he himself were provided with more than an average amount of that commodity—"wants ballast; but that will come. By the way, Kate, I've had your City friend of yesterday with me—Mr. Streightley."

"Indeed, papa!" said Katharine, carelessly. It was a great descent from Gordon Frere to the City man, Mr. Streightley. She rose from the piano as she spoke, and crossed to the mantel-shelf, on which she leaned her arm.

"Indeed, papa! Yes, and indeed, papa, and no mistake. It's a most remarkable thing, and I can't make it out. You don't understand business matters in detail, but you'll be able to follow me when I tell you that this Streightley, who has the name of being a deuced sharp man of business, has behaved to me in a deuced liberal and gentlemanly way—a deuced liberal and gentlemanly way! And what on earth can have been his motive—for of course he had a motive—what on earth can have induced him to show me any special favor, I can't divine."

"Can't you, papa?" said Miss Guyon. She was looking at herself in the glass, pushing back the hair from off her temples. A slight smile curved her lip, and she looked splendidly handsome. Mr. Guyon, glancing at her, caught the expression reflected in the glass, and sprang to his feet.

"By George, Kate, I've hit it! the man's in love with you!"

"Is he?" said Katharine, simply. "I noticed him in the Park yesterday afternoon, and standing outside the Opera last night."

"You're an angel!" said Mr. Guyon, again performing the paternal salute. "What are you going to do to-morrow?"

"I thought of going to the Botanical Gardens in the afternoon—it's the last *fête* of the season."

"You shall go! I'll take you myself! You—you have not asked young Frere to call again, have you?"

"No, papa. I—"

"Of course. I only wanted to know. Don't, until I tell you. And now I must be off. God bless you, my child!"

But, though Mr. Guyon took farewell of his daughter, he was not "off" yet; for he spent half an hour in his dressing-room, his head resting on his hand, and his busy mind full of thought.

CHAPTER III.

WITHIN THE PALE.

Three days had elapsed since the interview between Katharine Guyon and Gordon Frere, which had gone so far toward deciding the destiny of both, when that haughty young lady learned, with some astonishment and more disdain, that her father had it in contemplation to invite Mr. Streightley, the "tradesman" on whom she had called "in the City," to one of his quiet and limited, but very *recherché* dinners. She heard the announcement with such surprise that her father actually took the trouble of observing the expression of her face, and laughed quite spontaneously at it.

"That person, papa?" asked Katharine.

"Yes, my dear, 'that person,' as you call him, with the pretty insolence which is more becoming than reasonable. And more than that, Kate, you must make yourself agreeable to that person, and we must have pleasant people to meet him, for he has done me a great service, and is likely to do me several good turns, and to be a very useful acquaintance."

"But, papa," pursued Katharine, who was accustomed to hold her ground in words, as well as to have her way in actions, "he is not in our set, or in any set, I should think. A City person—a tradesman! I really can not see—"

"I dare say not, Kate," said her father, with a perceptible knitting of the delicately-traced eyebrows over the fine eyes, which indicated that this exquisite gentleman was not precisely the soul of patience and good temper. "I dare say not; but *I* can, and that is the chief matter just now. I dare say Mr. Streightley is not in any 'set,' as you say; but when you talk of him as a 'tradesman' you make a very silly and an ignorant mistake. Yes you do," he continued, in reply to an indignant look from his daughter, "though you are very clever, Katie—almost as

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clever as you are handsome, my dear. Mr. Streightley is a very rich and a very influential man, and no more a tradesman than I am."

"Well, then, papa," asked Katharine, "what did he mean by sending a bill in that extraordinary way? If he is not a tradesman, what dealings with him had you, and what services has he done you?"

Mr. Guyon smiled. His daughter's *naïveté* amused him. "Never mind, Kate," he said. "Men have money transactions outside their household bills, my dear, or even their tailors and bootmakers; but women do not need to understand these things, and I should only bore you if I explained them. Mr. Streightley's 'bill' was a very different thing to what you imagine, and his position is, I assure you, a most respectable one. Take my word for that, Kate, and don't trouble your pretty little head about the matter. I hope we shall see a good deal of Mr. Streightley, and I wish this dinner-party to be a success; so make out your list, and see Watkins about it at once."

"Do you wish any people in particular to be asked to meet this new friend, papa?" asked Katharine, in a tone which was a little sullen, and just the least in the world impertinent, "or shall I take them, as usual, from the visiting-book?"

Mr. Guyon ignored the tone of his daughter's question, but replied to its matter by saying, "No, no one in particular; either Lady Henmarsh or Mrs. Stanbourne, of course; but you need not have any girls. I fancy Streightley knows very few people; they'll all be new to him."

"Bar, Bench, or Bishop, like Mrs. Merdle—eh, papa?" said Katharine, as she rose from the breakfast-table, at which this dialogue had taken place. "Very well, I'll let you see my list when it's done. And now, the day?"

This point was fixed after a little discussion; and then Katharine went to talk with her housekeeper, Mrs. Watkins, to write her notes, to dawdle over her flowers, until the horses came round; and she started for the Park with the reasonable expectation of seeing Gordon Frere—an expectation which was fulfilled before she had been five minutes in the Row.

During the days which intervened before that named for the dinner-party, Katharine never gave a passing thought to the subject of her father's strange and incongruous guest; but when the day came, she felt rather ill-humored about the whole thing.

"What on earth can papa want with him?" she thought, impatiently; "and I am to make myself agreeable to him! Well, that generally comes easy to me; but not in this case. I can't even talk to him about the City, which I really should like, because that would be talking shop, though he's not a tradesman. However, it will soon be over," she thought, brightening up, and with an exquisite smile of happy anticipation lighting up her face, moody till then, "and the ball can't fail to be delightful."

Miss Guyon was going to a ball in the evening, after her dinner-party at home, and her toilet was made with a view to that festivity. An ornament or two, and a magical touch added to her head-dress, were all she would require for the perfect brilliancy of her appearance, in addition to the white dress, arrayed in which she appeared to the enchanted gaze of Robert Streightley, when he was ushered into her drawing-room, like a vision from another world. And it was quite true that he had never seen so beautiful, so graceful, so elegant a woman as the girl-hostess, who played her part with perfect self-possession, while he felt miserably embarrassed in his.

Katharine was seated on an ottoman, placed between the long narrow windows of the front drawing-room, talking to an elderly lady, whom Robert Streightley's quick eye recognized as he advanced from the door. Mr. Guyon left the group with whom he was talking on the announcement of Robert's name, and went forward to meet him with a decided *empressement* of manner, which had its effect on the other guests assembled. He led Robert up to Katharine, and presented him to her. She bent her graceful head, said a gracious word or two, and resumed her conversation with the lady—whom Robert had recognized, and who was Lady Henmarsh—with well-bred imperturbability. Did she remember him? Robert thought. Had she ever thought of him since that day which had meant to him so much, but to her so little? So little! nothing! and yet not nothing, if she had only known it, for he had discovered things about her father since. Robert found himself thinking these rambling thoughts, and gazing helplessly at Katharine, unheeding the smooth flow of Mr. Guyon's talk, as that gentleman, in his very best and airiest manner, addressed himself to the entertainment of his new and useful guest, and to the task of putting him at his ease in this strange sphere. With a sudden consciousness of his absence of mind came self-command to Robert, and before long he began to examine the other guests with much more of attention and curiosity than they were at all likely to bestow on him. To the dozen persons assembled in Mr. Guyon's drawing-room Robert Streightley was merely a stranger—well-dressed, well-looking, and, though deficient in the air of fashion, which more or less marked themselves, a gentleman in whom there was nothing to provoke any adverse or sneering criticism. To Robert they were all interesting. These were Katharine's friends—the people she lived among, the people who could influence her by their tastes and opinions, the people whose manners, and dress, and conversation she liked. In every man in the room Robert saw a possible rival, in every woman a possible enemy. He was very foolish, not only in the ordinary sense in which every man who is in love is foolish, but in an extraordinary sense—the result of his peculiar position, and the isolation of his life. He was possessed by his one idea, and he al-

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lowed it to become a centre round which every thing revolved. When the announcement of dinner told him that the party was complete, and relieved him from the apprehension of seeing Gordon Frere's handsome face among the number, he actually sighed audibly with the sense of relief. He listened eagerly as Mr. Guyon or Katharine addressed their guests, and learned with absurd satisfaction that three of the six gentlemen who composed the male portion of the company were married to three of the six ladies who composed the female portion.

Robert Streightley was a very clever man, but there was a dangerously weak side to his intellect, all the more perilous that he had never suspected it, and did not suspect it now; and that weak side was about to be stormed by a strong passion, all the more ungovernable because it attacked him for the first time. He had never played with this dangerous enemy; he had not known any of the feints, the mock-surprises of love, and he was hopelessly at its mercy. Mingled happiness and misery—the happiness of this delicious, unexpected access to Katharine's presence, the misery of his uncertainty as to her relations with others, with one terrible other in particular—the sense of his strangeness in the scene familiar to her—ravaged and divided his heart between them. For a time the misery was predominant; and then Robert, an impressionable man, and one in whom social tastes were not non-existent, only dormant, yielded to the charm of the present, and gave himself up to admiration of Katharine, who never showed to greater advantage than on such occasions. The *aplomb* of her manner, the brilliancy of her conversation, the taste, elegance, and fashion of her dress, the easy and pleasant grace with which she made the dinner-party "go off" with a success utterly beyond his experience of any festal occasion whatever, were full of a marvelous charm for the man who looked at this girl through the glorified medium of a first and overmastering passion.

Robert took little heed of the other guests except as one or other of them engaged Katharine's attention, and so divided his. He had the good fortune to be seated near Miss Guyon; and but that Lady Henmarsh directed much of her conversation to the young hostess, and so won Streightley's enthusiastic gratitude, she would probably have found her neighbor rather a dull companion. But Lady Henmarsh was never dull, and never suffered from other people's dullness. In the first place, she dearly liked and thoroughly understood a good dinner, and Mr. Guyon's dinners were invariably and remarkably good. She made it a practice to eat systematically and steadily through all the courses, and to do justice to all the wines. She was too fashionable and too impervious to other people's opinions to care what any body thought, and so she ate and drank precisely as much as she pleased, and gave her opinion of the comestibles with perfect candor. She was intimate with every body there except that good-looking new man, who was probably clever in something, but whom nobody knew, and who did not seem to want to talk much or to be talked to, and she therefore joined in all the general conversation, and did not mind him particularly, thereby increasing Robert's gratitude. Lady Henmarsh talked remarkably well. She was naturally quick and intelligent—well informed too, for a woman of fashion, with, of course, no time for improving her mind; and as she knew every one and had been every where, and probably had a more extensive epistolary correspondence than any other woman in London who did not play at either literature or politics, she was never at a loss for news to communicate or subjects to discuss.

With the exception of Mr. Guyon, whose like was not quite unknown within the circle of Robert's experience, every type there was a novel one to him. Few were interesting after a little—after a cursory examination extending to their personal appearance and the grooves in which their conversation ran. There was a new member, who talked "House" a good deal, and his wife—pretty and well-dressed—who talked "Ladies' Gallery," who hoped her husband would soon "speak" on the great topic of the day, and who seemed to regard every one not "in the House" as in the "butterfly of fashion" and general inutility line. There was a country gentleman, not at all stupid and not in the least fat; and a country lady, almost as sprightly as Miss Guyon herself, though by no means so handsome. The country lady and gentleman were also going to Mrs. Pendarvis's ball; and from their talk about it at dinner, Robert learned that Katharine was going to another entertainment that evening, and the tortures of his infatuated state recommenced. She would disappear, then, after dinner, and he should see no more of her, thought Robert, in his innocent ignorance of fashionable hours; and she would go and glitter among a crowd of happy people, and that handsome fellow with the light hair would be one of them. And so Robert once more stretched himself upon the rack, and gave himself an excruciating twist. He was miserable from the time the ball was mentioned. Did he wish that he could go there too? Hardly; he felt he would be too much out of place in such a scene; and where could he be more hopelessly parted from her? No, he did not wish to be going to Mrs. Pendarvis's house; he only wished she were not going.

"Have you a card, Mr. Mostyn?" he heard Katharine say, in a charming accent of interest, to a gentleman seated near her, whom Robert had already regarded with some surprise and amusement.

"Yes," returned Mr. Mostyn, in a supremely languid tone, at the same time permitting his eyes to raise themselves toward Katharine, as if in slow acknowledgment of the complimentary accent. "I think I shall look in for an hour

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very late. Will you give me a dance, Miss Guyon?" He said this as if he felt bound to make a concession to a wish of hers. Robert Streightley had very quick eyes, and he saw her steal a glance of sly, mischievous amusement at Lady Henmarsh, as she replied,

"I don't see how I can, Mr. Mostyn, if you only look in for an hour very late, for I mean to do my looking in rather early."

"Very sorry, I'm sure," said Mr. Mostyn, in a slow, measured, would-be modulated tone, which sounded to Robert's ears like the very voice of fatuity. "But one has so much to do of an evening just now. It's Lady Ismaeli's night, and I promised to look in and—"

"Of course—of course," said Miss Guyon, and her eyes danced with mischievous glee; "who would for the world interfere with Mr. Mostyn's gayeties? We all know they are but gravities in disguise. He is the slave of the season only to be its satirist, the pet of society to requite its indulgence by his teachings as a philosopher and his dulcet lays as a poet. Who would lay a tax on time spent in the service of society like Mr. Mostyn's, studying character in a cotillon, piercing the thin disguises of intrigue at a picnic, and reading the female soul in the evening lounge on a balcony? Ah! Mr. Mostyn, what triflers are we all beside you, the *poète-philosophe*, not only *sous les toits*, but of our dinner and toilet tables!"

Lady Henmarsh was listening, pleasure in her face. There was something under this lively talk, this seeming compliment, and Robert would have liked well to know what it was. It was something that amused Katharine, therefore interesting to him.

"Come, Mr. Mostyn," she went on, "you might tell *me*—I am a friend, you know. When is the new novel coming out? And what and who is it to be about? Only intimate friends this time, or have outsiders any chance?"

She paused for a reply, and an expression of candid curiosity was all her face betrayed. Mr. Mostyn did not look perfectly comfortable; a dawning doubt showed itself in his smooth features. It was only momentary, though. It cleared away, and he replied,

"Really, Miss Guyon, you embarrass me. I was not prepared to find you so much interested in my humble performances. I shall not publish again for some little time. I regard the writing of a poem or a novel as a serious undertaking, and I undertake it in a serious spirit. I wait for the inspiration, Miss Guyon; I wait until a favorable moment, when my mind is attuned—"

"And when you have got some very good models, Mr. Mostyn; isn't that so? Your acquaintance is so large, it must be quite delightful and not at all difficult. Don't be shocked, please, by my talking of such a little thing as difficulty in the case of such a grand thing as inspiration; but it must be so easy and pleasant just to sit down and put your friends in a book. People hardly expect it, do they? They let you see them as they are, and then that is charming; for you find out all about them, and they never suspect it; and all their circle recognize the portrait, and every one talks about it. I have quite a woman's curiosity about writers, you must know, Mr. Mostyn—I quite admire and envy them—and I should like to know all about them; and I have heard that even a totally worthless book will be read if it is very personal indeed. What a comfort that must be, Mr. Mostyn!—of course I mean to the persons who write worthless books; shouldn't you think so?"

Katharine threw a perfect tone of interrogation into her voice, and deliberately awaited an answer. Once more a shadow of doubt came over Mr. Mostyn's face, and once more a beam from the never-setting sun of his vanity dispelled it.

"I can not imagine there being any consolation in or for writing a worthless book, Miss Guyon," replied Mr. Mostyn, with even increased sententiousness. "For my part, I could only be satisfied with doing the very best—"

"*The* very best, or *your* very best?" said Katharine, with undisguised sauciness. Then recollecting herself, she dropped her voice to the serious tone again, and went on: "Of course no one is easily satisfied with his own work; but you really must not be too modest, Mr. Mostyn—you mustn't indeed. Every one says your portraits are wonderful; and what can be more interesting than to depict accurately persons who are very widely known, and place them in the most trying situations? The popular authoress, for instance, who makes love to your last hero—dear, what an exquisite creature he is!—how odd she must feel it to be 'put in a book' and recognized by every body! Ah! you are a dangerous man, Mr. Mostyn; perhaps you'll put me in a book some day, if I am good enough, or bad enough, or ask you here sufficiently often to do all my sittings properly; but—Lady Henmarsh looks as if I ought to have moved before this;" and, so saying, Katharine rose, and, like "fair Inez," took all the sunshine and light of every description with her, so far as Robert Streightley was concerned. Whether Mr. Mostyn was quite so sorry for her departure was another question. Robert looked at this gentleman with some curiosity and a little dawning compassion, for it struck him that Katharine had not spoken altogether *de bonne foi*, and he was curious to ascertain whether he too was aware of the fact.

Robert had little experience of *persiflage*, and was not behind the scenes on this occasion; but two or three of the other guests were, and they enjoyed the quiet little performance which had just been enacted greatly. As for Mr. Mostyn, his momentary discomfiture passed off with the characteristic reflection that jealousy made all women spiteful; and Miss Guyon had really not had so much of his attention lately as she deserved; he must be more considerate of her feelings for the future. The ladies gone,

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the gentlemen drew up into the usual cluster, and commenced the ordinary after-dinner conversation; and Robert would probably have found the affair very wearisome on its own account, not to mention that he was longing to be in Katharine's presence again, had not Mr. Guyon exerted himself to the utmost to draw him out, and to give the conversation a general turn, so as to include him, and to make it evident to the whole party that the "new man" was one whom he delighted to honor.

When the ladies were passing through the hall, Lady Henmarsh had said laughingly to Katharine, "For shame, Kate; you were too hard on the young author."

"Nonsense!" replied Katharine. "You enjoyed it immensely, and he deserved it richly."

When the gentlemen came into the drawing-room at Mr. Guyon's that night, Katharine was seated at the piano. Had any portion of Robert Streightley's heart remained unvanquished, she would have conquered it by her music; but he was already as much in love as he could be. Soon the business of leave-taking commenced. Robert was reluctantly advancing to make his adieux, when Mr. Guyon took him familiarly by the arm and said,

"Don't go just yet, Streightley. We'll see the ladies to the carriage, and then have a chat and a cigar in my room."

Miss Guyon left the room with Lady Henmarsh, but returned in a few minutes, wrapped in a soft white mantle. Every alteration in her appearance made her more beautiful in Robert's eyes. He had the felicity of taking her down stairs; and as she bowed and smiled from the corner of the carriage in which she had ensconced herself, and then was borne rapidly away, Robert needed Mr. Guyon's "Come along, Streightley; don't stand there in the cold," to rouse him from a sort of trance of admiration.

The ball at Mrs. Pendarvis's was crowded and brilliant, and Katharine's hopes were realized. Gordon Frere had waited her arrival on the staircase, and claimed her for the first dance. The hours passed like a dream to them both; and when Mr. Alured Mostyn "looked in," and at length succeeded in finding Miss Guyon, he saw her so radiant with beauty, so sparkling with animation, that he was quite touched at the idea of the effect produced by her pleasure in seeing him.

Another person noticed the unusual beauty and the increased animation of Katharine Guyon that night, and formed a truer estimate of its origin. This was Lady Henmarsh. She made certain observations, drew certain conclusions, and determined on a line of conduct which will develop itself in the course of events.

And Robert? Well, Robert had his chat and his cigar with Mr. Guyon, and then he went home—home to the house which he had never before thought vulgar or insignificant, which he had never thought about at all indeed, and which was in truth much more solidly comfortable than the gaudier abode which had suddenly been converted into a shrine to his fancy. He shrunk from it now as he thought, "I wonder what she would say to this, and our mode of life here?" and he returned the old nurse's greeting with grudging ill-humor, being inclined to resent her sitting up for him, though it was not an abnormally late hour, and her opening the door for him, which, though not her business, was, as he well knew, her pleasure.

"Any news, nurse? any letters?" he asked, in a tone wholly devoid of interest in the reply.

"No, Master Robert," said the old woman, "there's no letters, and there's nobody been but Miss Hester Gould, a-wantin' to know when Miss Ellen's comin' home."

CHAPTER IV.

MR. GUYON'S FRIEND.

The astonishment of Mr. Guyon at the liberal treatment which he had received at the hands of his new creditor was by no means feigned. That worthy gentleman, in the course of a long career of impecuniosity, had become acquainted with all the various plans of all the leading discounters of the city of London; knew what he called their "whole bag of tricks;" understood the different ways of getting time or obtaining renewal, according to the various idiosyncrasies of the holders of his stamped paper; and gave to the subject an amount of talent, industry, and attention which, otherwise employed, might have brought him in a very fair income. A very fair income was not a thing to be despised by a gentleman in Mr. Guyon's position, whose actually reliable income was represented by one figure, and that a round one. A sum of five thousand pounds, indeed, stood in the Consols in Edward Guyon's name; but on that pleasantly-sounding amount was laid a *distringas*, a horrible legal instrument preventing its withdrawal by the said Edward Guyon, while the annual interest, which would at least have kept him in cigars and gloves, found its way into the clutches of Messrs. Sharkey and Maw, attorneys at law, who had a few years previously advanced a sum sufficient to free Mr. Guyon from an unpleasant incarceration in the Queen's Bench, leaving him a few pounds over to convey himself to the Newmarket Spring Meeting, whither he proceeded immediately on his release. All that pleasant estate known as Bedingfield, in the county of Cheshire, with its three thousand acres of arable land, its salt and coal mines, its since-made railway bit, its punctually-paying tenant, and its various sources of revenue, which belonged to the Honorable Piers Rankley, and which every one thought he would bequeath to his cousin, Edward Guyon, had been left to a distant relative of Piers Rankley's childless dead wife, one Jacob Long, a member of the Plymouth Brethren, and originally a hide-dresser in Bermondsey, who, under the influence of qualms of conscience, agreed to allow his

reprobate connection, Edward Guyon, a sum of a thousand a year, "at his pleasure." It had been a matter of acute annoyance to Ned Guyon that he had no legal claim or hold on this allowance, so that it was impossible for him to mortgage or anticipate it in any way save by a three months' acceptance for the amount of the quarterly installment—less commission and discount—payable on the day that installment was due; but, in reality, it enabled him to pay renewal fees, to have occasional ready-money for certain *menus plaisirs* of his own and little treats for Kate, and to give such an air of respectability as it possessed to that old house in Queen Anne Street, the lease of which, with its dingy furniture and ten pounds for a mourning-ring, had been his sole legacy from Piers Rankley.

But no income, however fair, would have tempted Mr. Guyon to undertake any honest work, or, as he phrased it, any "d—d low, ungentlemanlike slavery;" and the consequence was that, what with an accumulation of gambling-table (he was a member of the Nob and Heels Club, where they play whist for twenty-four hours at a sitting, pound points and a tenner on the rub) and turf debts, he was just at the time of his introduction into this story in a really desperate condition. It had been an unlucky season with him. His racing information had been bad throughout. Commencing ill last Chester, he had been hard hit at Epsom, had dropped more money at Ascot, and could only pull off a stake at the coming Doncaster by a most unlikely fluke. He had had frightful ill luck at cards. Acknowledged to be one of the best whist-players of the day, he had scarcely held a trump since the winter, and had been beaten by the merest tyros. That very acceptance, which his new acquaintance Streightley held, had been given to Davidson for a card debt; and Guyon had forgotten all about it, having, contrary to his usual custom, omitted to enter it in his book. However, that was staved off for the present, and the few words which he had had with his daughter on the subject had opened a new well-spring of life in Mr. Guyon's breast. If what Kate surmised, or rather half hinted at, were true—and, with all her pride and willfulness, she had wonderful common sense and shrewdness—it might, with judicious management, be turned to wondrous advantage. It was but in embryo yet, to be sure; but, with Kate's beauty and his own tact, it could be brought off at any moment, and the value of it would be—well, he would see at once what the value of it would be by representing it as a certainty to his chief creditor and principal discount-agent, Mr. Daniel Thacker.

Who was Mr. Daniel Thacker? If you had been heir to an entailed estate, with as large a taste for pleasure and as limited resources as such heirs usually possess; if you had been an officer in either of the Guards regiments, or any of the crack *corps;* if you had been a member of any of the West-End government offices, with fast tendencies; or an author; or an actor frequenting fast society; or a theatrical manager; or a pretty *coryphée* fond of suppers and admiration, you would not have had to ask the question, for without doubt you would have possessed Mr. Thacker's acquaintance. A man combining the sharpest practice (in a gentlemanly way) as a bill-discounter with the keenest pursuit of pleasure of a strong, full-flavored, not to say of a gross kind, was Mr. Thacker—a man who made cent. per cent. of his money by judicious investment, and who at the same time "parted" freely; living in capital chambers in St. James's Street, keeping horses and carriages, entertaining frequently and well, having an Opera-stall for himself frequently and an Opera-box for a female friend, visiting the theatres, riding to hounds, and carrying out every thing he attempted in very excellent style. Life seemed a broad and pleasantly-turfed path for Mr. Daniel Thacker, down which he could stroll in his easy polished boots without the smallest stumbling-block to cause him annoyance. But there was one thing which wrung and chafed him, which he could never shut out from his happiest hour, which proclaimed itself whenever he looked in the glass (which was not seldom), which lay like a hideous pitfall for Mr. Thacker's friends, into which they were perpetually tumbling and coming out with inarticulate excuses, which pointed the sarcasm of little boys in the streets at first overwhelmed by his splendor, and edged the repartee of insolent cabmen, to whom he called to clear the way for his high-stepping steeds—a fact which nothing could hide, a brand which no money could obliterate—Mr. Daniel Thacker was an unmistakable Jew. Unmistakable! as unmistakable as if he had retained his old family name of Hart; as if he had remained in his old family neighborhood of St. Mary Axe; as if he had continued his old family occupation of contracting with the government for the supply of rum and lemons for the navy, and uniforms for the postmen. In that choice neighborhood, and out of those apparently not very meaty contracts, had old Simeon Hart, Daniel's uncle, made all the wealth which he bequeathed to his nephew; and when, long before the old gentleman's decease, the young man's aspirations led him to declare to his senior that he thought the Hebraic name stood in their way in certain matters of business, and that he had some idea of taking some less recognizable cognomen, the old gentleman remarked, not without a touch of sarcasm in his voice, "Do ath you like, Daniel, ma tear; do ath you like. You're a threwd lad, and are thure to turn out right; but underthand one thing, ma tear—you may change your name if you like, but you'll never be able to change your nothe." Mr. Simeon Hart was right; nothing short of cutting off that feature could have disguised Mr. Daniel Thacker's nationality. He was as distinctly marked as is the African; and though, with the addition of splendid sparkling black eyes, bright scarlet lips, a quantity of tightly-

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curling hair, and a fine flowing beard, he passed for a handsome man among certain of the other sex, there was no man to whom he had ever rendered a service — and he was, in the main, a kindly-disposed fellow, so far as his profession permitted—but set him down for a "d—d Jew."

He never forgot this—it was never absent from his thoughts. If he saw any one regarding him attentively, he felt at once what they were thinking about; it haunted him in the theatre, in society, wherever there was a chance of casual mention of his forsworn race. He had tried to laugh it over in his business discount-dealings with money-borrowers, asking them in a light and airy manner "why they came to the Jews," of whom they must have had such serious warnings; but the raillery always fell flat and heavy, and sometimes, from cubs of fashion, produced unintentional clumsy sarcasms which stung him to the quick. The renegade paid the penalty of his cowardice. With the blunted notions of an unrefined mind, he thought that the prejudice was leveled at his race, not at the character which the dealings of some of his nation had won for it, and which he himself was supporting. In his blindness he ignored the fact that among all those whose good word was worth having, the prejudice had died out; that the names of certain proud old Jewish families, who could trace their pedigree far beyond the barber-surgeon or border-robber founders of Norman or Scottish families, were honored among the honored; and that in any case a man who, brought into contact with a set socially superior to his own, took up his position calmly on the strength of his own acquirements, be these what they might, was received with a courtesy and a kindness which were naturally refused to the most glowing impostor. With Mr. Guyon, Thacker had long had extensive dealings—dealings which had extended over a long course of years; but of late he had been a little doubtful of his client's solvency, a little delicate in the matter of renewals and holdings-over, and with a clouded brow he heard from his clerk the announcement that Mr. Guyon was waiting to see him in the anteroom. He reflected for a moment, and seemed half disposed to deny himself to his visitor; then carefully shutting the right-hand drawer of his desk, in which he kept his check-book, and placing the morocco-bound volume, which was a ledger, but looked like a diary, close by him, he said, "Show Mr. Guyon in, James; I've just five minutes at his disposal."

Dressed in the most perfect manner, with all the latest improvements of fashion sufficiently tempered to his time of life, calm, collected, bland, and airy, yet with a certain amount of anxiety visible about his eyes and in the shifting corners of his mouth, Mr. Guyon entered the apartment and shook hands warmly with his friend.

Mr. Thacker received him civilly but not cordially, and expressed his hope that he saw Mr. Guyon well.

"Thanks, my dear Thacker," said that sprightly gentleman; "I think I may say, never in better case. I was getting a little pulled with the gayeties of the season—we old fellows can't carry it through like you young ones, you know—and I was, to tell truth, knocking up a bit; but last week I went down for a couple of days to Maidenhead—Orkney Arms, Skindle's, you know—where there was a particularly jolly party, all of them friends of yours, by the way —Bob Affington and Adèle, and Dalrymple and O'Dwyer, and Hattenheim and the Marchesa —a droll lot of people of the right sort—and we had great fun; and it quite set me up. Every body said they wished you'd been down there."

"Every body's very good," replied Thacker, sufficiently grimly. He hated hearing of any pleasure which he had not shared. "Every body's very good, but every body seems to forget that I've my business to attend to."

"Business, my dear boy!" said Mr. Guyon, stretching out his legs and clasping his lavender gloves in front of him; "and have we not all business to transact? I know, for one, that my time is nearly entirely devoted to business. Case in point, what brings me here to-day?"

"That's exactly what I can't understand," said Thacker, with a rather sardonic smile; "if it had been this day week," he continued, referring to his ledger, "I should have known at once, because on that day your acceptance for three hundred and fifty pounds falls due, and you would have come down to take it up."

"Or to get you to renew," said Guyon, insinuatingly.

"Oh, in that case you would have wasted your visit," replied Thacker; "that bill has been renewed once, and it is the rule of my house, as you know very well, never to do these things a second time."

He looked more than serious as he said this; but Mr. Guyon met his frown with a cheery laugh, and said in his most off-hand manner, "Well, my dear fellow, then it will be paid. Gad! you look as black as though thirty thousand instead of three hundred pounds were coming due from me next week. It's not for three hundred pounds that Ned Guyon, who has weathered one or two storms in his time, is going to pieces."

"N-no," said Thacker, slowly; "but you see, though only three hundred and fifty are due next week, I hold a great deal of your paper, Mr. Guyon, in addition to other mortages and advances on securities impossible to realize at once, and altogether I—in fact I—"

"Don't hesitate, sir," said Mr. Guyon, rising with a flushed face and buttoning the lavender glove with a trembling hand; "don't make any favor of it, I beg. It's been a pure matter of business hitherto, Mr. Thacker—a pure matter of business, convenient to both of us, though I'm sure, out of respect for you, I've endeavored to import a friendly element into our negotiations—a friendly element which, I may say, and, indeed, was one of the causes of my visit

to you to-day—which might have been the means of—however, since you choose to look upon Ned Guyon with suspicion, Ned Guyon wishes you good-morning." And Mr. Guyon settled his hat on his head, and was starting off in his usual easy swagger, when he was stopped by the touch of Mr. Thacker's hand on his arm.

"Stay one minute, my good sir. Don't misunderstand me, if you please. I simply tell you that an acceptance of yours will be due next week—an acceptance which you avow your perfect readiness to meet, and you talk about my looking on you with suspicion. I am perfectly ready to allow that our relations have been of a business nature, but I thought that I might take credit for having introduced into them some of the elements of private friendship. You have done me the honor of dining with me, and—"

"I have," murmured Guyon, absently, "and doosid good dinners they were."

"And yet you talk about suspicion. This is not fair, Mr. Guyon; this is any thing but fair."

"'Pon my soul, I didn't mean any harm; didn't, 'pon my life," said Mr. Guyon; "always found you doosid good fellow, Thacker, and that kind of thing—"

"And yet you are going away without telling me something which, if I understand you rightly, might be to our mutual benefit, and which you came down expressly to submit to me? Is that so?"

"Dev'lish stoopid and childish of me to take affront so easily, more particklerly from good feller," said Mr. Guyon. "Yes, I did want to say word to you upon matter of importance—matter on which I think you'll congratulate me."

"Sit down quietly, then, and let's talk it over.—The dry sherry, Evans, and a biscuit.—Any thing which benefits you interests me, Mr. Guyon—though all between us is 'pure matter of business,' eh? Oh unkind, sir—very unkind!"

"There! forget that, Thacker, and listen to what I've got to tell you. You know my daughter—at least you've seen her," added Mr. Guyon, with a rather painful recollection of several broad hints which Thacker had given of his wish for an introduction to Katharine—hints which Mr. Guyon had always carefully ignored.

"I have seen Miss Guyon," was the cold reply.

"Yes, of course—yes. Strange girl, very reserved, and—afraid of society."

"Indeed?"

"Oh very! been a great drawback to her; but at last she has consented to come out, and—well, I don't know that I ought to say it to any one, but you're a man not likely to break confidence—she's going to make a splendid match."

"A splendid match, eh? A title?"

"A title? Pooh! much better than that! A millionaire! one of the merchant princes of the City! A man whose name is good on 'Change for I don't know how much. What do you say to that, Thacker? Ned Guyon's in luck at last, eh?"

"It sounds very well, so far," said Mr. Thacker, quietly. "Might one venture to ask the name of the modern Crœsus?"

"To any one else I should decline—peremptorily decline to give it; but it's different with you, Thacker; you're an old friend. The gentleman's name is Streightley—of the firm of Streightley and Son."

"Is it, by Jove!" cried Mr. Thacker, startled out of his usual quiescence. "Bullion Lane?—I know him well—by repute, that is to say, not personally. If you've hooked—I beg your pardon—if Mr. Streightley is going to marry Miss Guyon, you've done a splendid stroke of business."

"You think so?"

"Think so—I'm sure of it. They say that there's no more far-seeing man in the City, and his profits must be tre-mendous."

"Well, that's the man. Now look here, Thacker, I'm open and aboveboard with you, as two men of the world, or rather two men of honor—not the same thing, eh?"—and the old man's eyes twinkled—"should be. This thing is well on; a little more will bring it to completion. One mustn't, as they say, spoil the ship for a pennor'th of tar, eh? One mustn't let a fine chance slip through one's fingers for want of a little gold-dust to put on one's hands to render the grip secure, eh?"

"I see your drift," said Thacker; "but you must speak more plainly."

"More plainly to you?" said Mr. Guyon, in a whisper—unconsciously each man had lowered his voice. "Well, what I mean is this. If this scheme turns out well, as it will undoubtedly, if it be only properly carried out—well—Katharine is devoted to me; she will rule her husband—oh, never fear, she has the spirit of a dozen women—and I shall be in clover once more, with all my arrears cleared off, and a handsome annuity! But the thing must be properly managed. Streightley must not take fright at any aspect of poverty, or want of means rather; he must not for an instant imagine that I am in any way hampered" (the thought of the £180 bill flashed across him, but he never changed countenance); "and he must be properly entertained; and Katharine must have a proper *trousseau*. He's not the man to speak about settlements," added Mr. Guyon; "and if he did, he must be told that there would be nothing until my death."

"And how is 'the thing to be properly managed,' and all the rest of it done?"

"I only know one way, and that is—"

"Speak out; you're not generally reticent on the score of modesty, Mr. Guyon."

"Well—that is—by your holding over the three hundred and fifty due next week, and making me a farther advance of—say a thousand, payable three months after my daughter's wedding-day."

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Mr. Thacker was silent for a few minutes, nor could Mr. Guyon, intently scanning his face, derive the smallest idea from its expression. Then he made a few rapid calculations on the blotting-pad in front of him, and said,

"You play for a big stake, Mr. Guyon, and don't stick at asking trifles from your friends. Now I like a big game; it at once invests any scheme with an interest for me which I can not give to mere pottering petty hazards. And I don't say that I won't help you in this—on certain terms—only—"

"Your terms will be your own, my good fellow," cried Guyon, his eye sparkling at the thought of success. "But I don't like that 'only.' What is it? Only what?"

"Only that I should like to be introduced to Mr. Streightley, and have a little talk with him; of course not on the subject under consideration, but on general topics, just to get an idea of him, you know. It's a large sum to advance, in addition to outstanding matters; and I'm a man of business, you know, Guyon, and like to see my way in these things."

"All right. Come down with me to the City, and we'll hunt him up in his den."

"No, I think not. We business-men don't like being hunted up in our dens, as you call them, unless our visitors bring us a carcase or two to growl over. You go over and see Streightley, and bring him here to lunch to-morrow at two. I leave you to find the excuse; your ready wit serves you always in such matters."

There was a tinge of sarcasm in Mr. Thacker's voice as he uttered these last words, but Mr. Guyon was in far too excited a state to perceive it. So he took his leave with much exuberant hand-shaking, and started off with much self-complacency. After his departure Mr. Thacker sat for some little time, leaning his head on his hands and his elbows on the desk, immersed in thought. "He's an unscrupulous vagabond, is Guyon!" said he to himself, after a pause. "He's going to sell that handsome daughter of his as he would a bit of land, or a diamond ring, or a reversion under a will, or any thing that would bring him money. A determined heartless dog! But he seems to have either played his cards well, or to have had great luck in hooking so big a fish as Streightley. Robert Streightley! Yes, yes; they say he pulled the Ocean Marine through when Overend Gurneys had given them up, and the knowing ones looked for an immediate wind-up, and now their shares are at 13 premium, and there are no end of the clever things he's done. He might be useful to me—might put me up to two or three wrinkles in the City, where all is big, and where one's own natural talent has some chance of showing itself. Hitherto I've been pottering on with hard-up swells, and men of the Guyon stamp—safe business enough, and remunerative so far it goes; pleasant too in its introductions to good people; but I know enough people now, and must look to making money as the chief thing. And this Streightley is the very man who could help me in such a matter. If I now see him, I'll back myself to read him like a book, and then I'll see how far this investment of Guyon's is worth my backing."

A telegram found by Mr. Thacker on his arrival at business the next morning announced that Mr. Guyon and Mr. Streightley would lunch with him that day, and at two o'clock the meal was on the table and the convives were assembled. In addition to Guyon, Streightley, and the host, there were Lord Bollindar, a pleasant old nobleman, younger brother of a deceased and uncle to a live duke, who had a limited income of two hundred a year and lived at the rate of two thousand—never owing a penny—on the strength of the handles to his name and a perennial flow of small talk; Sir Harvey Falmer, a lieutenant in the 2d Life Guards, who had dealings with Mr. Thacker, and who was kept to lunch on the strength of a recently negotiated bill; Mr. Wuff, of the Theatre Royal, Hatton Garden; and Mr. Tocsin, Q.C., the celebrated Old Bailey barrister. The lunch was admirable in itself and admirably served; and after the Champagne had circulated freely, the conversation, which at first had been rather slow, improved considerably.

"Doosid good Champagne!" said Sir Harvey Falmer, tossing off his glassful; "that's what I always say about you, Thacker; when you give a man a drink, it's a good drink, and you give it him; don't stick it in—swipes and gooseberry, you know—as part of your balance."

Mr. Thacker smiled somewhat ghastlily at this witticism; but Lord Bollindar came to the rescue by saying, "Good, good! devilish smart, Falmer! but you fellas are in clover now. Why, I reckleckt the dook—you reckleckt the dook, Mr. Streightley?"

"I—I beg your pardon—the duke?"

"Dook of Wellington I mean. He used to say, 'Hang your still Champagne!'—only his grace used a stronger term—'Hang your still Champagne! Champagne without froth is like man without woman!' Said so indeed, begad!"

"Did he, indeed?" said Mr. Tocsin, in his strident voice: "I should have liked to have had his grace under cross-examination to prove that."

"I don't think you'd have made much of him, Tocsin," said Mr. Thacker. "What do you think, Mr. Streightley?"

"I? I can't say, of course, so far as my knowledge of his grace was concerned; but I'm sure—that—the presence of ladies elevates—and refines—and—"

"Of course it does," cried Mr. Wuff. "Put on a fellow—I mean a male fellow—to dance, and see where you are. Patron of mine—noble lord who shall be nameless—said to me the other night, 'Never again, Wuff—never again. Many petticoats as you like; but if ever I see again a fellow in a low-necked dress, with grapes

in his hair, dancing at your theatre, damme, I leave the house.'"

"The sentiment did him honor, whoever he was," said Mr. Tocsin. "I don't want to pry into your secrets, Wuff, but the man was right, and spoke like—a man. What is it nerves to our best efforts? What is it makes us exert ourselves? Not the thought of the jury — I speak for myself—not the thought that we are —are—bending the minds of a few stupid men in—in a box; but the feeling that we are looked up to and gaining renown in the eyes of—of —those bright eyes which we wish to shine in delight upon our labors."

"Bravo!" cried Sir Harvey Falmer, who was rapidly falling into a maudlin state.

"Look at our friend here," said Lord Bollindar, pointing to Streightley; "one of—as I'm given to understand; never had the pleasure of meeting him before — pillars of British commerce. Ask him what prompts his men—Jack Tars and all that kind of thing—to brave storms, and billows, and typhoons, and whatever they're called, and carry British commerce from pole to pole. Is it the mere paltry gain, wages, advance-rate, whatever it is? No; the poet — what's his name?—Dibdin—has told us different: Jack's delight is lovely Nan — And the wind that blows—And mill that goes—And lass that loves a sailor—and all that."

"There can, I think," said Streightley, "be little doubt that the influence of a—a wife—can scarcely be overrated. I—I think," he added, in a lower tone to Mr. Guyon, who was his next neighbor, "that I've not sufficiently appreciated feminine influence; but that is a fault which can be remedied, eh?" And he said this rather nervously.

"To a man with your advantages, my dear boy," said Guyon, "delay, instead of being dangerous, has been, I may say, a safeguard. I was making this very remark — for, curiously enough, I've taken a strong interest in you—to my daughter this morning, and she perfectly agreed with me."

This for a sample of the conversation. When his guests had gone, Mr. Thacker stood looking at but not seeing the *débris* of the banquet. He was calmly feeling his chin and his hand, and saying to himself, "So far so good. The man is weak as water, and seems inclined to mould himself as old Guyon pleases. But I must have a look at the girl before I throw myself into the scales."

CHAPTER V.

HESTER GOULD.

"No one but Miss Hester Gould," the old nurse had answered, in reply to Robert Streightley's question; and he had never bestowed a thought upon the answer. What was Hester Gould to him, or he to Hester Gould? To the first section of this inquiry the present chapter will furnish a reply; to the second, time only; time, just then busy with the beginning of many complications in the life of a man whose career had been singularly even, uneventful, and interesting only so far as it had developed his abilities and the results of their employment.

The young lady, whose brief parley with Alice had simply consisted of the words reported to her master and darling by the old nurse, had known the unpretending little family at Brixton for several years, and had been, for the chief of that number, intimate with Mrs. Streightley and her daughter Ellen. This intimacy, however, was one-sided; Hester Gould was completely in the harmless and unimportant confidence of the two ladies, but they were not in hers. This was no treacherous, insidious distinction, no deliberate preference of other friends, on Hester Gould's part; for she was a woman who gave her confidence to no one; a woman of a self-sufficing nature, and the safest possible confidante, because she never felt sufficiently interested in any one person to betray another for his or her sake. No one could justly accuse Hester Gould of flattery or fawning, yet she induced her acquaintances to conceive enthusiastic friendships for her, and to tell her their most intimate concerns, to discover that she was indispensable to their comfort, and the dearest creature in the world; to declare that they did not know what they should do without her, and that her advice was always the best. How did the girl, without descending to the despicable meanness of toadyism, achieve popularity in her narrow sphere, though she was undeniably handsome, and that, too, after a fashion that was capable of development into downright beauty of a high type, if circumstances had been more favorable to her? She achieved it by "masterly inactivity." Whether she had thought over the life that lay before her, had formed a philosophy of her own, and decided upon a line of conduct as the result of her meditations, before she left the second-rate boarding-school at Peckham, where she had acquired all the technical education she possessed, it would be impossible to say, and the supposition that she had done so appears unnatural and far-fetched. It was probably partly by the instinct of native shrewdness, and partly by the exercise of precocious powers of observation, that Hester Gould discovered that the great art of making herself agreeable consisted in letting her friends talk to her of themselves, without claiming a reciprocal right. However that may have been, she observed as a rule strict reticence concerning her own affairs, and endured with smiling patience, paying her friends that subtlest of compliments, undivided attention; and displaying interest, which, if not demonstrative, was practical, in the fullest details concerning theirs. She was of a cold, silent, repressed nature, not exactly unamiable or false, but a woman who might become either under circumstances more disadvantageous than hers were at present, or might expand under favorable and fostering influences into a higher

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type of womanhood than she either physically or intellectually indicated now.

Hester Gould was a handsome woman at twenty, a period of life which she had reached only a few days before that on which she had made affectionate inquiries for Ellen Streightley; but she would probably be a handsomer woman at thirty, and if she then fulfilled the latent promise of beauty, would have a fair chance of retaining it long past the period at which the loveliness of women, in all but very exceptional cases, ceases to be a fact, and becomes a memory. She was tall and full-formed, but as yet she wanted gracefulness. She had handsome features, and fine, keen dark eyes; but her face had not sufficient color, and her eyes had too little depth; they lacked intensity; not that they were shifty and uncertain, but that they bore the vague, absent expression which tells of discontent, not particular, but general. Looking attentively at Hester Gould, one given to studying character in faces would know that there was incongruity between the actual and the potential position of the girl. Without restlessness, without impatience, always ruled by common sense, she seemed to be a person who had something in view, which, if not a firm resolve, was at least a cherished purpose. The tenor of her life was even and simple enough, and there was nothing remarkable in her history. Her parents had been plain people: her father, secretary to an old-established insurance office, had patronized the concern to the extent of securing a decent sum for the maintenance of his sister and only child. Her mother, who had "disobliged her family," as the phrase is, by her marriage, had died when Hester was a baby; and the only member of the disobliged family now living was a wealthy ship-owner, who had declined to take any notice of the sister who had disgraced herself by wedding a poor man. Mr. Gould came of parents quite as well-born as his wife's: they were all of the respectable tradesman class, but their standard was one of money value, and he did not come up to it. They might have helped him to approach it without inconveniencing themselves, but they did not consider or care about that, and the breach had been complete; indeed, it had soon become irremediable; for Mrs. Gould had survived her marriage only four years, and had died, taking her infant son with her away from all family quarrels and human affairs. Hester grew up, under the kindly, timid, narrow-minded charge of her aunt, a meek spinster, given to the perusal and distribution of tracts, and to the frequentation of meeting-houses where the doctrine was strong and the preaching unctuous. The child became "too much" for her timid aunt and her depressed father at an early period of her existence, and even rebelled against the vicarious authority of Miss Gould's favorite "ministers;" so she was sent to school, and there also she gave no little trouble for a time. But common sense was always Hester's strong point, and it came to her assistance. School was far from pleasant, she reflected, but home was worse; and as she had no power to provide herself with a third alternative at present, she would abide by the lesser of two evils, and turn it to all the advantage she could. The result of this rational conclusion was that Hester Gould profited to the utmost by the limited quantity and mediocre quality of the education administered at Laburnum Lodge, and acquired at least a foundation on which to build afterward according to her taste.

The discretion evinced by the school-girl was a clew to her character. No one was more popular among the small and far from distinguished community; but only the girls whose social position was a little higher than her own could claim Hester as an intimate friend. The gushing nonsense of school friendships had little attraction for her, and she contracted none that she did not contemplate maintaining when the association which had produced them should have ceased. Hester was not brilliantly clever; there was not the least *soupçon* of genius about her; but she was certainly a superior person in intellect, in manners, and in appearance, to the companions of her studies, the sharers of her school life, in that most unbearable kind of intimacy which means contact without companionship. When she went home for the holidays, things were not much better. She had been fond of her father in a quiet way, though she had taken his intellectual measure pretty accurately; and almost as soon as she had arrived at the conclusion that their life was on a dull, mean scale, had recognized his inability to elevate or enliven it.

"We should grub on like this all our lives, if it depended on *him*," the girl had said to herself in emphatic, if not elegant soliloquy; and there had been no willful disrespect to the honest, humdrum, unobservant father in the remark, only Hester's unclouded perception and resolute custom of telling herself the truth. When she was a little over fifteen years old her father died, and she had to endure, in addition to her natural grief, which was unfeigned and sore, a declension in position, and a narrowing of the narrow income, which at its best she had regarded with impatience, very keen, though never expressed, or permitted to escape her by so much as a gesture. Her aunt moved into a smaller house in an inferior situation, discharged one of the two female servants who had composed their modest establishment, and told Hester she hoped she had profited sufficiently by her music and singing lessons to go on without a master, for she could no longer afford to continue them.

Hester bore the alteration with apparent equanimity, but she took a resolution and acted upon it. She was a musician by nature, and music was the one branch of study to which she had taken with avidity, and which she had pursued with unrelaxed industry. She went to the schoolmistress (the establishment had not yet attained to the distinction of possessing a "lady

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principal") and asked her to put her in the immediately-to-be-vacated place of a pupil-teacher, allowing her to continue her own music and singing lessons as an equivalent for her services. The proposition took Miss Nickson by surprise; but she knew Hester Gould's abilities and popularity, and though she did not like the girl particularly, she trusted her fully. It never occurred to the schoolmistress—a simple woman, and a favorable specimen of a generally disagreeable class—that Hester had not made the proposition at her aunt's suggestion, while that young lady contented herself with informing Miss Lavinia Gould by letter of what she had done. "I don't lose caste by it here, where they all know me and I have been on equal terms with them," thought Hester, "and my only chance of getting out of our odious mean existence is by making all I can of such education as I can get. I shall have to teach anyhow, and I can fit myself for teaching a better class of people here." It was not a stupid calculation for so young a head, and it turned out perfectly correct. Hester did not lose caste when her schoolfellows became her pupils, and her teachers, in their turn, took additional pains with her when they knew the object with which she was learning.

Among Hester's intimates for several of her school years was Ellen Streightley, a girl who loved and worshiped one who was in most respects her opposite with a kind of enthusiasm not rare among unworldly natures, in which the intellect is much less powerful than the feelings. The boarding-school at Peckham was not altogether such an establishment as Miss Streightley should have been kept at beyond the period of primary instruction; but her mother was a shy, gentle, unworldly woman, who did not understand any thing about social ambition, and, provided she found her daughter brought up in sound morals and good manners, would not have considered for a moment whether her associates were of a higher class than her own, or came of richer or poorer people. Mrs. Streightley had never changed her mode of life in accordance with her increased means; she had but a narrow circle, which was, however, quite satisfactory to her, and she regarded the commercial and financial magnates with whom her son associated on the rare occasions of his "going into society" as completely out of the sphere of herself and her daughter. This daughter was very dear to her; a tranquil, gentle, congenial companion, a child who had never given her an hour's true anxiety in her life, and had even had the measles and the whooping-cough much more lightly and favorably than other children. Ellen Streightley was short, slight, and extremely fair. She was not exactly pretty, but the calm sweetness of her face was very winning, and the perfect candor and gentleness which sat upon her smooth forehead and looked out of her full blue eyes had an unwearying charm for those who knew how true these indications were of the mind and heart within. Ellen Streightley loved her mother and her brother Robert with all the devotion and dutifulness of her nature, but Hester Gould she loved with enthusiasm in addition. From the first Hester's strong mind had charmed and swayed her, and the imagination of the girl, not very vivid and but rarely awakened, had surrounded her with a halo of its weaving. Had Hester's moral nature been much or openly defective, she never would have won this tribute of love and worship from Ellen Streightley, who had good sense to come in aid of her high principle and her perfect purity of heart, but who succumbed to the superiority of Hester with a delighted submission. When they were children together, Hester's word had been the other's law, and had any thing been needed to perfect her love and admiration, Hester's conduct in voluntarily assuming the position of pupil-teacher in order that her aunt might suffer as little as possible from their narrow circumstances would have supplied their complement. There was no falsehood in this statement, made by Hester to her friend. It was quite true, only it was not the whole of her motive, but a part, and not the chief part of it.

And Hester—what was her share in this strict and loving alliance? Decidedly she liked Ellen Streightley very much, and she prized highly, without comprehending it altogether, the enthusiastic affection of which she was the object, the unreserved confidence of which she was the recipient. She liked the Saturdays and Sundays which she passed at Mrs. Streightley's house at Brixton when Ellen's school-days had come to a conclusion, and her friend coaxed Miss Lavinia Gould to spare Hester to her—a request that lady did not hesitate to grant, as she had very little need of her niece's society; her "Sabbaths," as she punctiliously called them, being passed in hot untiring chase of popular preachers, according to her notions of popularity and estimate of preachers. She declined to join the family party on Sundays, firstly on Sabbatarian principles, secondly because the Streightleys were "Church of England," and she hated that persuasion only a little less than the Roman Communion, and the opposition chapel which set itself against the ministrations of her own particular pastor and saint, the Rev. Malachy Farrell, a powerful controversialist, and a convert from the Romish heresy and abomination of desolation. Ellen had enjoined her mother to exert herself to "make a connection" for Hester, when her days of pupil-teachership came to a conclusion; that lady had obediently exerted herself; Miss Nickson had done as much for the girl, with whom she had never had occasion to find a fault, but who, she rather remorsefully admitted to herself, had never "gained on her" in all the years of their association; and Hester, at twenty years old, when we meet her first, was established as a teacher of music, with a respectable connection, and occupied with her aunt a pretty small house near the Brixton Villa, which in elegance

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and habitableness was a considerable improvement on that in which her father had lived and died.

Ellen Streightley had never cooled or wavered in her love for Hester; and her mother liked the girl very much, though she sometimes had an uncomfortable sort of feeling that she did not understand her perfectly—that Hester might perhaps be "too much" for her and Ellen, if she should think it worth her while to be so. But the kind lady was little given to mental exercises of any troublesome description, and never thought of analyzing her sensations. That she was an exceptional person, singularly unsuspicious, and unlike mothers in general, may surely be conceded, when it is stated that it never occurred to her to think that Hester might possibly be a dangerous intimate for Robert, her beloved and precious son, or could cherish any design or idea whereof he made part. Mrs. Streightley loved her son better than she loved Ellen—a preference which the girl accepted as a matter of course, and believed to be perfectly just and well founded. He was Robert, their Robert, the most important, the most beloved of men, and of course it was all right; and the two women did but follow the example of thousands of their sex, whose perceptions and ideas are confined within a small circle, and whose social sphere and enjoyments resemble a mill, and the going round therein performed by patient and tolerably well-fed beasts. Robert was an amiable man on the whole; he gave no more trouble in the household than was inseparable from the circumstance that he was a man and "didn't understand things," as the household phrase has it, and he loved his mother devotedly, and Ellen very much indeed. It had never occurred to him that her life was a dull one, and that he was rich enough to make it a very different life, if he would but waken up and look away from his counting-house, learn sympathy, and consider what was the real meaning and worth of money. He had never thought of the light and color, the stir and healthful pleasure he might diffuse through the decorous, comfortable, neutral-tinted existence of the Brixton Villa; he had never noticed their absence; and as he had no notion of the life led by other girls, on whom money was lavishly expended, and for whose delectation whole household systems were organized, there was no standard of comparison in his mind. He was so much older than his sister, so much nearer his mother's age than hers, that, while perfect affection had always subsisted between them, it had not been accompanied with much intimacy, and his confidences, which were wholly confined to business matters, had been restricted to his mother, on whose mind it had never dawned that any improvement in their household affairs could be desirable, who had never looked or desired to look outside the circle in which she moved, and who would have received any suggestion of an increase of Ellen's social opportunities and enjoyments with entire incredulity. To her Ellen was as yet little more than a child; and though, if he had been asked what was her age, and had paused to think the matter over, Robert would have perceived the absurdity of so regarding a girl of nineteen, by no means childish of her years, though simple and unworldly as few children are in these progressive days, he practically shared her delusion.

Robert was almost as much accustomed to see Hester Gould as he was to see Ellen. The girls were together as much as possible, due consideration being had to Hester's occupations, and the social duties and privileges of her "connection," which she never neglected. She led an infinitely pleasanter life than did Ellen; for she was very popular among her pupils, and many of their number contrived to extend to her their own amusements and pleasures. She had not much leisure, but she was under no painful necessity to overwork herself; her occupation need never degenerate into slavery, and such hours as she could devote to recreation she could always find recreation to fill. She possessed perfect health and an even temper; not according to the cynical saying, "A good digestion and a bad heart"—not yet, at least. Up to the present time, nothing in Hester's conduct had indicated badness of heart; a little coldness perhaps, but unperceived, and resolution whose inflexibility might have been suspected, but that her resolves had all been in the direction of right and duty. If any body had asked Robert Streightley whether he was acquainted with Miss Hester Gould, he would have unhesitatingly replied that he knew her most intimately—as well as his own sister, and he would have made such an answer in perfect good faith. It would not have been true, nevertheless. If any one had asked Hester Gould whether she knew Robert Streightley, she would have replied that he was an acquaintance of hers, being the brother of one of her dearest friends—(Hester would not have said her "dearest friend," for such a sweeping phrase might have been repeated to her detriment), and she would have said it in a tone calculated to convince the questioner that her acquaintance with Mr. Streightley was of the most formal and conventional kind. In this instance the reply would only have had the exterior of truth, for no one in the world—certainly not the man himself—knew Robert Streightley as well, as thoroughly as Hester Gould knew him. Not his sister, who would talk cheerily about her brother, and extol his genius, his temper, and his personal appearance; not his mother, who would tell Hester a dozen times in a week that he had never caused her an hour's anxiety, and who never admitted that he had a fault, except his tiresome objection to sitting for his photograph; not the old nurse, who would scold Robert freely enough herself, but in whose hearing no one would have had the boldness to declare him subject to the faults, the misfortunes, or the maladies of humanity. It was a fortunate circumstance that Hester Gould had perfectly read Robert Streight-

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ley's character, and had, without any thing like impertinent inquisitiveness, acquired a thorough knowledge of the family history and his personal antecedents; for, some time before the period of her friend's visit to Yorkshire, Hester Gould had made up her mind that she would marry Robert Streightley if possible, and Ellen's last letter had induced her to think of doing so at an earlier period than she had previously contemplated.

"I don't know that Ellen's marriage will not be the best thing that could possibly happen for me," said Hester to herself, as she walked briskly away from Robert Streightley's house after her parley with old Alice. "Of course her brother won't oppose it, though the girl is a greater fool than I thought her, to marry a man with no greater ambition than to spend his life among filthy savages, teaching them a religion entirely unsuitable to their condition of life and status in creation. I hope they won't eat him —at least I hope they won't eat *her;* but she will be better away. I should never succeed in curing her of Brixton ways, and she has really no tastes to be developed. It will be a good opportunity, when she will be divided between love for her Decimus — what a name to be in love with!—and distress at leaving her mother, to furnish her with a suggestion concerning a substitute: it must come entirely from her, of course."

Thus thinking, Hester Gould reached home. She greeted Aunt Lavinia kindly; she was scrupulously dutiful and attentive to her wishes, except in respect to meetings and ministers; sat down cheerfully to her tea, during which meal she quite enlivened the pensive spinster by her gayety, and then went to her piano for what she called a "real good practice." Hour after hour she sat there, filling the room and the house with music; and at length she sang, at her aunt's request, the very same song — of a trifling kind, which Hester rather despised, but sang because it was popular—with which Katharine Guyon was at the selfsame hour achieving the "final pulverization" of Robert Streightley's heart.

CHAPTER VI.

IN CHAMBERS.

The summer sun, bright, warm, and cheering, only just past the zenith of his annual glory, illumined the Temple Gardens, still farther withering the turf, which had been worn by the promenaders of the season into a very bald and ragged state; gladdening the hearts of country-bred nurse-maids with reminiscences of their earlier days, when their virgin hearts were yet untouched by the charms of deceivers in military or police uniforms; loved and cherished by the valetudinarians, poor and old, to whom this city garden was the nearest imitation of God's country which they were able to afford, and who, secluded during the winter in Strand side-street lodging-houses, ventured thither for their daily meed of light and air; glancing merrily on the turbid Thames; and even throwing enlivening glances into the topmost story of the house in Crown-Office Row, which Robert Streightley had visited one memorable night, and wherein one of its joint tenants now sat hard at work.

And, indeed, let him come when he might, in his spring weakness, in his summer glory, in his autumn grandeur, in the feeble struggles which he made during winter, the sun would never have found Charles Yeldham in any other condition. Work was his life, his idol. As a very young man, when he first quitted Oxford, he had prayed to be successful in the profession which he had chosen, and which he had gone into heart and soul. He had vowed that if his labors were only rewarded with success, there should be scarcely any end to them; and now, when he had no rival as a conveyancing barrister among his coevals and very few superiors among his seniors, he still kept grinding on. Not intended by nature for such slavery, as you can tell in one glance at his *physique*, at his broad chest, long sinewy arms and legs, and big white hands; not destitute of an appreciation of fun, as you can see in his bright blue eyes, his large happy mouth, and the deep dimples of his cheeks; what would be generally called a "jolly man," with thick brown curling hair, and a clear skin, and a great hearty laugh, breaking out whenever it had the chance.

Which was not very often. There is nothing very humorous in conveyancing, and in conveyancing Charles Yeldham's life was passed. Gordon Frere, returning from a ball, a supper, or one of his "outings," would hear the roar of Yeldham's shower-bath as he came up the stairs, or would see him, bright and rosy, deep in his books or scratching away with his pen, as he, Frere, with his gibus hat on one side, his collars danced down into a state of limp despondency, and with a faded camellia in his button-hole, peered into the common sitting-room before he crawled to bed. Five in the summer, six in the winter—these were Charles Yeldham's hours of rising. Then, after his cold bath and his hurried toilet, what he called "treadmill" till eight. A sharp run five times round the Temple Gardens, no matter what the weather, a hurried breakfast—chop, bacon, eggs, what-not, and at it again, "treadmill" till two. Bread-and-cheese, a pint bottle of Allsopp, a pipe—generally smoked as he leaned out of the window looking on to the river — and "treadmill" till half past six. Old shooting-coat changed for more presentable garment, hands washed, and Mr. Yeldham walked to the Oxford and Cambridge Club, where he would eat a light dinner, take a very small quantity of wine, and walk back to the Temple to have a final turn of "treadmill" until half past eleven, when he would turn into bed. He had reduced sleep to a minimum, as-

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certained that five and a half hours were exactly sufficient for a man, and never wasted a wink.

There was no absolute occasion for Charles Yeldham to slave in this manner; but when he commenced his work he had had a powerful incentive to industry, and he had found the work grow on him until he absolutely took delight in it. He was the only son of the Honorable and Reverend Stratford Yeldham, a cadet of the Aylmer family, who had been content to marry the daughter of the clergyman with whom he had read during one long vacation, and afterward to go into orders and take up the family living in Norfolk. The living was not a very rich one, and Charley, who loved his father after a fashion not very common now among young men, and who knew that the old gentleman had somewhat pinched and straitened himself to send his son to college with a proper allowance, had made up his mind not only that all that had been spent on him should be repaid, but that his sister Constance—his own dear little sister—should have such a dowry as would enable her to decline any offer whose advantages were merely pecuniary, and at the same time to bring an adequate income to the man of whom her heart should approve. The hope of accomplishing this end lightened Charles Yeldham's labor, and kept him at his desk and among his law-books without an idea of repining, generally indeed with a sense of positive pleasure.

He was at his desk that pleasant summer afternoon, when all nature outside was so bright and gay, so deeply engaged, that he paid not the slightest attention to the sound of the key in the outer door, and only looked up when he felt a hand on his shoulder and saw Gordon Frere standing beside him.

"Grinding away, Charley," said that young gentleman; "hard at it as usual."

"Just the same as ever, old boy," replied Yeldham, "but just as ready as ever to knock off for five minutes—exactly five minutes, mind—and have a chat with you. So there!"—laying down his pen—"now, then, let's begin. Where have you been all the morning? I say, you're rather a greater swell than usual, are you not, Gordon?"

"Eh—swell? no, I don't think so. Emerged just a little bit from the chrysalis state perhaps, but not much. But the least bit of color lights up tremendously and looks radiant beside your old blacks and grays. What a fellow you are, Charley! I wish you'd go in for another style of toggery, and just go to Poole."

"Go to Poole! God forbid!" said Yeldham, with ludicrous energy. "Why, my dear fellow, if I were to be seen in a coat of that sort"—touching the silk-lined skirts of Frere's frock—"or in a pair of trowsers that fitted me like those, there's not an attorney in London would give me any more employment. No, sir! In Store Street, Tottenham-Court Road, resides the artificer who for years has built my garments on what he assures me are sound mathematical principles, and I shall continue to employ him until one of us is removed to a sphere where clothes are unnecessary. And now, once more, where have you been all this morning?"

"Ah! that's exactly what I came home to talk to you about. I've been calling on a deuced pretty girl, Master Charley, and I want to tell you all about it."

"A very pretty girl, eh?" said Yeldham, in rather a hard tone of voice. "A very pretty girl! All right, my boy; tell away."

"I think I've mentioned her before, Charley," said Frere; "Miss Guyon—Kate Guyon, daughter of old Guyon, whom you've heard me speak of—a member of the club, you know—fellow who plays a deuced good game of whist, and that kind of thing. And the girl's really wonderful—very handsome, and with a regular well-bred look about her. None of your dumpy, dowdy, slummakin women—I hate that style—but tall and elegant; carries herself well, and has plenty to say for herself—when she chooses."

"When she chooses, eh!" said Yeldham, with a slight smile; "and I suppose she does choose—to you."

"Well, you know, that's not for a fellow to say. She's always been very civil; and I rode with her yesterday in the Park, and was in her box at the Opera last night—when I say her box I mean Lady Henmarsh's, the old cat who is her principal chaperone—and we got on capitally together, and I think it was all right. I should have told you of it when I got home, but I looked into your room, and you were as sound as a top; or this morning, but you were closeted in the office with some fellow on business. So I went off to call on her—there was a kind of tacit arrangement that I should do so—and, by George, I really think I'm hit this time, and that I mean more than ever I did before."

"Mean more! In what way, Gordon?"

"In the way of marriage, of course, you old idiot. Mean that if I were to ask her, I think she'd have me. And she'd be a deuced creditable wife to have about with one; and the governor must just stir himself, and use his influence and get me a consulship, or a commissionership, or something where there's a decent income, and not very much to do for it. There are such things, of course."

"I don't know, Gordon. Recollect these are the days when every thing is won by merit, and not won without a competitive examination."

"Oh yes; competitive examination be hanged! I'm not going in for any thing of that sort. If a man who's sat for the same borough for five-and-twenty years, and never voted against his party except once, by mistake, when he'd been dining out and strolled into the wrong lobby—if such a patriot as this can't get a decent berth for his son without any bother about examination and all that kind of thing, where are our privileges as citizens? Oh no; that'll come all square, of course. But what do you advise me about the girl?"

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"It's difficult to give such advice off-hand, Gordon, more especially as I have never seen the young lady, and have scarcely heard of her. But, though you're not particularly learned, young un, you've plenty of knowledge of the world, and are one of the last men likely to be entrapped into a silly marriage, or to let yourself be made miserable for life by giving in to a mere passing fancy. So, if you and the young lady are really fond of each other, and if your father can be persuaded to give himself the trouble to get some tolerably decent government appointment for you, I should say, 'Propose to her like an honorable man; and God speed you!' I—I think I should see my father first, Gordon, and make sure of what he would do; for, from all I've heard, I don't think Mr. Guyon is a man of resources—I mean pecuniary resources."

"N-no," said Frere, "I should not think he was. He's a remarkably chirpy old boy, tells very good stories, and is always well got-up; but I shouldn't think his balance at his banker's was very satisfactory. However, Kate's simply charming; stands out from all the ruck of girls one knows, and is in the habit of meeting and dancing with, like a star. I'll write down to the governor and sound him about what he'd be inclined to do; and I'll just go round before dinner to Queen Anne Street; not to go in, you know—of course not; but there's the last Botanical Fête to-morrow in the Regent's Park, and Kate asked me if I was going, and I said I'd go if she went, and she said she'd try and get some one to take her. I suppose the old woman who's always about with her doesn't care for dissipation by daylight. I say, Charley, fancy if it comes off all straight! Fancy me a married man!"

Yeldham smiled, but said nothing. There was scarcely any occasion for him to speak, for Frere was full of his subject, and rattled on.

"How astonished your people will be! I can see the vicar reading your letter announcing the news through his double eye-glass, and then handing it over to little Constance and exclaiming, 'Won-derful!' And Constance, with her large, solemn gray eyes, and her pert nose, and her fresh little mouth—Constance, whom I used to call 'my little wife' when I was grinding away with the vicar in those jolly days—ah! what a glorious old fellow he is!—won't she be surprised when she finds I've got a real wife! And you—you'll be left alone in chambers, Charley, old boy; all alone!—though you don't see much of me as it is, do you, old fellow?"

"No, Gordon, not much," said Yeldham, rising; "not so much as I should wish. But it's pleasant to me to look forward to your coming, to bring a little of the outside world's life and light into these dreary old rooms, and to prove to me that I am not actually part and parcel of these musty old books and parchments, as I'm sometimes half inclined to believe. However, I could not expect to have you always with me, any more than I could expect it to be always summer; and, indeed, if you were always here, I should not know what to do with you. Come, my five minutes' rest has been prolonged into a perfect idleness. Out with you, and let me get to work again!"

"No, no, not yet, Charley. It's so seldom I have the chance of getting you to take your nose off the paper, and to open your ears to any thing that is not law-jargon, that I'm not going to give in so soon. Besides, I've been talking all this time, and now it's your turn. I want your advice, and your going to give it to me, and that's all about it."

"It's a great pity you don't stick to your profession, Gordon," said Yeldham, half laughingly, half in earnest; "you would have made a great success at the Old Bailey. You've all the characteristics of that style of practice charmingly developed—plenty of cheek, plenty of volubility, and supreme self-reliance. If you had done me the honor of listening to me instead of thinking what you were going to say next, you would have heard me advise you half an hour ago."

"Stuff! I heard you fast enough. Propose to the girl, and all that; very honorable and straightforward, you know, Charley, but a little old-fashioned, you know—at least you don't know; how should you, shut up in this old hole? But what I mean to say is, fellows don't propose to girls nowadays, old fellow, except in books and on the stage, and that sort of thing. You understand each other, you know, without going on your knees, or 'plighting troth,' or any rubbish of that kind. But what I want to know is, what is my line toward the old party—Guyon père?"

"Hold on a minute, Gordon," said Charles Yeldham, rising from his chair, plunging his hands into his trowsers' pockets, and taking up his position of vantage on the hearth-rug. "Granted all you say about my being old-fashioned, you yet seem to think that there is a phase of courtship sufficiently unchanged—I was going to say sufficiently natural—for me to be able to advise you upon."

"He-ar, he-ar!" said Mr. Frere, knocking the table on which he was seated.

"But, before I attempt to give you any advice, I must know whether you are really in earnest in this business. Yes, I know you say you're 'hard hit,' and 'serious this time,' and a lot of stuff that I've heard you say a dozen times before about a dozen different girls. What I want to know is, do you really think seriously of marrying Miss Guyon? Has it entered your mind to regard it from any other point than the mere calf-love view, what you in your slang call 'being spooney' upon her? I mean, Gordon, old fellow—I'm a solemn old fogy, you know; but it's in the fogy light that such a solemn thing should be looked at—are you prepared to take Miss Guyon as your wife?"

"On my sacred honor, Charley, there's nothing would make me so happy."

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"Then the honorable way to go to work is to see Mr. Guyon at once and speak to him. Tell him your feelings and—"

"And my prospects, eh, Charley? He's safe to ask about them."

"Well, you can tell him what you've just said of your father's position, and what you intend to ask him to do for you. And then—"

"Yes; and then?"

"Well, then you'll hear what he's got to say to that."

"Ye-es; it won't take me very long to listen to an exposition of Mr. Guyon's views on my financial position, I take it. However, I'm almost certain — quite certain, I may say — of Kate; and as you think it's due to her to speak to her father—"

"I'm sure of it, Gordon. It's the only honorable course."

"Well, then, I'll do it at once, though I don't much like it, I can tell you."

"Whatever may be the result, it's best you should know it soon, Gordon. Nothing unfits a man for every thing so much as being in a state of doubt."

"I'll end mine at once, Charley. No, not at once. I must first see if that Botanical-fête arrangement is coming off, and after that I'll speak to her father. Devilish solemn phrase that, eh, Charley!"

"It won't be so dreadful in carrying out as it sounds, my boy. Clear out now; you sha'n't have another instant!"

Gordon Frere nodded laughingly at his friend, and, after making a hurried toilet in his own room, started off for Queen Anne Street, while Charles Yeldham seated himself at his desk.

But not to work; his mind was too full for that. The short, light conversation just recorded had given Charles Yeldham matter for much deliberation. When a man's life is thoroughly engrossed by mental work, the few humanizing influences which he allows to operate on him are infinitely more absorbing than the thousand fleeting affections of the light-hearted and the thoughtless. When Charles Yeldham gave his thoughts a holiday from his conveyancing, and turned them from the attorneys who employed him and the work which they brought him to do, his mind reverted generally to the loved ones in the vicarage at home, or to the two men whose friendship he had time and opportunity to cultivate. Never was younger brother better loved than was Gordon Frere by the large-hearted, large-brained philosopher whose chambers he shared. It was indeed from the elder-brother point of view that Yeldham regarded Frere. As a boy Gordon had been the one private pupil whom the old vicar had admitted into his house, and later in life he had passed two long vacations at the sea-side with his old tutor and the members of his family. Charley loved the young man with all the large capacity of his loving nature, looked with the most lenient eye on his boyish frivolities and dissipations, and had hitherto never feared for his future, hoping that he would settle down into some useful career before he thought of settling himself for life. But the conversation just held had entirely changed his ideas. Gordon, unstable, unsettled, without any means or resources, had announced his intention of taking a wife. And what a wife! Of the young lady herself Yeldham knew nothing; but certain pleadings which he had drawn some twelve months beforehand in a case which never came into court, and which had been settled by mutual arrangement, had given him a clear insight into the character of Mr. Edward Scrope Guyon, and into that worthy gentleman's resources and manner of life. With such a man Yeldham felt perfectly certain that an impecunious scion of a good family like Gordon Frere coming as a pretender for his daughter's hand would not have the smallest chance of success, and it was with a heavy heart that he sat idly sketching figures on his blotting-pad, and turning all over that he had recently heard in his mind.

"I don't see my way out of it," said he, throwing down his pen at length, and plunging his hands into his pockets. "I don't see my way out of it, and that's the truth. Gordon is hard hit, I believe—harder hit than he has ever been yet, and means all fairly and honorably; but fair play and honor won't avail much, I imagine, in carrying out this connection—at least with the male portion of the family. A man with the morals of a billiard-marker and an income of a couple of thousand a year would have a better chance with old Guyon than a Bayard or a Galahad. He's a bad lot, this Mr. Guyon, but as sharp as a ferret, and he'll read Gordon like a book. All the poor boy's talk about what his political influence and what his father must do for him, and all that, won't weigh for an instant with a man like Guyon, who is up to every move on the board, and who will require money down from any one bidding for his daughter's hand. I wonder what the girl's like, and how much of the play rests in her hands. That old rip would never be base enough to make her his instrument in advancing his own fortune? And yet how often it's done, only in a quieter and less noticeable manner! Gad! I begin to think I am a bit of a cynic, as Gordon chaffingly calls me, when I find these ideas floating through my head; and I'm sure any one would imagine I was one, or worse, if, knowing my own convictions, they had heard me advise that poor boy to see old Guyon and lay his statement before him. But I'm convinced that that is the only way of dealing with such a matter as this. Have the tooth out at once; the wrench will do you good, and prevent any chance of floating pains in the future. Guyon will handle the forceps with strength and skill, and poor Gordon will think that half his life is gone with the tug. But, once over, when he begins to find that the gap is not so enormous as he at first imagined, when he sees people don't notice the alteration in his appearance, he'll begin to think it was a

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good job that it happened while he was yet young, and he'll settle down and get to work, and perhaps make the name and reputation which his talents, if they had any thing like fair play, entitle him to. It's wonderful the different light in which men see these things. There's my boy there just mad for this girl, raving about her beauty, going into ecstasies about her hair, and eyes, and figure, and here am I, his chum and intimate, who can safely say that never, in the course of a life extending now to some six-and-thirty years, have I had the faintest idea of what being in love is like. Lord, Lord! what a queer world it is! and what is for the best? Perhaps, if I had had nice smooth fair hair instead of a shock-head of bristles, I should have been kneeling at ladies' feet instead of stooping over my desk, and writing sonnets for girls instead of drawing pleas for attorneys. I know which pays best, but I wonder which is the most interesting. 'Never felt the kiss of love, nor maiden's hand in mine,' eh? Well, I don't know that I'm much the worse for that. Maidens' hands seem to lead one into all sorts of scrapes; and as for the kiss of love— Why, what time's that?"

The striking of the clock on the mantel-piece roused him from his reverie, and looking up, he discovered that his intended five-minutes' absence from work had been extended over two hours, and that the daylight of the late summer time was beginning to fade. So, with a heavy sigh, he lit his reading-lamp and settled down to his desk again. Like every other man accustomed to hard work, he found it immediate relief from thought, and soon became immersed in his writing, at which he slaved away until it was time to get some dinner. He had no heart to walk up to the club that evening. He might meet some fellows of his acquaintance there—very possibly Gordon himself, and he was not inclined to chatter upon trivial subjects; so he put on his hat and strode over to the Cock, the quiet solemnity of the old tavern at that hour of the evening, when the late diners had departed and the early supper-eaters had not yet arrived, being thoroughly congenial to his feelings. After his dinner he went back to his chambers, and after smoking a pipe, during which process he again fell a thinking over Gordon's trouble, he returned to his work, and was in full swing, when he heard a key in the lock, and the next minute Mr. Gordon Frere entered the room.

"Halloo, Gordon!" said Charley, looking up at the clock; "why, it's not eleven; what on earth brings you home so early, young un?"

"Happiness, Charley! jolliness, old fellow! It's all right about to-morrow; Kate's going to the fête, and— After dinner at the Club I went up into the strangers' smoking-room, and there wasn't any one there I knew—only a couple of old fellows, who sat and smoked in silence; and so I got thinking it all over; and what a stunning girl she is, and how sure I am that she's fond of me, and how fond I am of her—regularly hit, you know; and so I thought it would be horrible somehow to go any where after—to the theatre, you know, or to hear the fellows chaffing in the way they do about—women and every thing, and so I came home."

"Just in time to wish me good-night, my boy. I'm off to bed."

"Not until I've extracted a promise from you, Charley, old fellow."

"And that is—? Look sharp, Gordon; I'm sleepy."

"And that is, that you'll come with me to-morrow to the Botanical Fête."

"To the—to the Botanical Fête! I? Ah! I see; poor Gordon! too much Guyon has made you mad."

"No, Charley, I'm serious. You know you're my best and dearest friend, the only real friend I have in the world—for my own people are like every body else's own people, full of themselves and not caring one rap for me—and I want you to see my—to see Miss Guyon, and to give me your real opinion about her."

"By which, of course, you'll be thoroughly influenced, and if I won't approve give her up at once. No, Gordon, I'm not much experienced in these things, but I *do* know enough not to commit myself in the way you suggest. However, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make half holiday for once, and go with you to the fête, reserving my opinion of the young lady to myself."

"Well, it's something to have got you to leave that old desk for an hour, to get you to look at trees and flowers instead of foolscap and red tape. And as for Miss Guyon—well, you'll say something about her, I've no doubt."

"I'm not sorry this opportunity offered," said Charley Yeldham to himself as he was undressing. "I've not much curiosity, but I confess I'm anxious to see the girl who has so captivated Master Gordon, partly on her own account, and partly to see if I can trace in her manner any suspicion of a— No; no woman could be bad enough to lay herself out to entrap a man at her father's desire! And besides, Gordon Frere's not worth snaring!"

CHAPTER VII.

KATHARINE GUYON.

So three men, all good fellows in their way, and two possessed of qualities not common, and destined to be influenced throughout all their lives by the seeming chance that had made them acquainted with her, were thinking of Katharine Guyon, rather than of any or all their more immediate and important concerns. She had dawned, a new luminary, on their horizon, and two were conscious worshipers of the bright visible presence, the other had not yet turned his eyes that way. He will do so before long, and then—

As for Katharine Guyon herself, she had

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thoughts at present for but one person, and speculations only on one subject. Her warm, impulsive, wholly undisciplined heart had accepted Gordon Frere as its tenant and ruler, after a sudden fashion, which was not to be defended or excused if judged by the standard of conventionality, or indeed of common sense. When the latter quality shall be in any one instance admitted into a case of love-at-first-sight, it may advance a claim to invariable acknowledgment — certainly not otherwise. As for conventionality, Katharine in no way bowed to its authority; and it was fortunate indeed that her good taste and innate good-breeding preserved her from any boldness or vulgarity of demeanor, for those were her only safeguards. Legitimate rule over her there was none, and she would not for a moment have brooked usurped authority. Her position was peculiar, and, though there was a good deal of the glitter of fashion and the reality of enjoyment about it, to clear-sighted eyes, looking below the surface, pitiable.

Katharine's mother had brought her husband no advantages in their short, not remarkably happy marriage, except those attached to an extensive and distinguished family connection. She had no fortune, no possessions of any kind, except some handsome jewels, which were secured to her, to descend to her children. She lived only a short time, but it is probable she thought the period sufficiently prolonged, for she died, when Katharine was born, with no farther expression of regret than that she wished she could have taken the child with her, but was consoled by learning that the physicians thought the feeble infant very unlikely to live. Isabella Stanbourne—for such was the name of Katharine's mother—was a handsome woman, of fine mind and high principles. These qualities had not availed to prevent her making the tremendous though not unusual mistake of a wholly uncongenial marriage, but they did her the questionable service of opening her eyes to the blunder she had committed before she had been Edward Guyon's wife many weeks. Once opened, Mrs. Guyon's eyes were not the sort of optics ever to be even partially closed again, and they perceived and scrutinized every particular of her husband's character and conduct with merciless clearness and vigilance. That gentleman furnished them with ample material for their scrutiny; and from the close of the honeymoon to the termination of her life Mrs. Guyon held the partner of her existence, whom she knew to be a liar and a profligate, and suspected to be a swindler, in quiet, undemonstrative, but supreme contempt. She was a woman in whom the existence of any kind of regard or even compassion was incompatible with the least feeling of scorn, and so she never tried to persuade herself that she entertained either toward her husband from the day she found out that the man she had married was a being of a totally different order to the idol which her fancy had set up and worshiped. She did not leave him even when she made farther and more serious discoveries: in the first place, because she disliked the scandal of a separation; in the second, because she was conscious of great delicacy of health, and had a strong presentiment that she should not survive the birth of her child. She determined to give herself the chance, if, contrary to her conviction, she lived; she could then decide upon her future. The chance befriended her, and Mrs. Guyon died. Her last days were undisturbed by her husband's presence. He had gone to Doncaster when the event which made him a father and a widower took place, and having made rather a good thing of the expedition, he returned to town in very tolerable spirits, and felt that he should now be more interesting and irresistible than ever as a young widower, and could easily get over the inconsolable stage by a trip on the Continent. His dead wife's sister-in-law, the Hon. Mrs. Philip Stanbourne, undertook very gladly to look after the little motherless infant, at whom the elegant Ned barely glanced, during her days of babyhood, and she redeemed her promise well.

It is unnecessary to inquire into the career of Mr. Guyon between the period of Katharine's birth and that of her *début* in society. It was evident that, however well-founded his anticipations of success, it had not been in the matrimonial direction; and, indeed, some rather amusing anecdotes were current in society concerning "Ned's" audacious attempts and egregious failures. His wife's relatives had never particularly admired Mr. Guyon; but they were kindly, unaffected people, and Mrs. Guyon had been strictly and uniformly silent on all her domestic concerns, so that, though they surmised that the brief marriage had not been the altogether ecstatic union Isabella had imagined it would prove, they had nothing but surmise in their minds respecting it, and they never thought of withholding from the motherless girl any of the advantages derivable from their social position and influence. These were far more important to Katharine's father than her guileless uncles, aunts, and cousins imagined—to whom a life of shifts, scheming, and pretense was an utterly unknown and unsuspected possibility—and much more important too to Katharine herself, as regulating her father's conduct toward her, than the girl ever knew or dreamed of. She would probably have been placed economically out of sight, at a foreign boarding-school, and left there to attain the age of womanhood, unnoticed by her father, had not the kind relatives under whose care her early childhood had been happily passed given her consequence in Mr. Guyon's eyes, causing him to regard her as a valuable possession, a court-card in fact. So, instead of a cheap foreign school being selected as an *oubliette* for the child—in virtue of whom Mr. Guyon had a seat at the tables of many who were more great than wise—an expensive establishment for young ladies in the Regent's Park was honored by Mrs. Stanbourne's choice,

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and there Katharine was brilliantly, if not solidly educated, the larger portion of the *pension* and her personal expenses being paid by her uncle. In Katharine's early girlhood the Hon. Philip Stanbourne died, and she sustained by this calamity a double loss—not only that of her kind relative and friend, but of her aunt's counsel, training, and protection in the perilous time which lay before her—the time of early womanhood and her entrance into society. The widow went abroad with her daughter, who was some years older than Katharine; and though she was in London when the events just related took place, she was not likely to be again a settled resident in England, as her daughter had married an Austrian nobleman, high in the diplomatic world, and desired to have as much of her mother's society as possible.

The fashionable "establishment" had turned out few girls so well calculated to do it credit and extend its fame as Katharine Guyon, when, at a little more than seventeen, she appeared in a circle of society where, though her father, with all his cleverness and *savoir faire*, received little more than toleration, she at once made a favorable impression. In her appearance she combined the personal attractions of both her parents: she had her mother's high-bred look, her father's vivacity and his fine features; she had the elegant carriage, the delicate hands and feet, the refined voice of Isabella Stanbourne, and the airy, easy manner which in Mr. Guyon had a *soupçon* of impudence. In disposition she resembled her mother exclusively; but there were strong points of difference between them—difference deepened, no doubt, by the circumstances of Katharine's girlhood, by the fact that she had never been the object, as her mother had been, of exclusive and conscientious female care since she had ceased to be a child. She had not the clear, direct, keen perception of her mother, but she was her equal in resolution, and more than her equal in implacability. She was high-spirited now, and impatient of contradiction to a degree that indicated some violence of temper; her feelings were keen and impulsive, and her affections strong and passionate, though undeveloped; for, indeed, who had the girl to love? She had gone through the ordinary school-girl friendships, and also through the customary flirtations since the former had come to a natural end, but she did not really love any body in the world except perhaps Mrs. Stanbourne, and of her she had seen but little for some time.

Her feelings toward her father were of a mixed, and, on the whole, of an unsatisfactory character, such as any one watching the girl with anxiety and experience must have recognized with regret. She was fond of him after a fashion, and there was a good deal of *camaraderie* between them; but she had an intuitive distrust of him, and she knew instinctively that all his indulgence, all his flattery, all his yielding to her wishes and furnishing her pleasures, were superficial compliances. He liked the kind of life she liked; she knew him well enough, without formally reasoning upon her knowledge, to feel convinced that if their tastes or wishes clashed in any way, *hers*, and not *his*, would be expected, if not obliged, to yield. She admired her father's pleasant manners and social talents; she had but rarely any opportunity of contrasting his fulfillment of the paternal relation with that of other men; and she was full of youth, health, spirits, and capacity for the enjoyment of every kind of pleasure that offered; so she went her way carelessly and joyously, and reasoned little upon the present or the future. Katharine and her father were not real friends, but they were always technically "good friends," a result to which the underlying violence of the girl's nature no doubt unconsciously conduced. Mr. Guyon hated trouble and detested scenes, and he had a tolerably correct occult sense that he might find himself "in for" both if he interfered much with Katharine: consequently he did not interfere; and as she was totally in the dark respecting his pecuniary circumstances, and never asked any troublesome questions, they got on very well together. Real companionship they had none, but they did not miss it; and while her father's chief anxiety about Katharine was that she should make a good match before "she went off" in looks—a good match implying a rich son-in-law, conveniently indifferent about settlements, and ready to "do" bills to any reasonable or unreasonable amount—Katharine's chief anxiety about him was that he should dye his hair and whiskers with greater success, and drink less wine on evenings when he went to parties with her. She knew he was proud of her beauty, and thought her "doosid good company," but she did not for a moment imagine he had any sentimental love for her; indeed, she fancied he had not much feeling, for he had never mentioned her mother to her in his life. Their relation, in fact, was pleasant, hollow, and heathen; and when Katharine abandoned herself to her new-born love for Gordon Frere, she never thought of her father's feelings or wishes in the matter, or had a more dutiful notion in her mind than that it "made it pleasant that papa liked his coming about the house." You see she was no exceptional being, no angel alighted for a little on a sphere unworthy of her footsteps and her wings, but an interesting, captivating, self-willed woman, such as circumstances had made her—a woman whose weaknesses were as visible as her charms, whose strength was latent and unsuspected.

It was not to be supposed that a girl like Katharine—handsome, clever, dashing, and independent in her ideas and manners, of a not precisely-to-be-defined position in society, and with a not-exactly-to-be-commended father—should escape sharp, and not kind or altogether candid criticism. She was very much admired; she commanded admiration indeed, however reluctantly accorded; and men liked her very much, even men who were not in love with her, and with whom she did not take the trouble to flirt. Women did not like her, and yet the girl

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gave them no fair excuse for their prejudice. She was not a determined coquette, conquering and monopolizing; she was not rudely inattentive to women, as "beauties" and "blues" usually are; she was smiling and agreeable, and perfectly indifferent to them all; and, with a host of acquaintances, had but one female friend, her aunt, Mrs. Stanbourne. With Lady Henmarsh, who was a distant relative on her father's side, Katharine lived on terms of great intimacy—the lady was indeed her constant, her official *chaperone*—but it was an intimacy of the kind which more frequently precludes than includes friendship.

Lady Henmarsh was a woman of the world, in every possible meaning and extent of the term. She was the exact opposite of Mrs. Stanbourne in manners, mind, tastes, opinions, and principles; and she disliked Mrs. Stanbourne so cordially, that she might have endeavored to influence Katharine in a contrary direction to that of her wishes, simply to annoy that lady; but she was saved from any thing so unphilosophical by the fact that it suited her in every way to appoint herself high-priestess of Miss Guyon's world-worship. As no one ever saw, and many had never heard of Lady Henmarsh's husband, it was a pardonable mistake, frequently made by strangers, to suppose that she was a widow. This, however, was not the case. A miserable invalid, whose migrations, if not quite confined to Goldsmith's *itinéraire*, were only from his dull house in Hampshire to his dull house in Cavendish Square—a cross, palsied, querulous old man, called Sir Timothy Henmarsh, who had long since lapsed out of the sight and the memory of society, still existed, not altogether to the displeasure of his lady, who would be seriously impoverished by his death—existed in a condition of illness and suffering which rendered it indispensable that his wife should, in deference to what society calls common decency, provide herself with some farther excuse for her neglect of him, and her constant presence at gay and festive scenes of every description, than the real but unproduceable one that she liked dissipation and disliked him. Lady Henmarsh and Mr. Guyon had been very good friends indeed in former days, when he was a young widower, thoroughly consoled, and Hetty Lorimer was a pretty portionless girl, who knew that she had nothing to look to but marriage, and that if she desired to secure the enjoyment of such things as her soul loved, she must take care that it was a "good" one. A marriage with her handsome cousin would have been any thing but one of the required description; and, indeed, neither of them ever contemplated such a possibility. They were persons of a discreet and practical turn, and Mr. Guyon went to Hetty Lorimer's wedding (a solemnity at which Sir Timothy Henmarsh's son, a gentleman some years the bride's senior, sternly declined to be present) with perfect alacrity and good-humor. They had been excellent friends ever since; and when, the time having arrived at which Mr. Guyon found it convenient to transfer his daughter from the "establishment" to Queen Anne Street, Lady Henmarsh gave him her advice, and offered him her services with enthusiastic friendship, what more proper and satisfactory arrangement could possibly have been entered into than that Lady Henmarsh should "do the maternal" by Katharine?

"I've no doubt you'll do it to perfection, Hetty," said Mr. Guyon, as he rose and terminated the interview; "only you won't look the part within a dozen years." And the good-looking deceiver went down the stairs with a smile, which expanded into a grin when he reached the street; for Miss Hester Lorimer and Miss Isabella Stanbourne had been girls together, and the former was a little older than the lady who had married the irresistible Ned Guyon.

This unexceptionable arrangement had now lasted a considerable time, and no likelihood of its coming to a conclusion by the marriage of Katharine had yet presented itself. Lady Henmarsh was better pleased than Mr. Guyon that it should be so, and less surprised. She understood Katharine better than her father understood her; she knew how entirely unscathed she had been amid the lightning flashes of real admiration and simulated sentiment which had played around her girlish head; she knew that in Katharine's perfectly impartial brightness, her frank acceptance of the incense offered before her, her smiling pleasure and indifference, consisted the barrier to Mr. Guyon's wishes. For her part, she was in no hurry about the matter; indeed, the longer Miss Guyon should require some one (meaning herself) to go about with her, the better pleased she would be. But, though Lady Henmarsh did not disquiet herself because Mr. Guyon's wishes remained unfulfilled, she would very seriously and earnestly have disapproved of their being traversed and thwarted. She did not particularly care that Katharine should marry soon, but she fervently desired that she should marry well; and it was with a new and very unpleasant sense of misgiving that she observed the eager and vivacious pleasure which Katharine evinced in the society of Mr. Gordon Frere, and watched the faces and the manner of the two from the alcove, whence she beheld the dancers at Mrs. Pendarvis's ball. Lady Henmarsh knew very little of Gordon Frere; indeed, only one fact beyond the good looks and the good manners patent to all observers. But in that one fact lay the only important item of knowledge, in the estimation of Lady Henmarsh. Gordon Frere was a poor man, with no income to speak of, and only very desultory, undefined, and contingent expectations. Clearly this would not meet either Mr. Guyon's views or her own. She hoped, she trusted, nay, she believed that Katharine would not be so infatuated as to think of marrying Frere; she trusted Frere was too much a man of the world to think of marrying Katharine. It was only a flirtation—it must

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be only a flirtation; but even that, if she carried it to such an extent as she had done at the ball, Katharine must be induced to give up. It would be remarked—it would keep off other men; of course, it was quite foolish to be afraid of any thing serious; so Lady Henmarsh hoped, and trusted, and believed, and yet she doubted and feared. She did not altogether like to acknowledge to herself, perhaps, how little confidence she felt in her own power of "inducing" Katharine to do any thing which did not accord with her own inclination and humor. The tie between them was formed of mutual complaisance, not of influence and respect. Lady Henmarsh did not understand either the strength of Katharine's feelings or the determination of her temper; she had never seen either roused into action, and she regarded her as rather shrewder and more worldly-minded than most girls, as well as cleverer and better-looking. So, though she knew her to be self-willed, she calculated on her sense and shrewdness overcoming her obstinacy in a matter in which her worldliness would teach her that obstinacy was injurious and misplaced.

Lady Henmarsh pondered these things one fine summer's day, while Katharine rambled about the Botanical Gardens with Gordon Frere and others; while every glance caught from his blue eyes, and every sentence intoned especially for her ear by his earnest musical voice, bound the girl's heart more closely to him, and rendered the task which Lady Henmarsh proposed to herself more difficult of fulfillment, more infructuous in result.

"At all events, it shall not go on like this beyond to-night," said her ladyship to herself: "if she looks at and dances with him as she did at Mrs. Pendarvis's, I shall tell Ned Guyon about it, and find out what he thinks; but my decided opinion is that it is full time *some* steps were taken." And then she went to visit Sir Timothy.

Mrs. Streightley and her daughter had returned to the Brixton Villa, had been affectionately received by Robert, and had heard from him the history of all his doings in their absence. Of course Ellen had allowed the briefest possible space of time to elapse between her return and the dispatch of an eager summons entreating Hester Gould to come to her with the least possible delay. Hester arrived about two hours before the ordinary dinner-hour, and the young ladies passed that space of time in the interchange of delightful confidences—complete and heartfelt on the part of Ellen Streightley, and as meagre as might be on that of Hester Gould. All the particulars of Ellen's engagement, which she had already detailed by letter, were again confided to Hester; all the particulars of the visit from which they had just returned, and which had been made to certain relatives of Mrs. Streightley's, of the agricultural persuasion, were once more related in full.

"I used to think Thorswold rather a stupid place, dearest Hester," said Ellen, and a fine blush overspread her pretty honest face; "little did I ever think I should meet my fate there. I do so long for you to see Decimus. You will think him so delightful."

"I shall be very much pleased to see him, Ellen," returned Hester; "and I rejoice, as I am sure you know, in your happiness. But tell me about your brother—what does he say to it all?"

"Well, indeed, Hester," said Ellen, hesitating and laughing, "that is what I can hardly tell you, he has said so little. He kissed me, and pulled my ear, and called me a little goose, in his own kind way, you know; but he is so taken up with some new friends he has made, I can not make him out. He looks quite different, I am sure, and is so particular about his dress! A lot of new clothes have just come home from his tailor's, and a whole boxful of lavender-kid gloves. Isn't it funny, Hester? Dear old Robert, he talks a great deal about *Mr.* Guyon; but I suspect he thinks more of *Miss;* though, indeed, I only found out there was a Miss Guyon quite by accident."

Hester Gould's face flushed with sudden anger, and into her calm calculating heart there came a pang of unaccustomed doubt and fear. But it was quite in her ordinary tone she said,

"So your brother's friend is Mr. Guyon, is he? Does he live in Queen Anne Street?"

"Yes, yes; I am sure that is the street I have heard him mention. Stay, there's an invitation stuck in the chimney-glass—here it is. 'Mr. and Miss Guyon request'—and so—yes, '110 Queen Anne Street.' Do you know them, Hester?"

"No, not personally; but I have seen Miss Guyon frequently. I used to teach singing to the Miss Morrisons in the next house, No. 109—it is vacant now, and shut up since Sir Christopher died—and I often saw her going out to ride. She used to go just about at my hour."

"And is she nice, Hester—is she pretty? Robert never has told me any thing particular about her. Men never can describe any one."

"She is very handsome, very elegant, and very fashionable," replied Hester; and then she departed from her usual cautious reticence so far as to say, "and I heard the Morrisons say Mr. Guyon was very 'fast,' and lived beyond his means."

"Indeed," said Ellen, in a very grave tone, for to her the accusation of living beyond one's means sounded very portentous; "I am sure Robert would not approve of that."

Hester Gould watched Robert Streightley quietly and closely the whole of that evening. She saw him different to any thing he had ever been; preoccupied, absent, but not unhappy. A smile played frequently over his features; and though he sunk into frequent fits of abstraction, they were evidently not painful. He was as kind and affectionate as usual to his mother and sisters, as attentive to herself; but a change had passed upon him which she fully under-

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stood. In her cold, repressed way, she was bitterly angry.

She went home rather early. As Robert Streightley saw her to the cab and bade her good-night, she said to herself,

"Daniel Thacker knows this Mr. Guyon—his sisters may know something about the girl. I'll go to Hampstead to-morrow; they don't mind Sunday visitors, and I may have a chance of seeing their brother. Really that girl Ellen grows sillier every day."

CHAPTER VIII.

AMARYLLIS IN A MARQUEE.

The prettiest public *fêtes* in London are those given in the gardens of the Botanical Society in the Regent's Park. There is to be found plenty of fresh green turf; there are myriads of lovely flowers blooming in open beds, or tastefully arranged beneath the marquees; there are solemn old big trees stretching out their umbrageous arms, and in their majesty making one think even less favorably than usual of the perky straggling sticks at South Kensington; there are the bands of two or three guards regiments, having sufficient compassion on the visitors to play one after the other, and not, as in some places, at the same time; and there is generally a collection of the nicest-looking people in town. There are few *savans*, and not much literary or artistic talent; but as *savans* and the professors of literary and artistic talent are for the most part any thing but nice-looking, and as flirtation is the science to which at these gatherings attention is principally devoted, their loss is not felt; indeed, it may be safely said that the general company is happier for their absence.

Although the last *fête* of the season is scarcely to be compared to its immediate predecessor, the warm weather of the two preceding days had done very much in contributing to its gayety on the first occasion when Mr. Charles Yeldham found himself making holiday from his work, and taking part in a grand ceremony of nothing-doing with those whose lives were passed in never doing any thing; and, like most men who rarely emerge from the business of their lives to seek a temporary respite from perpetual work in a few brief hours of enjoyment, Charley was determined to make the most of his time, and to reap the full value of those precious hours which he had grudgingly given up. With his chum leaning on his arm, he made his way through the fruit-tent and the flower-tent, round the American garden, where the glorious azalias, so lately a mass of magnificent beauty, now stood bare and drooping; now attracting the attention of a group of faded dowagers by his energy and volubility; anon pausing in rapt attention, listening to the strains of the melody-breathing "Sonnambula," as performed by the Grenadiers, or nodding head and beating hand in sufficiently ill-kept time to a whirlwind galop rattled through by the band of the Artillery. Into his holiday, as into his work, Charley had thrown his whole heart; he had determined to shut out temporarily all thoughts of attorneys, pleas, work, and worry, and he went in for the pleasures of the day with an eagerness and an impetuosity that perfectly astonished his companion.

"I'll tell you what it is, Charley," said Gordon Frere, after they had careered round the gardens, and were standing once more by the gate at which they had entered, "I'll tell you what it is—you're like a country cousin, by Jove! or one of those horrible fellows that come up to town with a letter of introduction. You want to see every thing, and all at once. It's a deuced good thing that you don't often give yourself an outing, or you'd be wanting me to take you to the Thames Tunnel, and the Monument, and Madame Tussaud's, and all sorts of wonderful places. Here have we been rushing about from pillar to post, or rather from tent to tent, and from band to band, and you've never yet given me breathing-time to look round and speak to any of the people I know. Now you really must hold on for a moment, for it's just upon three o'clock, and that's the time that Kate—Miss Guyon, I mean—said she should be here, and I promised to be near the entrance, to join her at once."

He spoke with animation, and his bright eyes glowed with fire as he seized his old friend by the shoulders and used a feigned force to arrest his progress. You see Mr. Gordon Frere was brimming over with happiness. To be six-and-twenty years of age; to be good-looking: to have high animal spirits; to have indulgent tradespeople, and a tolerable sufficiency of pocket-money; to be in love with a very charming girl, and to have your passion returned, are all things calculated to make a man content with life, and disposed to regard human nature from its best point of view. He was pleased to speak of himself as a "creature of impulse," and, by some accident probably, he rightly described himself. Whatever best pleased him for the time being he took up and went in for earnestly and vigorously. He had done so all his life, in cricketing, rowing, riding, at school and college—actually once in reading, when he studied so hard and to so much purpose apparently that old Mr. Yeldham wrote to Charles, anticipating for his son's chum and his own pupil the highest University honors; but Gordon slacked off, and when the class-list came out, a double-third was all the position awarded him. Up to this time the "impulse" had not been shown very strongly in any love affairs: he had had his ball-room flirtations, involving bouquet-sending, Rotten Row riding, Opera-box haunting, etc., as all men have; but he had never—to Charles Yeldham's idea at least—been so really smitten with any one as he announced himself to be with Miss Guyon. So his honest old chum, albeit he had his own views of the probable reception of

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Gordon's proposal by Mr. Guyon, could not find it in his heart to check him, and only smiled pleasantly as he said,

"All right, Gordon—all right, my boy. But you talk of my taking you about here and there, as though I were not a mere child in leading-strings in such a place as this, to be shown each separate sight in the proper order. Now we've seen the fruit and the flowers, and listened to the bands, let us take a look at the people. Tremendous, what you call 'swells,' are they not? No end of crinoline, and flowers, and finery. By Jove! just turn a few of these young ladies to walk through the Temple Gardens, and there would not be much work done that day. Every clerk's nose would be glued to the window; and I verily believe that even old Farrar, our underneath neighbor, would leave his books and his papers for such a refreshing sight. Now there's one—look there! that tall girl just coming in, with—halloo! steady, young 'un; what's the matter?"

Charley Yeldham might well cry "steady;" for Gordon gave a visible start as he turned in the direction indicated by his friend, and his tone was thick and hurried as he said, "That's Miss Guyon and her father—and—who the devil's that man with them?"

"Now that's a curious thing," said Yeldham, with provoking placidity. "I don't suppose I know another soul in all this large gathering, but I do know that man intimately, and I can tell you who he is. That's Robert Streightley, the City man that you've so often heard me speak of, and—but what has come to him? Talk of 'swells'—why, I should scarcely have recognized Bob Sobersides, as they used to call him, in that costume. And so that is Miss Guyon, is it? that's Miss Guyon! I say, young 'un, she's—she's wonderfully lovely."

"For God's sake, don't stand staring there with your mouth open, Charley, but let us go up and speak to these people. They've seen us already;" and Mr. Frere, passing his arm through his friend's, led him up to the group, and, after making his own salutations, freely presented him to Miss Guyon and her father. Immediately after his introduction Yeldham turned and shook hands with Robert Streightley, and after a few words of astonishment from each at meeting the other in such a place, they commenced a conversation, in which Mr. Guyon took part, leaving Gordon Frere and Katharine walking together a little in advance of them.

There are few things more embarrassing than having something very particular to say, knowing that you will have great difficulty in saying it, and being perfectly convinced that if ever it is to be said at all, the exact time has arrived. This was Gordon Frere's position. He knew that the end of the season had arrived; that another fortnight would see Miss Guyon flown, with the rest of the fashionable world, to some English sea-board, foreign watering-place, or country-house, whither he could not have the remotest excuse for following her; he knew the proverbial danger of delay, especially in love affairs; he fully shared in Charley Yeldham's only half-expressed doubts as to the reception of his proposal by Mr. Guyon; and in the sudden and unexpected appearance upon the scene of Robert Streightley—whom he had never met before, but of whom, his wealth, his talents, his City position, he had heard frequently from Charley—he saw a new and important element of danger. If he intended to make his *coup* for the winning of this peerless beauty, now was the time. So he screwed up his courage and began.

"You are a little late, Miss Guyon"—this in a low, deep, tremulous voice; "you said you would be here at three."

"You don't pretend to say that you recollect any thing I said about it, Mr. Frere?" in the same tone. "I scarcely remembered we had touched upon the subject."

"Don't you pretend to imagine any such thing so far as I am concerned, Miss Guyon. No, no; pardon me for one instant; you know that whatever concerns you, in however trifling a degree—and more especially when it relates to the chance of my seeing you—is always of importance to me."

He had bent his gaze upon her as he said this, and he received a faint fluttering glance as his first reply. Then she said,

"I was scarcely conceited enough to think so, and—and of course I feel the compliment. However, we *have* met, you see."

"Yes; and, so long as that has come about, no matter how late you are, for you see I still hold to my original opinion. However late or early, I must be doubly thankful for the chances of meeting you now; for the season's at an end, and I suppose you will be off with the rest?"

"I suppose so; though nothing is settled, I believe."

"And where do you go?"

"Papa talked of Scarborough some time ago. He has not said any thing about it lately; and as I'm wholly indifferent on the subject, I'm very good to him, and let him have his own way."

"Are you similarly complaisant to Mr. Guyon in all things?"

There must have been something special in the tone of his voice, for she looked up quickly with a slight flush, and said,

"In all matters in which I take no particular interest. Where I am concerned I am *exigeante*, and—I am afraid—stubborn."

"Let us call it 'firm,' Miss Guyon," said Frere, with a slight smile. "Firmness is a quality by no means reprehensible, even when exercised toward one's father. It's a horrible thing this break-up of the season, especially as one gets older. All the little pleasant—well, I suppose I may call them friendships—are nipped in the bud until next April, when one has to begin again and struggle on until August, when we find ourselves in exactly the same position in which we were a twelvemonth before."

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"That is, unless we take up with a different set of friends," said Katharine, "and I believe there are instances on record of such a change."

Gordon Frere looked at her again, and threw an additional warmth into his voice as he said, "Granted that fidelity is uncommon, Miss Guyon, it should be the more prized when it is found. You are going to-night to Mrs. Tresillian's?"

"Yes; Lady Henmarsh has promised to take me. It is almost my 'last rose of summer'—positively the last of our ball-engagements this season."

"Let us trust it will be one of the pleasantest. You will come early, and you will give me the first *valse*, and as many afterward as you can."

"I—I shall be very happy; but we shall leave early. Papa has a holy horror of having his horses kept out late, more especially when he is not present; and he will not be there to-night, I think, for he's going to ask Mr. Streightley to dine with us, and I believe he wants to talk business to him afterward."

"Mr. Streightley going to dine with you? By the way, who is Mr. Streightley?"

"Mr. Streightley? he's a horror—I didn't mean that. He's a City friend of papa's, and, as I am told, a very rich man."

"Very rich, and in the City, eh!" said Gordon Frere, looking over his shoulder at the object of their remark. "He's better got up than most of his genus. I think I could swear to Poole in his coat. Very rich, and you've been told so, Miss Guyon! He's a lucky man."

"Is he, Mr. Frere? You'll excuse my saying that I don't follow you; that I don't know why Mr. Streightley is lucky."

"Did you not yourself say that he was very rich, Miss Guyon, and that you had been told so?" said Gordon, with more warmth than he had previously exhibited. "Society acts as this gentleman's *avant-coureur*, and repeats his claim to respect wherever he goes, and of course he finds people prepared to proffer him ready-made honor."

The bitterness in his tone jarred on Kate's ear. His face was averted, so that there was no need for her to restrain the half-inquiring, half-loving gaze with which she looked up at him as she said,

"I never knew you cynical before, Mr. Frere, and I don't think the mood becomes you. Surely the notion that wealth is the most desirable of all possessions is utterly exploded. For my own part, I think that riches in a man—I mean when they are so great as to be talked about—are something against him—something to be got over, like his being black, or having a hump-back."

"This is a very refreshing doctrine, Miss Guyon, but I'm afraid it has not many disciples; and even you would lean to the side of the modest competence and—"

"I would lean to nothing—I would give way to nothing so palpably sordid and base."

"You are strangely in earnest on this point, Miss Guyon."

"I am thoroughly in earnest about it; and I—"

"You can not tell with what delight I hear it, Miss Guyon. I—you have removed a certain distrust which has prevented me from—"

"As you say"—broke in the strident voice of Mr. Guyon, as he with Streightley and Yeldham "formed up in line"—"in a formal dinner-party you may sit side by side with people and never know any more about them than if they were at opposite ends of the table. You're quite right, Streightley, quite right. But to-night we're quite alone. Katharine, my dear, Mr. Streightley has promised to take us as he finds us, and come home to dinner to-day."

Miss Guyon bowed, and murmured her delight. Then said *sotto voce*, "It is Mrs. Tresillian's night, papa, you recollect, and Lady Henmarsh is coming to fetch me."

"Oh yes, my dear—of course, of course. Lady Henmarsh coming, eh! But that won't make any difference."

"No, papa; only you won't mind my running away."

"Of course not, my dear—of course not. And how is my young friend Gordon Frere? Blooming as usual. No need to ask that. Give your arm to an old boy, Gordon, and trot him round, and show him all the—the beauty of the day."

Gordon, who was eminently disgusted at the interruption of his conversation with Kate, and who was showing his feelings in his knitted brow and puckered mouth, had any hopes of a farther *causerie* which he might have entertained dashed to the ground by Mr. Guyon, who passed his delicate lavender glove through his young friend's arm and led him off in triumph, while Streightley and Yeldham followed on either side of Miss Guyon.

Few men could make themselves pleasanter companions than Ned Guyon when he was so inclined. He had not merely a capital flow of animal spirits, a store of what in women is called small-talk, but what in men may better be described as broad talk, a keen perception of the ludicrous, and a sufficient power of satire, but he had the great knack—learned in his long experience of life—of exactly suiting his conversation to his audience. He possessed in perfection the slang of the clubs, which nowadays passes current for what is called "swell talk," and which is not merely a peculiar *argot* with special words meaning special things, with excised pronouns and abbreviated nouns, but which, to be perfect, must be spoken in a voice specially pitched for the purpose. The voice and the language none had studied better than Guyon; there were few men of his age, indeed, who had taken the trouble to master either; but in the fashionable sinner's worldly experience he had found the greatest profit in keeping himself *au courant* with the ways and manners of men of the rising generation. Once let any of them

perceive that he was a fogy, in the least antiquated in his ideas or pursuits, and all hope of influence over them was gone; but so long as he could take a leading part in their follies, and blend undoubted past experience with apparent present enjoyment, their houses, horses, purses were at his disposal; and it was considered rather an honor among the subalterans of the Rag or the Plungers from Aldershott to have dropped their money at *écarté* or *baccarat* to such a cool clever hand as Mr. Guyon.

Perhaps the old diplomatist had never been in better force than on the present occasion, although there was apparently little opportunity for the exercise of his powers. Frere, *distrait*, if not savage, at starting, found himself first listening to his companion's remarks, then laughing at his stories, finally answering him, and leading him on to farther banter. With a fair proportion of the company present Mr. Guyon had some acquaintance, and of nearly every body who was any body he had some racy anecdote to whisper laughingly into his companion's ear. It did not strike Frere until long afterward that all these piquant stories were indebted for their piquancy to a half-sneering cynicism, a half-avowed libertinism; that in all the broad principles of honor were ridiculed, and the scampish shifts of so-called "gallantry" exalted; that the whole conversation, in fact, was such as might have been expected from a *blasé* youth or a battered rake, but scarcely to be looked for in a gentleman whose marriageable daughter was walking within a few feet of him.

They remained in the gardens until past six o'clock, promenading, visiting the tents, stopping to speak to friends, but never on any occasion had Gordon Frere another chance of approaching Miss Guyon. He made several attempts, but invariably her father had something to say to her or to him, and cut in between them with the pleasantest smile and the cheeriest remarks possible. It was not until just as they were getting into the carriage that Mr. Guyon suddenly turned aside, and saying, "Ah, by the way!" took out a card, wrote on it in pencil, in his airiest manner borrowed an envelope from the ticket-taker standing at his desk in the entrance, and dispatched it by a commissionaire who was in waiting. In that short interval Gordon Frere managed to slip round to Miss Guyon's side and whisper, "The first valse, to-night?" and to receive in reply an almost imperceptible acquiescence in the glance of her eyes and the bending of her head. Then Mr. Guyon, wheeling round, took a very affectionate leave of Gordon, and made a polite bow to Charles Yeldham, handed his daughter into the carriage, motioned to Streightley to follow her, and finally jumping lightly in himself, they were whirled off, with much door-slamming and horse-pawing.

The concluding episode of the little drama in which he had asserted his position with Miss Guyon had reanimated Gordon Frere, and rendered him happy and amiable. "Such a lord is Love, and Beauty such a mistress of the world." So he turned cheerily to Yeldham, on whom he had not bestowed so much as a glance or a thought for the past two hours, and, gripping his arm, said,

"Well, old boy, and what do you think of her?"

Mr. Charles Yeldham was seldom absent or preoccupied; he was far too practical for that. But on the present occasion his thoughts must have been engaged, for he started, with something like a flush on his cheeks, as he said,

"Who? what, Gordon? I wasn't attending, I fear."

"I was asking you what you thought of Miss Guyon, Charley?"

"She is wonderfully beautiful."

"Well said, old fellow. Quite enthusiastic, by Jove!—for you, at all events. But what I mean is, seriously, is not she something to be proud of—something different from the ruck of grinning, simpering, yea-nay girls one meets about—in such places as that we've just left, for instance?"

"She is, indeed."

"I hope you talked to her. Not that I think —no offense to you, old fellow—not that perhaps your talk would be exactly suited to her—too deep, you know, and all that kind of thing —but still you would be able to make out that she had a head on her shoulders. Doesn't she talk well?"

"Well, to tell truth, I had not much opportunity of judging, for she remained tolerably silent; and the conversation—such as it was—was between Robert Streightley and myself."

"Oh, by the way, that fellow Streightley—I've heard you speak of him. Who is he, and what's all about him? What the deuce did old Guyon bring him here for? and why has he gone home with them to dinner?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Charles Yeldham. "'Beware, my lord, of jealousy!' Here's an Othello for you! I don't think, Gordon, you need look with much suspicion on Robert Streightley, unless you've fixed your affections on good investments or early information, and then you would stand no chance with him, I can tell you. But he's been too long engaged to Capel Court to waver in his allegiance."

"But what on earth brought him here?"

"What? Who? you should ask, and I would answer, your intended father-in-law. There's no man with a clearer head for business: what will be more explanatory, I will say there's no man better able to put a friend on to 'a good thing' than Streightley; and I fancy Mr. Guyon would not be above a little stagging if he could act on Streightley's information."

"But people don't get City information or talk to each other on what you call 'stagging' topics at Botanical Fêtes. Why did he bring him here?"

"Oh impetuous youth, 'still harping on my daughter!' don't you see that there must be a *quid pro quo?* If Mr. Streightley is to assist Mr. Guyon, why should not Mr. Guyon show

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Mr. Streightley the elevated position which he holds, the society in which he moves?"

"Yes, that's all very well; but I say, Charley, Streightley dont know Mrs. Tresillian, does he?"

"Who's Mrs. Tresillian?"

"The wife of the member for Penmouth; people who live at Rutland Gate, and entertain perpetually. He's not likely to be going there to-night, this Streightley, is he?"

"No more than he's likely to be going to Kamtschatka—not so likely. Why?"

"Oh, nothing; only Miss Guyon is going there—and so am I."

"Is Miss Guyon going? Ah! well, I hope you'll enjoy yourself."

And during their ride to chambers in the Hansom both men were singularly silent.

Mr. Streightley had plenty of time to make himself acquainted with the features of the private friends and the public celebrities who were enshrined in Miss Guyon's photographic album; with the views of the Rhine and the Moselle; with the cards of callers "lurking within the bowl;" with the tastefully-arranged flowers and their elegant basket; with the paper-knife, like a golden dagger; with Gustave Doré's latest sketches; and with all the innumerable knick-knacks of a lady's table. Miss Guyon had gone straight to her room; and Mr. Guyon, begging to be excused, as he had a few little matters of business, had retired into what he called his "study"—a very gloomy little den behind the dining-room, furnished with a battered leather writing-table, a cane-bottomed chair, a grim bust of a deceased friend powdered with "blacks," a boot-jack, a clothes-brush, a glass-case of stuffed birds, and the Court Guide for 1850. Streightley had been shown, at Mr. Guyon's suggestion, into a spare bedroom, where he had performed a brief toilet, and then mooned about the drawing-room, occupying himself in the manner just described. Mr. Guyon was the first to break in on his solitude; and shortly afterward Miss Guyon entered the room, looking so lovely that Robert Streightley remained spell-bound, and could not take his eyes from her. She wore a pale mauve-silk dress, with soft *tulle* half way over it, looped up with real Cape jasmine, a tiny *bouquet* of the same flower in her bosom; and her hair gave her a certain air of peculiarity, and shed around her a subtle and intoxicating perfume. Round her neck she wore a string of pearls with a diamond clasp, and the same on each arm completed her jewelry. Looking at her, Robert Streightley seemed to lose his identity, and to become part and portion of some fairy story which he had read, some picture of *moyen-âge* pageant which he had seen. Women? Yes, he had known women before—his mother, Ellen, Hester Gould. What had they in common with this soft, delicate, queenly creature, the touch of whose hand on his arm thrilled him to the bone, the sound of whose voice sent the blood rushing to his heart, the glance of whose eye—light, fleeting, and uninterested though it was—he would have purchased at the price of a king's ransom.

The dinner was good, and Mr. Guyon was gay; but neither succulent dishes nor brilliant sallies had much effect on Robert Streightley. They were scarcely seated before he learned, from a chance observation uttered by Miss Guyon, that she was going to Mrs. Tresillian's ball, and the knowledge that Gordon Frere would probably meet her there—a fact which he divined intuitively—weighed heavily on Streightley's mind. He tried to exert himself to respond to his host; he tried to talk lightly and pleasantly to Kate, who seemed in the highest spirits, but all unsuccessfully. Whenever there was a lull in the conversation, he fancied her in Frere's arms being whirled round the room, or listening to his low voice with such a pleased expression on her face as he had seen there that night in the Opera-box. Those bright eyes, that flow of spirits, that general happiness, which even prompted her to be far more agreeable to him and far more recognizant of his presence than she had yet ever deigned to be, were not they all due to the fact that she was going to meet his—well, why not?—his rival? As he was thinking thus the servant entered the room bearing a letter, which Miss Guyon read, opened, and flung on the table with an air of vexation, that contrasted strongly with her recent good-temper.

"It's too bad!" she cried, in a petulant voice; "too bad! and I don't believe a word of it."

"What's the matter, Kate, my child!" asked Mr. Guyon, in his blandest tones.

"After dressing myself, and setting my heart upon it—the last ball of the season too—it's—it's most horribly annoying!" and Miss Guyon bit her lip very hard, and threw her head back to stop her tears.

"My dear Kate," said Mr. Guyon, looking like a modern edition of Lucius Junius Brutus, "you seem to forget that, besides your father, there is present a gentleman who—no, pardon me, my dear Streightley, allow me to speak—who should be—hem!—thought of. *What*—if I may again be allowed to put the question—*what* is there in that note that can have so very much discomposed you?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Streightley—I—but it is so annoying! Here's Lady Henmarsh, papa, writes to say she can not go to Mrs. Tresillian's to-night. She's got one of her headaches—those horrible headaches that I don't believe in one bit—and she knows I was looking forward to her taking me, and that it will be impossible for me to go without her. It *is* so vexing!"

Mr. Guyon was about firing off an elaborate remark; but, hearing Streightley commencing to speak, he stopped himself, and waved his hand toward his friend.

"I was—eh, you're very kind—no, I was only going to say," said Streightley, with a hesitation

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which was quite strange to him, "that I'm sure I sympathize with you, Miss Guyon—sympathize with you thoroughly. It is very annoying to be balked in any thing that we've—set our minds on, as I may say. But what I was going to say was—I don't know about these kind of things, of course, as you know, Mr. Guyon, and no doubt you too, Miss Guyon; but could not your papa, Miss Guyon—could not your papa be your escort to this ball?"

It was a really grateful glance that Kate shot at him as she said, "Oh, thank you so very much for the suggestion, Mr. Streightley. Of course he could. Papa, do you hear?"

"I do, my dear. I hear Mr. Streightley's suggestion, which is exactly in accord with that —that—high-mindedness and—and suggestiveness for which I've always given him credit. But, unfortunately, it's impossible, Kate—perfectly impossible to-night. I have some documents in there," jerking his head toward the den behind, "the perusal of which will occupy me until—ah, daybreak."

Miss Guyon said not another word, but rose from the table as her father ceased speaking. She wished Mr. Streightley "good-night," and, after a moment's hesitation, gave him her hand; she kissed Mr. Guyon's forehead—the little space which was not covered with his carefully-poodled hair — with her lips, and left the room. But as she passed the glass, Streightley caught a glimpse of the reflection of her face, and saw that every nerve in it was quivering with repressed passion. He knew the reason well enough, and it did not tend to raise his already-drooping spirits; so he shortly afterward took his leave and went home, where he found his sister Ellen waiting up for him to tell him that Hester Gould had been spending the evening with her, having previously been to the Botanical Fête, where she had seen the beautiful Miss Guyon.

"And you were walking with her, Hester says, Robert," said Miss Ellen; "she saw you, though you didn't see her. How I should like to see her, Robert! Now tell me all about her. Is she so beautiful? and is she going to be married?"

"My dear child," said Robert, in rather a harsh tone, "do you imagine I tell you the names of a tithe of the people I know in business? Mr. Guyon is a business acquaintance of mine, and I have been introduced to his daughter. So far as I am a judge, she is very beautiful; but really, though I have seen her a few times, she has not yet confided to me whether she is going to be married or not."

On the receipt of which short answer, Miss Ellen Streightley, telling her brother "he need not snap her head off," handed him his candle and went to bed.

Mr. Guyon had said that the "perusal" of certain "documents" would occupy him until daybreak; but long before the first faint thread of dawn appeared in the eastern sky that gentleman was sleeping the sleep of the just, having immediately after Streightley's departure slipped down to his Club, and returned lighter in heart and heavier in purse after playing a few rubbers with consummate skill and great luck. But, gleaming on certain characters in this veracious history, the first rays of the rising sun found them defiant of sleep, if not actively engaged—found Katharine Guyon with her dark hair streaming over her pillow, bedewed with tears of rage and disappointment, and her eyes, under their swollen lids, bright and staring—found Robert Streightley, racked with sharp pangs of jealousy and doubt, vainly courting repose—found Gordon Frere lounging homeward up Piccadilly, his hands plunged in his trowsers pockets, his opera-hat hanging listlessly on the back of his head, a cigar in his mouth, and a faded flower in his coat, chafing bitterly against the absence of his heart's idol from Mrs. Tresillian's ball, and at the postponement of the love-avowal which he had determined to make; finally, found Charles Yeldham, bright, fresh, and glowing from his morning bath, just settling down to his desk, with his mind filled partly with thoughts of the work he was about to commence, partly with reminiscences of a queenly figure, a stately walk, and a bright pair of eyes seen yesterday for the first time.

CHAPTER IX.

INVESTMENTS.

It was seldom that Robert Streightley allowed himself the luxury of thought. He was so much in the habit of deciding, after a rapid business calculation, upon any thing that was submitted to him, of accepting or rejecting the proposition at once, that he scarcely knew what it was to ponder, and weigh, and calculate chances. In his business he had never, apparently, had occasion to calculate them. The knowledge which guided him seemed to come to him intuitively, and hitherto had scarcely ever failed in producing a good result. But in these recent days he had proposed to himself a venture such as he had never previously contemplated, a risk which was a risk indeed, a prize for which he should have to enter against sharp competition, and which, even if he gained it, he yet felt would be uncertain and difficult to deal with. It was a troublous time for this honest, straightforward, simple man of business, who for the first time in his life found himself possessed by a mania over which he had not the least control; this long-headed, cool, calculating fellow, who was accustomed to look far ahead, and see clearly what would be the end of any step he proposed to take before he took it, and who now found himself irresistibly impelled to rush blindly on, ignoring consequences, content to leave all to Fate, and to console himself with the victory of the moment. Never before during his career had he felt the smallest pang of jealousy; never before, when bidding for great

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contracts, involving such an amount of capital as made the boldest hesitate before speculating, had he, after a few minutes' rapid calculation, wavered for an instant. But the present case was different: it was "the house" then; it was "the heart" now. Luck, carefully steered by prudence and by foresight, and acumen more than prudence, had brought his ventures safely riding over the billows, and through the shoals and shallows; would it do so now?

He was desperately in love with this girl—this bright, brilliant, haughty, willful girl. Even in all the mad fervor of his passion he allowed to himself that she was haughty and willful, and he loved her all the more — loved her with a depth and earnestness, with a wild passionate longing such as he had never believed he could have felt. Haughty and willful! were not these very qualities great ingredients in her charm? Had he not for nearly forty years been living with the tame and commonplace women among whom his lot had been cast, and had any of them ever had the slightest influence over him? had they ever caused his heart one extra vibration—his pulse one extra throb? Why should he not enter the lists and tilt among the others for the hand of this Queen of Beauty, who sat smiling so superciliously in the balcony? It was an open course, and he brought among his attributes a stout heart and a willing hand to the encounter. In curvettings and caracoles, and all the dainty manœuvres of the *manège*, in courtly skill and trick of fence, there might be his superiors; but when the issue of the combat came to sheer hard fighting, where courage and persistency won the day, he would give way to none. And, carelessly fluttering over the leaves of his ledger, as in his dim City office he revolved all these thoughts within his mind, he felt—not without a blush of shame—that he had secured the services of a most potent ally within the citadel. In these portentous leaves the name of Edward Guyon, Esquire, of Queen Anne Street, now had a small space reserved to itself, the details covering which, though insignificant in such a business as that of Streightley and Son, were multiplied amazingly since the first "transaction" which had brought the siren to the abode of Plutus. Over Robert Streightley Mr. Guyon had obtained an extraordinary influence—due, let it be stated, of course to a certain extent to the young merchant's infatuation, but also in a great degree to his own admirable tact. During the course of a life passed in business Robert had seen many specimens of *tracasserie* and humbug, which his good nurse had enabled him to estimate at their real value, but he had never been brought in contact with any of their professors who had, or seemed to have, the real charm of social influence. In Mr. Guyon's society—and of late he had been admitted into a great deal of Mr. Guyon's society—Robert Streightley seemed to feel himself a different being. There was nothing rough or unpleasant in his new friend and those to whom his new friend introduced him; he became for the first time in his life aware of the existence of another world, where well-bred ease, polished manners, and refined conversation were substituted for that eternal strife, and fight, and wrangle for money-getting in which his whole previous existence had been passed.

And she — Katharine — his adoration — she was of this world, and yet not of it so much as she might be; held not that queenly position in it which she might hold, were circumstances different. It would have taken a mind much less acute than Robert Streightley's to perceive at once the influence which the possession of wealth had among those who affected to despise it. In an instant he saw—few so rapidly—how many of the new society into which he had been introduced, while merely electro-plated and veneered, were endeavoring to pass themselves off as the genuine article; and he ascribed, correctly enough, the sneers at money, in which most members of the society indulged, to their lack of it. Why should he not be the means of giving her the position which she would so thoroughly adorn? She looked a duchess; why should he not give her the power of gratifying the tastes of a duchess? Robert Streightley, constantly engaged in the accumulation of money, had given very little thought to the amount that he had accumulated. Confident in the security of his investments, he left the heap to gather in rolling; his simple life and the even more simple life led by his mother and sister in the Brixton Villa were provided for at a comparatively infinitesimal cost; and of the bulk of his possessions he had taken little heed, knowing that it was there "to the good." But recently, within the last few days, he had looked through his accounts, and found that he was the possessor of what would be considered, even in "the City," to be a large fortune. Money he had in funds, and stocks, and securities of all kinds; money in ships bound on antipodean voyages, and in semi-cleared Canadian forests; money in loans to Egyptian viceroys and Nicaraguan republics; money in an English estate, "all that house and estate known as 'Middlemeads,' in the county of Bucks, with five hundred acres of park-like land, well-preserved coverts, lake with fishing-temple, large stabling, forcing-houses, hot-houses, orangery, delightfully situate on the brow of Holcomb Hill, with the silver Thames winding in the distance," as it was described in the auctioneer's advertisement. The auctioneer, whose descriptive powers are here recorded, had not the opportunity of bringing this "lot" to the hammer; for, finding the previous bidding dull, Robert Streightley, to whom the estate had reverted on the foreclosure of a mortgage which he held upon it, determined to withdraw it from public competition, wisely thinking that he could sell it a better bargain to some private purchaser. When the bold idea of asking for Miss Guyon's hand first entered his head, the recollection of this property flashed upon him at once. He had never seen the place, but he knew from his agent

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that it was essentially a gentleman's house, and that the entire estate was large, productive, and one of which any one might be proud. "Mrs. Streightley of Middlemeads;" "Middlemeads, August;" "Mrs. R. Streightley presents"—Robert Streightley found himself sketching these words on his blotting-pad as these thoughts passed through his mind; and though he gave a short laugh of semi-contempt at the wildness of his fancy, the idea had so far possessed him that he wrote off to his old friend and legal adviser, Charles Yeldham, begging him to be at the Great-Western station at a given hour on the next morning, and go with him to see a place down the line which he had purchased as an investment.

At the appointed time Mr. Streightley walked on to the platform, and found his friend already awaiting him. Mr. Charles Yeldham was indeed instantly recognizable. In all the crowd of pushing, anxious passengers, he stood perfectly calm and self-possessed, heeding neither the porters wheeling heavy barrows, who shouted to him "By your leave!" and charged straight at him with the obvious intention of grinding him to powder; the grooms, vainly endeavoring to hold their braces of pointers, which invariably came to grief through disinclination to go the same side of the columns supporting the roof; the helpless female, or the excited male passengers. There were men in every variety of traveling-dress, in wide-awakes, and pork-pie hats, and cloth caps, and fezzes; in suits of dittoes in every conceivable variety of check, in knickerbockers and gaiters, in tightly-fitting 'horsy' trowsers, and wearing couriers' bags or slung race-glasses. But among them placidly walked Charles Yeldham, in his broadish-brimmed chimney-pot, his high-buttoning black waistcoat, his Oxford-mixture trowsers very baggy at the knees, and his Wellington boots—among them, but not of them—with a pleasant smile on his cheery face, and with his head full of the case of Marshland *versus* the Bagglehole Improvement Company, the pleadings in which he had to draw. But he saw Streightley at once, and as he caught sight of him he again noticed the change in his friend's style of dress, which he had not thought of since their meeting at the Botanical Gardens, and laughed quietly to himself.

"This is good, Yeldham; I knew you would come," said Streightley, as the train moved out of the station. "You're just the man I want for a sound practical opinion."

"On an estate which you've bought, Robert? Yes; my knowledge of the value of land, derived from occasionally looking out on to and running round the Temple Gardens; the quick eye with which, from constant practice, I shall be able to detect any shortcomings in the building, and suggest improvements; my general acquaintance with farming stock and agricultural produce, will enable me to give you some very valuable advice."

"You're laughing at me, old friend; but it don't much matter; and I know of old that you always will have your joke. No, it was not exactly on these points that I wanted to consult you—in fact, not at all upon them. With all your pretended ignorance, you are a country-bred man, and one able to give a thoroughly practical opinion on the value of Middlemeads and its capabilities; and, moreover, by this means I get you out quietly into the air and away from those stivy chambers, and have the opportunity of a long quiet talk with you about—about any subject that may turn up, without the risk of your being worried by perpetual visits of attorneys' clerks, or the annoyance of seeing you constantly fidgeting to get to your desk again and get to work at something else."

"Oh ho, Master Robert! then this is a trap, is it? a kind of perforce holiday into which you have led me?"

"Not at all. Wait until the day is over, until I've said all I've got to say, and you've heard it, before you complain. And even if it were—supposing it were a holiday, you don't take so many of them that you need grudge yourself this outing."

"So far as that goes, we're both in the same boat, I think; but I have had a holiday, and only a couple of days ago, when I was at the Botanical—why, by Jove! you were there too."

"Of course I was. That *is* good! our each giving the other credit for constant industry, and then recollecting that we had lapsed into idleness together. By the way, that Mr. Frere—who lives with you, doesn't he?—what sort of fellow is he?"

"A capital fellow," said honest old Charley Yeldham; "a good deal younger than we are, you know, Robert, and consequently more impulsive, and what he would call 'gushing;' and yet older in some respects too—older in cynicism and so-called knowledge of life, and—but a very good fellow, a capital youngster. I've known him since he was a boy. He was a pupil of my father's."

"Oh, indeed! Has he—has he been very long intimate with Mr. Guyon's family, do you know?"

"No, not very long, I should say. By the way, I did not know, until I met you with him, that you knew Mr. Guyon, Robert."

"Didn't you? Oh yes; a business acquaintance of mine."

"Business acquaintance? Hem! I can understand Mr. Guyon's popularity from a social point of view, but in matters of business I confess I think that—"

"Don't you fear, dear old Charley; I know all about that; and—and does Frere go often to the Guyons'?"

"N-no, not very often, I think. He's been once or twice lately, but he's not likely to see much more of them this season, as he's gone out of town—down to his father's—on a matter of business. What do you think of Miss Guyon?"

"She is very handsome—at least I suppose so; I'm not much of a judge in those matters.

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And how are we getting on with Hamilton's action?"

Upon which question the gentlemen plunged into a conversation full of business details, which occupied them until they arrived at their station, where alighting, they hired a trap and drove over to Middlemeads.

Passing through a little village, and turning sharply to the right after sighting the old church, they came upon a quaint one-storied stone lodge. Standing out from the ivy, in which it otherwise was buried, stood a sculptured knight in full armor, treading on a serpent, the well-known crest of the Chevers of Middlemeads, the glorious old family whose ancestral seat had passed to strangers, and whose last scion was now dwelling in a little cottage at Capécure near Boulogne. A few short words of explanation to the old portress gained them admission, and they entered a long drive leading through groves of noble trees and over undulating ground—where the deer, half hidden in the deep fern, were quietly feeding—to the house; then under the principal gateway, with its long range of gables and unrelieved wall, through the double arch in the first court, which was carpeted with greensward, to the second or paved court, fronted with its pure Ionic colonnade, where the old housekeeper, already apprised of their coming, was in readiness to receive them. Charles Yeldham's heart, albeit somewhat incrusted with legal formulæ and a long course of Doe and Roe, yet filled with reverence for antiquity and appreciation of architectural beauty, thrilled within him as, preceded by the old housekeeper, they walked through the great hall, now denuded of its glorious family pictures, its Holbeins and Lelys, its Jansens and Knellers, its grand Vandyke, its "Animals reposing" by Snyders, and its "Riding-party" by Wouvermans, all long since dispersed at the hands of Christie and Manson, but still retaining its fireplace with the ornamental fire-dogs bearing the arms and initials H. A. of Henry VIII. and Anne Boleyn, royal guests of the Chevers in the good old days. Through the Brown Gallery and Lady Betty Chiddingstone's chamber, through the Spangled Bedroom, and the King's Room, where James I. had passed a night, through the Organ Room, where still stood the ancient instrument which had been used for divine service in connection with the adjoining chapel, long since dismantled and half in ruins, they passed, and in each the old cicerone poured forth her oft-told tale of bygone glories.

While in each of these rooms Yeldham indulged in retrospect, peopling them according to his fancy with those who might have inhabited them, picturing to himself how the stately lords and ladies lived, and moved, and had their being, and smiled half-cynically to himself in the thought that, other differences allowed, they were doubtless swayed by the same passions, victims of the same hopes, and fears, and doubts, moved by the same temptations, and acted on by the same impulses as we of these degenerate days, he was surprised to find that his companion was going through the house in the most practical manner, apportioning the rooms one by one to their several purposes, deciding upon the Brown Gallery for a drawing-room, the King's Chamber for the principal bedroom, planning the furniture and fittings for the great hall, and altogether comporting himself as though he were the head of a large family come down to make the necessary arrangements for its immediate induction. This notion struck him at first comically; but when he saw it persevered in in every detail, he began to think more seriously of it; and after they had left the house, and were again in the trap driving back to the station, he turned to his friend and said,

"Why, Robert, what on earth is in your head now? I've been perfectly astonished in watching you ever since we entered Middlemeads."

"Have you? In what way have I excited your astonishment? Did I swagger too much about my purchase? did I what they call 'gush' about my place?"

"Not a bit; and if you had, there would have been every excuse for you. A more delightful old house and more perfect grounds never were seen."

"Well, then, what did I do?"

"Well, it seemed to me that you didn't regard the place from a bachelor point of view. You were planning drawing-rooms, and bedrooms, and dining-halls, and—"

"You know that my mother and sister form part of my belongings?"

"Ye-es; but I didn't hear any mention of your mother and sister, and—"

"Speak plainly, Charley, and say that you think I contemplate matrimony."

"And suppose I were to say so?"

"Suppose you were? Well, then, all I could say would be—that I felt myself a sneak for not having owned the fact before to you, my dear old friend. But in any thing out of my regular routine of business I'm as shy as a great school-girl, and I could not bring myself to tell even you about it."

"Then it's a case, Robert. A case at last with you, of all men in the world. I feel now that even I myself am not impregnable, after 'Bob Sobersides' has surrendered at discretion."

"Chat away, old fellow. I've no reply to make, save that the opposing force was irresistible—as I think you'll allow."

"My dear Streightley, I hope I'm a true friend, but I don't think you could have a worse confidant in an affair of this kind, so far as giving any opinion on an unknown young lady is concerned—"

"But suppose the young lady is not unknown to you?"

"Not unknown to me! Well, that alters the case, of course. But, God bless my soul, who can—who can have won your love in this sudden way, Robert? You're not a man of impulse; you're accustomed to think deeply, and weigh and balance before committing yourself

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—you would not do any thing rash. Who on earth can it be?"

"I'm a bad hand at concealing any thing of this sort," said Streightley, with a half-rueful smile. "Indeed, I think I must seem awkward about the whole business; but the truth of it is, old friend, I'm madly in love with Miss Guyon, and I hope to make her my wife."

"Miss Guyon?"

"Ay, Miss Guyon. It has not been a long acquaintance, I know; but I believe those things never are—I mean that—you know what I mean. But you know her; at least you've seen her, and—that must be my excuse for the rashness, and the folly, and whatever the world chooses to call it. For she is very lovely, isn't she, Charley?"

"Very lovely, indeed!" said Yeldham.

And then, as though by a tacit understanding, both men leaned back in the carriage, and delivered themselves up to their own reflections.

Needless to say what were Robert Streightley's. Vague desires to call up well-remembered expressions of Katharine's face, which yet refused to be recalled at the moment; dim distrusts and doubts of his own chance of winning her hand; soul-disturbing thoughts of her friendship with Gordon Frere; wild plots of laying Mr. Guyon under even greater obligations to him, and thus making sure of his alliance and support; dreamy reminiscences of how she had looked and moved, and what she had done and said on the several occasions when he had seen her.

Charles Yeldham's thoughts were of a very different kind. Here was this simple girl, of whose existence he had scarcely known a few days ago, now exercising influence over the future fate of three men—no, of two men; as for himself—bah! the chambers and the pleadings, the hard work which was to make up little Clare's dowry—that was his fate, and there was an end of it so far as he was concerned. But Gordon? Poor Gordon, who had gone off full of life and hope to urge upon his father the necessity of "doing something for him," actuated thereto solely by the hope of propitiating Mr. Guyon by being able to show himself in a position to ask for Katharine's hand—poor Gordon, who was at that moment doubtless promising and vowing all sorts of things in his own name to his father, and who, if he succeeded in getting promise of an appointment, would write off triumphantly in prosecution of his suit, or who, if he failed, would come back to town and try and pursue it without the necessary qualification, but who in either case would have a cold shoulder turned upon him and the door shut in his face so soon as a suitor of Streightley's calibre was known to have entered the lists. "I hope to make her my wife." Those were Robert Streightley's words, and from them Yeldham could not gather whether or not the final question had been asked; but, be that as it might, he knew sufficiently of Mr. Guyon to feel certain that Gordon's hopes were destined to suffer utter wreck. Would not the girl herself be true to the—to the what? What could this poor lad adduce in support of the flame which he had nourished but the ordinary flirtation-phrases indulged in night after night in hundreds of London ballrooms? How could he (Yeldham) tell whether Katharine loved Gordon or not? He had no clearer indication than the readiness of a joyous, enthusiastic, rather trivial nature to believe in the existence of what it hoped and desired; he shrunk from the idea of the lad's disappointment; but, after all, he knew Gordon Frere too well to suppose that he would be unlike the remainder of mankind—that he would not get over it in time—in perhaps no very long time. Had it been himself now—had he loved Katharine Guyon, and another came to win her from him by his superior wealth—but he would not pursue so futile a thought as that—he had nothing to do with love. Hard work, and not the indulgence of fancy, was his lot, and he was content. He wished it was over, though, and that Gordon knew the worst.

These and many other thoughts resembling them chased each other through Yeldham's brain, and rendered it difficult to him to keep up even the desultory conversation for which only Streightley was disposed. The friends parted at the railway station, and Yeldham betook himself at once to his chambers. It was a still, hot evening, and the airlessness of the rooms oppressed him. He was a man little influenced by such things ordinarily; yet this evening the grim cheerlessness, the dust, the ungentle disarray, in whose disorderliness there was a kind of order, of which he held the key; the harsh bundles of papers, the very fittings of the rooms, in which all was scrupulously designed for use, and as devoid of ornament as only true British business upholstery knows how to be—all these things made themselves suddenly apparent. He revolted against them—against his life in general. It suddenly seemed alike hard and useless: what was he grinding away like this for? supposing his object accomplished, *cui bono?* An unwholesome frame of mind to be betrayed into, even for a little while—a relaxation, a renunciation of the great principle of duty which had upheld and guided him so long; and Charles Yeldham knew that it was so, and felt afraid of himself. He shrank from the first insidious chill of the advancing tide of discontent; he recognized the deadliness of it.

"Yes, that's it," he said, thoughtfully, when, having emptied his letter-box, and looked over the memoranda left for his inspection by his clerk, he sat moodily by the open window, through which faint sounds from the river reached his ears: "yes, that's it. I have seen a fine place to-day, and talked with a rich man—a man who hardly knows how rich he really is, I fancy—about what he is to do with his money; and I suppose I am actually envious, cut up by the sight of something desirable that never can be mine. He is going to invest in hap-

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piness, is he?—to buy a beautiful idol, and set her up in a splendid shrine? he's rich enough to do it, if he likes. I wonder how it is really. I wonder whether he will be as happy as he believes. But no — I don't wonder any thing of the kind, of course; no one ever was or will be, since life is limited, and faith is infinite. It's a dull business, I fancy, even at the best — as dull, perhaps, as it is to me, who am so very far off the best."

And then Charles Yeldham rose, shook off the unusual and perilous mood which had held him already too long, and sat down resolutely to his work. It was very late that night when he went to bed, and sleep kept away from him in a harassing manner. The events of the day reproduced themselves in his thoughts, which escaped his control, and dragged him in their course. The strange imbroglio in which he found himself engaged; the clashing interests of two friends, in whom he was greatly though not equally interested; the certain crash of the hopes and projects of one of them; his uncertainty of the extent to which Streightley had received encouragement, but which his knowledge of Robert's real diffidence of character and unconsciousness of his own value in the eyes of a scheming and mercenary society induced him to believe must have been considerable; his doubts as to the course he ought to pursue toward Gordon — no wonder he could not sleep while these conflicting thoughts battled with each other in his mind.

The practical result of his cogitations was that Charles Yeldham decided on postponing any communication with Frere until his return. Gordon was not likely to write to him—he hated letter-writing rather more than he hated any other kind of mental exertion; and whether his application to his father might have good results or not, he would no doubt return without delay. On the other perplexing question—had Streightley proposed to Miss Guyon?—Yeldham ardently desired information, but for the present there was no means of attaining it within his reach. He must wait like the others — only not like them in this, that he did not wait and hope. He was only an outsider, an inconsiderable person, the recipient of half-confidence on one side, the confidant of baseless hopes, as he feared, upon the other; while to one principally concerned he was nothing. No conjuncture of affairs could make him an object of importance in the life of the proud, beautiful girl, whose fair face came between him and every thing on which he strove to fix his attention—the only woman's face which had ever charmed Charles Yeldham.

Hester Gould had seen a good deal of her friends at Hampstead since the evening on which she had made so favorable an impression on Mr. Daniel Thacker. She had accompanied her dear Rachel and Rebecca to the Botanical promenade, whither they had repaired arrayed in much splendor, and with the gorgeousness of coloring and richness of material affected by their nation. Mr. Thacker had joined the party, and had exerted himself to the utmost to be agreeable to Miss Gould, whom he admired more than ever, when he contrasted the taste and propriety of her dress with the splendid array of his sisters, from which he shrunk with dismay. As it suited Hester's plans for obtaining information that Daniel Thacker should succeed in these efforts, he did succeed, and she had enjoyed an opportunity of observing Miss Guyon closely and attentively during her animated conversation with Gordon Frere, and also during her father's *empressé* introduction of Streightley to her notice. She had decided, with characteristic readiness, on entering the grounds, that she would tell Thacker that she wished to see Miss Guyon, and she had done so. Mr. Thacker had entertained a distinct purpose of business, in addition to that of pleasure, in coming to the *fête*, and it was a source of conscientious gratification to him that he found himself enabled to serve both. He had been informed by Mr. Guyon that Streightley would be there, and he resolved to see for himself how that gentleman stood with Miss Guyon. Thus he and Hester were each bent upon a similar object. There was, however, one material difference between their modes of pursuing it. Mr. Thacker did not begin to watch Katharine until Streightley joined her. Hester Gould watched her from the first moment she distinguished her figure amid the gay group, which was one of the most conspicuous in the gardens. She watched her, not with the jealous gaze of an angry woman watching a dangerous rival, but with unclouded, unprejudiced senses, with close admiring attention, and the keen perception of a woman gifted with intuitive knowledge of the world, a cool temper, and unusual discretion. She had seen expectation and pleasure in every line of Miss Guyon's expressive face as Gordon joined her; she had marked the heightened color, the brightened eye, as they passed and repassed each other; she had heard the note of irrepressible gladness in the sweet musical voice; and Hester Gould knew that Katharine Guyon loved the fair-haired young man, in whose air and figure she recognized the ease and self-possession, the simplicity and frankness which made Gordon so attractive, as well as the girl who was giving herself up to all the unrestrained happiness of young love knew it. Hester did not ask her companion who Gordon Frere was; she did not attract his attention to the young gentleman at all; on the contrary, she engrossed it so completely, that when she said quietly, "There is Ellen Streightley's brother talking to your friend's daughter now, Mr. Thacker," Daniel looked round with a start, and felt that he had almost forgotten the business part of his purpose.

A bow of recognition had passed between Mr. Guyon and Mr. Daniel Thacker, but Robert Streightley had not seen Miss Gould. It had not been her intention that he should see her;

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her purpose was to observe him closely, and she had effected it. She was no more mistaken in her estimate of his sentiments than in that of Katharine's; and it was characteristic of her that, though her observations changed a vague surmise into a positive certainty, a threatening risk into a certain present danger, she betrayed not a sign of uneasiness or discouragement. Neither her color nor her countenance changed, though she saw before her eyes the overthrow of a scheme cherished long and deeply—though she could only calculate the chances in her favor by a vague speculation on the possible fortune and position of the young man she had seen with Katharine; or, supposing he had neither, on Katharine's strength of determination in opposition to her father. It was also characteristic of Hester Gould that, though she had determined to marry Streightley without permitting herself to love him, she told herself that night that she felt a degree of dislike to Katharine Guyon, which might, if she did not take care, grow into hatred.

"She is my unconscious and involuntary rival," said the strange woman, whose candor toward herself was never laid aside, "and I must not hate her, for hatred is troublesome—a passion—and I will never put myself under the tyranny of a passion."

Hester Gould was at the Brixton Villa when Robert returned from his visit to Middlemeads. Mrs. Streightley and his sister were aware that he had gone into the country, but they knew no more. When he examined the letters sent by his orders from the City, he found among them one from Mr. Guyon, requesting him, if possible, to call on him on the following day, leaving the hour to his selection, but urging his attention to the request. The letter was a dainty missive, with a fine colored monogram on the seal, and expressing in its appearance as wide a difference between itself and Robert's ordinary correspondence as it was in the power of stationery to convey. Ellen Streightley was one of those young ladies blessed with a taste for simple pleasures, and who rated the possession of crests and monograms very high among them. Accordingly she exclaimed,

"Oh, Robert, that's something in my line. Do let me have it!"

He handed her the envelope.

"Oh, how delightfully intricate! I can't make it out. What are the letters, Robert? Whose name is it?"

"The letters are K. S. G.," said Robert, rather reluctantly.

Hester watched him closely: "Oh, that's it, is it? but what is the name?"

"Katharine Sibylla Guyon," replied Robert; and still Hester watched his embarrassment. "But the note is from Mr. Guyon—he wants to see me. I suppose he wrote it at his daughter's desk."

Ellen perceived nothing of her brother's embarrassment, and went on:

"Robert, you never saw Hester the other day at the Botanical Fête, but she saw you; and you were talking to such a beautiful girl; she says she is sure it was Miss Guyon—was it?"

"Yes," returned her brother, "that was Miss Guyon; it must have been, for I did not know any other lady who was there. I am sorry I did not see you, Miss Gould. Did you enjoy the *fête*?"

"Very much indeed," said Hester. "I was particularly struck with Miss Guyon. She seems to be very much admired. I saw a gentleman with her before you arrived—a very young man with fair hair, very handsome. He seemed completely captivated, I thought. You must excuse my talking such nonsense, ma'am, but I really was amused looking at them. Do you know who he is, Mr. Streightley?"

"I fancy, from your description, the gentleman in question is a Mr. Gordon Frere," Robert answered in a formal tone, whose bitterness and displeasure Hester Gould did not fail to recognize. She turned the conversation at once, and took her leave early, having received all Ellen's confidences before Robert's return, and having duly admired the mingled piety and sentiment of the Reverend Decimus Dutton's latest letter.

Ellen retired immediately after Hester's departure, and was soon fast asleep, with a neat packet of the missionary's love-letters under her pillow, and a locket containing a photographic likeness of that apostle, which might have taken a prize for feebleness, resting upon her innocent breast.

Robert Streightley sat up late with his mother, and told her of his visit to Middlemeads, his purposes respecting the estate, and the hopes which had led to their formation.

CHAPTER X.

STRUGGLE.

Robert Streightley slept but little on the night after his visit to Middlemeads, for that note which he had found awaiting him from Mr. Guyon sat heavy on his soul. Wanted to see him on particular business, eh? What did that particular business mean? Not more money advances, surely? Such transactions as he had had with Mr. Guyon were small enough to a man accustomed to the particular kind of business—the loans, and contracts, and subsidies—with which the firm of Streightley and Son were in the habit of dealing; but yet Robert, however willfully blind, could not shut his eyes to the fact that he had already supplied Mr. Guyon with loans for which he had nothing like adequate security. Could Mr. Guyon possibly mean to touch upon that other subject, which, as a man of the world, he must have already divined lay very close at Robert Streightley's heart? Could he intend to broach the question of his daughter—? As the idea crossed Streightley's mind he felt his cheek flush,

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and the cold beads of perspiration start out upon his forehead.

For he was an honorable man, brought up in an honorable school, where "a fair fight and no favor" had been the motto from time immemorial, and where any one taking undue advantage or seeking to compass his ends by unfair means toward his rival would have been scouted with ignominy. And he felt—how could he but feel?—that the struggle in which he was at that moment engaged was scarcely being conducted in the same open manner. He felt that he was creeping up toward the assault under the protection of a hireling guerrilla force, which, with all the advantage of the knowledge of the ground, was pushing its renegade advantage, furthering his advance here, throwing out earth-works for the hinderance of the enemy there, and all from the mere sordid love of gain and chances of plunder, but without the smallest heartiness of feeling in the matter. Not a nice feeling for a man of Robert Streightley's sense of punctilio. It galled him, and he chafed against it sadly during the long watches of that night. What was it? a caprice, a sudden fancy, a madness which had stung him, that he, a mature man of confirmed bachelor habits, with his own household gods around him, and his own life completely settled and hitherto sufficient, should suddenly break through all his customs—yes, that would be nothing, but break through them in a weak and feeble manner—break through them in a way in which he, so far as he read it to himself, took no active part, but suffered himself to be the mere tool and instrument—for his own purposes indeed—in hands which were certainly not exempt from suspicion of being soiled. This was bad—very bad indeed. What should he say to himself suppose a parallel case in the business world—that world which he understood, which had hitherto been his sole life, and out of which he felt he could not with safety emerge—had been submitted to him? Why, he would have declared that, as a point of honor, a man in that position ought at once to set himself free from such trammels. And if in business, surely in love there was all the more reason for his doing so. For his part, he would hesitate no longer; he would at once drop the Guyon acquaintance, sinking the advances which he had up to that point made to Mr. Guyon, and writing them off as salutary experience lightly paid for, and—And then, as he lay tossing on his fevered pillow, rose before him a vision of Katharine in all her grace and beauty—Katharine saucily laughing at Mr. Mostyn's solemn vanity; Katharine the cynosure of all at the Botanical promenade, queening it among the loveliest and the best-bred, evoking admiration from all; Katharine with earnest face and downcast eyes, then with flushed cheek and sparkling glance, in conversation with Gordon Frere—No! that last thought was too much. In Robert Streightley's nature there lay hitherto latent an amount of mad, blinding, unreasoning jealousy, whose existence was suspected by none of his friends, by him least of all; but it leapt into flame as this last picture crossed his mind, and all thoughts of withdrawal from the career in which he had suffered himself to be embarked shriveled up before its scorching heat. It should not be from want of perseverance on his part, nor from want of employment of all the resources at his command, that he would fail in this, the—yes, the really first scheme in his life in which he had taken hearty interest. He would need all his skill, and tact, and patience to carry it through—ah! if he could only sleep now—if he could forget for an instant those haunting eyes, that queenly form, that sweet winning smile!

He lay awake during all the early hours of that morning, and it was nearly five o'clock before he sunk into a heavy, unrefreshing slumber, from which, despite old Alice's repeated warnings, he did not wake until long past nine. Then he had his bath and dressed himself, and went slouching down to breakfast with pale face and red eyelids, and a wearied, anxious look. Mrs. Streightley had ere this sallied forth armed with a complete library of little red books, over which she waged weekly warfare with the neighboring tradespeople; and Ellen had an "early service" on, followed by a little light recreation of district-visiting, and a small interlude of first meeting of coal and flannel fund, so that Robert had only his old nurse to watch over him at breakfast, and render every mouthful additionally distasteful by her comments.

"Well, Lord knows, I never thought to have lived to have seen this day," said the old woman, when Robert, after a vain attempt at eating, pushed his plate away from before him; "that any child of your father's, let alone you, for whom he thought, and cared, and slaved most, should have quarreled with the victuals provided for him in this house, I didn't expect."

"Ah! nurse," said Robert, trying to smile, "it's not what's provided: I'm not well just now; somehow—I—"

"Not well, indeed! I know what's the matter with you. You're in love, and pleased with ruin, as the saying is—that's what ails you. Oh, don't frown and look so; do you think the old woman don't know those signs, Robert, my boy? No appetite, and looking a long way off, and never speaking when spoke to? Lor' bless yer. And do you think old Alice don't know what that means? Come, they're all out, Robert! tell me who it is. Tell the old woman who nursed you when you couldn't speak, or scarce cry, for the matter of that, you was that weak; and the doctor never thought to have brought you through it; and wouldn't if it hadn't been for me, though I say it as shouldn't; tell old Alice all about it, deary; tell her, and trust her, as you used to—oh, so long ago."

"There's nothing to tell, Alice," said Robert, with a forced laugh, rising from his chair; "you've made a pretty story for yourself, nurse, but I'm too old now to be amused at it even, much less to think of taking one of the characters. I'm a little overdone with business, that's all."

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"Is it?" said the old woman, shortly. "Well, if it's business, that's all right. But it's the first time since ever I've been connected with the house of Streightley and Son, and that's nigh fifty year, that I heard it was necessary to forward the business of the house, or to captivate the brokers and the shipping-agents, and that like, by dressing one's self up in fal-lal clothes, and by dancing attendance at opera and play houses (I found the papers of them in your pockets) until all hours in the morning. And I'm thinking that if that *is* the way, your father made but a poor hand at it, Master Robert; and it's a great mercy that he didn't ruin the whole concern." And so saying, and with a sniff of great meaning, the old lady retired from the room.

By no means reassured or made more comfortable even by this short interview—for he was a nervous man in some things, and very much disliked what he called "being upset"—Robert Streightley pushed the breakfast things away from him and started off for town. He had dropped the omnibus long since, and took a cab as a matter of course; and as he journeyed along, he could not help contrasting the splendor of the house he had yesterday visited with the meanness of that one which he had just left. Both were his own, and both were to a certain extent typical of his life: in the latter, with frugal commonplace people his money had been made; in the former, with one bright being it should be spent. Yes, he had had enough of this daily grind of business, this sordid strife, and he had determined that henceforth—if his hopes were realized—he would live a different life. If his hopes were realized? what forbade their realization? This man — this Gordon Frere was younger, it is true, better-looking, more of a "lady's man" than he; but he himself was not so old, not so hideous, not so—Ah! good God! What a fool he was for arguing the question in this way, even to himself! He felt that he loved this girl, and that on that deep love and earnest devotion alone must he rely for the success of his suit.

He found Mr. Guyon awaiting him in the dining-room, with the *Morning Post* on the very verge of the table, and a large blotting-book, a portentous inkstand, and a perfect armory of steel pens close in front of him. The flavor of Turkish tobacco hung round the apartment, and a cut-glass goblet containing the remains of a draught that looked suspiciously like brandy and soda-water stood on the velvet mantelpiece. Mr. Guyon himself, dressed in the loose lounging jacket and the Turkish trowsers, lay on the sofa with the butt-end of a cigarette in his mouth, and extended his hand to his friend in cordial greeting.

"I take this doosid kind of you, my dear Streightley, coming round in this way when I asked you. Doosid kind!" said Mr. Guyon; "and I show my appreciation of it by receiving you without the least ceremony or the least humbug — which is the greater compliment. When one says to a fellow, 'I want to see you on a matter of business,' the fellow who's good enough to come round naturally expects to see the fellow who sent for him in a state of business — stiff shirt-collar, and almanac, and all that kind of thing. That's what I myself should do to some fellows, but I don't to you. I say to myself, 'He's above all that sort of dodgery. He's a real man of business, and would see through it at once. Let him take me as I am. I'm an idle, nothing-doing, pleasure-seeking son of a gun: he knows it; why should I attempt to disguise my natural self from him and prove myself to be somebody else? Let him see me as my natural self.'"

Here Mr. Guyon paused for an instant to take a sip from the cut-glass goblet and to throw away the butt-end of the cigarette. Feeling it incumbent on him to say something, Robert Streightley murmured, "Very kind!"

"No," said Mr. Guyon, raising himself on his elbow, and looking lazily across the table at his visitor, "not very kind. Shrewd, perhaps, but not kind. When a man is in want of serious advice, and goes to the fountain-head for—that sort of thing—boldly and without scruple, he may be said to be shrewd. Now that's my case, and I come to you."

This, so far, was so like the commencement of Mr. Guyon's conversations when loans were in question, that Streightley had made up his mind that more money was required; he changed his opinion, however, as his host proceeded.

"Now, my dear Robert — you'll forgive an old fellow's familiarity, won't you? I don't often indulge in a fancy, but when I do I'm like the—ivy, damme, I cling. You can see—you must have seen plainly enough long since, that I'm not a man of business. In three words, I hate it. If I had been a rich man, I'd have had a fellow to do all my business for me while I smoked my cigarette and looked on; and hitherto, whenever it's been a question of business, money, and all those horrible details arising from the want of it, I've shirked it as long as I could, and then stumbled through it in a devilish blind, stupid, haphazard kind of manner. That's been all very well so far; but now another question arises—a very different question—one touching the heart and that kind of thing, and the welfare of a person who—however, I'll go into that by-and-by—a question on which I feel so deeply that I've determined to be guided by the advice of the clearest-headed man of my acquaintance, and so I've sent for you."

Robert Streightley bowed, and murmured a few words of incoherent thanks. Not money! Question on which he felt so deeply! What was Mr. Guyon driving at?

"I will be perfectly plain with you, my dear Robert," said Mr. Guyon, "frank as the day, all open and aboveboard. I won't disguise from you, I don't attempt to disguise it from myself, that perhaps there never was a man less fitted than I am to have been blessed with what

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would be a crowning solace to many men—a daughter." Streightley involuntarily started as these words met his ear; and Mr. Guyon noticed the start, but he did not betray himself, and proceeded: "I'm not a domestic man, and not cut out for domestic happiness. I believe my enemies call me a loose fish, and 'pon my soul I think they're right. I like my rubber and my club, and—in fact, my freedom. I'm a sort of claret-and-*entrée* butterfly, and was never intended for the roast-joint and bread-and-cheese *ménage* of respectability and home consumption. However, what was intended and what is are two very different things. I have a daughter, and—well, you're a man of the world, and I won't bore you with a father's maudlin praises of his child. She is—there, I was very near breaking into what I had just declared I would not do!—what I mean to say is, her future is my greatest care. I've been a man of the world myself, and I know all she will be exposed to, and, my dear Robert, I tremble when I think of it. I've only to refer to my own conscience to see what might be in store for her. Her poor mother—of whom she is the very image—was weak enough to marry me; and though—though I always treated her as a gentleman should treat his wife, by Jove! I know I—many shortcomings."

Here Mr. Guyon buried his face in a large white pocket-handkerchief; and Streightley, not knowing what to say or do, drummed vacantly on the table.

"You follow me, my dear boy? Of course, I knew you would," resumed Mr. Guyon, after a momentary pause. "Now wait and hear the rest. A girl like Katharine, possessing—well, what I suppose even I may call many attractions—will necessarily receive a vast amount of admiration from all sorts of men, and it will be my duty—and a duty which I shall perform with the greatest strictness—she has no mother, you know, poor girl! and I must be doubly vigilant—to see that she does not get led away and tempted into any foolish alliance by any good-looking young fashionable fop with nothing but his good looks to recommend him. What my girl requires in a husband—for she is light and giddy, like the rest of her sex—is ballast, my dear Robert; a man of matured experience, and not too young in years; one whom she could look up to, who could give her the position which her beauty, and—I may say her birth—entitle her to; that's the sort of husband to whom alone I should be happy in giving my Katharine."

Mr. Guyon paused once more, and Streightley bowed again in an absent manner, his right hand all the time plucking at his chin.

"The—the ideal, if I may so call it, that I have just drawn by no means resembles the writer of a letter which I received this morning honoring me by a proposal for Katharine's hand." Streightley's arm dropped upon the table, and he leaned forward with an eager gaze. "Yes, my dear Robert, the Goths are already in full march upon the—what d'ye call 'em—Capitol, and it is under these circumstances that I have sent for you to ask your advice."

"You—you're very good," murmured Streightley; "and of course any thing that I can do—but I really scarcely see in such a matter as this—and without knowing—knowing any thing of the—the parties—"

"My dear Robert, you don't think I would have sent for you with the notion of making any half-confidences. You shall know every detail. The writer of this letter," pursued Mr. Guyon, producing a packet from his desk—"of these two letters rather, for there is an inclosure for Katharine which I have not yet delivered—is a young man whom you may have seen with us—a Mr. Gordon Frere—a doosid good-looking, well-born, well-connected young fellow, who seems tremendously in earnest about it too," continued Mr. Guyon, balancing his trim gold eye-glasses on the bridge of his nose; "for he writes to me to say—to say that—there, I need not read his letter—the gist of it is that he's been down to his father, at some place in the country where he writes from, and his father, who is a member of the House, has promised to use his influence with government to get him a decent berth. Now that's plucky and honorable; I like that, eh, Robert?"

"Oh yes, sir—very honorable indeed," said Streightley, nervously. "I think you mentioned that you had not forwarded the inclosure to Miss Guyon."

"Not yet—no. I was desirous of having your opinion—as a man of business—on the proposal."

It had come at last, then, this long-expected blow to that dream of future happiness in which, spite of his own better reasoning, he had dared to indulge. She would be wrested from him—be taken to the heart of that smooth-spoken dandy whom he had loathed from the first instant of seeing him. All her loveliness—ah! how he remembered each brilliant charm!—would go to grace the life of that silly fop. The blood rushed back to Robert Streightley's heart as he thought of all this; his teeth were clenched, his pallid lips trembled and shook, and he thought that if he had had Gordon Frere before him at that instant he could have killed him without remorse. For an instant his better feeling struggled with his passion; the struggle was short and sharp, but the passion was victorious; and he said, in a strange, dry voice,

"This gentleman scarcely fulfills the requirements you named just now, Mr. Guyon."

"Admirably put, my dear Robert—clearly and admirably put! I must allow it, he does not."

"If there were some one who, by his age and position at least, was calculated to—to be to this young lady—what you—"

"Yes, my dear Robert, yes—"

"Who—" Then, with a great gulp—"I'm a bad hand at beating about the bush, sir. What

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I have seen of Miss Guyon has so enthralled me that—that I would give my life to win her for my wife."

He sought his handkerchief to wipe his fevered lips, but Mr. Guyon caught his hand and pressed it warmly. "You, Robert, you? My dear boy, those are the happiest words that my ears have heard this many a day. You? Why, in a father's—what you may call fondest dreams, I could not have hoped for such good news as this! You? Why, of all people on earth, the very man!"

"The very man" looked any thing but happy as he sat there with pallid lips, and puckered forehead, and rapidly-beating heart—sat there silent and downcast, only occasionally raising his eyes to glance at the letter which Mr. Guyon had placed on the table before him. At that letter he stole long wistful glances; it seemed to possess for him a kind of baleful attraction; and after a short interval, his regard fixed on it so directly that his companion could not fail to notice it. But, though Mr. Guyon fully comprehended what was passing within Robert Streightley's breast, it by no means suited him to refer to it at once.

"My dear Robert," said he, after a few minutes' pause, "the unexpected delight of your communication just made has really taken me —even old stager as I am—what I may call off my legs! I understand you to propose for my daughter's hand?"

"The very man" said never a word, but bowed his head abstractedly.

"Then I congratulate you and myself, my dear boy!" said the elder man, again seizing his companion's passive hand, "and I think we may regard it as a settled thing. My daughter has not seen much of you at present, but I am quite certain that when she once comes to know the qualities of your head and heart, she will—"

"What about that letter, Mr. Guyon?" said Robert Streightley, in a cold, hard voice, pointing to the envelope still lying on the table.

"That letter!" echoed Mr. Guyon, his face falling considerably. "Well, my dear Robert, there's no denying that—eh? That letter—you see that young man Frere, Gordon Frere, gentlemanly fellow, good address, and all that kind of thing, has had opportunities of—in fact, making his way, which—willful woman and so on. Gad, if that letter were delivered, there's no knowing how things might turn out!"

Streightley's heart sunk within him, and he turned faint and sick; but he controlled himself sufficiently to say,

"Then you were a little rash in your congratulations, Mr. Guyon?"

"Not at all, my dear boy, not at all. Recollect, I spoke of a contingency. I said, *if* that letter were delivered."

"*If* that letter were delivered to Miss Guyon? Do you mean to say that you would dare to withhold it from her?"

"'Dare' is a very awkward word, my dear Robert. It appears to me that if one could select two men as judges of what should or should not be addressed to a young lady, they would be her father—and her intended husband."

"But that letter!"

"Well, my dear fellow—that letter? Shall I give it to Katharine? Shall we install Mr. Gordon Frere into what should and what will be your position? shall I subject myself to a fortnight's confounded rows, and finally saddle myself for life with a 'detrimental' son-in-law? or shall I quietly put it by, and acquaint my daughter with your very delightful proposal? My dear Robert, you look aside and shake your head; but I am an older man than you, and know that I am—that we are—acting for the best. Recollect what the fellow—Kean, I think —says in the play: 'He that is robbed not wanting what is stolen, let him not know it and he's not robbed at all.' Doosid good that, and doosid appropriate. So we'll settle upon that course, eh? and you'll leave all to me? What! you're not going, my dear boy—you'll stay to luncheon?"

"Not this morning, thank you—not now, Mr. Guyon—I—I must go now!" and Robert Streightley passed into the street, and for the first time in his life felt a sense of shame at his heart, and a desire to shun the glances of those whom he encountered.

Mr. Guyon, so soon as the door had closed behind his friend, drew his chair to his desk, carefully read through Gordon Frere's letter to Katharine, hitherto unopened, replaced it and the letter to himself in their envelope, which he carefully indorsed with the words "Shown to R. S.," and the date, and locked them away in a private drawer. Then he wrote a rather long and elaborate letter to Mr. Frere, addressed it with great care, was very natty in his arrangement of its postage-stamp, sealed it with a large splodge of red wax bearing his coat-of-arms, and went up stairs.

On the third night after the events just recorded Charles Yeldham and Gordon Frere were walking up and down the departure platform at London Bridge, by the side of the mail-train just about to start. Frere was dressed in traveling costume, and looked, as most young fellows do in such garb, sufficiently picturesque. But his face was deadly pale, save where there were blotches of bright red under his eyes.

"Now listen, Charley," said he, "and hear my last words. I go away cursing that woman. You know I'm not romantic, or melodramatic, or any thing of that kind; but she's spoiled my life for me, and I curse her for it. It's too bad —by the Lord, it's too bad! You know how I —yes, damme, how I loved her—followed her about like a spaniel, and she could have done any thing with me. And then never to keep her appointment, never to send me a line; and then, when I write and make her a regular offer, never to take the least notice—not a line, by Jove!—and to leave her infernal old father to

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write to me that she's engaged to that cold-blooded, mannerless beast, Streightley! Oh, I know he's a friend of yours; but, damme! it's too bad! And when the governor, dear old boy, had actually got me a nomination to the Treasury, and—however, that's thrown up, and I'm going out to an infernal German principality to be secretary to that bewigged old fool in that carriage, and leaving you, and all through the tricks of that heartless coquette! Oh yes, all right! I hear the bell, and I'm going to get in. Now, God bless you, old boy; but recollect my last words. I leave this place cursing that girl, and I'll be even with her yet!"

Mr. Frere wrung his friend's hand and sprang into the carriage as the train began to move. Charles Yeldham waited until the last glimmer of its red lamps had died away, then turned slowly round and walked toward his dreary chambers.

"It's very bad for you, Gordon, my poor boy!" said he to himself as he strolled along; "very bad indeed just now; but I sadly fear it will be worse for others in the long run, and for poor Bob Streightley worst of all!"

CHAPTER XI.

LEFT LAMENTING.

The morning sun, which arose on the world with its accustomed regularity, shone steadily on to its noonday splendor, but found Katharine no more resigned or peaceful than she had been on the previous night. She had been little used to opposition or contradiction, and she did not brook them easily. That she should have been disappointed in the matter of Mrs. Tresillian's ball was natural enough, but that she should have been put so completely out of temper and out of spirits by the disappointment as to have made the fact glaringly apparent to her father and the "City man" was not at all natural to Katharine's well-bred self-command and sense of what was due to good manners and her self-respect. She was discontented with herself, provoked with Lady Henmarsh, and miserable in reflecting upon the disappointment which Gordon Frere had doubtless sustained, and in fancying that he might have imputed her absence to coldness or caprice. Love had taken possession of the girl, had utterly humbled her, and she had no thought of her own charms, her own importance, no notion that Frere might hesitate to ask her to share a destiny which could not be represented as brilliant; she never considered or questioned his position for a moment. She knew he was well born, well connected, and in good society, but she knew and cared to know nothing beyond. She had acquired the enchanting certainty that he loved her; she felt that the next time they met he would tell her so; and her heart had no room for any thing but the mingled rapture and suspense which proceeded from the delightful experience of the preceding day, and the pitiable disappointment of the preceding evening.

Katharine did not see her father on the morning after the Botanical Fête. When she went down to breakfast the dusty footman gave her a message from Mr. Guyon to the effect that he found himself obliged to go out early on particular business, and as he could not say how long he might be detained, she must not expect him to ride with her—he would return to dinner. This message was a fresh annoyance to Katharine, a new exacerbation of her already irritated temper. There, now, she should be unable to ride, and no doubt Gordon was looking forward to meeting her in the Park, and would be again disappointed; indeed, he might think she was purposely avoiding him—who could tell? Katharine pushed her untasted breakfast from her and hurried up stairs to the drawing-room, where she paced up and down before the long windows with an impatient tread. Would he come? Would he call on her at the delightfully unconventional early hour he had selected for his first well-remembered visit? Perhaps—nay, surely he would! It was not far from eleven now; she glanced at the chimney-glass, smoothed her glossy hair, inspected the condition of her neat morning-dress, and then sat down to her piano to play all the tunes which he liked, and so get over the interval before his coming would be possible. But the expedient was not successful; the gay strains died away in harmonized reveries, sometimes into silence, as the girl sat and thought of her lover—glorified by her imagination and exalted by her own fervent nature into a very different being from the real Gordon Frere. If Katharine could have but seen him at that hour, what a difference might it not have made to them and to others! He was turning over the leaves of a Railway Guide, and talking away to Yeldham in all the newborn impetuosity of his approval of his friend's advice, and his resolution to act upon it. Yes, he would go at once; he would not delay an hour; he would not trust himself to see Katharine again. If he had met her at the Tresillians, he should certainly have committed himself; and Yeldham was right—quite right; of course Mr. Guyon would only laugh at him, and very justly, unless he could put forward some decided prospect for his consideration. Perhaps it was better that he had had no understanding with Katharine as to meeting within a day or two; he might not have been able to resist seeing her again. He would write her a note, though—just a line, saying he should be out of town for a few days—he must indeed, for she had asked him to inquire for some music she wanted at Cramer's: he could just write the note and get the music, and send both to Queen Anne Street before starting for the station. He flung down the Railway Guide, took up his hat and departed, whistling as he descended the staircase with an invincible light-heartedness, whereat Charles Yeldham smiled. The smile was not gay, however, and it vanished quickly, and the barrister

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laid down his pen, leaned his chin upon his folded hands, and gazed out of the window with eyes that saw nothing they looked upon. It was a most unusual thing for Charles Yeldham to indulge in a fit of abstraction, and the indulgence was brief. He brought his gaze and his thoughts back again with an effort, shook his hair from his forehead, and resumed his work doggedly.

Mr. Guyon, returning from his business expedition at about one o'clock, and proposing to let himself into the house by means of his latch-key, as he did not feel particularly desirous of an interview with Katharine just then, and feared she might come down to seek him if she heard a ring, found a commissionaire just in the act of pulling the bell.

"Wait a minute, my man," said Mr. Guyon, in his cheery way; "I'll open the door," and he suited the action to the word. "What have you got there? Oh, I see—a parcel and a note for my daughter. You're paid, are you, eh? Never mind, here's another sixpence—good-day."

The man turned away well pleased, and Mr. Guyon, carrying the parcel in his hand, went on into his own room. There was a note with the parcel, which was evidently a roll of music. Mr. Guyon looked at it, considered it, finally muttering "It will always be easy to say the fellow must have lost it," he opened and read the missive. As he did so his face brightened up. "Out of town, eh? on important business; trusts to see her the moment he returns, eh? Not if I know it, Mr. Frere—not if I know it." Then Mr. Guyon put the note carefully away in his pocket-book, for destruction at a convenient season.

He next proceeded to search among a heap of cards stuck into the frame of the chimney-glass for one bearing the inscription "Mr. Gordon Frere," passed it under the riband with which the parcel was fastened, and rang the bell.

"Take this to Miss Guyon," said he to the footman, who answered the summons. "A commissionaire brought it just now."

Katharine was standing by one of the windows when the man entered the drawing-room, salver in hand. Her tall, graceful figure and proud head expressed eager anticipation and waiting in their attitude.

"A parcel, ma'am," said the man; "a commissioner 'ave brought it."

"Put it down," she said, without turning her head; and several minutes elapsed before she looked round, or remembered the interruption. At length she sighed impatiently, and said aloud, "He will hardly come now, it is too near lunch-time; and if he comes later, the room is sure to be full of bores, as usual. However, I had rather he came, no matter who may be here. But it is very stupid of him not to call early." At this moment her eye lighted on the parcel, and the card attached to it. The color rushed violently into her face, and then subsided, leaving Katharine many shades paler than usual.

Mr. Guyon was in very good spirits when he met his daughter at lunch. He talked, and laughed, and made himself as agreeable as if she had been somebody else's daughter and worth cultivating. He congratulated Katharine on her appearance both at the *fête* and at dinner on the previous day; he asked her where her bonnet came from, and whether her milliner was determined to ruin him completely this season? To all these sallies Katharine replied little; she was pale, *distraite*, decidedly out of humor. Mr. Guyon shot sharp inquiring glances at her across the table wholly unperceived. He was a little surprised at her mood. "By Jove!" he thought, "she has been harder bit than I suspected, and this has been a near thing, I fancy. I've only given Hetty the office just in time. Something must be done before this dandy fellow comes back—and it won't be too easy to manage Kate either."

These reflections troubled Mr. Guyon a little, and repressed the fine flow of his spirits; but his daughter took as little notice of one of his moods as of the other.

"Have you heard how Lady Henmarsh is to-day?" she asked, absently; and the seemingly harmless question brought a more impartially diffused color to Mr. Guyon's face than the evenly-defined bloom which usually embellished it.

"No," he replied, decisively; "have you?"

"I have not," said Katharine. "I was thinking of walking round there to inquire for her; but James makes out that there is so much to do, after yesterday, that I saw he would only grumble if I took him out"—Mr. Guyon breathed rather quickly, and then looked relieved—"and, as I knew if any thing serious had been the matter with her or Sir Timothy, she would have put us off for to-day, it didn't matter."

"Ah, by-the-by, yes!" returned her father, "we dine there to-day."

It was rather odd that Mr. Guyon should have said this in a tone of reminiscent surprise; for his particular business of that morning had included, if not entirely consisted of, a long interview with Lady Henmarsh, which interview had concluded with these words:

"Well, then, good-by until seven. You quite understand?" on the part of the gentleman; and "Yes, I quite understand," on the part of the lady.

It will be remembered that Mr. Guyon had dispatched a note to his complaisant cousin in the course of the preceding day, which note had borne fruit in Katharine's disappointment of the evening. It had also prepared Lady Henmarsh for Mr. Guyon's visit, and had convinced her that he "meant business." It is unnecessary to go into the details of the interview, which had taken place while Katharine had watched and waited throughout the dreary hours, and in which her fate was settled, so far as it was in the power of her father and her chaperone to settle it. Its bearings will all be clearly developed by the results; it is enough at present that

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each of the parties was satisfied with the views entertained and the promises made by the other.

Katharine looked very bright and beautiful that evening, and her manner was as gay and gracious as if Lady Henmarsh had not inflicted a severe disappointment upon her, and seriously disconcerted all her plans and hopes for one day and night at least. Her pride had received a slight wound, not a deep or deadly one as yet, but it was keen, and sensitive, and thrilled to a touch; and that card, without note or message, had touched it. She recalled her last words to Gordon Frere, his last words to her, and their tone, which meant so much more, and she could not but recoil from this incident. There was some relief in fancying that he might have taken this way of evincing pique at her absence from the ball; and when this idea occurred to her she cherished it, and at last it gave her complete comfort. There is a sort of charm in such piques and pets, when they are not carried too far, and Katharine did not care to remember that, had Gordon been offended, and taken such a way of showing it, he must have indulged temper at the cost of sense, as he must have known her absence arose from no fault of hers. But Katharine, a remarkably clear-sighted person in most cases, was as blind and as silly as the rest of the world in this, and caught with eagerness at a reason which seemed to exalt her lover's devotion at the expense of his common sense. Yes, that was it! of course. How foolish she had been! they would meet to-morrow; even if he did not call, he always went to Lady Tredgold's "evenings," and there they should meet, and "make it up." Katharine's girlish spirits rose, under the influence of the conviction that she had been worrying herself unnecessarily, and she was even unusually charming. The dinner-party was a pleasantly-assorted one; Sir Timothy, a perfect gentleman, old and invalided as he was, prosed away indeed at the end of the table, but she was not near him at dinner, and he never appeared in the drawing-room. She talked brilliantly; her low, well-bred laugh was heard like frequent music amid the buzz of conversation; and Mr. Mostyn, who honored Lady Henmarsh on the present occasion, made up his mind that Katharine should be his next heroine. He calmly contemplated her animated face, and studied the details of her dress, considering whether she should be wedded to a clever Irish political adventurer (he knew a man whom he could "do" for the part admirably, and what was more and better, every one else knew him also), rescued from his brutality by the hero (Mr. Mostyn would be his own hero), and suffered to die of a broken heart in consequence of her hopeless passion for her rescuer; or whether she should merely retire, in her maiden bloom, into a convent, when the hero marries the duchess out of compassion, and hangs wreaths of *immortelles* on the bell-handle of the holy house of our Lady of the Seven Dolours on each anniversary of the double event. While his mind was agitated by this dilemma, he heard Mr. Guyon say to Lady Henmarsh,

"Yes, we saw him yesterday at the Botanical Fête. I don't know that he mentioned your invitation. Katharine, did Mr. Frere say whether he was to dine with Lady Henmarsh to-day?"

Katharine turned her head quickly toward her father, and there was a slight frown on her fair brow as she answered,

"No, papa, certainly not. I did not know he had been asked. When did you invite him, Lady Henmarsh?"

"Several days ago, Kate—when I asked you all. I suppose he had something better to do; and really he is so horribly conceited, and represents himself as in such request every where, he is quite welcome to stay away for me."

The matter dropped there, but Katharine was very silent now; and Mr. Mostyn, attributing her depression to the near termination of dinner, and the inevitable move, decided that her pensive tenderness was even more charming than her sparkling allurement.

In the drawing-room she was silent still. When opportunity offered she said to Lady Henmarsh,

"How did you send Mr. Frere your invitation?"

"How? Why, Kate, how inquisitive you are!" and her ladyship laughed—rather a forced laugh; "by post, of course. To the Temple; that's all right, isn't it? I said, to meet a few friends, the Guyons, and one or two others. But, my child, I can't stay gossiping with you; there's Mrs. Weldon preparing to consider herself neglected and to take offense."

Katharine was not so much annoyed as she was puzzled by this incident. It is hardly necessary to tell the intelligent reader that no such invitation had ever been sent to Gordon Frere, and that the fabrication had been a happy idea of Mr. Guyon's, and hurriedly imparted to his colleague by a note before dinner. Frere's absence might be very short, and was undoubtedly very precious; and Mr. Guyon had determined to play a game which, if not exactly desperate, was very daring. This was the first card; he had played it, not with perfect, but with tolerable success. With increased eagerness Katharine looked forward to the morrow—with such eagerness as took the healthy color from her cheek and the limpid brightness from her eye, and replaced the one by a flickering flush, and the other by a look of anxiety and absorption. The morrow came, and she rode in the Park with her father, but did not see Gordon Frere. The routine of a London day followed; she drove out with Mrs. Stanbourne, and on her return looked over the cards which had been left during her absence, but there was not one bearing the name she longed to see. At dinner her father was in the gay spirits which had distinguished him since he had made Robert Streightley's acquaintance, and took no notice of her silence and dejection. She went

to Lady Tredgold's reception, and there endured such pangs of expectation, suspense, mortification and anger, love and longing, as only a mind totally undisciplined by sorrow, and unaccustomed to finding its calculations disturbed by conflicting results, could undergo.

The history of the two days which succeeded that of the Botanical Fête, which had been such an eventful date in Katharine's life, and was destined to remain fixed in her memory forever, was repeated in those which followed them. Weary waiting and wondering, heartsick longing and anger, the blind wrath of a proud heart stung and outraged, the remorseful relenting of a girlish passionate heart—through all these, and numberless other phases of feeling and suffering, Katharine Guyon struggled friendless and alone. Pride ruled the girl outwardly, as much as love reigned in her inwardly; and the only person to whom she would have spoken, Mrs. Stanbourne, had left town suddenly, having been called away to a friend who was dangerously ill. Katharine might not have spoken to her indeed, had she been available for purposes of confidence—the calmness and steadiness of the lady's nature might have repelled her, for this was an unfortunate effect which those qualities had frequently produced upon the impetuous and passionate young girl; but, now that she was away, she felt that she would have done so, and regarded Mrs. Stanbourne's absence as an additional grievance and aggravation of the bitterness of her lot. The season was over, town was thinning fast, their own particular set had all broken up, and autumn engagements were either being eagerly discussed or busily entered upon. Days wore on — how wearily, they only who know how long time is to those who watch and wait, can tell — and Katharine did not see the face of Gordon Frere or hear his name. The girl changed visibly under the suffering of this period; the anxious look, so strange to her lustrous eyes, became fixed in them; the soft music of her laugh ceased to ring in the ears of her companions; her girlish gracefulness hardened into something defiant, very attractive to strangers, but which would have made one who loved her sad to see, and apprehensive for her future; but no one who loved her was there to watch the change in Katharine Guyon with prescient eyes.

The day was hot, sultry, breathless; the autumn had fairly set in, and beat fiercely upon the weary Londoners; the sense of oppression produced by the immense circumference of stone and brick was heavy upon such of the world as had any chance of escaping from it. Such as had no chance probably did not like it; "but then," in homely expressive speech, they had to "lump it;" and very few were likely to trouble themselves about them. The last flicker of the gayeties of the season had died out, and even Mr. Guyon had found it impossible to get up a Greenwich dinner-party to comprise more than four individuals, including Robert Streightley and Daniel Thacker. He had avoided his daughter as much as possible of late, and Mr. Streightley had sedulously sought her society, with every kind of tacit encouragement within her father's power to give him. It was the day named for the Greenwich dinner; and Katharine, glad to be alone, and yet feverish and miserable in her solitude, had refused to go to Lady Henmarsh's, there to hold a *causerie* on their several autumn plans.

"She will drag poor old Sir Timothy to some German baths or French watering-place, and she wants me to back her up in the cruelty," thought Katharine, as she contemptuously twisted up the note which had contained the invitation, and desired Lady Henmarsh's page to tell his mistress she was busy and could not come; "but I won't. Why can't she go down to Deanthorpe and keep quiet?" She had been dawdling over her luncheon and feeding her Skye terrier without taking any interest in either occupation, and she now leaned idly against the window-frame and gazed out wearily. She saw the hot, baked streets; she saw the poor old woman opposite sitting by her basket of full-blown blowsy nosegays, sheltering them and herself under the shade of a huge umbrella, fallen from its high estate on some family coach-box, and displaying sundry patches ignominious in their discrepancy with each other and general incongruity with the original fabric. The old woman was yawning and sleeping by snatches, and Katharine's impatient weariness was increased by watching her. She turned away, and went up stairs to her own room. A newspaper lay on the table in the hall, and she took it up mechanically and carried it with her. Her own room was spacious and airy, and physical ease and refreshment at least came to her with its stillness and its shade.

She sat down in an arm-chair by the window, and fell a thinking on the invariable subject, wondering, yearning, raging, as she had done now for days which had run on into weeks, during every hour which had not been tranquilized by the anodyne of sleep. After a while she looked idly at the newspaper in her hand, and in a few minutes her eyes lighted on a paragraph which announced the departure of Lord A—— as British *chargé d'affaires* to the court of F——, accompanied by Mr. Gordon Frere, who attended his lordship in the character of private secretary, and a numerous suite.

Katharine Guyon was not a fainting woman. She had never fainted in her life, and hysterical affections she held in equal suspicion and disdain. No merciful weakness came to lesson the physical anguish she experienced when these few lines conveyed to her shrinking soul the full assurance of the fate that had befallen her. The physical suffering of a sudden grief is always terrible — most terrible where strength reigns with tolerable equality in body and mind. Her flesh crept and burned; acute, agonizing pain darted into her eyeballs and transfixed them; a slow, shivering anguish seized upon her limbs, and caused her lips to part and shud-

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der over the clenched teeth. No cry escaped her, nor sound except a moan, half of mental pain, half of the deadly sickness, the actual nausea, which every one who has ever sustained a severe shock of pain or fear knows is its invariable accompaniment. Black rings formed themselves in the air, and dropped from under her eyes, into what seemed to her like infinite space. She wondered dimly whether this could be any thing like death; and sat there, so feeling, so wondering, she had no idea what length of time. Her maid came to her when the hour for dressing for dinner arrived, and found her pale, motionless, and tearless.

"I'm not well, Marwood," she said; "as papa is out, I need not go down. If you'll help me to undress, I will go to bed."

The woman was utterly surprised. Illness was unknown to Katharine's vigorous frame and eager spirit. She acknowledged that her mistress looked ill, and suggested sending James for a doctor.

"Not on any account," said Katharine; "I am suffering for my obstinacy in riding too long in the sun yesterday, and eating ices last night. I shall be quite well in the morning."

The woman assisted her to undress, and left her, and Katharine lay down in her bed, feeling as if she should never rise from it again. The evening fell, the beautiful autumn night succeeded the brief twilight, and the fair morning dawned, and still she lay quite motionless, tearless, sleepless; speechless too, but for one short sentence whose agony of anger and outraged feeling defied restraint. It sounded strangely in the quiet of the room:

"He was only amusing himself, after all. He *dared* to amuse himself with ME!"

Hester Gould had fulfilled her intention of finding out all she could about Robert Streightley's new friends, as she usually fulfilled all her intentions, quietly and completely. She had paid a friendly visit to Daniel Thacker's sisters, resident at Hampstead; and having timed her visit fortunately, or it would be more correct to say judiciously, she had met Daniel, and extracted from him all the information he was disposed to give. She was not in the least deceived in her estimate of his frankness; she knew that he had more to tell respecting Mr. Guyon and his handsome daughter (Mr. Thacker called her "stunning") than the general facts into the disclosure of which she led him; but she was not unreasonable, and she read character accurately. She had not seen much of Daniel Thacker; for, not being mistress of her own time, she could rarely visit the dwellers at Corby House at the hours which found that gentleman in the bosom of his family; but she had seen enough of him to understand him much better than most of his acquaintances did, and to feel a comfortable assurance that she could gain an influence over him, if any thing should occur to make it worth her while to do so.

Daniel Thacker possessed at least one sterling virtue—he was an excellent brother. Nothing in reason and within the compass of his means did he deny the handsome, red-lipped, dark-browed girls, who strongly resembled him, and were even more Jewish-looking than he. They had a good house, a comfortable establishment, a sufficiency of society among their own persuasion generally, a sufficiency of theatre and concert going, and plenty of the savory meat which their souls loved. They would have been happier perhaps—or they thought so—if their beloved brother, whom they devoutly believed to be the handsomest and most elegant man in Christendom or Jewry, had lived with them at Corby House; but he had fully explained the impossibility on "business" grounds, and the docile Hebrews, Rebecca and Rachel, acknowledged the plea without hesitation. They were among the firmest, warmest, and most useful of Hester Gould's friends, and they had been for a time her pupils. They had perseveringly spread her fame abroad among their *habitués;* and as music is an invariable taste among the Jews, and their musical entertainments are splendid and numerous, their praises had done her solid service, and Hester's time was fully filled by very lucrative engagements.

Rachel and Rebecca had been infinitely delighted by Hester's arrival to pass the evening with them, and had gushingly expressed their pleasure.

"Tuesday evening too, Daniel's evening: how delightful!—he hardly ever misses. I am so glad; isn't she a dear?" said Miss Rachel, in a sort of monologue, while she applied her large red lips several times to Hester's olive cheek.

The calculations of the sisters did not deceive them. Daniel came, smooth, good-humored, affectionate, and obliging, and they passed a very agreeable evening. Miss Gould had what she called a "confidential cab," which attended her on special occasions, of which this was one; and as she drove away, having accepted an invitation to accompany the sisters to a Botanical "promenade" (it was the last of the season they said, and dear Hester must come), she made a little calculation of the gain of her visit, thus:

"Mr. Guyon is a fast man out at elbows, and a great friend of Daniel Thacker's. That means that he is largely in Daniel's power. Miss Guyon is a handsome, high-spirited girl, much admired, and with no fortune. I can see that Daniel has no notion of her—he would be snubbed, rich as he is, I suspect, even by the out-at-elbows father. But he has seen Robert with Mr. Guyon, and for some reason or other—I don't know what reason *yet*—he is concerned in promoting a match between him and Miss Guyon. Can I prevent this? I fear not. We shall see; I must be most cautious not to purchase even a fair chance of doing so too dearly"—here she thought intensely, and her brow clouded over heavily. "If I could find out that the girl does not care for him, I might make my way to her

and put her on her guard; but suppose she does? No, no; I must not risk *all* until I know *all*."

Mr. Daniel Thacker's perfectly appointed brougham was conveying him rapidly to St. James's half an hour later, and as he smoked a choice cigar (part of a bankrupt lot dirt cheap at the price), he pulled his silky beard, and meditated upon Hester Gould and her questions.

"Knows Streightley and his mother and sister very well, does she? Thinks him a 'nice' man, but easily led—thinks his mother is *so* anxious he should marry, eh? Now what the deuce is *her* little game? Can't be to marry him herself, I should think, or she's just the woman to do it—to have done it long ago. Devilish nice girl; real good-looking, and a rasper for determination, I should say. 'Gad, I should like to see a good deal more of Hester Gould."

CHAPTER XII.

VICTORY.

Mr. Guyon was not troubled with sensitive feelings, and bashfulness or hesitation in the carrying out of any project on whose execution he had decided were completely foreign to his character. He possessed a happy mixture of hardness and effrontery, which enabled him to do very cruel things with charming lightness of heart and an engaging unconsciousness of demeanor, which had occasionally even deluded his victims themselves into thinking his intentions more harmless than his acts. He was a man whom even remorse, the evil form of repentance, had never visited, and who had never believed in any agency more supernatural than *luck*. He had been accustomed to watch the variations of that divinity pretty closely, and had arrived at a sort of scheme of its operations, and just now he regarded good fortune as in the ascendant—a conviction which received signal confirmation by the success of his interview with Streightley. He had not distinctly acknowledged to himself that he dreaded finding an obstacle in Robert's conscientiousness; he had rather put his apprehensions to the score of the "City man's" pride.

"I can't pretend that she likes him, or that she does not like Frere," he had said over and over again, as he turned the hopeful project, which had succeeded so perfectly, in his mind. "He is not quite such a flat as to believe any thing of that sort. It all depends on his being satisfied to have the girl at any price; and he knows so little of the world and of women, that I do believe he'll be idiot enough to take her against her will. A pretty life she'll lead him; but that's no business of mine."

Mr. Guyon possessed one trivial and negative virtue—he never tried to deceive himself. Perhaps one reason why his hypocrisy had frequently been crowned with success was that he reserved it entirely for his transactions, sternly extruding it from his meditations. *Vis-à-vis* Ned Guyon, he was the soul of candor. True to this characteristic, when screwing up his courage to the inevitable interview with his daughter, which was the next performance in his programme, Mr. Guyon did not try to persuade himself, as a more shallow scoundrel would have done, that he was in reality doing the very best thing within his power for her, and establishing, in truth, a clear claim to her gratitude. He did not repeat that the man she loved was a frivolous fellow, who could never fill the heart and the intellect of such a woman, and was unworthy of her affection. He said nothing to himself of all he had said to Robert Streightley. He knew nothing, and he cared nothing about Frere's character; and the consideration of Katharine's unhappiness did not concern him in the least.

"She will be very rich," he thought; "and if that does not make her happy, she is a greater fool than I take her for—a greater fool even than Streightley."

Callous and unhesitating as he was, nevertheless Mr. Guyon felt considerable apprehension about the impending explanation with Katharine. No material disagreement had ever taken place between his daughter and himself. He had always had a sense of Katharine's intellectual superiority which had governed him in certain respects, and an unexpressed unwillingness to rouse a temper which he felt a tacit conviction he could not rule had restrained him from opposing her unnecessarily, so that his daughter had always given him credit for much more amiability and complaïsance than he actually possessed. He was not afraid of her in any actively restraining sense, or he would not have entertained such a design as that he was now prosecuting against her; but he was afraid of a war of words with her; he was afraid that her keenness might lead her to suspicion; above all, he dreaded her girlish ignorance, her disregard of wealth, when wealth only was what he had to urge upon her acceptance.

The announcement of Gordon Frere's departure was the cause of almost as profound an emotion to Mr. Guyon as to his daughter. To her it meant the extinction of hope, the blighting of joy, the outraging of love and pride, the awakening of passionate anger and agonizing grief. To him it meant the termination of a period of most unpleasant suspense, during which he did not dare to take a step toward the furtherance of his plans, lest at any moment they might collapse, and defeat insure detection. But all had turned out rightly for him; he was safe; the young man—"the biggest fool of the lot" Mr. Guyon called him, with coarse contempt for the pliability of his victim—had received his sentence in silence and without protest, and had left England; a circumstance beyond Mr. Guyon's hopes, which had extended only to his keeping out of Katharine's way until the scheme should have succeeded.

On his return from the dinner at Greenwich,

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which had been rather tedious, and during which Robert Streightley's abstracted look and dispirited manner had excited Mr. Guyon's scorn and apprehension, inducing him to think that if there were much delay Robert might become troublesome and scrupulous after all, he, too, read in the evening journals the announcement which had come upon his daughter like the stroke of doom. Unmixed satisfaction was rapidly succeeded by a determination to act at once. He had seen as little as possible of Katharine for some time, pleading engagements and business when the rapid "thinning" of London prevented his procuring the presence of a third person to insure him against a *tête-à-tête*. But he had watched her; he had observed her restlessness, her anxiety, her abstraction and indifference. He had noted the shadow on her beauty, he had heard the harsh tone which now sounded in her voice, the unreal ring of her laugh—had noted them without one touch of pity or hesitation, and been satisfied with the result. He recognized grief in all these symptoms, but he saw still more anger, pride, and defiance. Every thing that he observed gave him encouragement; and Lady Henmarsh, who did not know the whole truth, but had guessed at something very like it, had made satisfactory reports. She understood Katharine much better than her father understood her, and had played the irritating game in his interests with a charming air of unconsciousness and complete success. The first thing to be done was to see Lady Henmarsh; and as she was going to take Sir Timothy out of town in a day or two, no time was to be lost. Mr. Guyon could be an early man when it suited his convenience, and it happened to do so just then. He presented himself at Lady Henmarsh's breakfast-table, much to the surprise and a little to the confusion of "cousin Hetty," who had never quite lost the habit of liking to look well for "cousin Ned," and was conscious that she might have looked better than on this occasion. But "cousin Ned" had neither time nor inclination for the revival of *ci-devant* sentiment, and Lady Henmarsh soon perceived that "business" engrossed him wholly.

"My dearest Kate," said Lady Henmarsh, as, three hours later, she entered Miss Guyon's room, and found her up and dressed, indeed, but sitting idly by her bedroom window, and looking as though a month's illness had robbed her eyes of their lustre and her cheek of its bloom, "what is wrong with you? Clarke tried to prevent my coming up stairs, but of course I knew you would see *me*. My dear girl, you look shockingly!"

"Do I?" said Katharine, forcing a smile; "I feel wretched enough. It is only the heat, I suppose, and the season. It is time for every one to leave town."

"Every one seems to think so," returned Lady Henmarsh; "except yourself and ourselves, almost every one is gone. I had such a number of callers yesterday, I was quite sick of them. So sorry you could not come round, dear; but you did quite right to keep quiet, if you did not feel well. By the way, Mr. Mostyn —I must not say your admirer, I suppose; but the gentleman who kindly permits you to admire him—came in while the Daventrys were there, and he looked quite sentimental when your message came. He actually condescended to ask why you did not go to Mrs. Tresillian's ball, and to say, but for Miss Guyon's absence, he should have pronounced it the best ball of the season. You know his formal way. I am sorry you missed it, Kate; they all agreed that it was a brilliant affair, and Lily Daventry was in ecstasies about it. To be sure she's new to balls; but how she did go on about Coote and Tinney's band and Gordon Frere's waltzing!"

Katharine winced. Lady Henmarsh played with a ring-stand, took up the rings one by one and examined them, keeping a close watch on the girl as she talked on.

"What a goose that girl is, to be sure, but so pretty! and if the men admire her so much, though she has not any sense, she is as well without it. What a flirt she is too! It amused me to watch her trying her ringlets and her attitudes upon Mr. Mostyn. Now that Gordon Frere—as great a flirt as herself—is out of the way, she tries her hand upon him; and he is so horribly vain, that, though he was at the Tresillians', and saw her flirtation with Frere, he actually believes she is quite captivated. Why do you wear an opal ring, Kate? you were not born in October; it's unlucky, my dear."

"Is it?" said Katharine, languidly. "I did not know. Are the Daventrys going to Leyton?"

"Yes, they start to-morrow. By-the-by, I was so surprised at Gordon Frere's appointment; weren't you? I never heard him mention it, and yet it appears it had been settled a long time. I am sorry I did not see him when he called."

"How do you mean that his appointment was settled?" asked Katharine, with great self-command. Lady Henmarsh turned her head away from the dressing-table, and looked full at her as she answered,

"Why, Lord A—— had promised to take him as his private secretary when his turn should come; you know those diplomatic people have their regular order of succession; he told Lily Daventry all about it at the Tresillians' ball. He had been idling through the season, he said, and amusing himself the best way he could, in anticipation of going to work in earnest. He rather thought he should have gone a little earlier; and, to tell you the truth, Kate, I wish he had." There was meaning in the speaker's tone, and Katharine understood it. Her eye lighted angrily as she asked, in the coldest possible voice,

"Indeed! may I ask you why Mr. Gordon Frere's movements are of interest to you, Lady Henmarsh?"

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"Come, come, Kate, don't speak like that to me," said her friend; "you know perfectly well how dear you are to me, and what an interest I take in every thing that nearly or remotely concerns you. I'm sure you can't deny that, my dear."

A bend of the head, a softened expression in the face were the sole answer.

"And I must say," continued Lady Henmarsh, "I am very much mortified at the way Gordon Frere has set people talking about you."

"About *me?*"

"Yes, my dear, about you. He paid you very marked attention, and you received it with quite enough complacency to set people talking —don't be angry, Kate, I don't blame you; you were not to know that he meant nothing. And then, for you, and me, the nearest friend you had—a friend standing, in the eyes of the world, in the place of a mother—to be the only people of his acquaintance, as it appears we are, ignorant of the fact that he was going abroad immediately. Just suppose, Kate, you had cared for him as much as he tried to make you, and as I am very much afraid many people think you do! No, a male flirt is my abhorrence, and Gordon is one *aux bouts des ongles.* I assure you, Lady Daventry—and you know she is not at all an ill-natured woman, or given to scandal —asked some very unpleasant questions. I really wish I had seen the gentleman; every one else seems to have seen him. He was in town only three days, and I really believe he called in person on every one else, though he only left a card for Sir Timothy. Did he call here?" Lady Henmarsh asked the question very suddenly, and as Katharine answered it, her cheeks reddened with a painful blush, which did not fade again during the interview.

"No, Lady Henmarsh, he did not."

"Ah! I thought so. And now, my dear Kate, let me speak to you, as I feel, with the affection of a mother and the experience of a woman of the world. Gordon Frere has treated you very ill; he has exposed you to comments very injurious and painful to any girl, still more so to a girl situated as you are. He might have made you miserable, as well as ridiculous, if he had succeeded in making you love him. Now you must defeat his unmanly triumph, and silence all the talk among our countless dear friends who are amusing themselves at your expense. Your being ill just now is peculiarly unfortunate; I know they will say you are shutting yourself up, and doing the *Didone abbandonata.* You have rather unfortunately good health, Katharine, for this sort of thing, and have long defied hot suns and iced creams too successfully to escape suspicion by pleading them now. I really wish, my dear girl, you would come out for a drive; there are still many people to see you. Take an old woman's advice, Kate, and don't disdain precaution because you are not conscious of its need. *No one* can afford to be laughed at; and if you are wise, you will reject Mr. Gordon Frere's legacy of ridicule."

Lady Henmarsh spoke earnestly and with much mental trepidation. She had ventured very, very far; much farther than, when she entered Katharine's room, she had believed she would dare to venture, for she too knew that Katharine had what her father called "a devil of a temper," and there were few things she would not have preferred to rousing it. But the silence of the girl, something of forlornness under her pride, the patience with which she had borne her first approaches, had given Lady Henmarsh courage, and Katharine's demeanor satisfied her that all her suspicions had been more than just—that she had loved Gordon Frere frankly, fully, and with all the truth and ardor which were characteristic of her better nature. A moment's silence ensued when she had ceased speaking, and then Katharine, stately, cold, and graceful, rose from her chair, and, placing her hand upon the bell to summon her maid, said,

"I appreciate your kindness and your advice, Lady Henmarsh. If you will come back for me in half an hour, I will go with you any where you please. But—this subject must never be spoken of again between you and me."

Katharine's maid entered the room, and Lady Henmarsh left it, merely saying in an assenting tone, "Very well, my dear," and descended the stairs to the hall. There she met Mr. Guyon, who attended her to her carriage with great solicitude. A whisper only passed between them, for they treated servants with systematic caution. It was from Lady Henmarsh, who said,

"I don't think you will have much trouble, Ned."

Several persons of her acquaintance met Miss Guyon driving in the Park that afternoon, and had ample leisure to observe her among the diminished throng. A few regarded her with curiosity—for, though Lady Henmarsh had grossly exaggerated the facts, she and Gordon Frere had been "talked of" in their own set—many with admiration, and remarked that she looked particularly well and blooming, not at all cut up by the season. None knew that something had gone out of the beautiful face that was never to return to it—that the woman they admired that day was not the same they had been accustomed to see and to admire, but who was now a thing of the past, never more to have any terrene existence.

"Katharine," said Mr. Guyon to his daughter on the following day, as she sat opposite him at breakfast, while he furtively watched her countenance from behind the defense of a convenient newspaper, "I have something to say to you."

"Have you, papa? What is it?"

She looked at him uninterested and unconcerned. Mr. Guyon threw down his newspaper, left his chair, and took up a position on the hearth-rug suggestive of wintry weather. He felt and he looked awkward; he cleared his

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throat, and pulled at the blue-silk ribbon which encircled it, as though its pressure incommoded him. His daughter did not move, and the expression of her face was still uninterested, unconcerned.

"Yes, Katie," he recommenced, "I have indeed, my dear, something very particular to say to you. I don't often speak seriously to you, you know, and never bother you about business; so you must not think I want to bother you now, and you must really attend to me."

"If it's about going out of town, papa, I really don't care where—"

"No, no, Kate, it's not that," said her father, interrupting her; "it's nothing so easily settled as that. The fact is—Kate," he said abruptly, and in a changed tone, "what do you think of our friend Streightley?"

"What do I think of Mr. Streightley, papa? I can hardly tell you; I don't think I know—I don't think I have any thoughts about him. But what has that to do with any thing important or particular that you want to speak to me about?"

"It has every thing to do with it, Kate. Robert Streightley is the best friend I have in the world, and he is the best fellow I know."

Katharine looked at her father with surprise. She was very far from understanding him perfectly, but she certainly had a notion that Mr. Streightley did not resemble the sort of person to whom she would have expected her father to apply the favorite epithet "good fellow." She said nothing, however, and Mr. Guyon, watching her more eagerly than he suffered his features to tell, continued:

"I need not weary you by explaining the services Streightley has done me in detail, but I must tell you that I have been unfortunate in money matters in many ways; I have trusted friends, and been deceived—" Again Katharine's face expressed surprise, which she certainly felt, and yet would have been puzzled to explain. "I have been speculating, and have been ill-advised; the result has been disastrous; in short, Katie, I must have gone to the wall had it not been for Robert Streightley."

Katharine had become exceedingly pale now, and she fixed her eyes on her father with more steadiness than he liked. He leaned his right elbow on the chimney-piece, and kept his right hand hovering about his mouth and chin, ready to cover an undesirable expression of candor or embarrassment.

"Do you mean that Mr. Streightley has lent you money, papa?" asked Katharine.

"Yes, my dear, he has, and large sums too; and I have lost so heavily by those speculations I mentioned, that I can not pay him without the greatest inconvenience — indeed, almost ruin. He does not know how I am situated, and of course it would be painful and humiliating to me to tell him, unless I could also tell him the best news he could hear, Kate—"

"What is that, papa?" she asked, perfectly without suspicion. Mr. Guyon found his change of attitude very useful now, and he critically examined his boots before he said,

"Well, my dear—I know you will be surprised, and indeed I was astonished when he mentioned the subject to me—the best news that Mr. Streightley could hear, Katie, would be that you had consented to become his wife," and at the last words he raised his head and looked at her. Katharine started up and exclaimed,

"Me! I! Oh, papa, what are you saying?"

Her father approached her, put one arm round her waist, and took her hand in his. He seldom caressed his daughter, and she instinctively shrunk from the encircling arm as if a danger threatened her; but he held her firmly, and she stood still and listened.

"I dare say you can't understand it, Kate, but it's quite true for all that; and you know you are a doosid sensible girl, and doosid lucky too, I can tell you." Mr. Guyon was recovering himself. "Now look here. You've always lived like a lady—a long way better than many ladies, by Jove—and you don't know what difficulties and poverty mean; and it will be your own fault if you do know now, or ever. You've no fortune, Kate; and a girl who hasn't can't choose for herself—that's a fact. Men can't and won't marry without money; and though you don't know much of the world, except the ball, supper, promenade, and park side of it, Katie, I dare say you know enough of it not to deny *that*. You don't know much of Streightley; and I dare say he's not the sort of fellow you would fancy if you *did* know ever so much of him. But then, you see, the sort of fellow you would fancy can't marry you, because you have no money, or won't, which comes to the same thing — at all events doesn't—" Here Katharine released herself and sat down. Still she turned her white face and attentive eyes steadfastly upon him, and showed no sign of emotion save the occasional twitching of the hand which she laid upon the table. Immensely reassured by her quietness, Mr. Guyon went on, quite cheerily:

"It's all nonsense thinking about love-matches in these days; and, indeed, at any time I don't think they turned out well. Now, Kate, this is the real fact. If you don't marry Streightley, who is a first-rate fellow, and immensely rich, and ready to do all sorts of generous and noble things, in addition to giving me time to look about me until I can pay him the money I owe him, absolute ruin is staring me in the face, and you too. Don't speak, Kate; don't say any thing in a hurry; and don't say I ask you to marry Streightley for my sake; but just listen to the alternative. Well, suppose that you determine not to accept Streightley—and remember, beautiful and admired as you are, he is the first man who has ever asked you to marry him —a pretty strong proof, I think, of the truth of my statement that men won't marry without money, especially if you will take the trouble to count up the number of ugly heiresses married

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since you have been out, and to several of your own admirers too—we all go to smash here; I must shift for myself the best way I can—get off abroad, and escape imprisonment, though I can't escape disgrace—and never hope to show my face in England again. And as for you, Katie, don't think me hard or cruel—I must tell you the truth; I must tell you the whole truth, that you may know what you really reject or accept. I see nothing for you but becoming a companion to a lady—which I take it is the most infernal kind of white slavery going—or being dependent on the charity of Lady Henmarsh. You can't live with your aunt, because she is going to live with her daughter; and you can't come abroad with me, for many reasons, the chief being that I could not afford to take you. Cousin Hetty is very pleasant and nice now, and a capital chaperone; but you are, as I said before, a doosid sensible girl, and I dare say you can guess what Cousin Hetty would be to a poor relation, with a shady father, living on her charity, so I won't dwell upon *that*."

He paused a little, but still she did not speak. Still she looked at him, her face white, her lips firmly closed, and the hand on the table twitching occasionally. Once or twice there was a sound in her throat as if she swallowed with difficulty, but she uttered no word. Mr. Guyon felt exceedingly hot and uncomfortable, but he went on, less glibly perhaps, and looking rather over than at her.

"The other side of the medal is this, Katie. You have the opportunity of marrying a rich man, in an honorable and advancing position, so desperately in love with you that you may choose your own manner of life. He is very good-looking and well-bred, and I don't see any reason why you may not like him quite well enough to get on with him as happily as any woman gets on with any man. Let me tell you, my dear, the strength of your position will be incalculably increased by your not being in love with him; in nine cases out of ten, a woman in love with her husband bores him horribly, and brings out all the bad points in his temper, which she might never find out, or, at all events, might easily manage otherwise. You will have every material of reasonable happiness, and the power of indulging your tastes—and they are not economical, Kate. And now choose for yourself, and remember I don't play the sentimental parent, and urge you to this for my sake. We have always been good friends, Katie, but I don't expect a sacrifice from you; and I don't talk the absurd nonsense of representing a splendid offer like this, involving advantages which no girl in London knows better than yourself how to appreciate, as a fearful trial, affording you an opportunity of performing martyrdom to filial duty."

There was a coarse sneer in his voice, which he would have done well to repress, which was dangerous; but his temper was getting the better of his prudence. Katharine shrunk from the tone, and felt even in that moment of tumultuous emotion that the love she had for her father was but a weak affection. It was dying while he spoke, dying as her fresh knowledge of him was born; it would soon be dead, she knew, with that other love now forever lost to her, and only the hopeless pain, the weariness of contempt, would live where the two honest natural affections had sprung up, to be blighted. Mutual avoidance, something like mutual fear, was in the faces that looked at each other, and were so strangely like, now that the expression of each was one of its worst. With no enviable sensations, Mr. Guyon waited for Katharine to speak. She rose from her seat before she did so; then she said:

"Mr. Streightley does not imagine that I entertain any feeling of regard for him, I suppose?"

This was a puzzling question, and Mr. Guyon allowed the embarrassment it caused him to be evident.

"Except as a friend of mine, and—" he stammered.

"I understand," said Katharine, and she bent her head slowly and emphatically. "And he is willing to purchase me on those terms? It is well the bargain should be distinctly understood."

If Mr. Guyon had ever understood, had ever cared to understand his daughter, these words must have taught him how great a change had passed upon her. They would have been impossible of utterance to the Katharine of three weeks ago; but a wide gulf, never to be spanned, of pain and injury lay between that time and the present. He felt afraid of the girl; but, rallying his courage for a decisive effort, he said,

"Your answer, Katharine—you see the case as clearly as I do—what am I to say to Mr. Streightley?"

"Nothing," she answered, "but that I will see him myself. Tell him to come here this evening, to-morrow, any time you please; I will see him, I will hear what he has to say. There must be no mistake in *this* case, no self-deception, no mutual deception. The truth is not beautiful or holy, but at least it shall be told."

She left the room as soon as she had spoken the last words. Her father remained as she had left him; an ugly dark shadow had spread itself over his face. After some minutes he looked up, shrugged his shoulders, and strolled over to one of the windows. He looked out idly for a little, then roused himself, and went into his own room. There he wrote two letters, bestowing considerable time and pains on the first, which was addressed to Robert Streightley, but scribbling the other off with careless rapidity. It bore Lady Henmarsh's name upon the envelope, and contained the following words:

"Dear Hetty,—I have done my part of this business, and *I think* things look well. As to my having very little trouble, perhaps, if you had heard and seen, you would have continued

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to think so, but I should be devilish sorry to do it over again.—Yours, E. G."

Katharine did not appear at dinner that day, and Mr. Streightley partook of that meal, for which he had a very moderate appetite, *tête-à-tête* with her father. When the two gentlemen adjourned to the drawing-room Katharine was seated by the window, and they could hardly discern her features, so rapidly was the autumn twilight deepening into darkness. While Mr. Guyon was calling rather angrily for lights, Robert Streightley advanced toward the motionless figure, awaiting his greeting; and as Mr. Guyon heard his daughter reply to the confused and agitated words which Robert addressed to her, he started at the changed tone of the voice, as if a stranger had spoken.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARTIGNY.

"I wish you were going to the wedding, dearest Hester," said Ellen Streightley to Miss Gould, as the two girls stood in attitudes of critical examination before a heap of gay-looking wearing-apparel, which was destined to resolve itself into the costume of a modern bridesmaid.

"You have said that several times already, Ellen," returned her friend, with a touch of impatience in her voice very unusual to her. "But you know I can't be at your brother's wedding, so there is no good wishing about it."

"Well, I think Robert might have asked Miss Guyon for an invitation for my dearest friend. I can't understand his standing on such extreme ceremony with her. He really seems afraid of every mortal thing he says and does, lest he may offend her; and I don't think she's bad-tempered either. I'm sure I hope not, for Robert has never had to put up with a bad temper, and he'd be sure to be miserable. Oh, Hester!" said Ellen, with a sudden gush of feeling, "what would we do if she did not make Robert happy!"

Miss Gould replied in rather a hard voice: "But there's no danger of that, is there, Ellen? Miss Guyon is very handsome, and very fashionable, and very clever; and your brother is—what is the proper phrase?—desperately in love with her, is he not?"

"Why, of course he is, Hester; you can see that for yourself."

"And she is desperately in love with him, I suppose?"

"I suppose she is," said Ellen, and this time her tone was impatient; "but no doubt fashionable people have a fashionable way of being in love. I only know it's not mine, and it is not Decimus's, and I'm glad of it. I wouldn't have him hesitating about what he might and what he might not ask me to do, I can tell you, for any thing. What nonsense it all is, as if Miss Guyon mightn't just as well make your acquaintance now as afterward! she will know all about you then, I suppose."

Ellen's zeal had outrun her discretion, and told Hester Gould more than she intended; but Hester did not take any notice of the information she had gained beyond one sudden gleam of anger which shot from her shallow dark eyes.

"Mrs. Streightley is not going?" she said; and the simple girl, whom she could always lead, was as docile as usual, and turned to the new theme, under her guidance.

"No; mamma does not like weddings (she could not even go to Robert's, she says) since my father died. Decimus and I go with Robert; and Mr. Yeldham, he is to be the best man, you know; and the three other bridesmaids are all strangers. Miss Guyon has no near relatives; she is like me in that, but not like me in having a dear, darling Hester, as good as any sister."

"At least as any sister-in-law, I hope," said Hester, with grave emphasis, when she had quietly submitted to the hugging with which Ellen invariably accompanied her effusions of affection.

"Yes, indeed, a thousand times better," she impetuously exclaimed. "I don't think my sister-in-law will ever care much for me, or I for her. She's too grand for me, Hester, and too clever; and when I am with her (the few times I have been), I feel afraid of her, though she is very polite to me; but I had rather she was less polite and more kind; but I suppose politeness is fashionable, and kindness isn't. As to Decimus, he is quite wretched when he is with her, because he thinks she will make me worldly; but I am sure he needn't be afraid of that, for I shall never like the things she cares about, and I'm sure I shall not care for staying at Middlemeads, even if she asks me."

"It is a beautiful place, is it not?" asked Hester, absently.

"Yes, lovely. Only Decimus is quite distressed about the church; it is *high*, you know," and Ellen's voice sank into a mysterious whisper. "He says he will feel such anxiety when I am there, lest it should be a snare to my feet."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Hester, who was apt to weary of the Reverend Decimus's opinions, hopes, fears, and doctrines; "but the house and grounds, I meant. Miss Guyon has seen them, has she not?"

"No, she would not go down, though Lady Henmarsh—(she's a nice woman, Hester, and has a way of making you feel comfortable; and Decimus has hope of her spiritual state)—though she offered to go to Middlemeads, and Robert would have pursuaded mamma to go; but it was all no use. And do you know what he said?—I did not like it—he said, 'When Miss Guyon says "No," Ellen, it is not you or I who will induce her to change her mind.' I did not care about this, Hester, for my own sake—why should she mind *me?*—but I did think she might alter a purpose for Robert."

Miss Gould smiled—it was not a pleasant

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smile—but said nothing; and then, the dress-parade completed, the two girls went down stairs to the drawing-room, where they found Mrs. Streightley and her reverend son-in-law expectant in placid converse.

Mrs. Streightley had accepted the intelligence of her son's intended marriage, as she accepted every thing in which he was concerned, with perfect confidence and approbation. Miss Guyon was his choice; she must necessarily be as charming as she was fortunate. Miss Guyon's manners were too finished in their elegance to render it possible for her to treat the mother of her intended husband otherwise than with perfect respect and courtesy. Had the Handbook of Etiquette included a chapter devoted to the proprieties of demeanor on the part of a daughter-in-law elect, doubtless it would have been found that Miss Guyon's behavior was in precise conformity with its rules. The elder lady did not feel exactly happy or at ease in the society of the younger, but that was her fault, not Miss Guyon's; she did not understand fashionable people, that was all. It would be hard to part with Robert; but was she, his mother, to murmur at, to put any consideration in the world in comparison with his good and happiness? Surely not. To have been capable of doing such a thing would have been a treason to the whole ordering of her dutiful, pious, conscience-guided life. She was very much pleased, and perhaps a little proud, with that beautiful vicarious pride of mothers, to think of her son in the dignified position of a country gentleman, owning a fine estate, and holding his head high among men. She should be glad to see his beautiful and luxurious home, but the comfortable Brixton villa satisfied all her individual wishes. She would not be present at her son's wedding—she would be out of her place among the other guests there; but he should go forth that day with his mother's fervent blessing, and his marriage should be hallowed by her prayers.

The state of mind of the Reverend Decimus Dutton was not so calm, not so complacent. He disapproved of the connection. It was worldly; it was, if any thing, "high:" the family circle of the Guyons included a bishop of ritualistic tendencies; on its outer edge to be sure, but he *was* a relative; and "any thing of that kind," said Decimus to Ellen, rather vaguely, "is so very shocking." Again, the diversion of large sums, presumably disposable for missionary purposes under happier, "more consistent circumstances" he called them, according to a phraseology in use among persons of his persuasion, and which is rather oracular than grammatical, into the mundane channels attendant on a "fashionable" marriage, was also "extremely sad." Decimus had come up to town hoping to induce Robert to share his own burning zeal for the mission to the Niger, and he found him engaged to a young lady who looked extremely unlikely to approve of the diversion of any of his wealth in a religio-philanthropical direction, and who had calmly remarked, "Of course you would not suffer your sister to go to such a fatal climate," on hearing that the Reverend Decimus proposed to convey his bride to "Afric's burning plain."

The Rev. Decimus Dutton was a youngish man, with a face which would never look much older or much wiser than it looked at present. It was rather a handsome, and decidedly a good face; and it presented an absurd resemblance to that of Ellen Streightley, though there was not the slightest relationship between the amiable enthusiast and his betrothed bride, who believed him in all simple sincerity to be the noblest, best, handsomest of mankind. Perhaps there was a little veneration, due to habit, which is very powerful over such minds as Ellen Streightley's, in favor of Robert; but Decimus was decidedly more pious, there could be no doubt of *that*. A more prejudiced, a narrower-minded, or a better-meaning man than Decimus Dutton probably did not exist; and so admirably matched were he and Ellen Streightley, that those who saw their perfect adaptation to each other were apt to be tempted into using the gentle missionary's cant phrase, and talking of their proposed union as "providential."

"Oh, Decimus dear," began Ellen, as she and Hester entered the room—Miss Streightley was apt to emphasize her speech with interjections—"Hester is *so* pleased with my dress. Not that *you* care about that; still, one may as well be decent. Hester must go home now; so just ring and send for a cab."

Then followed adieux, and Miss Gould departed. Her face was dark and angry as she drove away; but it cleared after a little, and her thoughts shaped themselves into these words:

"After all, no one can rule destiny; and supposing I had loved him, I must have borne it all the same."

Hester Gould witnessed the marriage of Robert Streightley and Katharine Guyon; not in the capacity of a guest indeed, but in that of a spectator. It was characteristic of Hester that, though she had determined to be present, she made her attendance at the church appear to be the result of Ellen Streightley's importunities. That young lady threw looks of confidence and affection, and blew kisses off her finger-tips at her friend at furtive intervals during the ceremony, after the fashion of the Peckham boarding-school, somewhat to the discomposure of the devoted Decimus, who maintained a plaintive and under-protest air throughout. Hester Gould acknowledged, with ready acquiescence, the exceeding grace and beauty of the bride, as she advanced with an assured and steady step, leaning on her father's arm, and took her place before the altar-rails, where the bishop with ritualistic tendencies stood ready to consecrate that awful promise so familiar to us all, and also to realize the utmost fears of Decimus, for his lordship read every word of the service, and wore the fullest of canonicals. Hester bent an eager gaze upon Katharine

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Guyon; but, under all its wrath and bitterness, there was the candor, there was the justice which never failed this exceptional woman; and she acknowledged fully and freely to her own heart the exceeding beauty of her unconscious rival.

Katharine was paler than her wont; but her eyes shone with their accustomed light, and her tall figure, drawn up to its full height and proudly motionless, was full of indescribable dignity and grace. The rich folds of her dress, of lustrous white satin, with its garniture of swansdown and its fastenings of diamonds, did not so much adorn as they received grace from her. And the noble outline of her features showed like that of an antique statue under the filmy bridal veil, which softened but did not conceal them. When Hester looked from the bride to the bridegroom, she acknowledged, too, that no external incongruity was evident. Robert Streightley looked like a self-possessed gentleman; not very handsome, not strikingly elegant, but not too much inferior to the beautiful girl whom he led away, in a few minutes, his wedded wife. It was quickly done and over, and the crowd was pressing round the carriages, and peering into the aisle of the church. Mr. Guyon, the very picture of gayety and juvenility, led out Lady Henmarsh, quite affected, and remarkably well-dressed; then came Charles Yeldham and the bridesmaids—the unappropriated bridesmaids, be it observed; Decimus had paired off with Ellen the moment the bride and bridegroom had reached the church door. Then the general crowd drifted out; and in the porch Hester found herself face to face with Mr. Daniel Thacker, who testified great delight at the *rencontre*.

"You are here as a spectator, like myself, Miss Gould?" said Mr. Thacker.

"Yes," replied Hester, "I am very much interested in this marriage. Mr. Streightley is one of my oldest, and his sister is one of my dearest friends."

"Just so," said Mr. Thacker. "I don't know much of Streightley, but I know something of the bride, and more of her father. A capital match for her and him."

"Meaning Mr. Streightley?"

"Meaning Mr. Guyon, Miss Gould. I am going to Hampstead; could I prevail on you to visit my sisters to-day? My phaeton is at the door. Do let me have the honor, Miss Gould; a visit from you is such a pleasure to them."

"Thank you, no; not to-day. My time is not my own, you know, Mr. Thacker, and I have an appointment at one o'clock a good distance from here."

"I am so sorry—so disappointed. Perhaps later in the day; I can be at your service at any hour."

"No, thank you." Hester smiled slowly as she spoke. "I promised to give this evening to Miss Streightley. She will have so much to tell; and she will come home as soon as possible after the bride and bridegroom are gone."

"Ah! by-the-by, where are they going to?"

"Where? To Paradise, of course; but *en attendant*, I believe, to Switzerland."

And Hester Gould, who had for the first time in her life been wanting in caution, bade Mr. Thacker "good-morning;" and that gentleman watched her as she walked away, and said under his breath,

"By Jove, she *did* play for Streightley, and Miss Guyon beat her!"

So those twain were one flesh, and departed according to prescribed routine for their bridal tour on the Continent. So far the contract had been carried out, the price paid, and the goods delivered into the carriage by Mr. Guyon, who converted a broad smile of triumph into a doleful look of farewell, and who, as the happy pair drove away, turned back into the dining-room to expedite the departure of his guests, in order that he and Lady Henmarsh might have a quiet talk together over the past and the future.

So far all had gone well, thought Robert Streightley, or rather endeavored to think so, but felt a sad depression and sense of failure at his heart, as, leaning back in the railway-carriage whirling them to Folkestone, he stole occasional glances at his bride, who, paler but lovelier than ever, kept her eyes fixed on a book, the pages of which she never turned, and of which she read never a line. How much did she know, he wondered, of all that had taken place? Not all; he himself had resolutely shrunk from hearing any thing in detail about the transaction in which that man Frere and his proposal were involved; and she—he knew her well enough to know that if she had the smallest suspicion of foul play she would leave him then and there on her marriage-day. No! she knew nothing of that—she never should know. But there was a something in the dead calm of her face, in the cold clear look of her eyes, in her set lips, and in the quiet tones of the voice in which she briefly replied to his occasional questions after her welfare—something that made Robert Streightley's heart give a guilty throb, and told him that the first phase of retribution had begun. She might live it down—it would probably pass away; under different circumstances, and surrounded by all the luxuries that money could purchase, the haunting memory of the past might soon be laid at rest; but there are few men, let us hope, who on their wedding-days have, as Robert Streightley had on his, to face the conviction that not merely the love, but the tolerance of his wife had yet to be won by him, and that between them lay a mine, partly of his own preparation, any accidental spark blown on to which would shatter their happiness forever.

And she? In a charming but perfectly natural position, her head bent so as to screen her face as much as possible from her husband, her eyes fixed on her book, she sat there, outwardly cold as a statue, inwardly raging with slighted love, hurt pride, horror of the past, and dread of the future. The occurrences of the last

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month, so often revolved in her mind, were, as she sat in the railway-carriage, once more brought out of their store-house, and passed in dreary review: Gordon's strange silence, his absenting himself from their house, his abrupt departure for the Continent, her father's confession of his embarrassments, his proposition for getting rid of them, her friendlessness and despair, the few words spoken to her in the deepening gloom by Robert Streightley, and her reply, which decided all and settled her future—her future!—ah! good God! Even the outward semblance of calm was gone as the thought rushed across her; the hot tears welled into her eyes, she set her lips tighter than ever, and with great difficulty restrained a cry of mingled anger and despair.

There was her fate sitting opposite to her: with that man, with whom she had not one thought in common, for whom she had, if any feeling at all, rather a feeling of abhorrence—with him was the rest of her life to be passed. He had bought and paid for her—paid for her? No! a great deal of the purchase-money was yet to come—was to be placed at her disposal; and she would take care that it was speedily spent.

It was some time, however, before she found an opportunity of spending any of the large sum of pocket-money placed at her disposal by her husband, so eagerly were all her wishes anticipated by him. Previous to their marriage he had made his future bride many valuable presents—of dressing-case, jewels, traveling-desk, and elegant costly feminine knickknacks, all of which had been examined, appraised, and duly extolled by Mr. Guyon; and their bridal tour was almost as expensive as a royal progress. In Robert Streightley the *ober-kellner* at the Hôtel Disch in Cologne found an easy prey, and sold to him more wicker-covered bottles of the *eau* than he had ever previously palmed off upon any Englishman. All along the Rhine-border the fiery cross was sent by couriers, and conductors of steam-boats, and drivers of *eilwagens;* and the landlords of the hotels knew that one of those *tolle Engländer* who mind no expense was coming on, and forthwith prices were trebled, and cellars were ransacked for the precious wines, the Steinberger Cabinet and the Johannisberg, which none but mad Englishmen ever pay for. No town which they stopped at—and they stopped at nearly all, for the small amount of romance in Katharine's nature was roused by the sight of the castles and crags, of which in her school-girl days she had so often read; and it was the nearest approach to pleasure which she could experience to push aside actual practical life and lie dreaming of the past—no town which they stopped at was so poor as not to furnish some trophy for Robert Streightley to lay at his bride's feet. Accompanied by the courier, who made cent. per cent. upon every transaction, he would go blundering through the narrow streets, looking through the windows at the wares displayed in them, rushing in here and there, and making wild and incongruous purchases, to the intense astonishment of the pipe-smoking burghers, all unaccustomed to such energy. Robert Streightley's greatest pleasure seemed to lie in purchasing presents for his wife; and when they reached Frankfort he was never out of the jewelers' shops on the Zeil, and his courier's whole day was taken up in running to and fro with little packets of hirschhorn and coral trinkets.

It was at Frankfort, a month after their marriage, that they received their first news from home. Streightley had wished to pass his honey-moon untroubled by thoughts of business, and Katharine had been too indifferent to give any directions about her letters; but when Robert called on the British consul, who was an old correspondent of their house, he found a packet waiting for him, and hurried back with it to Katharine. She was reading a Tauchnitz edition of a novel, and looked languid and *distraite.*

"Here are letters from home, dearest," said Robert, rushing in with his usual energy; "two of them for you."

She thanked him as he handed them to her, and took them without other remark. One was from her father, full of parental gushing and expressive of intense anxiety to see her again: the other was from Lady Henmarsh, and was filled with the gossip and tattle of the watering-places at which she and Sir Timothy were staying. She read them through, placed them on the table beside her, and was reverting to her novel, when her husband, still busily engaged in reading his correspondence, said,

"You don't ask me who my letters are from, Kate? I thought all women were curious in such matters."

He tried to throw a tone of raillery into his voice, poor fellow! as he said this. It was not very successful, for no answering smile beamed on Katharine's face as she said,

"I thought they were business letters."

"Business letters! no, dearest; you may be sure I should not bore you with those. Here's one from your father; but he says he has written to you; and—yes, of course; and here's one from Ellen, my sister, full of news. You would like to read it?" And he held it out to her.

"There seems a great deal of it," said Katharine, looking blankly at the sheets crossed and recrossed with Miss Streightley's spidery writing.

"Yes, there is a good deal of it; and some, perhaps, that might not interest you. But there was one thing I wanted to tell you—oh yes, here it is. You recollect Miss Gould—Hester Gould?"

"I have heard you mention her; I never saw her."

"Never saw her? never saw Hester Gould? Dear me! How can that have been, I wonder? Well, Ellen writes that Hester Gould's uncle is dead, and has left her all his fortune. Hester is an heiress now; and though, of course, very

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quiet as yet, Ellen says she thinks Hester intends what Ellen calls 'making a splash.'"

The announcement had apparently no interest for Mrs. Robert Streightley, for she merely said "Indeed!" and took up her book.

What had any interest for Mrs. Robt. Streightley? In good truth, nothing at all. Her pleasure in life seemed to have died out, and her cavaliers of the preceding season would scarcely have recognized the queen of the cotillon, or the beauty of the Row, in the cold, passionless woman who would sit for hours looking straight before her without speaking a word, and only by an occasional gleam in her eyes or a fleeting movement of the muscles of the mouth giving evidence of existence. Her pleasure in life had faded out, and she almost hoped that her life would fade out too, so hopelessly wearied of it did she feel. "Would to God that I were dead!" was her constant cry from the solitude of her chamber; and one night her wish was nearly fulfilled.

They had "done" all the usual Swiss places; and at Katharine's first and only request, Robert had postponed their contemplated return home in order that his wife might have a glimpse of Italy. They selected the Simplon Pass as the easiest, and left Chamounix in the early morning on mules, purposing to rest that night at Martigny. Katharine had been ailing for the last few days, but had said nothing to her husband. Ten hours' journey on a jolting mule, the terrors of the Tête Noire Pass, despised by mountaineers, but sufficiently horrific to young ladies out of health, and the absence of food—for it was impossible to eat the hard goat's-flesh or to drink the sour wine put before them at the *auberge*—finished the little strength left to her; and as her husband lifted her from the mule at the door of the hotel at Martigny she fainted in his arms. The kindly people of the inn were round her in a moment, carried her to their best room, and were unremitting in their attentions. Under restoratives Katharine recovered for a few minutes, only to fall again into a fainting-fit so prolonged, so deep, so dismally like death itself, that Robert, horribly alarmed, bid them rush off and fetch the first doctor they could find.

The doctor came—a tall, thin man, with a light straw hat on his head and buff slippers on his feet—a solemn man, who made a solemn bow, and took his place by the side of the patient solemnly. He touched poor Katharine's pulse; he peered into her face, and he announced that mademoiselle—he begged pardon—madame, was not well, and that he would send her a *tisane*. He took up his straw hat, bowed solemnly, and went out.

Robert Streightley had stood by watching this performance with impatience; but when the door was closed behind the doctor, Katharine gave a long low moan, and said, in answer to his fond inquiry, "Oh, I shall die!" He saw that no time was to be lost in doing something more effectual than what was proposed by M. le Docteur Grabow, and at once summoned the landlord.

"That doctor is an idiot. Is there no other in the place?"

"But no, monsieur. And the Doctor Grabow—"

"Is there no English doctor in the hotel?"

"But no, monsieur. You and the suffering lady are all of English whom I have now the honor to— Ah! let us not forget! There was an English doctor of medicine who left here yesterday morning—"

"Do you know where he has gone?"

"Certainly, monsieur—to Geneva; did not I myself recommend him to the Hôtel de l'Ecu—me?"

"Do you know his name?"

"I can show monsieur the name in the strangers' book. It is a name of English, which nobody but English can pronounce."

The book was brought; and five minutes after a telegram was dispatched to Dr. Hudson, at the Hôtel de l'Ecu, Geneva, imploring him to come and see an English lady then lying dangerously ill at Martigny.

That night never faded out of Robert Streightley's memory. To his last hour he recollected the dead solemn calm, broken only by an occasional moan from the half-insensible figure on the bed, the position of the furniture, the subjects of the prints on the walls. As he kept his watch grim and solitary (for the doctor, after the failure of the *tisane* to produce immediate cure, gave up the case and refused to attend again)—as he looked at Katharine, with her face whiter than her night-dress, with blanched lips, and hair flung in wild disorder over her pillow, his heart sunk within him and he shook with fear. Was this to be the end of it? Was that lovely prize, which he had accomplished with so much difficulty and at such a sacrifice of principle, to be taken from him now? Was he to lose her—to lose her without ever having had the chance of winning her love; of letting her see that he was something more than the mere rich City man, who had triumphed by the influence of his money; that he worshiped her with all his soul—? Ah! she must be spared until she had learned that. And Robert Streightley fell on his knees by the bedside, and prayed to God to hear his petition.

The next day at noon Dr. Hudson arrived. Katharine was at her lowest ebb about this time, and Robert was nearly mad with anxiety; but he derived infinite comfort from the sight of the English doctor's honest cheery face and from the sound of his voice—a wondrous voice; so clear and yet so soft, ringing with comfort, and encouragement, and hope—a voice at the first sound of which Katharine opened her long-closed eyes and looked with interest at the speaker—would have spoken herself, but that Dr. Hudson raised his finger with a cautioning gesture, and then laid it on his lip. He did not permit her to speak until he had left her pulse

and heard the account of her seizure from her husband, and then he only asked her a few questions which needed very short replies. And then Dr. Hudson took Robert Streightley into the next room and said,

"She may recover—I think she will; but the next four-and-twenty hours will decide."

"You—you will not leave her, doctor! Any sum which—"

"My dear sir," interrupted Dr. Hudson, laying his hand on Streightley's arm, "I will not leave her bedside until the crisis is over."

And he did not. Independently of the attraction of the case itself (and Dr. Hudson loved his profession, and pursued it with an ever-increasing fondness for its study), he found himself very much interested in the beauty of his patient, and profoundly touched by the adoration of her so quietly, so unceasingly shown by her husband. It was a little new to him this worship of a woman by the man who was legally bound to her; for Dr. Hudson lived habitually in Paris, and had a high repute among the French aristocracy, among whom there was indeed a great deal of the tender passion, though it generally flowed in the wrong channels. He was pleased, too, with Streightley's sound sense and straightforward honesty; and after the crisis had passed, and Katharine was in the earliest stage of convalescence, she would hear the doctor and her husband discussing politics and commerce, statistics and science, far into the night. The doctor was a widower—had no domestic ties—all his patients were away from Paris, and he was so pleased with his new friends that he extended the period of his holiday, and remained with them as their guest.

So a fortnight passed, at the end of which Katharine was pronounced in a fit state to journey homeward; and they started, traveling by easy stages to Paris, where they remained three days. At the "Nord" railway-station, just before their train left for Paris, Dr. Hudson bade them farewell.

"Remember!" said he, holding Katharine's hand, "I've seen you in an important crisis of your life, and I want to be associated with it. I'm an odd old fellow, with no one to care for or to be cared for by, and I've taken a fancy to you and your husband. If ever you're very ill, or in any state in which you think I can be of service to you, you'll promise to let me know?"

Robert was settling the wraps in the carriage; but Katharine pressed the doctor's hand, and said, "I promise you."

The next moment the whistle sounded and the train moved on.

When and where was that promise kept?

CHAPTER XIV.

AT MIDDLEMEADS.

CULTIVATED taste and the tender sentiment which finds delightful occupation in preparing a house for a beloved object had not been called into operation in the arrangement and decoration of the abode to which Robert Streightley brought his bride in the early spring which succeeded their marriage. These motive powers had, however, been efficiently replaced by the care and experience of a first-rate London upholsterer, and a more refined and *exigeant* taste than that of the young mistress of Middlemeads might have pronounced a favorable judgment upon the result. There was, indeed, nothing ancient about the mansion but the mansion itself. Its family associations were all with those from whose keeping it had passed, and by the change had lost the subtle touch of dignity which lingers about a residence within whose walls many lines of the same race have begun and ended. It had none of those grand though dingy *pièces de famille* which lent an air of refinement and meaning to the faded house in Queen Anne Street; but it was a home which any man might be proud to inaugurate—a home to which all these things might be suitably added in time. Seen as Katharine Streightley saw it first, with the tender glory of the spring upon the woods, with the sunshine pouring down upon the grand old façade, and the joyous music of innumerable birds piercing the pure air, her new home elicited an exclamation of delighted surprise from her, which was eagerly welcomed by Robert. He had seen but rarely of late any evidence of the enthusiasm and freshness of heart which had been among the first and most potent of Katharine's charms for him. He had looked for them in vain when new scenes and new impressions might have been expected to call them forth during their travels; but they had rewarded his search so rarely, that he had begun to wonder if he was ever again to see that peculiar smile, like sudden sunshine, in the eyes whose beauty had grown sombre of late, or to recognize that keen trill of girlish pleasure in the voice whose refined intonation had acquired depth and seriousness since he had heard it first. Robert Streightley knew very little of the woman he had married—as little of her strength as of her weakness; and the passionate ardor of his love for her, the undiminished admiration with which he regarded her, were accompanied with all the interest and curiosity attendant upon a new study. His narrow experience of life, his little knowledge of women, preserved him from much pain in the present at least. It never occurred to him to impute the alteration in Katharine to its true source. He had taken Mr. Guyon's word for the trifling nature of the sentiment entertained by his daughter for Gordon Frere, though even at that period it is probable he would have hesitated at taking Mr. Guyon's word upon any other subject; and though he could not deceive himself so far as to believe that his beautiful wife reciprocated the feelings with which he regarded her, he never ceased to hope that in time she would come to love him. At least he would deserve her love, if unlimited indulgence, if

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ceaseless observance, if the gratification of every wish, every fantasy could merit it. At least he would atone— And when Robert's meditations reached that point they were apt to become very uncomfortable, and he would fall back upon the recollection of his wealth, and of all that he intended to do with it solely for Katharine's benefit and pleasure, and he would say in his heart, "At all events, Frere could have given her nothing that she values; for she likes luxury and pleasure—she is quite a woman of the world." In saying which he, the poor fellow, believed he passed a eulogium upon her; for that "world," seen through the medium of his passion, had quite bewildered his fancy and obscured his judgment.

It was, therefore, with intense pleasure that Robert observed the glow of satisfaction, the eager alacrity with which Katharine inspected the house and grounds; that he noted the bright eyes and glowing smiles with which she praised all the arrangements made for her comfort, and approved of the scale and order of the household. The irrepressible girlishness of her age aided her in these circumstances. It was quite impossible not to feel pride and delight in such possessions, and she felt them to the full. Ignorant as she had been of the real state of her father's affairs, and guiltless of the false pretenses of their life in London, she had always had a vague sense of insecurity; she had always been annoyed by a dearth of ready-money; she had constantly found herself wishing papa would give her a check when she went out shopping, and would not oblige her to remain so long and so deeply in her milliner's debt, and now she felt the contrast in the sense of an unexplained but intense relief. The perfect order, the luxury, the quiet of her house, the beauty of the gardens and the woods, the deference, the observance with which she was treated—differing widely from the capricious caresses of her father, under which her keen intelligence detected the unscrupulousness, selfishness, and the contempt for her sex from which her pride and her delicacy revolted—the novel sense of the importance of her position—all these united to rouse Katharine from the coldness and bitterness of feeling which had succeeded the awakening from her love-trance. She thought in after-days that during the time which immediately succeeded her arrival at Middlemeads she had not been far from loving her husband. Certain it is that she thought less of her false lover, that she nourished her anger against him less sedulously, that she fed less upon the poisonous fruit of pride, rage, and mortification. She took pleasure in the beauty and luxury which surrounded her: she owed it all to Robert; she could hardly look upon and enjoy it without feeling some gratitude to the giver, without some softening of the pride of her resentful heart, without some more tender and womanly sentiment than that she had purchased all this at the price of herself, and it was but her right. The love which she could not deny, which she was forced to acknowledge, to wonder at every day since she had been Robert's wife, had at first inspired her only with contemptuous wonder; she treated it with disdain in her thoughts as another proof of the reckless selfishness of men. Here was one ready and willing to pay any price for the gratification of a fancy. So much the better! He had his reward; and her father's needs were supplied, and her defeat and mortification covered by the same means. But was she bound to feel any affection or gratitude to this man in consequence? He loved her for his own sake, not for hers; it was a selfish passion, and he was rich enough to buy its object—that was all. It suited her to be sold; and there was the whole transaction. Love and gratitude had no part in it, could never have any part in any thing in which she should be concerned any more. Gordon Frere was a poor man, she believed: well, she could have been grateful to him if he had shared his narrow means with her, and incurred the anger of his family for her sake; she could have been very happy and very good. But what was the use of thinking of these things? He had only amused himself with her. Was she to be grateful to this man, who had merely purchased her, as he might have purchased any other expensive object which it pleased him to possess. They would get on very well together, no doubt. She had no fear of any disagreements; she trusted, with reason, in her own high breeding and her entire indifference; and then rich people never need quarrel and be disagreeable to each other—the restrictions of life were not for them; finally, it did not much matter, after all. Katharine believed that she had discovered life to be a swindle, and that she should never more be deceived. This was already a sufficiently lamentable effect of the disappointment she had sustained. With such a character, what might not result from a discovery of the whole truth—from a discovery that the man she loved had never been false to her, and that the marriage into which she had entered in self-defense was the basest of transactions?

For the present no such discovery was within the reach of calculation or apprehension, and Robert reveled in the new-born graciousness of Katharine's manner and in the revival of her girlish brightness. A little sense of duty now—a little of that training in principle, that discipline in well-doing, which only a mother's care, or that of a woman fitted to replace a mother, can bestow, and a life of happiness and usefulness might have begun for Katharine. But all such influences were wanting; and the instincts for good which made themselves heard occasionally in her tempestuous soul were but impulses—they had no root in themselves, and they withered away. The future process by which they were to be planted, and watered, and given increase, would be full of pain no doubt, as every such process of cultivation of the human soul must be; in those early days at Middlemeads it had not begun. The joyous,

gracious manner which shed sunshine into her husband's heart was but the ebullition of Katharine's girlish pleasure, and the natural demonstration of a perfectly well-bred woman, to whom it was pleasant to be gracefully grateful, and to whom polished prettiness of speech was "free as bird on branch." It sufficed to create an Elysium for Robert, who found it easy to accommodate himself to the change in all his habits and in his manner of living, and to whom each day brought a renewed opportunity of ministering to his wife's tastes and pleasures.

Among the earliest of their visitors was Ellen Streightley, who had received a polite invitation from Katharine a few days after her arrival in England. This invitation had included Mrs. Streightley; but there had been no serious wish on the part of Katharine that it should be accepted, and a satisfactory conviction that there was no danger of such an event. Any thing like *rapprochement* between his mother and his wife was beyond Robert's expectation, almost beyond his desire. They belonged to two distinct worlds of thought, feeling, habits, and ideas; and though he comprehended the fact rather by instinct than by perception, he did comprehend it too fully to be led into any danger of making an effort to bring them together, which must be unsuccessful, and might be disastrous. Mrs. Streightley's naturally quiet temper had made her accept Robert's marriage with tranquil acquiescence. Her son would be less widely parted from her than most sons from their mothers, under such circumstances; they would still have many subjects of common interest, and she must be content with that. She had never seriously expected that Robert would make a selection from their narrow circle; she had not expected that he would be attracted by the Miss Pratts and the Miss Perkinses of the Brixton connection, who exchanged patterns for Berlin-wool work and manuscript music with Ellen, who wore Oxford-Street bonnets, and took notes of Sunday's sermon and Wednesday evening's lecture. She had been content so long as Robert made no choice at all, but devoted himself exclusively to his business; and now that he had chosen a beautiful, fashionable young lady, whose habits, whose pursuits, whose very speech was all but unintelligible to her, she would be content still. Her religious principles were largely assisted by her natural temperament, and their combined action made her the most inoffensive, the most distant, and the most silent of mothers-in-law.

"But you have never seen my fine country-house, mother; you will surely come and see it," Robert remonstrated, when his mother requested him to bear her excuses to Katharine.

"I shall see it in time, my dear," she answered, "never fear; but you must let me have my own way; you know I have always had it;" and she smiled gently, with the touching smile of the old looking back upon the past. "Your wife must have many friends whom she wishes to see. I could neither bear to find myself among fine people, to whom I am totally unaccustomed, nor to feel that I was excluding her friends. You will be constantly in town, Robert, and you will come and see me very often." And then she began to speak of his health, to inquire into the details of Katharine's illness at Martigny; and Robert saw that the matter must remain as it was for the present. It was, however, decided that Ellen should accept Katharine's invitation, and accordingly she made her appearance at Middlemeads within a fortnight of Katharine's installation in her new house. It would have needed a less kindly nature than Katharine's—in which, perverted as it was, true womanly feeling had its place—to resist the frank and innocent gayety of Ellen, the naïf pleasure which she showed in the inspection of the house, her admiration of the luxurious furniture, and her surprise at finding herself in a scene of such unaccustomed splendor, and yet, after a fashion, at home there. All this was her brother's — all this was Robert's, who had been so well content with the modest comfort of the Brixton villa; and the beautiful young woman who had inspired him with tastes thus gratified, and admitted him into a circle of society of which Ellen had never before had even a glimpse, was her own sister-in-law. She had a kind of prescriptive right to be intimate with her; she wondered whether she might venture to call her "Katharine." Not on the first day of her visit certainly; for, though Katharine was perfectly polite, there was no approach to familiarity in her manner; and she inquired, at luncheon, whether "Miss Streightley" would drive, in a tone which seemed to render any such sisterly appellations as "Ellen" and "Katharine" hopeless. But this did not last: they were, after all, two young girls; and the very superiority of intellect and of breeding, of which Katharine was conscious, made her readier to thaw toward Ellen, whose admiration of her brother's beautiful wife was as sincere and single-hearted as it was warm and humble. The warnings of the Rev. Decimus lost their power over the girl's imagination; she yielded to the charm which Katharine exercised over all whom she chose to attract, and was almost as much dazzled as her brother. To Robert the good understanding which subsisted between the two was a source of the purest pleasure; he loved his sister dearly, and he had a sense of her piety, her gentleness, her humility of mind, and the beneficence of such an influence, though he had never defined these things to his own mind or reasoned upon them. On the whole, these early days at Middlemeads were good days; they were a fair seed-time, and the harvest might have been blessed; but the enemy had sown the tares early, and they were destined to flourish in sinister strength.

As for Katharine, the genuine affection and admiration with which her sister-in-law regarded her soon began to be sweet and precious to her; her former life had been isolated from all such ties of girlish friendship and confidence,

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and she had despised them in theory, holding them among the missish follies which she laughed at and held herself above. She had aspired to the reputation of a woman of the world, and she had attained it, and in right of it had no intimacies except of convenience, and no relations with her own sex except those of the most superficial social observance. To Katharine, therefore—who had not, since she left the elegant establishment in which she had acquired all the graces with which nature had not previously supplied her, had any more congenial companion for the hours not absolutely demanded by society than Lady Henmarsh—the novelty of such a friendship as that offered her by Ellen Streightley possessed an ineffable charm. The purity, the simplicity, the very narrowness of the girl's mind pleased her; the unquestioning submission with which she received her opinions, the unqualified admiration which she evinced in every look and word, conveyed, by their simple sincerity, the subtlest charm of flattery. Katharine felt that Ellen's presence did her good; that the peace of mind which pervaded her diffused a tranquil and wholesome atmosphere around her; she did not know whence came the salutary influence; she had never been taught to recognize piety and principle by their peaceable fruits; but she felt all that she did not analyze; and, above all, she became conscious that she was living less for herself—that she was acquiring new, unselfish, and harmless interests. Her heart had begun to soften in those days; she was won by the artless confidence of the girl to whom she was an object of wondering admiration, and the wrath and bitterness of her soul began to subside.

The last thing in the world to occur to such a mind as that of Ellen Streightley would have been such a possibility as a marriage without perfect affection and confidence. She had never met with an instance of any thing so dreadful and unnatural out of a novel; and the Rev. Decimus disapproved of novels, so that she had discontinued their perusal, and had even had the hardihood to endeavor to induce Katharine to do likewise, and to substitute the interesting details of the *Missionary Record*, over which she was accustomed to shiver and cry a good deal. Thus Ellen never doubted for a moment that Katharine's had been, in the language of young ladies, "a love-match;" and the matter-of-course way in which she took this for granted, founded all her talk to Katharine upon it, and treated her brother and his wife as absolutely one in undivided interest and unreserved confidence, though, no doubt, a conclusive evidence of Ellen's own dullness of perception, had all the good effect which an opposite quality, and the exercise of the most perfect tact, could have produced. It was impossible to resist the influence of this frank and perfect belief in the mutual good faith of their relation; it was impossible to resist the gay and happy simplicity which persisted in believing in its ideal; and, but for the sore spot in Katharine's heart, so obstinately hidden, and the sorer spot in Robert's conscience, which ever and anon pained him horribly and vainly, the angel of peace might have found an abiding resting-place with them then. The soft rustle of his wings was often audible to both in those early days, to which they were destined to look back in the future with vain yearning and regret.

"Were you not surprised, Robert, to hear of Hester's good fortune?" said Ellen Streightley to her brother one morning, as the little party were engaged in the pleasing occupation of reading their letters, of which an unusually large number had been laid upon the breakfast-table.

"Yes," said Robert, raising his eyes from a letter which he had been reading with a moody and troubled expression. "Yes, I was indeed, and very much pleased. She was an admirable example of industry and courage. I never could bear to think of a woman having to work; that is a man's part in life. Is your letter from Hester?" he asked, in a tone of interest.

"Oh yes," said Ellen; "Hester is just the same to me as ever, though Matilda Perkins said she wouldn't be, and I must be very silly to imagine a rich heiress would care about me. I can't think how people can be so mean; can you, Robert? Only fancy any one imagining that money can influence people in that way! I am ashamed to say she made me feel almost afraid of Hester, and I can not tell you how relieved I was when I found her just the same. I was very near confessing to her that I had wronged her in my thoughts; but then I knew they were not my thoughts, but Matilda Perkins's, and I had no business to tell her sins, you know; and, after all, perhaps she was not so much to blame—she did not know Hester as well as I do."

Katharine, who had laid aside her letters, and was now busily crumbling bread into a saucer half full of cream—an operation which her beautiful little Maltese dog, Topaze, watched with placid but appreciative interest—smiled at the ingenious eagerness with which Ellen sought to exculpate one friend and to exalt another. Robert's attention strayed from his sister; his eyes were following the movements of his wife's slender fingers. She placed the saucer on the ground and called her dog.

"Here, Topaze, come and eat your breakfast! And now, Ellen, tell me all about this wonderful Miss Gould. She is tremendously rich, isn't she, and very handsome, blue, and *bel esprit*, and all the rest of it?"

Ellen looked rather puzzled as she said, "Hester is very rich, certainly; but I am not sure about her being very handsome; she always seemed so to me, of course—but then I knew her so well."

"And every one is handsome whom you know well?" said Katharine, laughing. "What a beauty your brother must be, and Mr. Dutton, and I—after a while, when you know me long enough!"

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"You know quite well that you are a beauty now and always, to me and to every one," said Ellen with beaming eyes, "and it is wicked of you to laugh at me because I can not exactly express what I mean. Hester is not beautiful like you, so that every one must acknowledge and no one can deny her beauty; but I love her face. And she is very clever—wonderfully clever. Robert, have you never told Katharine about Hester? She used to be quite one of ourselves, you know. She knows all about you, Katharine, and takes the greatest interest in you."

"Does she?" said Katharine, with rather a vacant smile.

"Oh yes; and—Katharine," said Ellen, timidly, "I should so like her to know you—I should so like my two best friends to be acquainted—and—and she is so accustomed to be with me and Robert—and I have told her so much about Middlemeads, that—if you don't think I take a liberty in asking you—"

"You would wish me to invite Miss Gould here, you mean, my dear Ellen?" said Katharine, with her most graceful air, "and you stammer about it as if I were a tigress, and you were afraid to ask so trifling a favor in your brother's house. You are a dear silly little goose; go pluck one of your own quills, and send off your invitation to your friend immediately. Ask her for Tuesday: Lady Henmarsh comes to-morrow, and we must have her and Sir Timothy *casés* before any one else arrives."

Katharine rose as she spoke, and Ellen did the same, turning with sparkling eyes to her brother.

"Oh, Robert, do you hear what Katharine says?" she exclaimed. "She desires me to invite Hester to Middlemeads; and I hardly dare tell you how I longed for her to come here. Is she not kind?"

"Yes, indeed," said Robert; but he spoke rather absently. "She is—I am sure we shall be delighted to see Hester here."

"Come, Ellen," said Katharine, "I am going to look after my hyacinths: leave your brother to his letters, and come with me."

A minute later the two girls passed by the window of the room in which Robert sat, still engaged in what was apparently no pleasant task. He looked up as their voices caught his ear, drew near to the window, and followed the graceful figures with thoughtful, regretful eyes, until they disappeared. Then he sighed deeply, and, gathering up his papers, left the room.

Half an hour later Robert sought his wife and sister in the garden, and found them in deep conversation with the gardener, a Scotchman of unparalleled skill and obstinacy.

"I beg your pardon, Katharine," he said, "but I overlooked this letter this morning. It is from your father, inclosed to me, from Paris. It must have fallen out when I opened his."

"Thank you," said Katharine, carelessly, as she took the note from his hand and stuck it into her belt; then resumed her conversation with the gardener. Ellen felt rather surprised that Katharine could possibly defer the reading of a letter from her father, and recurred to the matter again as she sat down to her desk to enjoy the delight of sending off the longed-for invitation to Hester Gould. She had seen Mr. Guyon at his daughter's wedding, but only on that occasion, and she had not been particularly attracted by him.

"Could it be possible that he was not kind to Katharine, and that she is not very fond of him?" thought the guileless Ellen, to whom any perversion of the relations and duties of life was almost inconceivable and incredible. She shook her simple head gravely at the suspicion, and then proceeded to write a gushing letter to Miss Gould, in answer to that which she had received, and in which, had she indulged a second person with its perusal, that individual would have discerned a very distinct intimation that the writer expected and exacted from Ellen that she should obtain precisely such an invitation as Katharine had so readily and gracefully suggested.

CHAPTER XV.

HARDENING.

"My dear Kate, what a perfect paradise of a place you have here!" said Lady Henmarsh to her young hostess, when, having made a tour of inspection of the house, the two ladies found themselves alone in Katharine's morning-room. "I had no notion Mr. Streightley meant to *mêner grand train* after this fashion. You are a fortunate girl, Kate, and I hope you understand and appreciate your luck."

Lady Henmarsh spoke with the accent of strong conviction, and looked around her approvingly as she did so. She and Sir Timothy had arrived by a midday train from London; the first hours after their arrival had been passed in the manner usual on similar occasions—in seeing the house, dawdling about the gardens, and inspecting the hot-houses; and now the moment had arrived which Katharine and her guest had each felt disposed to defer as long as possible—that of a *tête-à-tête*, in which a discussion of the past and present must necessarily have its place.

Katharine was standing by a window which opened like a door upon a small perfectly-kept flower-garden, and looking musingly out upon the fair expanse of park and woodland which stretched away into the distance. Lady Henmarsh was looking at her with more curious scrutiny than she had ventured to indulge in in the presence of others, and the result of her examination was that Katharine was more beautiful than ever. The assured demeanor, the perfect gracefulness, the lofty ease of manner, which had been perhaps a little too pronounced in the girl, were perfectly in their place as attributes of the young matron, who did the hon-

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ors of her splendid house with faultless elegance and *aplomb*. The taste and richness of her dress, the judicious assortment of her ornaments, the air of dignity and calm which dwelt about her, made her indeed a being to be regarded with almost wondering admiration. And Lady Henmarsh admired and wondered —wondered how she liked it all; wondered how she and Robert got on together; whether he was afraid of Katharine (she put the question to herself in just such plain words)—thought it very likely, all things considered; wondered whether Katharine ever heard of Gordon Frere, and what she thought of him if she did; and finally wondered whether she might venture to question her on these points; but, while the thought passed through her mind, the answer passed through it also, and Lady Henmarsh knew perfectly well that she would never dare to mention Frere's name to Mrs. Streightley.

"This room is perfectly exquisite," Lady Henmarsh began again, "and I suppose you keep it strictly to yourself; that you give audience here, queen of Middlemeads, when it suits you, but shut out the profane vulgar—eh, Kate?"

"Yes," answered Katharine, carelessly; "it is a pretty room, and I use it a great deal—that is to say, Ellen and I."

"Ellen and you!" repeated Lady Henmarsh, with profound astonishment. "You don't mean to tell me, Katharine, that you have really taken to be intimate with that uninteresting creature —that sheep-like young lady, the veriest type of the most detestable class of society girls that I have ever encountered—a silly, pious, underbred girl, engaged to a vulgar missionary preacher! Really you amaze me, Kate. Perhaps," she said, with a covert glance at Katharine, and a strong effort to be perfectly familiar and natural, dictated by an instinctive feeling that she had lost ground with one whom she had formerly influenced—"perhaps you are doing the model wife, acting on the 'love-me-love-my-dog' principle, and cultivating this very modest flower for her brother's sake. If so, I admire you for it, Katharine. I am glad to see you have a due sense of the value of 'thorough' in you; there is no more precious quality; but I confess I did not expect it."

Katharine had fixed her large bright eyes upon Lady Henmarsh at the beginning of this speech with an expression of cold surprise, which succeeded in making the speaker feel very uncomfortable before she reached the end of it. A few moments elapsed before Katharine answered gravely,

"Miss Streightley is a person whom I like and *esteem*. I fear I shall never imitate her good qualities, but I am glad to know that I have at least the grace to admire them. Of course, as Mr. Streightley's sister, I should have shown her every attention; but such a duty soon became a pleasure."

Katharine spoke in a cold and dignified tone, which produced an exceedingly unpleasant effect upon Lady Henmarsh, whose face assumed a certain comical expression, suggestive of an instantly-repressed inclination to whistle. Her feeling toward Katharine had always hovered on the borders of dislike, but from the present moment it crossed them, and she never tried to deceive herself more about its nature. She had been a party to the wound inflicted upon the pride of this haughty woman; she had witnessed her suffering, had spoken to her of her humiliation, had had cognizance of the "transaction" of this marriage, and Katharine would never forgive her. In her she would find a polished, hospitable, and attentive hostess, observant of every social duty, and resolute against every attempt on her part to re-establish an intimacy which had never been more than superficial and of convenience. Lady Henmarsh perceived the state of the case clearly; but as she had no feelings to be hurt in the matter, she took very kindly to a hearty dislike of Katharine.

"It is a comfort to know that Ned has got what he wanted at all events," she thought, as she looked at the moody frown which had come over Katharine's countenance as she spoke the last sentences; "and if she's fool enough to *filer le parfait amour* with this City lout and all his kin, or hypocrite enough to pretend to do so, so much the better—things will be easier for Ned, and that's the main point."

But Lady Henmarsh said aloud, and with the most perfect suavity,

"My dear Katharine, you are surely not so silly as to suppose I blame you for any attention to Mr. Streightley's sister. I dare say I shall like her very much when I know her better, and I'm sure it's quite charming to find you getting on so admirably with your people-in-law. And now, I think, having seen as much of your beautiful house as I can manage for to-day, I will disappear until dinner-time. I must look after Sir Timothy. Thank you, dear, I know my way to my rooms. How delightfully you have chosen for me, Kate! just the situation and aspect I like best. Sir Timothy is perfectly charmed."

Lady Henmarsh, safely secluded within her own apartment, proceeded to indite a piquant epistle to her "cousin Ned," in which she painted the Streightley *ménage* in colors highly agreeable to that gentleman's feelings, and indulged herself with some of the ridicule of Ellen and her brother, whose flow had been so peremptorily arrested by Katharine. She knew that it would be rather agreeable than otherwise to Mr. Guyon to be told, on the authority of an eyewitness, that his daughter was perfectly happy; so she gave him that pleasant assurance, inquired affectionately when he proposed coming to witness the felicity of Middlemeads in person, and hinted that his presence would add considerably to the attractions of that sojourn in her own estimation.

Robert's reception of Sir Timothy and Lady Henmarsh had been all that the most exacting

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guests could desire. The poor fellow felt unbounded gratitude toward Lady Henmarsh, who had, as he said to himself, "always been his friend"—gratitude which it was a pleasure and a relief to him to feel—gratitude which he could not extend to Mr. Guyon—no; he was an accomplice, not a friend; and the tie between them was one of pain, which made itself felt, and of shame, to which no effort, no triumph, could render him insensible. He was totally ignorant of Lady Henmarsh's complicity in Mr. Guyon's manœuvres; he knew only that he had received the warmest welcome from her when his pretensions were announced; that she had appeared to regard his marriage as all that it should be; and even now that the prize was won, the treasure he had paid so high a price for all his own, he attached an unreasonable importance to Lady Henmarsh's presence, to her approbation. He did not say so in plain terms to himself, but he felt that she would support his cause with Katharine, that she would lend him additional importance. In the timidity of his sore conscience, he felt that it was a great thing to be strengthened by the presence of a person unconscious and unsuspicious of the means by which his success had been effected, and who had welcomed it on its own merits. So little did he understand his wife's proud isolation of heart, that he mistook her courtesy to her guest for respect for her opinion, and looked to Lady Henmarsh's aid in gaining Katharine's heart as ardently as he had hailed her support in his suit for her hand.

The truth was just the opposite of that which Robert believed it to be. From the moment Lady Henmarsh arrived at Middlemeads, Katharine's mood underwent a change unfavorable to the prospect of domestic happiness which had begun to dawn upon her. An atmosphere of heartlessness and worldliness surrounded this woman; and then she was associated in Katharine's mind with all the bitterness and humiliation of the past. The pain, now almost grown old, began to revive again; the restlessness and weariness of spirit, the terrible anger, the unavailing self-contempt, which rendered Katharine unapproachable to all, despite her suave and gracious manner, and especially to him who had afforded her the occasion to incur it. These feelings did not return in their intensity all at once, but their first approach to the invasion of Katharine's heart was made when the girl perceived the hardly veiled contempt with which her *ci-devant* chaperone regarded her spontaneous effort to be good and happy. It needed little to turn the balance in which the fate of Robert and Katharine Streightley hung at that moment, and Lady Henmarsh's disdainful touch did it. Not directly—she had no direct influence with Katharine now—but indirectly, by the pain of humiliating association, by the sudden revival of the old bitterness, and the sense that all this was but a sordid bargain after all. The evil leaven began its work when Lady Henmarsh left Katharine, still standing by the window of her morning-room, in the selfsame attitude in which she had stood by the window in Queen Anne Street, and watched in vain for the coming of Gordon Frere. She moved away at length with a restless and impatient sigh, and went to seek for Ellen.

Ellen Streightley had been rather frightened by Lady Henmarsh, whose rapid talk on a variety of subjects removed from Ellen's comprehension and experience had oppressed her considerably. She had accordingly kept out of the way since she had contrived to make her escape during the tour of inspection, and Katharine ultimately discovered her in a quiet corner of the library, deeply engaged in the manufacture of an unspeakably hideous pair of embroidered slippers. She laid aside her work at Katharine's approach, and they proceeded to discuss the time and manner of Miss Gould's expected arrival on the ensuing day, Ellen losing herself in conjectures as to what Katharine would think of Hester, and what Hester would think of Katharine. She had most of the discourse to herself, and also enjoyed a secret satisfaction in the reflection that to-morrow she would have *her* friend—a more important person than Lady Henmarsh—too, to make a fuss about. She wondered how Robert could like that woman so much, and be so deferential to her; she might be very grand and all that, but she had a way of making people feel small and uncomfortable, which was not like a real lady—not like dear Katharine, for instance; however, there was one comfort, she could not put down Hester.

"Is Miss Gould likely to marry, Ellen?" asked Katharine, in the course of their conversation. "It would be a terrible take-in for the fortune-hunters, you know, or rather you don't know, if the prize of the season were found to be already won."

Ellen looked at her sister-in-law with the half-solemn, half-stupid gaze habitual to her when she was puzzled. Katharine had never uttered any such *banale* sarcasm to her before; that she did so now was the first symptom of the evil influence that was upon her.

"No," said Ellen, slowly, "I do not think Hester ever cared for any one; she gave all her mind, she used to say, to her work. But oh, Katharine, how nice it is to think that she can marry a man as poor as Decimus now, if she likes—that is the only thing that makes it worth while to be an heiress, is it not?"

"I am not sure of that, Ellen," said Katharine; "it is a great recommendation certainly, but heiress-ship has some other advantages too. But there's the first bell; let us go and make ourselves beautiful for Sir Timothy."

"And for Robert, Katharine," said Ellen, archly; "but you are always beautiful for *him*."

"Ay, she may marry a poor man if she likes," thought Robert's wife, as she sat before a long glass in her room, and looked at her beautiful face framed in the unbound masses of her glossy hair. "She may buy instead of being

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bought—that's all the difference; the distinction is valuable, however."

* * * * *

Robert Streightley drove his sister to the station where he and Yeldham had hired a trap on the occasion of their visit to Middlemeads, to meet her friend on the day following Lady Henmarsh's arrival. The drive was a pleasant one, for Ellen talked of Katharine, with only occasional and brief interludes and digressions in favor of the absent missionary, and Robert was ready to extend his sympathy to his sister to a degree which would have seemed incredible to him a short time before. He was very happy that day; his face showed the gladness that was at his heart, as it reflected the smile with which Katharine had nodded a farewell to him and Ellen as the open carriage passed the window where she was standing with her little white dog in her arms. How bright, and beautiful, and girlish she looked! he thought; how truly she harmonized with all around her! Surely she was happy now—happier than at first.

"There's the smoke, Nelly; we are just in time," said Robert; and in another minute they were on the platform, and Ellen had caught sight of Hester's dark eyes, with a smile of recognition in them, as the train came slowly up and stopped.

Robert stood aside while the two women exchanged their greeting, after the manner characteristic of each, and during that brief interval he regarded Hester with some interest and curiosity. He had not seen her since she had so unexpectedly inherited her uncle's wealth—he had hardly thought of her; the old time in which they had been familiar, if not intimate, seemed very far past now; he had lived all of his life that had been worth living since then. It occurred to him now for the first time that it might be curious to see how this young woman had borne a transition which could hardly fail to be trying. In the first place, he recognized that Hester Gould was elegantly dressed. He had become skillful in such observation now; he who had not formerly had an idea on the subject, and could not have told whether his sister was attired in velvet or cotton; but his close attention to every thing in which Katharine was concerned or interested, his ceaseless admiration of her, his keen perception of every thing which adorned the beauty which he worshiped, had educated his eyes, and he perceived at once that Hester's toilet was perfect in its taste and appropriateness. Nothing appeared in her which could annoy Katharine's refined ideas; not the least touch of vulgarity, not the most transient embarrassment, or pretension of manner, nothing to convey the smallest suggestion of the *nouveau riche*. With the same frank courtesy that she had displayed in their former relations Miss Gould received her host's welcome; with precisely the correct degree of interest she inquired for Mrs. Streightley; and with a totally unchanged manner she entered into conversation with Ellen, during the necessary delay which took place while the servants were securing the luggage.

As they drove to Middlemeads, Robert talked with his guest of the country around, of the gentlemen's seats which they passed, of the Buckinghamshire backwoods, and other topics appropriate to the occasion, but which had little interest for Ellen, who was anxious to put one of her idols *en rapport* with the other as soon as possible. Hester had said something very civil, and perfectly sincere, about the pleasure she anticipated from seeing Middlemeads, and was listening attentively to Robert's anecdotes of the historical importance of the place, when Ellen said, in her peculiar interjectional fashion,

"Oh yes, it's all most delightful, and ever so grand, Hester; so different, you know, to Brighton and that, that I really should have been half afraid of it if it hadn't been for Katharine. She is *so* delightful, you can't think, Hester. I think she could make a cabin feel like a palace. I do so long for you to see her."

"You forget that I have already seen Mrs. Streightley several times, Ellen, and I can not believe that my admiration can be increased on better acquaintance."

Robert looked delighted, but surprised, and was just about to speak, when Ellen began again:

"Yes, yes, I remember; you saw her at the famous *fête*—that *fête* which I shall always think, in spite of Decimus, a most fortunate and praiseworthy piece of worldliness and dissipation, for there Robert fell in love with Katharine, and there I am sure Katharine fell in love with him, though I have never got her to tell me any thing about it—I suppose it's not the correct thing among fashionable people to talk about falling in love!—and then you just had a glimpse of her on her wedding-day; but I mean I want you to see her constantly in her own house, and to admire her as we do."

"I could hardly venture to do that, Ellen," said Miss Gould, in a tone which conveyed the lightest possible suggestion of ridicule of Ellen's enthusiasm, and would, therefore, have betrayed to any one thoroughly acquainted with Hester—supposing such an individual to exist—that her temper was momentarily disturbed. She was instantly conscious of the tone herself; and, turning to Robert with unaffected good-humor, she said,

"The occasions which Ellen mentions were not the only ones on which I had the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Streightley. I think I know her by sight longer than you do."

"Indeed! how was that?" asked Robert, rather eagerly, for every thing in the past, as in the present, which regarded Katharine, had a potent interest for him.

"I taught music to the Miss Morisons, who lived next door to Mr. Guyon, during two seasons," said Hester, simply; "and as they seized upon every conceivable opportunity for neglecting their lessons, they made it a point to rush to the windows to see Miss Guyon going out to

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ride, and I never could resist the temptation of looking out with them. I like to see a woman on horseback who looks and rides as she does. I am not sure that I did not envy the gay cavalcade sometimes, when I used to see them set off, and had to turn to 'one, two, three, four—pray attend to your fingering,' and so forth, again."

"You will have horses in town too, Hester, won't you?" said Ellen; "and have cavalcades on your own account, and gallant cavaliers to escort you, as Katharine had?"

"I am not so sure of that," said Hester, demurely; "the Morison girls, who were very slang, used to talk about Miss Guyon's escort being always the 'best' men in London; and there was a Mr. Frere—her cousin, is he not?—whom they used to admire almost as enthusiastically as they admired her. Caroline, who was horribly silly, used to quote Tennyson's 'Guinevere' as they went by the windows: very appropriate to a London street, was it not?"

"Look, look, Hester!" said Ellen, jumping up in the carriage, "there's the first glimpse of Middlemeads;" and then the young lady occupied herself with pointing out every detail of the approach, until the carriage passed under the arch and drew up at the entrance, where Katharine was standing in the open doorway, pleased to gratify her sister-in-law to the utmost by the demonstrative kindness of her reception of Miss Gould.

"We were in capital time, Katharine," said Ellen, as the three ladies passed through the hall, "and had a delightful drive, hadn't we, Robert? Oh, he's gone off to the library, I suppose."

Katharine was much pleased with Hester Gould, and the little party at Middlemeads was apparently composed of the most harmonious elements. The great heiress was naturally an object of curiosity in that character, and Katharine was no more slow than Hester herself to perceive that her guest's presence lent an additional attraction in the eyes of the neighborhood to the newly-mounted *ménage* at Middlemeads. It was not every country-house which had two such specimens of womanhood to show—the one so beautiful, the other so rich, and the neighborhood proved itself not undeserving of its opportunities. Lady Henmarsh had experienced some not unnatural pangs of apprehension lest the dignified dullness which her soul abhorred should beset her at Middlemeads. She had had her doubts about Robert Streightley's fitness for his new *rôle* in society; she had dreaded, she did not exactly know what, in Katharine; but her apprehensions proved utterly unfounded. She did not care to look beneath the surface, and that was all that could be desired. Mrs. Streightley dispensed a splendid hospitality with perfect grace, and Robert had no desire save that in all things her pleasure should be done. Her pleasure was to fill her house with company, and to pass her life in a round of such amusements as were attainable in the country, previous to entering upon the London season with a brilliancy and splendor which should convince the world that she was one of the most fortunate persons in it, and leave herself no time to recur to any of the absurd fancies which had once beguiled her for a little. How absurd they were! She laughed at them now, and at herself, and yet the laugh was not entirely real. And sometimes she would think of Hester Gould's wealth with a dreadful pang of envy, but in which there was not an atom of sordid feeling.

Hester Gould turned every hour of her stay at Middlemeads to account. She was incapable of such a blunder as copying any one's manner; but she studied the best types with which she was brought in contact, and profited by them. She knew exactly the extent and value of such personal attractions as she possessed, as well as she knew the exact sum of money which she owned; she understood her own advantages and defects to a nicety; she appreciated the utility of the interval thus attained for studying phases of society hitherto unknown, before entering on the great world, and she made the most of it. Impossible to unite self-possession, simplicity of tastes and manners, and sound common sense more admirably than they were combined in Hester Gould. Impossible to be more popular and more impenetrable. Had she been in possession of all the truth, she could hardly have understood the "situation" more clearly than she understood it, aided only by her remarkable penetration and the quickening influence of concentrated anger. Had her heart been concerned in the scheme in which she had been defeated by the unconscious Katharine, and in which only her brain and her will had been active, she would have felt more acutely and more transiently; but as it was, her anger neither cooled nor decreased. It was characteristic of Hester that her changed position made not the least difference in her feelings. She knew that her wealth gave her opportunities in comparison with which a marriage with Robert Streightley would have been but a meagre triumph; she knew that her defeat had been practically rendered no defeat at all by the freak of fortune which had endowed her with riches; but the knowledge had no effect on her. The ruling principle of her character, the egotism of an inflexible will, had suffered a deep wound, and she admitted no balm in such considerations to heal it. Katharine's had been the hand to deal this wound. As for Robert, "he never would have loved me," she said in her heart; "but I should have married him for all that." And she would punish Katharine—unless, indeed, Fate should spare her the trouble. Of this vicarious vengeance she discerned a promising probability, for day by day she saw that Katharine was hardening. She was satisfied to perceive the result without analyzing the process very closely, and she discerned that her own presence, though the most unexceptionable relations subsisted between her and her hosts, had as sinister an influence as she could desire. She was not the

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woman to employ unnecessary activity. If she could do mischief passively, so much the better, so much the safer. Hester's character had received by her defeat the impulse toward the development of evil which had hitherto been wanting, and more than once she had to recall her determination never to permit any passion to gain dominion over her. Hitherto her will had been stronger than any indication of passion she had ever felt; if it only proved so for the future, life would have no great harm in store for her.

Lady Henmarsh had taken the young heiress under her especial patronage (she had a genuine admiration for rich people); and before her visit to Middlemeads had terminated, it was arranged that Miss Gould should be promoted to the place vacated by Katharine, and should make her *début* in London society under the auspices of Lady Henmarsh.

CHAPTER XVI.

CANAAN FROM PISGAH.

The month of April was nearing its close, and the party at Middlemeads were beginning to think of separating, to meet again in the more exciting scenes of London life during the season.

A programme—including entertainments which should combine splendor and originality, to be given at the mansion in Portland Place—had been agreed upon, and perfect harmony reigned among the ladies. Miss Gould took a deep interest in the preparation of Mrs. Streightley's town-house, and had frequently accompanied Katharine to town, when she visited Portland Place to give new orders and observe the fulfillment of old ones. Katharine threw herself into this novel and decidedly exciting occupation with all the fervor of her age and character. She interpreted and acted upon Robert's permission to do precisely as she pleased to its fullest extent.

"Please yourself, dear, and you will please me," he had said to her; "you know I have not much taste for such things."

"Perhaps your mother—" Katharine had considered it polite to say.

"Oh no," Robert had answered hastily; "my mother would be less useful to you than myself. She has lived in a plain house and in a plain way all her life, and she would not in the least understand how the cage for so bright-plumaged a bird as you are should be decorated."

It was an awkward metaphor, an unfortunate pleasantry, and Robert felt it so as soon as he had uttered it, and hastily left his wife on the plea of letters to be answered, having received the briefest, coldest acknowledgment from her of a permission on which she proceeded to act immediately with much animation and entire recklessness of expense. While she was engaged thus, and when the time for the removal of the establishment to town was drawing near, Katharine learned that Mrs. Stanbourne had arrived in England, and was desirous of seeing her, and making the acquaintance of her husband. The letter which conveyed this intelligence to Mrs. Streightley was not altogether and heartily welcomed by her. The one single individual in the world for whom Katharine felt perfect respect—respect in which her intellect was as active as her heart—was Mrs. Stanbourne, and yet, even though affection mingled largely with that sentiment, she could not feel real pleasure in the prospect of seeing her. She did not tell herself what it was she dreaded, but she knew in her heart that it was her true friend's clear-sightedness and her unbending rectitude. She had so shrunk from announcing her marriage to her that Mr. Guyon had found himself obliged to undertake that very unpleasant task; a substitution which had surprised Mrs. Stanbourne much and hurt her a little; but she was a woman in whose disposition the small susceptibilities born of self-love had not much place, and she put the light mortification aside, and wrote to Katharine just such a kind motherly letter as, under other circumstances, would have added to the happiness of a bride. But Katharine had read it hurriedly, with a flushed brow, and her rich red lip caught under her white teeth, and had put it away out of her sight. Nay, more, she had put off answering it until she might venture to disregard its tone and substance; and treating her marriage as an affair whose novelty had quite worn off, and to which any farther reference would be out of place, had filled two sheets of paper with a pleasant, flippant account of her Continental trip, and a lively sketch of some of the costumes which took her fancy among the Swiss peasantry. Katharine's letter pleased Mrs. Stanbourne as little as her father's had done; but she was a sensible as well as a feeling-hearted woman, and she recognized that explanation of any thing which excited her misgivings was not just then attainable. It must be waited for; it had better be waited for patiently; she would see Katharine as soon as possible after she should reach England, and in the mean time would write to her, as usual, not very often, but very frankly and affectionately. She had adhered to this resolution; and now she was about to see and discern for herself whether this marriage, whose exterior advantages were undeniable, was all that she could desire, or any part of what she had desired for this impetuous, unmanageable girl, whom she had always loved, and for whom she had always been apprehensive, with the well-grounded fear which is taught by experience and the knowledge of the human heart—with that fear which can hardly fail to be awakened when one who has traveled far on the journey of life looks back and sees the young beginner joyously setting forth in delusive hope and with the courage of ignorance.

The prompt invitation to Middlemeads by which Katharine replied to Mrs. Stanbourne's notification of her arrival in England was all

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that it should have been, in words, and the acceptance was as prompt and affectionate.

"This day week, then, she will be here," Katharine said to herself, as she sat before her writing-table with the letter in her hand. "This day week. I am glad the house is likely to be so full—I don't want to be alone with her. It is all so unlike her ideas—and she is so quick." Here Katharine sighed. "Well, after all, she knows I always liked money, and what money gives one in this world, and she knows I never was romantic. It's all very gay and splendid here; and if I don't care quite so much about it as I used to think I should, I must be a worse actress than I think I am if she finds that out. One thing, at least, she does not know, and can never discover—one secret is at least inviolably my own. No one can ever guess that I cherished the delusion of love and truth, of a life lived for their sake—a life lived with a man who amused himself all the time, who made me love him *pour rire*."

So far as it went, Katharine's argument with herself was frank and well founded; but it did not go far enough—it did not extend to the acknowledgment of the real blot which she dreaded her friend's hitting. That Mrs. Stanbourne should regard her in the gravely responsible position of a wife, as wholly given up to empty amusements, the pursuit of pleasure and excitement, and the lavish expenditure of money upon every trifle which took her fancy, was, she chose to persuade herself, what she dreaded. And this certainly was an impression to be deprecated; but it was only secondary, though she put it first. It was her conduct toward Robert which she really feared to find exposed to the keen, unembarrassed scrutiny of Mrs. Stanbourne, whom she knew to be a woman incapable of trifling with the ideal of duty either in theory or in practice. That she would discern her to be a wife without love for her husband, without gratitude for all his affection and observance, without sympathy for his tastes, observance of his wishes, or consideration for his feelings—a woman hardened, willful, and selfish, who had made a marriage which was a bargain, and was not faithful to the spirit of her share in that bargain. If Mrs. Stanbourne's customary penetration did not fail her, this was what it would show her, under the surface of a life of gayety, extravagance, and luxury. She felt in her conscience, whose voice she could not stifle, that she was unjust toward the man who had given her not only money, but love. True, she did not care for the love, she did not want it; but, after all, it was the vehicle by which the money which she did want and did care for was conveyed to her; and there was an undeniable baseness, a failure of duty and propriety in her conduct, only the more flagrant because the sufferer by it was compelled to endure it uncomplainingly, because the injury was, so to speak, impalpable. Katharine was too clear-sighted not to perceive and understand her own shortcomings perfectly, and in her inmost heart she dreaded that Mrs. Stanbourne would understand them too. Plainly put, she knew the truth to be that she was revenging on the man who had given her a brilliant and enviable position before the world; who had effectually screened her from scorn and malice, and made her an object of envy instead; the man who loved her with a fervor of admiration and devotion which served only to provoke and embitter her—the deadly injury inflicted upon her by another, the baseness of whose conduct every womanly instinct should have taught her to requite with contempt. She had done Robert Streightley the tremendous wrong of marrying him without loving him; true, he knew it, and accepted it, but it was none the less, in the light of a pure woman's conscience, a deadly wrong, and she had not made the slightest effort to retrieve or repair that wrong. If a transient impulse, ascribable to the elasticity of spirit of her age more than to any real motive of her conscience, had drawn her nearer to him for a little while, she had fallen away from him again in impatient weariness, and now each day seemed but to set them farther apart. And she could not even regret it; she could feel no repentance, no wish to be different—that was the worst of it; it was not that she desired the conditions of her domestic life to be altered, but only that she dreaded their discovery by Mrs. Stanbourne. Katharine's meditations were not, therefore, of the brightest; and a second cause of embarrassment arose to trouble them. Lady Henmarsh and Mrs. Stanbourne were utterly uncongenial to each other, and yet each occupied an exceptional position as regarded her: they would be certain to clash unpleasantly. It would have been easier to bear had Lady Henmarsh not been there. Katharine must announce the expected visit to her *ci-devant* chaperone, and she felt exceedingly uncomfortable at the prospect. She had on several occasions narrowly escaped quarreling with Lady Henmarsh *apropos* of Mrs. Stanbourne, and she thought it extremely likely that on this occasion they might quarrel outright. Katharine was not a person likely to defer doing any thing of the kind because it was unpleasant, so she went immediately to the south drawing-room, where she found Lady Henmarsh, Ellen, and Hester Gould. Lady Henmarsh was doing nothing, so far as her hands were concerned. Sunk in the luxurious depths of an easy-chair, she was looking out on the flower-garden and the statues, and talking to Hester Gould, who was seated on a footstool in the embrasure of the large window, and pulling the ears of Topaze, who was lying contentedly in her lap.

"Look at this faithless little creature, Mrs. Streightley," exclaimed Hester, as Katharine entered the room. "He actually followed me out of the breakfast-room this morning in preference to you. Can you fancy any thing so base?"

"Topaze prefers lying on a silk dress to lying

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on a muslin one, Miss Gould," returned Katharine, smiling; "and she is particularly fond of having her ears pulled. I have had no time to indulge her this morning; I have been busy with my letters. I have heard from papa, Lady Henmarsh."

"Indeed, my dear! I thought all his correspondence was reserved for his son-in-law. When is he coming?"

"Not just yet; indeed, I fear he will not be able to manage to come to us before we go to town at all. But I have also heard from Mrs Stanbourne. She has come to England, and she is so good as to promise us a visit. She names this day week for her arrival at Middlemeads."

"Oh indeed!" said Lady Henmarsh, in a satirical voice, and directing a glance at Hester, which satisfied Katharine that she had indulged in sarcasm concerning Mrs. Stanbourne to her new friend. "Well, I shall not have the pleasure of seeing her, and I dare say she will not particularly miss me. I was just going to tell you, my dear Kate, that Sir Timothy and I must really take a reluctant leave of Middlemeads on Wednesday. Sir Timothy has had letters from his steward requiring his immediate attention; and you know he is rather fidgety, and never satisfied unless he is on the spot."

Katharine did not know any thing of the kind, but she was quite content to take Sir Timothy's inquietude for granted; and she received Lady Henmarsh's explanation with perfect grace, and much internal satisfaction. The four ladies then had a great deal of animated conversation about all they intended to do, and the constant intercourse they hoped to establish in London, and the morning wore away very pleasantly. Katharine's spirits recovered their tone when she discovered that the meeting under circumstances of close association between Lady Henmarsh and Mrs. Stanbourne, which she had so much dreaded, was not to take place. Hester was looking forward to her *début* in the character of a great heiress, under the auspices of the most agreeable married woman she had ever met, but whose character and disposition she read with equal precision and indifference. Ellen, who was to return to town with Hester, was sunk in a charming reverie of anticipation; for the Rev. Decimus hoped to be in London when she should arrive, and to be able to tell her to which of the most unhealthy and savage regions of the known world it was his desire and intention to convey her. Hester's visit would terminate a day or two after Mrs. Stanbourne's arrival. Ellen was very glad not to leave Middlemeads before; she was very anxious to see Katharine's friend and kinswoman. Hester did not care in the least about the matter. It was not likely that Mrs. Stanbourne could ever be of any importance to her; she had nothing to gain and nothing to lose by her; and Miss Gould was very little given to thoughts or surmises, or the taking of interest concerning any matter which did not immediately concern her. When the bell rang for luncheon the ladies obeyed the summons, and Lady Henmarsh asked where was Mr. Streightley.

"Robert is gone to London," said Ellen. "He went by the first train, did he not, Katharine?"

"Yes, I believe so," answered Robert's wife, carelessly. "He had business in town, I understood, and will probably not return until tomorrow."

She neither knew nor cared what the business was that had called her husband away; but Lady Henmarsh knew, and cared enough to feel irritated, if not sorry. She had had a letter also from Mr. Guyon—a more confidential one than the brief chatty epistle he had written to his daughter, and she knew that at the moment at which they mentioned him, he and Robert Streightley were closeted together, in the office in the City, in deep, and by no means pleasant conversation. Miss Gould also had had some letters that morning, and one of them offered her at least a suggestion of the nature of Robert's business in town. It was written by Mr. Thacker; and among its rather voluminous contents Miss Gould read, "Old Guyon is going the pace tremendously; it must kill in the end; even Robert Streightley—his patience can't hold out, I should think, if his purse can."

The week passed unmarked by any remarkable incident. Lady Henmarsh carried off Sir Timothy on the appointed day, and bade Hester Gould farewell with much demonstrative affection, which that young lady received with well-bred acquiescence, and which Katharine observed with mingled amusement and contempt.

"She never was half so fond of me," she thought; "but that is easily understood. I never was rich while she could make any use of my money."

During this week Hester observed that Robert Streightley was more silent and dispirited than usual, and that not a day elapsed without his receiving a letter from Mr. Guyon. She felt some curiosity concerning the nature of these communications, for she by no means imputed them to Mr. Guyon's affection for his son-in-law; but she was quite satisfied to wait for its gratification. Mr. Thacker was expected at Middlemeads, and she knew that she should discover much, if not all she wanted to know, from that gentleman, over whom her sagacity, firmness, and coolness of disposition, being qualities which he particularly admired, had secured her considerable and increasing influence. It was finally settled that Mr. Guyon should not visit his daughter at her country residence until the close of the season, an arrangement to which Mrs. Stanbourne's arrival had largely contributed. He was not afraid of her now; he had carried his point, and her influence was no longer to be dreaded; but he disliked her excessively, to an extent which amounted to an-

tipathy; and he would not have encountered a week in a country-house in her society, and exposed to her observation, for any but a very large consideration. A slight to his daughter was a small one, so Mr. Guyon staid away, and his daughter was decidedly relieved by his absence.

The apprehensions with which Katharine had regarded Mrs. Stanbourne's visit were fully realized. Her true friend discerned the change in the girl, for whom she felt sad and genuine interest; the woman whose life was full of duty steadily done perceived at once that in Katharine's that mainspring was wanting. She had felt apprehensive before; but her fear for Katharine's future grew with every hour of personal observation, with every fresh evidence of her total indifference to her husband which presented itself. She studied Robert Streightley closely, and she found in him much to like, to respect, and to esteem, but still something which puzzled and distressed her. She could not comprehend that a man could bear indifference, hardness, almost disdain, from a woman upon whom he had lavished such proofs of love, with so much submission as Robert endured them from Katharine withal. "If the man had done her a wrong, and she was graciously exercising some forbearance toward him, his manner might be what it is with some reason and appropriateness; but as things are, I can not understand it. It is ruinous to her, fostering every evil tendency in her nature, putting her in a false and unnatural position, and it is positively unmanly on his part."

Mrs. Stanbourne meditated a good deal upon these things before she made up her mind to speak to Katharine. "*Entre l'arbre et l'écorce ne mets pas le doigt*" was a wholesome saying, and she bore it in mind; but "a word in season, how good it is!" had equal wisdom and superior authority; and compassionate affection for the young wife, who was blindly laying waste her own life and another's, who was pursuing the phantoms of pride, vanity, and pleasure, and turning her back on love and duty, carried the day over caution and mere worldly prudence. "I will tell her the truth," said Mrs. Stanbourne to herself. "It may turn her against me, she is so proud, and so violent in her temper; but no matter for that, if my speaking the truth may only do her good, and spare her something in the future. Katharine used to love me once, I sincerely believe; but I doubt whether she loves any one now. What can have come over the girl?"

Among the many valuable qualities possessed by Katharine's one true friend, tact was conspicuous, and she exercised it on the present occasion. She selected her opportunity well, and she employed it with admirable discretion. There was no assumption of superiority, no "lecturing" tone in the grave, kind words which she addressed to Robert Streightley's wife, and in which she appealed to her sense of right, of duty, of delicacy, and of gratitude. Katharine could not deny the truth of any thing she said. She had married Robert Streightley because he was a rich man, and she had given him nothing in return, not only for all the money, but for all the love which he lavished upon her, that it was in her power to withhold. The interview was a painful one to both parties—especially painful to Katharine, who had to hide from her friend the real motive which had actuated her in her marriage and in her subsequent conduct—a motive in which not only did there not exist the smallest excuse, but which, in reality, increased her guiltiness toward the man whom she had married. She could not deny the truth; she could not impugn the force of the contrast presented by his conduct, which Mrs. Stanbourne painted to her in all the glowing colors of generosity, devotion, patience, and forbearance. Katharine felt, as she promised, that she never could forget the picture as drawn by her friend; it appealed to all that was best in her nature; it touched her innate nobility of soul. Nor did she forget it: in the time to come she bore it, every hue, every tint, in her memory.

Mrs. Stanbourne was surprised and delighted at the result of her hazardous interposition.

"I will not pretend to feel toward him what I do not feel," said Katharine, in her softest tones, as their conversation drew to a close; "but I will be more considerate of him—I will be less selfish—I will try to make him happier."

"Do so, my dear Katharine," said her faithful friend, "and depend on it, your own happiness will be the result. You have only to do your duty to your husband, and the feelings to which you could not pretend, and ought not to feign, will arise in your heart spontaneously. Try to make him happy, because it is right and you owe it to him, and you will soon find your own happiness centred in him as his is in you."

The elder lady kissed the younger gravely, and left her. Katharine covered her face with her hands and burst into tears. She very rarely wept; and now, though she thought, "Ah! if she only knew—if she only knew that love is dead for me!" there was refreshment in the transient passion of grief and self-reproach, and a new dawn of better days in the frank resolution with which Katharine determined on the fulfillment of her promise.

Mr. Thacker's promised visit to Middlemeads was duly paid. He seldom allowed himself a holiday; but this visit was an agreeable combination of pleasure and business, in which he thought he might very safely indulge. Besides, to have it known that he was staying with Streightley of Bullion Lane; to have letters addressed to and to date them from "Middlemeads, Bucks;" to do the *grand seigneur* for a few days, and simultaneously to do a very excellent stroke of business—all these things were pleasant to Daniel Thacker's soul. He arrived late, only in time to dress for dinner, during which repast he contrived to impress Mrs. Stanbourne, next to whom he was seated, with a holy

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horror of his appearance, manners, and conversation; for Mr. Thacker had what his sisters were in the habit of calling his "company manners" toward ladies, and which consisted either in repulsive insolence and would-be sarcasm, or rather more repulsive adulation. Something had tended to put Mr. Thacker into great spirits on this particular evening. The dinner had been very good, the wines excellent; there was an air of luxuriant refinement all around him, and his immediate proximity to Mrs. Stanbourne was specially grateful. He knew her as a woman of mark even among persons of mark; and he "liked that kind of thing, damme!" as he was accustomed to remark in moments of confidence. It mattered little to him that he received at first merely polite and at last chilling monosyllabic replies to his advances; he saw his way toward concocting a paragraph for the fashionable weekly paper in which his name should be included among a list of "swells" as being entertained at Middlemeads; and for what Mrs. Stanbourne really thought of him he cared but little. With the person with whom it was essential to him that he should stand well he made much greater progress. Before the ladies retired for the night, and while Katharine was playing, he had flung himself on an ottoman where was seated Hester Gould, and had said, in the nearest approach to a *demi-voix* which with his natural nasal intonation he could command,

"Are you an early riser, Miss Gould?"

Hester looked at him with a little astonishment, and without the slightest affectation of hauteur, at the sudden question, and replied, "Always, Mr. Thacker. I was compelled, as you know—who better?—to get up early to go to my pupils; and since I have lost the necessity I have not discontinued the practice."

"That's right; it's a good habit, though, I suppose, one not much indulged in here. However, that's so much the better. I want a quiet half-hour's chat with you. Could you be in the grounds at eight to-morrow morning?"

A properly-regulated young lady would have blushed and exclaimed at this proposition; a flirt would have manipulated her fan, and nodded assent behind it. Hester Gould was neither, and did neither. She simply looked Mr. Thacker straight in the face, and said "Yes."

"All right," said Mr. Thacker. "There's a sun-dial, or something of the kind, I think I noticed, at the end of the house which fronts the bay-window of this room. If you could meet me there at eight, we could stroll on and have our talk without fear of interruption."

To which Hester Gould merely replied, "I know it; I will be there."

Daniel Thacker prided himself on his punctuality; but when, attired in an unmistakably new suit of morning-dress, he arrived at the trysting-place the next morning, he found Miss Gould there before him. After the ordinary salutations they turned their backs on the house, and walked on side by side. Then Mr. Thacker told her that since she had been pleased to honor him with her confidence, and to employ him as her man of business, he had been incessantly turning in his mind a scheme for employing some of the large sums of ready money which were lying at her command; and that, after great cogitation, and while he was even thoroughly undecided what investment to recommend to her, by the merest chance an opportunity had offered which ought not to be missed, and which, unless she was warped by silly sentimentality, she ought certainly to profit by.

Miss Gould listened attentively, and then said, "Unless I am warped by silly sentimentality? I don't think that would ever stand in my way, Mr. Thacker. Of what nature is the investment you propose?"

"A mortgage on an estate, worth at least a third more than the money required to be raised."

"There seems very little sentimentality in that. So far as my small experience of business matters goes, I can not conceive any thing more safe and prosaic. What can you mean, Mr. Thacker? Is it a case of widow and orphan, or of family estate held since the Conquest passing into the hands of a *parvenu*? Believe me, I'm adamant on both those points. If husband and father squanders and dissipates, widow and orphan must pay the penalty; if Hugo de Fitzurse is sold up, why should not Jones of Manchester buy Bruin Castle, moat, portcullis, battlements, and all?"

Such a sentiment as this delighted Daniel Thacker amazingly. He looked at his companion with intense admiration as he said, "Of course; why not? But it's scarcely that sort of sentimentality that I alluded to. Suppose the estate in question, on the mortgage of which the money was to be lent, had belonged to a friend—one whom you had—liked very much; what then?"

"What then? Now really, my dear Mr. Thacker, this appears to me to be slightly childish. Of course I should be extra glad to know that my loan of the money had been serviceable to my friend. He, she, or it would be glad to know that I had good security; and as to the sentimentality of the affair, I don't see the least occasion for it, unless the friend could not pay, and there arose a necessity for—what do you call it?—foreclosing."

Daniel Thacker laughed outright—a short, sharp, shrill laugh of intense enjoyment. "Miss Gould," he said, "I can not tell you how immensely I respect you. You are out and away the best woman of business I ever met. Then you seem to entertain this notion of the mortgage?"

"If you prove to me that it is all sound and sufficient. But what about the sentimentality? Where is the estate on which the money is to be lent?"

"I should say," said Mr. Thacker, stopping short, and looking fixedly at her, "I should say

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that at this moment we are standing in about the very middle of it."

Hester Gould had stopped when her companion stopped; and as he said these words a bright flush overspread her cheeks, and a bright light flashed into her eyes. That was all the outward and visible sign of the prospect which Thacker's speech had conjured up. Robert Streightley pressed for money—that money lent by her, and not repaid—she the mistress of that much-vaunted estate—she the heiress in due course of time dispossessing the man who slighted, and humbling the woman who rivaled her. All these thoughts glanced through Hester's mind, but the only sign of their presence was the flush of her cheek and the gleam of her eyes. Daniel Thacker marked both, but it was not his game to be reckoned appreciative in such matters; so he said,

"You are silent, Miss Gould. I thought my last announcement would settle the question."

"Then you for once thought wrong, Mr. Thacker," said Hester, with an effort. "I am sorry to hear that Mr. Streightley requires this money, though probably a loan under such circumstances is the commonest thing in his experience of business. I am glad I am able to let him have it. I only make one stipulation, that my name does not appear in the matter. You will lend the money, if you please, and Mr. Streight—the borrower will only hear of you in the transaction. Details we can arrange at another opportunity. Now shall we turn toward the house?"

"One moment, Miss Gould. I'm a bad hand at expressing myself in this kind of thing, but —but—" To his intense astonishment, Mr. Thacker found himself turning very red and stammering audibly—"but the fact is, that there is a charm about you which—which—the way in which you adapt yourself to business, and your knowledge of the world; and—I can assure you I've never been looked upon as a marrying man, but if you would do me the honor to accept my hand, I would—"

"You would actually sacrifice yourself," said Hester, with a slight smile. "No, Mr. Thacker; I must say no. Believe me, I'm fully sensible of the honor, but I think we know a little too much of each other for a happy match. I should not care very much to be valued by my husband for the manner in which I 'adapted myself to business,' as you call it, and I've little doubt that when you take a wife, it will be some pretty girl whose want of 'knowledge of the world' will not be her least recommendation. No; we will be very good friends, if you please, and as my man of business you will—but let us be candid—you will always make a good thing of me, without— I think we understand each other? And to this plain speech Mr. Thacker made no other protest than a shoulder-shrug.

Before Hester Gould went to bed that night she stood in the bay-window of her room, looking out upon the garden and the park beyond, bathed in the bright moonlight. For more than a quarter of an hour she stood thus, calmly contemplating the scene before her. Then she said, as she turned away, "Mistress of this place, which that proud woman down stairs exults so in!—mistress of this place, and Robert Streightley's creditor! It could not have been very deep-rooted, my love for that man. And yet I don't know; I think at one time it equaled my present hate of him — and of her; and then, God knows, it must have been deep enough!"

CHAPTER XVII.

CITY INTELLIGENCE.

Robert Streightley's preoccupation and loss of spirits were not without due cause. In the half hour that had lapsed between his parting with his wife and sister, and his rejoining them when in colloquy with the Scotch gardener, he had gone through a phase of mental torture such as he had never before experienced. The Irish gentleman of good birth and vanished fortunes, who comes to London with just sufficient money to pay his entrance-fees to a fashionable club, to keep a garret in St. Alban's Place, and to hire a hack for the season from a livery-stable, and goes in to win the heart, or, at all events, the hand of an heiress, gets to work at once, finds his *coup manqué* ever so many times during one season, and soon begins to look upon his rejection as a mere matter of chance, and falls back on the grand principle of "better luck next time." The starving student, living from hand to mouth by the preparation of badly-paid work from grinding booksellers, eats his ninepenny plate of boiled beef, and hurries back to the reading-room of the British Museum, convinced that the day will come when his talent shall be appreciated and remunerated as it should be. The parish-doctor's assistant sings over his pestle, and slaps his spatula cheerfully on the china plate, confident that the retired Indian nabob, the wealthy widow with the quinsy, the measles-struck child of the countess, his successful care of all or one of whom will insure the pair-horse brougham, the M.D. degree, and the house in Saville Row, are all gradually working up toward him. "Hope springs eternal in the human breast;" and so long as we perceive no symptoms of dry-rot in our dearest aspirations, we are for the most part content to grind away, facing present difficulties manfully, and awaiting the result. But if you were to prove to the Irish gentleman that his fascinating powers were on the wane; to the student that his overtaxed brain was giving way; to the doctor's assistant that he was every where considered a hopeless quack, you would cut away all their hold on life, and they would be whirled into that abyss of despondency in which thousands, similarly unfortunate, yearly perish.

A phase of torture very much allied to these described was being undergone by Robert Streightley. The "transaction" between him

and Mr. Guyon, under which Katharine had become his wife, was constantly rising in his mind, and the heart-ache consequent thereon was only allayed by the thought that his possession of wealth enabled her to indulge in the extravagance which seemed to form a part and parcel of her life. He knew thoroughly well that, under her father's influence, he had won her by his riches, that they constituted his sole claim to respect in her eyes, that the fact of her having made "an excellent match," as bruited abroad by Lady Henmarsh and her set, meant that she had married a City man in a large way of business and with a large amount of ready money at command, which would be at her disposal, and enable her to indulge all the freaks and vagaries of her fancy. It was, after all, a poor shifting foundation, a mere quicksand, on which to base any structure of future happiness; but within the last few weeks, marking the improvement in his wife's spirits, and the increase of kindly feelings toward him, Robert had been content to accept it at all events as an installment of conjugal bliss, and had flattered himself with the idea that when Katharine found all her thoughts anticipated, all her wishes gratified, she might have some—he did not like to think of it as gratitude, he wanted a feeling with a warmer name—toward him who lived only to do her bidding.

Feeling, then, against all his hopes and attempts at self-deception, that in the money which he was enabled to place at his wife's command, and in the position which she was thereby enabled to obtain, lay his only chance of obtaining favor in the eyes of her, to gratify whose every whim was the only pleasure of his life, it may be imagined with what feelings Robert Streightley read through a letter which came to him by the same post as brought Hester Gould's missive alluded to in the preceding chapter. It was from his confidential clerk, Mr. Foster, and ran thus:

"DEAR SIR,—Mr. Delley, the City editor of the *Bullionist*, who, as you know, has for many years supplied the house with reliable information, called in at 2 P.M. to see you; but, learning you would not be at business to-day, he sent for me to your private room, and told me he understood that Messrs. Needham, Nick, and Driver were in a very shaky state, owing to the failure of the Dublin branch of their bank, announced in to-day's City Intelligence. Knowing how heavy our account was against them (£28,917 7*s.* 9*d.*), I started off at once to Fenchurch Street, but found the doors closed, the shutters up, and all business suspended. Mr. Delley has been here just now (5 30 P.M.), and talks of a shilling in the pound. Old Mr. Nick's death, and the large sums taken out of the bank by Mr. Needham junior, who was only admitted as a partner two years ago, are said to have led to the wind-up. Please come up at once, if convenient. Your obedient servant,

J. FOSTER."

When Robert Streightley laid down this letter his hand trembled, his mouth was parched, and a film seemed to come over his eyes. It was not the sum lost, though that was very large, but a horrid sensation crossed him that retribution was attacking him in his most vulnerable part; that the joints in his armor had been spied out by the enemy, and that— Good God! if he were to lose that one hold upon his wife's gratitude! if he were compelled to tell her that the mere wretched subsistence to which she had been sacrificed was a sham and a swindle, that he— Pshaw! he sank down in his chair as these thoughts rushed through his mind; then he wiped his damp brow with his handkerchief, and shook himself together as it were with one strong effort, and rising, began to pace the room. What a weak, cowardly fool he was, he thought, thus to give way! This was a blow undoubtedly—what some of the Stock-Exchange fellows called a "facer;" but what of that? It could be met; and even if he lost all—if things turned out as badly as Foster predicted—well, thirty thousand pounds would not shake the credit of Streightley and Son. The mere repetition of the name seemed to rouse up innate business instincts which had been slumbering for some months—to call into action all those qualities which had made the man what he was; and he determined to go up to the City at once, and see for himself how the business stood. He waited for a minute or two until Ellen had strayed off into a by-path in search of some flower, and then he said to his wife,

"I must leave you, Katharine, for a short time—four-and-twenty hours or so—not longer, dear."

His voice dropped, and quivered a little with the natural emotion which he felt. He looked tenderly up at her, and drawing near her, tightly laid his hand on her arm. She was binding together a few flowers as he joined her. She did not cease from her little task; but as she leisurely made the knot, and drew it tight with her teeth, she said, without looking up,

"Oh, indeed! business, I suppose?"

Robert Streightley started as though he had been shot. What else could he have expected? Did he anticipate a few tender words of regret at his necessitated absence; a tear or two dimming the bright eyes; a little pouting or peevishness at being left alone? Did he imagine that his wife might have made some inquiry as to the nature of the business which caused him to absent himself for twenty-four hours from his home? Such might have been the case in those preposterous matches which are arranged thoughtlessly and frivolously by two young people without calling their elders into council—in those ridiculous unions of hearts. But there was nothing in Robert Streightley's bargain, no clause in his bond, to warrant his expectation of any thing of the kind. "To have and to hold," certainly; but to create sympathy, to awaken interest—no mention of either of these

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superfluities in the marriage contract. So he simply said, "Yes, dear, business," and laid his lips to her cheek, and ordered his clothes to be packed, and drove away to the station.

He was uncomfortable, vacillating, wretched all through the journey, but he became his old self as he entered his offices. As the door of his private room closed behind him, as he marked the letters lying unopened on his desk, as he took his seat in the birch-framed, cane-bottomed chair which had been his seat ever since he first assumed his junior partnership, and as he saw old Foster standing at his elbow, with his paper of memoranda in his hand ready to read from, Robert Streightley felt more genuine pleasure than he had for months. The mere fact of there being a difficulty—a hitch—something toward the elucidation of which the play of his business talents might tend—gave him life; the *gaudia certaminis* inspired him; and he set to work with such a zest, that old Foster, who had been shaking his head dolefully for the past few months, and thinking to himself—he would not have breathed such an opinion for the world—that the glories of the great house of Streightley and Son were on the wane, took fresh heart, and indulged that evening in the enormity of an extra half pint of stout at the chop-house where he took his dinner, in token of his delight.

Robert Streightley had not been more than a couple of hours at work, when a junior clerk entered, and told him that Mr. Guyon was outside in a cab, and had called to know if Mr. Streightley was in town. Bidden to show Mr. Guyon in, the junior clerk retired, immediately returning with Mr. Guyon, looking ten years younger than when Robert had last seen him—with his brown-black whiskers, and hair a little red-rusty from travel; with the strong trace of a silvery beard; with a rakish Glengarry cap on his head, a traveling suit and a courier's bag on his body. He entered with his usual impulsive bound, and had Streightley by both hands almost before the latter knew he had entered.

"The merest chance, my dear Robert—the merest chance that I should have called in to-day. Returning from Paris by the tidal, and having to stop at that most confounded of all confounded stations, London Bridge, and having to go through this cursed City—no offense to you, my dear boy, but it's a dreadful hole—I thought I'd just drop in and see whether you were in town."

Mr. Streightley assured Mr. Guyon—a somewhat supererogatory assurance—that he was in town, adding, of which there was no such corroborative testimony, that he was glad to see him.

"And Katharine?" asked Mr. Guyon, carefully smoothing his chin with his hand, and looking up under his eye-glass at his son-in-law—"Katharine is well?"

Katharine was quite well, Mr. Streightley thanked Mr. Guyon.

Mr. Guyon devoutly thanked heaven for that news. All the traces of that horrible—eh? at Martigny—quite gone, eh? Thought he should never have been able to dress himself that morning when he opened Streightley's note about Katharine's illness. His man thought he was going to have a fit, and wanted to hasten for a doctor. Told the man he was a consummate ass; that what he, Mr. Guyon, was suffering from was feelings; and what the devil did he, the man, know about them! And Katharine was well; and their place, Middlemeads—eh? —was perfection? Oh, he'd heard it here, there, and every where. Saw Roger Chevers at Boulogne, *en passant*, and heard him say what a lovely place it was, and how leaving it had smashed up his old governor, root and branch. He was always talking of it, sir—said Roger—and wondering whether they'd cut into the avenue, or whether they left that view clear top of Two-Ash Hill, looking out the south way; or whether they'd put the stables in order, or built others where the Red Barn stood. That's what he should have done, if that cursed Brazilian mine had only turned up trumps! "Poor old Gov! he'll never forget Middlemeads!" said honest Roger, who drowned all thought of his lost patrimony in cheap brandy and the delights of perpetual pool, and dances at the *Etablissement des Bains*.

Ignoring the opinions and speculations of Mr. Roger Chevers, Robert Streightley acknowledged that Middlemeads was a fine place, and that he thought it had improved since it had been in his hands.

"Of course, my dear Robert, of course!" said Mr. Guyon; "your princely munificence, and what I think I may say—although my own child is in question—Katharine's excellent taste, would be certain to do wonders for any place to which both could be simultaneously applied. *Allez, toujours, la jeunesse!* a French phrase which is roughly but not inadequately rendered by our own maxim of 'Go it while you're young!' As for me, I'm an old bird—an old bird, begad, come back to an empty nest, to find the sticks and the straw and all that, but my young fledgling flown." Mr. Guyon seemed quite affected at the allusion which he had thus made, and turned away his head, touching his eyes lightly with his handkerchief.

"I trust you will have no cause to repent of your sanction to your daughter's flight, Mr. Guyon," said Streightley, in a somewhat marked tone. "You recollect, before she left your roof, that—"

"My dear Robert! my dear Robert!" interposed the old gentleman, "do you think I have forgotten the confidence in which I told you that I was unworthy of the blessing of such a daughter—that I was by nature more fitted for —for less domestic delights? And indeed I—in Paris I have enjoyed myself most amazin'ly, most amazin'ly! That fellow, sir—whom I recklect, when he lived in King Street—used to drive a doosid good cab, I recklect, he certainly has improved Paris wonderfully. But it's horribly expensive, my dear boy, horribly expens-

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ire. I—I ran rather short before I came away, and I was obliged to draw on you for a hundred—I was indeed!"

Streightley's face looked very stern as he heard this. "Do I understand you to say that you have drawn a bill on me for a hundred pounds, Mr. Guyon?"

"Yes, my dear boy, at a month; it'll be due—"

"That is a liberty which I permit no one to take, and which must never be repeated."

"A liberty, Robert?"

"A liberty, Mr. Guyon. Any man who draws a bill on another without first asking his friend's permission, takes what we of the City think an unwarrantable liberty. I am sure you erred in ignorance; but I must ask you to put a stop entirely to what seems to have become a habit with you—a reliance on me for money. I can not make you any farther advances, at least for the present."

This was a great blow for Mr. Guyon, who had been boasting, as was his wont, among his English acquaintances in Paris of the great wealth and generosity of his son-in-law. Nor had his French friends been unenlightened on the subject; "eel a milyonair—com voter Roschild vous savvy," the old gentleman had remarked with great self-satisfaction. And now to find his milch-cow refusing her supply, and, as it were, threatening him with her horns and heels, was any thing but pleasant. However, Mr. Guyon's temperament was light and elastic; he thought this determination of Streightley's would not last; that some business matters had "put him out;" that his anger would soon "blow over;" so he assured his son-in-law that he would remember what he had said; and shaking hands fervently with him, skipped back to the cab, with the pleasant feeling that at least a quarter of the hundred pounds so judiciously drawn was at that moment safe in his trowsers-pocket.

Then Robert Streightley called Foster into his room, and over books and ledgers, and commercial documents of all kinds, they held a consultation which lasted until late in the afternoon, and which proved to them both that the financial position of Streightley and Son had recently had the hardest blow, in the stopping of Messrs. Nick's bank, which it had received since it commenced operations of any magnitude.

"It comes at an awkward time too for you, sir," said old Mr. Foster. "We wanted all the ready cash we could lay our hands on just now; there are the calls on the Benares Railroad, and the deposits upon the Indian Peninsular—we're pretty deep in both of them—and there's six thousand for the lease in Portland Place, which of course must be paid at once. However, there's no reason to hold the Indian lines; they're both at a high premium; and as this bothering bank has crippled us for a bit, perhaps we had better sell and—"

"Not one share, Foster! not a single share! we'll stand to our guns, and the money shall be forthcoming when it's wanted, I'll take care of that. 'Forward!' has been the motto of Streightley and Son, Foster, as you know very well, and they're not going to change it now! You shall see the thirty thousand replaced, ay, and doubled, before you retire on a pension, Foster, I promise you."

"There never was any one like you, Mr. Robert," said the old man, his eyes sparkling with pleasure; "when you say a thing will be, I know it will be, ay, as sure as the Bank of England." And so closed the business consultation.

The lease of the house in Portland Place, which Mr. Foster had alluded to, was one of Robert Streightley's wedding-presents to his bride. They must have a town-house, of course—one befitting her position in society; and partly because of its proximity to her father's residence, partly because the substantial appearance of the Portland-Place houses, and the knowledge that they had been for years in great demand among the moneyed classes, pleased him, he bought the lease of this house then in the market, had the house splendidly decorated while they were away, and on their return home had given Katharine *carte blanche* as to its furniture. Katharine had gone twice to London during their stay at Middlemeads, and had held long consultations with the upholsterer, but Robert had not seen the house since he had purchased it.

He walked there now; and though it was still in disorder, he was astounded at the magnificence of the decorations and the splendor of the furniture. Under the direction of Katharine's excellent taste, the *carte blanche* given to the upholsterer had worked wonders. No duchess could have had a more perfectly-appointed house, with nothing new or perky-looking about it: for what would be the use of money nowadays if it could not purchase antiquity in every thing save family? and even that can be manufactured to order at the Herald's College. So Robert Streightley walked in pleased astonishment among the high-backed chairs in the dining-room, and past the dark oak bookcases in the library, and through the pale-green drawing-rooms with the lovely hangings, the elegant *portières*, the buhl cabinets, the splendid glasses, the *étagères*, and all the knickknackery of upholstery. It was in this last paradise that Mr. Streightley found one of the partners of the upholstery firm, a gentlemanly-looking man, who was surveying his men's work with much complacency. He bowed to Robert, and hoped he was pleased with what had been done. Mr. Streightley expressed himself as thoroughly satisfied; and Mr. Clinch then ventured to hope that he should not be considered troublesome if he were to ask for a check—not for the total, of course—just something on account, as workmen's wages must be paid, etc. Certainly; what amount did Messrs. Clinch require? Mr. Walter Clinch "for self and partners" ventured to name the sum of twelve hundred pounds.

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Mr. Streightley, after the smallest possible start, made a memorandum in his pocket-book, and said that a check should be sent the next day.

Twelve hundred pounds for decorations and furniture—"on account" too, showing that there was perhaps as much again to pay! Katharine had certainly understood the word *carte blanche* in its widest and most liberal sense. Twelve hundred pounds! and until his marriage he had lived in a little Brixton villa, the entire furniture of which was not worth one third of the sum. Should he speak to his wife—should he— Not he! now she was his wife, why was she his wife? Simply for the sake of his money—that money which he had placed at her command. The one happiness that he could offer her was the power of spending money, and should he refuse her that? The only salve that he could apply to his never-quiet conscience was that he had been enabled to supply her with the means of gratifying extravagant tastes which must have remained ungratified had she married that—had she made that match which seemed so imminent when he had that never-to-be-forgotten interview with Mr. Guyon. No! Katharine had married him because he was a rich man, and a rich man he must remain to her. Besides, after all, what was her expenditure? what were these few hundred pounds to him? This horrible bank business had frightened him, he supposed; had it not happened, should he have given the smallest thought to such a trifle as Mr. Clinch's account?

Neverthless, all that he had said to Foster he determined on carrying out. There should be no "drawing-in their horns," no curtailment in the operations of Streightley and Son. The money necessary to meet this bank failure must be raised somehow. He could get it in the City at an hour's notice. From the Bank of England downward there were plenty of establishments ready to help the old-established firm. But such matters are talked of in the City, chatted over in the Bank parlor, whispered on 'Change, give matter for gossip, and shoulder-shrugs, and eyebrow-liftings; and Robert's spirit shrunk from the idea that he or his firm could form the subject of any such speculations. And yet the money must be had. Where could he turn for it? Ah! a lucky thought. That man—Mr. Guyon's friend—what was his name? Thacker; a shrewd, clear-headed, clever man. He would go and see him, and talk the matter over.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE END OF THE CLEW.

And what was Charles Yeldham doing with himself during all these months? What, indeed, save pursuing his "treadmill," daily increasing in reputation and practice, and accumulating more and more money for little Constance's dowry. The attorney's clerks who climbed up his black staircase were more numerous than ever. Though never relaxing from his work for five minutes more than usual, he found himself compelled day by day to postpone the acceptance of cases, with the alternative of rejecting them altogether; and by the sheer force of perseverance and industry he was on the high road to fame and wealth. He did not relax now any thing like so much as when his old chum Gordon Frere shared his chambers with him: there were no five minutes of chat, and chaff, and raillery; no listening to poor Gordon's confidences on love, debt, future career, now. The only time which Charley Yeldham allowed himself for talking of unprofessional matters was the half hour during which he smoked his final pipe, and drank his glass of grog before going to bed, and then he would pass in review the curious events that had happened eight months before, and wonder at and reason over them. Three men running after one girl—three! Well, he could hardly count himself, though certainly he had thought more about Katharine Guyon than of any other woman before or since (and, let it be noted, that at this stage of his reflections he invariably produced from his desk a photographic *carte* which he had obtained of her, and gazed at it with great tenderness)—two men, we'll say, in hot pursuit, and Bob Sobersides winning the race! She must have been an outrageous flirt, that Miss Guyon, though! Dear old Charley Yeldham, with all his partiality, his romantic fondness for Katharine, is constrained to admit—an outrageous flirt. Did not she carry on with poor Gordon, fooling him to the top of his bent; meeting him at the Opera, at Botanical fêtes, at balls, and what not; flower from her bouquet, hand-pressure, appointment for the next day? And, after all, did she not whistle him down the wind, throw him away as one does a split-pen, and marry Robert Streightley? Ay, ay! ay, ay! Better the old desk and the long "treadmill"—better the flirtations with attorneys, and *billets-doux* from Bedford Row, all of which have some satisfactory result, at least, than the pinning of your faith on a woman's word, and the breaking of your heart by a woman's tricks! After all, it was perhaps better that such a girl should have married such a man as Robert Streightley. His steadiness would guide and control her; his wealth would enable her to indulge her taste for extravagance; and her dash and beauty would give pleasant *status* among his acquaintance. Nothing of that kind could have happened had she married poor Gordon Frere. Both young, extravagant, and reckless; both accustomed to have their own way; both fond of flirtation; neither understanding the theory of "give and take"—dear me! dear me! thought Charley Yeldham to himself, when the honeymoon was over, that would have been a disastrous business and a wretched *ménage*.

He had had several letters from Gordon, then private secretary to Lord ——, acting minister at Rudolfstadt; letters full of complaints, which were ludicrous to the reader, though evidently

insufferable to the writer. "It's a dull, wearying, dreary place, dear old boy," said Gordon; "a beastly hole, with no one but besotted Germans to talk to, who all are either professors, when they bore you to death with their metaphysical cant, or half-fed dragoon officers, who make you long to kick them for their infernal impertinence. Old Wigsby, who has nothing to do, and who never opens a book or gives what ought to be his brains, but what I firmly believe is either tow or wool, the smallest exercise, passes his days in calling on the Frau Ober Consistorial Directorin or the Hochgeborner Herr, and his nights in sitting in their wretched twopenny theatres listening to their squealing singers. He expects me to attend him on both occasions, and airs himself to this German-silver nobility, this veneered *haute noblesse*, in his patronage of me, d—n him (that's by way of parenthesis). On Wednesday nights we go to the Jäger Hof, where the Duke von Friedenstein lives when he is visible; and the entertainments there are something which would be too much even for you, Charley, old fellow—and you know you *can* stand a lot in the way of dullness! The old duke stands at the end of a big room, and bows away like mad to every one who comes in, until I wonder how his old spine holds out; and then the company wander through the rooms, and look at the curios and the pictures in the Kunst Kammer, which they've all of them seen a thousand times before; and then the squealing singers from the theatre tune up and shriek away for dear life in the music gallery. And then there's not a bad supper of a queer kind: big hams, and potato salad and herring salad, and hot salmon and cold jelly, and cold rice and jam, and some very decent light wines; and it's all over by ten o'clock, and we're off to bed. Old Wigsby goes to these lets-off *en grande tenue*, and is, I am sure, seriously grieved that etiquette does not permit him to wear his court suit. He is the most stupendous ass you can conceive, and is always haranguing me about 'the position of a diplomatist,' and the 'representative of her Britannic majesty;' he makes a *précis* of his washing-bills, and tells me that Lord Palmerston would not 'suffer my handwriting, which is frivolous and unformed.' What the deuce do I care? I only wish I was back in England—not for the reasons which you probably assign for the wish. All that is past and gone, and I sometimes grow hot all over when I think of the melo-dramatic farewell which I took of you, my dear old Charley, at the London Bridge station. I was an idiot then; but now that fire has burnt out, and left very cold ashes. I hope Mrs. Streightley is well and happy, with her charming husband. You'll grin at this, you old skeptic, but on my honor it's true. I haven't the smallest shadow of regret for K. G., and I don't care one straw for any woman in the world; but I do long to be out of this infernal place, to be rid of old Wigsby, and his pomposity, and patronage, and to be out of earshot of this hard grating German cackle, which sometimes makes me stop my ears and kick with sheer rage. How are the old chambers looking, and how is their old owner? Oh, if I could only put my hands on his dear old broad shoulders, and have half an hour's chat with him, it would do me a deal of good! Yours always,—G. F."

Ex uno disce omnes. This was a specimen of Gordon Frere's letters, and the perusal of which left Charley Yeldham any thing but satisfied with his friend's position. It was a good thing to think that he was cured of his love infatuation—so cured that he could write calmly and even kindly of the traitress and his successful rival; but the monotony of his life, and the dull dreariness of Rudolfstadt, were evidently eating into his soul. No good could come of the continuance of such distasteful work; and if Gordon Frere's career were to be any thing but one of blighted hopes and miserable vegetating, he must begin anew, and that, too, with all possible speed. So Yeldham, after cogitating deeply over the matter, at last wrote to his friend, and told him he felt that the sooner he put an end to the business in which he was at present engaged, the better it would be for him, and the greater likelihood he would have in adopting some new profession, which he might pursue with pleasure and profit to himself. It was evident that Gordon was wasting his life at Rudolfstadt, and his friend's advice to him was to make his adieux to his patron Wigsby, and return at once to London. Here the old chambers were ready to receive him; and if he were to make up his mind to go to the bar, Yeldham thought he might do well enough. "I don't mean to say that you'll soon be attorney general, young fellow, or that your opinions are likely to outweigh Chitty's; but you used to be fluent enough at the Apollo Debating Society; you've a certain knowledge of the world, and unparalleled impudence; and with the possession of these qualities, and with the aid which I can give you among the attorneys, I think you're likely before long to be able to gain your bread and cheese at the Old Bailey: at all events, you will be in London, where a man ought to be, if ever he wants to profit by chances; and you'll be relieved from that harassing depression which seems to me to be sapping your character, and rendering you utterly degenerate."

It was a great relief to honest Charles Yeldham's mind to find that Gordon Frere had so readily, and, to all appearance, so effectually got over his disappointment in regard to Katharine. Often and often, in the few leisure minutes stolen from his work, had Yeldham sat, with his pipe in his mouth, pondering over the curious history of Robert Streightley's marriage, and wondering how it might be influenced by Frere's return; for, recluse as he was, unworldly in the "society" sense, and nearly entirely given up to his work, Yeldham knew enough of human nature to feel perfectly certain that the marriage which Mr. Guyon so prided himself in having brought about was no love-match; that Streight-

ley was by no means the kind of man to have awakened any passion in the breast of such a woman as Katharine; and that when any strong opposing influence might be brought into play, his tenure on her fealty would be slight indeed. The only thing that puzzled Yeldham was how the marriage had been managed, and how Kate's consent to it had been obtained. Unless Gordon Frere's vanity was most self-deceptive, this girl had undoubtedly been hotly in love with him within an ace of her engagement to Streightley. She was not by any means the sort of girl to be prevailed upon by parental coaxings or threats (though her father was exactly the man to employ both); and Robert had only his honesty of purpose, which was nothing to women in general—and his wealth, which was nothing to this woman in particular — to back his suit. There was something in the whole affair which was inexplicable to Charles Yeldham; and, being inexplicable, he resolved never to rest until it was explained.

He had not seen Streightley, save in one or two casual street meetings, since the marriage; and though he had received a warm invitation to Middlemeads, pressure of business had prevented him from availing himself of it. Pressure of business, he said; but he wasted the whole of the evening on which he received the invitation (and on which, with his powers of working, he might have got through a great deal of work) in handling the dainty note, and conning it over and over, and in smoking many pipes, and thinking over many strange things. The note was in Katharine's hand, and ran thus:

"My dear Mr. Yeldham,—Finding that his own efforts at inducing you to visit us are completely useless, Mr. Streightley asks me to try mine. I think I need scarcely say how happy we shall be to see you here, and how our utmost endeavors will be used to compensate you for your absence from those legal studies in which, I am assured, you find your sole delight. Very faithfully yours,

"Katharine Streightley."

A simple note, with a very slight touch of very mild badinage. But Charles Yeldham was unaccustomed to the receipt of letters from ladies, and this one certainly had a singular effect on him. What a pretty hand she wrote! how refreshing were the thin, slight, angular strokes after the rounded fists of the attorneys' clerks! how the dainty paper and brilliant monogram contrasted with the blue-wove and the wafer-stamp seal of his ordinary correspondence! And then, as he puffed at his pipe, and watched the blue vapor curling up around his head, Charley remembered the first, almost the only time he had ever seen her in that soft diaphanous dress at the Botanical Fête, where, even before he knew who she was, he had been sensible of her presence, and where he had felt himself completely subjugated by her loveliness, her elegance, and grace. They would laugh at him, Frere and some fellows of his acquaintance, as a stoic and a cynic—not that he was one or the other—but, after all, was it not better to go through life unvexed and untroubled by thoughts of lovely women, who were as far removed from you as the stars, than to endeavor to win them, and find yourself cast down from star-height as the reward of your presumption? It was a dull life his, no doubt, with nothing to cheer it but the success of his work, and—good God! how beautiful she was! (here he took the photograph out); what perfect grace in the *pose* of her head, in the resting of her hands, in the long sweeping folds of her dress! Ah! if little Constance ever grew up to be any thing like that, there would be less need of the dower which her brother was so carefully putting by for her. No wonder Gordon Frere, young, impressible, buoyant, and hopeful, was desperately in love with such a beauty; no wonder that, looking at her, Robert Streightley forgot his ventures, his shares, his cautious dealings, and his long-headed speculations, and rushed into the matrimonial market, determined, at whatever cost, to carry off the prize.

How had Robert Streightley accomplished this result? The desire of being successful was intelligible; but how was the success arrived at? As Yeldham pondered over his question during his midday interval of rest, and while smoking his midday pipe, there came a knock at the oak; and opening it, Yeldham admitted the man of all others most likely to be able to answer him—Robert Streightley himself.

He came in wincing a little at the clouds of strong Cavendish which filled the barrister's room, and seated himself in the attorneys' chair. He looked pale and a little careworn, but he greeted Yeldham certainly as heartily as usual, and smiled as he said, "For once in his life—bravo! for once in his life, I've found the machine without the steam up, and Charley Yeldham *not* at his desk!"

"Sir," replied Charley, "you come at a peculiar time; these are the five minutes of relaxation; so let us relax together. Robert, my boy, you're looking very seedy, white and peaky!"

"Well, I have been rather seedy; but I'm not very bad, after all. I've had a good deal of worry lately, in one shape or another, and worry tells on me more than it did. Getting old, I suppose!"

"You ought to take a partner, Robert—I mean a business partner. That affair of yours is too big to carry on single-handed. Oh, tell me, by the way—you won't misconstrue the reason of my asking—that confounded bank failure? Rumor says you were hit hard by it. Is it true?"

"Yes; for once in the course of events, rumor hasn't lied. Our house was in heavily, and has suffered with the rest."

"That's part of your trouble, Robert?"

"Well, perhaps part; though I should scarcely say so, as the money-loss has been replaced,

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and Streightley and Son have passed the sponge across the slate, and look upon it as an unutterably bad debt."

"Lucky for them that they are able to do so; had it been my case, I should either have been playing rackets in Whitecross Street, or wearing a black wig and whiskers, and hiding myself as much as possible in a steamer bound to a country without an extradition treaty. I often think if you great commercial swells only knew how we professional men live, and the amount of the balance presently standing to our credit at our bankers—"

"Yes; and if you professional men only knew how the commercial swells, as you call us, envy you your freedom from responsibility."

"Freedom from responsibility, indeed! By the way, how's your wife?"

"*Apropos* of responsibility! She'd take that as a compliment. She's very well indeed, old boy, very well; not up in town yet. Still staying at Middlemeads, where you've never yet been, though both of us have done our best to get you there."

"My dear Robert, what on earth would be the good of my arriving at your country place with a blue stuff bag full of papers, and enjoying my holiday in the country by sticking to your library from morning till night, reading cases, drawing pleas, and giving opinions? I feel perfectly certain that at your library-table, which is probably virgin-free from ink-blots, in your library chair, which is probably comfortable, and surrounded by your country atmosphere, which of course is pure and fresh, the few wits which I possess would leave me, and the most which I should do at Middlemeads would have the effect of utterly depriving me from ever earning five guineas again. No, I won't come to Middlemeads until I can — with a comfortable conscience—leave my blue bag behind me, and when that will be heaven only knows!"

"And in the mean time, and for the mere sake of your work, you drag your life on in these solitary chambers?"

"Listen to him! listen to Benedick the married man, so full of domestic happiness that he must crow over us poor bachelors. Very well, old fellow, as fate has willed it, is my life; the more work I have, the happier I am; if I had not any, I should stick my head into the Temple fountain, and thereby incur the odium of the Benchers. No, I must not do that quite, while I've the old governor and Constance left, lest I should be supremely wretched; whereas in my work I'm thoroughly happy; and as for solitary chambers—well, they are solitary now, but they wern't once, and won't be again soon, I think. My old chum's coming home."

"Your old chum? Who do you mean?"

"Why, the man who lived with me in these rooms before, and will share them again, I hope —Gordon Frere."

"Gordon Frere? Is he coming back to England—to London?" Robert Streightley's face turned pale as he asked this question, and his lips twitched with nervous anxiety.

"I hope so. I've written to him to try and persuade him to do so. He's a clever fellow, airy and specious, with what they call a good 'gift of the gab,' and I want him to try his fortune at the bar."

Streightley rose from his chair, took a few paces round the room, then settled himself again with his face shaded by his hand, looking at his friend.

"You were very intimate with this man Frere, Charley?" he asked in a hard, dry voice, after a minute's pause.

"Intimate? Didn't he live here, I tell you? —though you knew it long since, if you'll only give yourself the trouble to recollect."

"And you were thoroughly in his confidence?"

Charles Yeldham answered, "Entirely." But the word had scarcely escaped him when he saw the drift of the question, and wished he had pondered ere replying.

"Then you know, I suppose, that he—that he was—was in love with Miss Guyon—with my wife?"

"My dear Robert, what on earth are you talking about? what on earth—"

"Do you know it, or don't you?"

"I have heard it, of course, and—"

"You have heard it, of course; and now he's coming back! Coming back, curse him!"

"My dear Streightley, have you taken leave of your senses? What on earth has the young man's return—although in past times he might have had sufficient good taste to admire Miss Guyon and hope to win her, for which I honor him—yes, I say I honor him—what on earth has his return to do with such an outbreak as this?"

"Never mind, Charles Yeldham! He sha'n't see her! Look here—mark this—he may be a friend of yours or not, but he sha'n't see her. I'll have no renewal of old friendships and all that! He sha'n't see her! Mr. Guyon shall take care of that. I'll appeal to him, and he'll back me up, I know."

"My dear Robert, if you're weak enough to have to appeal to your father-in-law in any matter in which your wife is concerned, I think you're to be pitied! However, don't fear! Any feeling which Frere may have had for Miss Guyon is quite past and gone, and now that she is Mrs. Streightley—"

"Ah! that's all very well; but he sha'n't see her. Mr. Guyon will back me up in that, I'm sure. I know he will. Good-by, Charley;" and Mr. Streightley turned the handle of the door and left the chambers.

The attorneys whose cases Mr. Yeldham had in hand that day found the celebrated conveyancer a little dilatory. Their clerks attending the next morning were bidden to call again later in the day. You see you don't get through much work when, your feet on the fender, and a pipe in your mouth, you sit for the whole aft-

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ernoon staring at the grate and chewing the cud of mental reflection. "'He sha'n't see her!' Why not? Streightley can not be idiot enough to suppose that there is such fascination in Frere as to—Oh no! That's not it. 'He sha'n't see her'—that means they sha'n't meet, sha'n't speak, sha'n't— 'Mr. Guyon shall take care of that—he'll back me up'— Mr. Guyon! —they sha'n't meet! Mr. Guyon back me up! —they sha'n't meet! No answer to Gordon's proposal, no meeting with him at that ball—old Guyon's reply as to the pre-engagement, and— Now, by the Lord, Robert Streightley, I only hope my thoughts are wrong; for if I'm right, you've been led by weakness or worse into a base conspiracy, and henceforth are no friend of mine!"

CHAPTER XIX.

HESTER'S DEBUT.

The judgment passed by Robert Streightley on Hester Gould, when he had critically examined her bearing under the novel and trying circumstances of her heiress-ship, was amply borne out by her subsequent conduct. She was a decided success; and though totally unknown to the members of the great world in which she had now taken her place, so that they had no opportunity of comparing her as she was in the present with what she had been in the past, her simplicity of manners, her unassuming tranquillity, as free from deprecation as from assertion, received a tribute of genuine admiration. Miss Gould was as much alive to the little touch of impertinence in this general sentiment as she was to its usefulness and agreeability; but she enjoyed the latter, and did not resent the former.

"They are wonderfully kind and polite, and all that," she said one day to Lady Henmarsh, while she was entering a long list of new names and addresses in her visiting-book; "but it amuses me a little to observe that no one of them can quite conceal her surprise at discovering that I look and behave like a lady. How I delight in such *naïveté!* They let me see, without the least disguise, that they expect me to be vulgar and underbred, but visit me because I am rich and certified by you."

"It's the way of the world, my dear Hester," said her friend, "and neither you nor I will change it, be assured."

"I don't want to change it, for my part," said Hester; "it suits me very well as it is."

This gay colloquy took place shortly after Miss Gould had taken possession of her handsome and perfectly-appointed house at Palace Gardens. The programme agreed upon at Middlemeads had been faithfully carried out, and the intercourse between Portland Place and Palace Gardens was frequent and affectionate. Miss Gould demeaned herself toward Robert and his wife with exemplary tact and propriety. Not the keenest and closest observer could have divined that she possessed a knowledge of the affairs of the one wholly unshared by the other, and that she had succeeded, by minute investigation and the art of inductive reasoning, at an understanding of the means by which the marriage which had thwarted her plans, and given her the first shock she had ever experienced of the humiliation of defeat, had been brought about, almost as clear as that possessed by the principals in the transaction. The firmness, the indifference, and the decision of Hester Gould's character had much attraction for Katharine, who found pleasure and amusement in watching that young lady's method of dealing with her novel position, and to whose proud nature the coolness and self-possession of Hester were peculiarly congenial. They were not confidential with each other; but then, how could they have been so? Katharine had a secret in her life whose concealment had been of such immense importance to her that she had taken the one step which determines a woman's whole existence in order to secure that concealment. Outside that she had no confidences to bestow. On Hester's side there was still less frankness in their intercourse; but she would not have been confidential with Katharine had there been no hidden link between them; she had never trusted any one fully. The nearest approach she had ever made or permitted to a confidential intimacy had been in Mr. Thacker's case, and she had begun to repent of even that limited *démarche* lately, since that gentleman had hinted at the hopes to which it had given rise.

"I might have found out all he has told me for myself, if I had only waited," she said in vexed soliloquy; "if I had only had patience, I need not have wanted him at all, and now there's no saying how troublesome he may think fit to be."

In this misgiving Hester Gould was entirely mistaken, and her entertaining it showed that she had not read Mr. Thacker with her accustomed thoroughness and infallibility. Daniel knew, when Miss Gould refused him in the matter-of-fact and reasonable fashion she had done, that she was perfectly in earnest, clearly in the right, and immutable in her resolution. He had no more notion of annoying her with a renewal of his addresses than he had of resenting their rejection. He must have liked her very much, and have seen many advantages in addition to its pecuniary attractions in the scheme of such a marriage; for Mr. Daniel Thacker was as little of a marrying-man as any individual in London, but he was quite incapable of such a *bêtise* as persisting in an unwelcome suit, or exhibiting, indeed of feeling, the slightest offense. Hester Gould was the sort of woman, being an heiress, whom it would have been pleasant and advisable to marry; but, as such an arrangement was not practicable, he fell back upon the other and less hazardous alternative—that of fostering and preserving confidential relations with her. If she was not to be his wife —and he knew the moment she said "no" that

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that was not to be—she would remain his very good friend, in the real meaning of the term. He believed he had found out what her game had been in the past (that game she had lost, as it seemed to him, by waiting too confidently); he acknowledged that he did not know the nature of that which she meant to play in the future; but if any one was ever to know it, he would be that person, with her consent or without it. He had felt at once the change that had come over her after his luckless proposal; he had discerned her imperfect appreciation of his *savoir faire;* but he was neither offended nor afraid. He knew he could safely trust his own manner and time to convince her that he had accepted her decision as final, that she had no importunity to fear on his part.

The result had fully justified Mr. Thacker's anticipations, and his relations with Hester were permanently established on a footing of as much mutual reliance as was possible to the nature of either, and the frank interchange of mutual good services. Mr. Thacker was unfeignedly pleased when he learned from the voice of rumor that the shipowner's heiress was becoming quite the fashion, and when he perceived by her brightened expression, her fresher color, and the added vivacity of her manner and bearing, that Miss Gould entered with sincere enjoyment into the pleasures within her reach. A youth of well-concealed ambition, of self-repression, of toil, had not hardened, and deadened, and narrowed her, as it might have done a weaker nature; there was no active poison of cynicism in her knowledge of the world; and her cool-headedness, while it secured her from deception, did not err on the joyless side of utter disbelief. She enjoyed life as a connoisseur, not as an enthusiast—as an epicure, not as a gourmand; but she did enjoy it both well and wisely.

Circumstances favored Miss Gould very decidedly. She was sufficiently attractive to be admired by men, and not so aggressively beautiful as to be hated by woman. She did not in the least overrate her own personal charms or the powers of her mind, but she knew that she was good-looking and clever enough to be admired in society, independently of the wealth which had been her passport into it; while other women would console themselves for her success, and explain it on the grounds of that wealth solely. She had found herself admitted at once into the best of the society in which Katharine Guyon had moved before her marriage, and the circle was constantly expanding. Lady Henmarsh was more popular as the chaperone of a well-looking and richly-dowered heiress than as the chaperone of a well-connected beauty with no money, and a detrimental though pleasant papa. Miss Guyon's remarkably sensible and commendable marriage had also shed reflected glory upon Lady Henmarsh; and as the dangerous beauty was dangerous no longer, but, on the contrary, a decided acquisition, being excessively rich, and possessing a praiseworthy taste for expensive hospitalities, all the petty jealousies and envies excited by Miss Guyon were forgiven to "that dear creature Mrs. Streightley."

Thus the world was to all seeming very fair and bright before the two young women whom a chance had brought together, to be thenceforth inextricably intermingled in each other's lives.

It belonged to the well-regulated completeness of Hester Gould's character, to the firmness of a woman in whom there was nothing little, however much there might be that was bad, that she never neglected a friend, never forgot a kindness, never overlooked a former claim on her consideration or gratitude. She was incapable of the meanness of disregarding those who had aided her when her lot was one of poverty and obscurity, and equally incapable of the impertinence of patronage. She felt gratitude, and she displayed it simply, genuinely, appropriately, with the true and delicate tact which was one of the finer features of her character. She had provided for the comfort of Aunt Lavinia as carefully as for her own in the arrangements of the handsome house, which the good old lady regarded with mingled admiration and misgiving. She had explained to her aunt that all the requirements of the world would be fulfilled by the arrangements into which she had entered with Lady Henmarsh; that she would never be expected to do violence to her principles by partaking of the dangerous and delusive delights to which her niece's novel position afforded her access; and she gave her *carte blanche* for as many entertainments of the substantial-tea description, which they particularly affected, as her favorite "ministers" could be prevailed on to accept. Nor was her attention to her aunt limited to such formal provisions for her comfort. No pleasure, no hurry, no press of engagements, none of the flutter of popularity and general request into which Miss Gould soon fell, ever induced her to neglect the commonplace but worthy woman who had befriended her youth and shared her evil days. A portion of every morning was spent with Aunt Lavinia, and a visit to the quiet spinster preceded invariably the fulfillment of her evening engagements, over which her aunt would sigh furtively, and concerning which she reposed many mournful confidences and misgivings in sundry clerical breasts, without, however, feeling any distressingly deep conviction of the enormity of her niece's behavior. Hester's old schoolmistress had not been forgotten. The modest sum which the labor of half a lifetime had painfully accumulated, but which had yet some years to gather ere it could suffice for even such a humble maintenance as the well-nigh worn-out teacher longed for, was supplemented by the old pupil to whom Miss Nickson never "could take;" and Laburnum Lodge, with the inky and lacerated desks, the dreary fly-blown maps, and the dreadful jangling rattletrap pianos, was disposed of by private contract. Once every week Hester Gould's brougham might be seen before the little gate of a pretty little cottage at Fulham;

and Hester's figure, grown graceful now, and clad in elegant attire, might be recognized seated in the little parlor window as she gave an hour of the time on which society made insatiable demands to the woman who had done her duty to the orphan girl for conscience' sake.

She was no less considerate of those to whom her former obligations were of another kind, and must be redeemed in a different way. Among their number were the Hampstead Hebrews, Rachel and Rebecca Thacker, and Ellen Streightley. To the dark-browed sisters of her confidential friend Miss Gould extended every social advantage within her power to compass for them. They found their lives wonderfully brightened and their ideas much expanded under Hester's influence, and they became more enthusiastically fond of her than ever.

Ellen Streightley had become less enthusitic about Katharine since she had been in town. The constant stir, the fashionable jargon, the incessant familiar mention of places, and persons, and circumstances, all foreign to her knowledge, her tastes, and her ideas, troubled and confused her. The same sort of thing had existed at Middlemeads indeed, but on a lesser scale; and then Ellen had had Hester to support her, and she had not felt so insignificant, so lost, as she felt now, in the ever-shifting, ever-thronging crowd in Portland Place. Katharine was as kind to her as ever, but she had no time to occupy herself with her; and the romantic vision of sisterly confidence, which had made her sojourn at Middlemeads delightful to Ellen, vanished away before the realism of the tumultuous frivolity of London life. Ellen had been enchanted with Middlemeads, but the house in Portland Place alarmed more than it pleased her. She remembered penitently the warnings of Decimus, who was soon coming back now — a circumstance which rendered them all the more terrible; she was chilled by the cool, undemonstrative disapproval of her mother, who had but once entered her son's splendid house; she felt out of her place there; she was no longer at home with Katharine as she had been at Middlemeads; here she was only one of her sister-in-law's innumerable guests. But when Helen was with Hester Gould she had no such feeling. Hester was quite unaltered, enjoyed as much leisure, and was as well disposed to share it with her friend as in the old days. Hester's house was very handsome, and her establishment was very imposing, and in all things different from the Brixton villa; but Ellen was not dazzled and bewildered, and put at a disadvantage by this difference, as she was by that of Katharine's house and manner of living; she did not feel like a stranger at Palace Gardens. Hester would receive her as calmly and pleasantly as though no afternoon engagements were in contemplation; would listen to all her simple, eager, unimpressive confidences with unwavering patience; would listen even to the outpourings of the honest missionary, who had a habit of digressing into sermons in his love-letters; in short, Hester took a sound and serious interest in Ellen's fate. Miss Gould excessively disliked the deportation of her friend to foreign and probably cannibal parts, and had given much consideration to the question whether it might not be possible to restrain the ardor of the Rev. Decimus by the mundane process of purchasing him a living at home. She had very little doubt of being able to procure him the advantages of heathen society, provided he did not insist on black pagans. Down in Staffordshire now, or in outlying London districts, or among the truly rural population of Devonshire, he might surely find hideous ignorance, crime, and brutish unconsciousness of any thing but the lowest instincts of nature, flourishing as luxuriantly as in the Feejee or the Andaman Islands. If the police reports spoke truth, there was room for the evolutions of a whole noble army of martyrs in picturesque and prosperous England; and Decimus might be quite as useful, while Ellen would be infinitely more safe. So Hester thought about the matter, and came to the conclusion—excusable to her ignorance, and deducible from her experience of the ease with which every thing one wants can be had for money—that a living in British heathendom might be purchased. She did not impart her ideas to Robert Streightley, for she had her own reasons for knowing that he was not in a condition to receive any proposition involving the expenditure of ready money with much favor just then; but she took Mr. Thacker into her confidence; and as that gentleman's religious persuasion prevented his feeling any scruples concerning a transaction of the kind, he undertook to buy a living for Hester's unconscious *protégé* with as much alacrity and unconcern as he would have undertaken to hire an opera-box or to match a carriage-horse. "Remember, if you want a presentation likely to fall in soon, you can't get one cheap," was his sole demurrer when Miss Gould explained, with the utmost *naïveté*, the object of her wishes.

"I don't want to get it cheap, Mr. Thacker," replied Miss Gould. "Provided its comfortable, and there's enough to do to keep the pocket-apostle busy, and it's a wholesome place for Ellen, and not dangerous in the way of strikes and mill-burnings, I am content. I don't think I should like it *too* rural and picturesque, please, because the murders in places of that sort are always so very horrible."

"By Jove! she gives me her directions as if it were a semi-detached villa with a good croquet-lawn she wanted," said Mr. Thacker, as he left Hester's presence, having cheerfully undertaken the somewhat difficult task she had imposed upon him. "There's nothing on earth to equal the unreasonableness of even the most reasonable woman, and she certainly is that. Not bad for an unconscious bit of satire either on Christian notions in general—would be nuts to some of our people, I dare say."

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The season was at its height, and all London seemed abandoned to the pursuit of pleasure almost as completely as the gay capital of France in its normal condition—all London, that is to say, except the few hundreds of thousands who were suffering, dying, bearing all the ills and miseries of life, unseen and unheard by their more fortunate brethren, for whom the hour of calamity had not yet sounded. Among the most fashionable of the fashionable *réunions* fixed for one brilliant night in June—a night on which the fields and trees, the rivers and the gardens, were bathed in moonlight, and fanned by warm perfumed air—a night on which all nature was wrapped in a trance of delight, was Mrs. Pendarvis's ball. Her ball *par excellence*, be it observed; for she "opened her rooms" for dancing and music, for charades and kettledrums, for every conceivable purpose for which people could be gathered together, a most satisfactory number of times during the season. But this was a grand, an exceptional occasion—a yearly event, which found record in the chronicles of the doings of the magnates of society, and formed an epoch in the history of each successive year.

Katharine Streightley and her husband were going to this ball. Miss Guyon had never missed the grand occasion since she had been "out," and its last recurrence had been memorable to her. She remembered it well as she sat under her maid's hands, and suffered herself to be attired far more splendidly than usual. She took a secret pleasure in forcing upon her own attention the contrast between the past and the present on this night. When her toilet was an accomplished fact, she stood before her glass and gazed upon her radiant figure, clothed in the richest white satin, and decorated with the valuable and quaintly-set diamonds which had been her mother's sole legacy to her, and a thrill of irrepressible triumph ran through her whole frame. She felt her own beauty as she had never felt it before; and she acknowledged that it was very pleasant to have the means of adorning it so lavishly, of adding so much to its power. Her toilet-table was covered with cases in which gems of great value and beauty were nestled away in green-velvet niches, or displayed boastfully upon backgrounds of satin; but she had left them all undisturbed; her mother's diamonds should be her only ornaments that night. She desired her maid to bring more lights, and set them about the room, so as to show her her own figure in every point of view. The woman obeyed, with some surprise: this was not like Mrs. Streightley, who, though inordinately extravagant, was not practically vain, with the kind of vanity which impresses itself upon the attention of a waiting-woman.

She was looking over her white shoulder at the reflection in the long glass behind her, and her maid was standing by with a heap of soft white wrapping drapery on her arm, when Robert knocked at the door of her dressing-room. She bade him "come in" in a pleasant voice, and he did so.

"The carriage is waiting. Are you nearly ready?" he said. And then stopped short, and looked at her, literally dazzled with her exceeding beauty. Thus he had seen her a year ago, the first time he had dined at her father's house, dressed for a ball—a ball at Mrs. Pendarvis's too—a ball he had heard mentioned with a kind of hopeless envy. And she had gone down stairs to the carriage with him then. How well he remembered it, how distinctly he saw it all! —the head-dress she had added to her dinner-array, the white cloak—was this which he took from the maid and tenderly placed around her the same? he wondered. It looked like it; but it was another, ten times more costly than Miss Guyon had ever worn. Again he saw the smile, the bow, from the corner of the carriage; again he heard Mr. Guyon's "Don't stand there, Streightley; come in." And he felt like a man who has formerly seen in a dream things now passing before his eyes.

He could not speak before her servant, so he trusted to a glance to tell his wife how beautiful he thought her. He saw immediately that among the jewels she wore were none of his gifts, and he said, with some hesitation,

"You do not honor my selection much, Katharine. Would not your bracelet go with your other ornaments, dear?"

A splendid serpent, a glittering mass of brilliants, with emerald eyes and protruded ruby tongue, lay on the table. He took it up as he spoke. Katharine looked half disposed to refuse; then she said gayly,

"Never mind if it does contradict the quaint old roses and crescents; I'll wear it, Robert. Put it on, please—there." And she held out her round white arm.

It was a trifling incident, but it meant a great deal to Robert Streightley; so much, that when they were seated in the carriage he thanked her with all the ardor of a lover. He told her he had never seen her half so beautiful; he reminded her—he who rarely dared to refer to the past—of the first time he had seen her dressed for a ball, and told her what a vision of beauty, what an enchantress she had appeared to him then—what an unending spell she had cast upon him. There was no wrath, no bitterness in Katharine's heart that night, though the remembrances evoked were all of the kind calculated to provoke them. Time, and the unfailing, persevering love of this man—love which she wondered at, and which had begun to touch her heart—were working on her proud nature. She listened to him with a smile, with a faint, beautiful blush. She was glad that she had pleased him; it was not hard to do so: to wear a gorgeous ornament like that, and be thanked for it, was not a great sacrifice. To be so passionately admired by one's own husband was not unpleasant. Katharine was quite aware that it was not a very common case. Their carriage fell into the line; the light of many lamps was flitting about. She threw her cloak off the arm that bore the bracelet, and admired

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the splendid jewel, rippling with many-colored light:

"It is extremely beautiful, Robert," she said. "I like it better than any of your presents. It was your first, you know."

He did know; and he also knew that this was the first, the very first word he had ever heard from his wife's lips which implied any sentiment concerning the past connected with him. A fresh tide of hope and joy welled up in his heart; and as she laid her hand lightly in his, and let it rest there until their turn had come, and the carriage drew up under the striped awning, surrounded with a gaping crowd of idlers collected to see the ball-goers, Robert Streightley was happier than he had ever been in his life before.

Mrs. Pendarvis's house was large, but the fashion and success of a ball appear to depend on the disregard of proportion between the room and company; and when it is said that this ball was brilliantly successful, it becomes unnecessary to state that it was excessively crowded. Robert and Katharine were detained for some time on the staircase, but the delay was not tedious; for they encountered a few scores of their acquaintances, and Robert had the satisfaction, which in his present happy mood was unmixed, of observing the universal admiration excited by his lovely wife. At the top of the first flight of stairs there was a large recess, or rather room, beautifully hung with muslin and lace, and profusely decorated with flowers and odorous plants. A few route-seats were placed in this apartment, which was only a little less crowded than the dancing-rooms and the staircase. When Robert and Katharine reached this temporary harbor they found Lady Henmarsh in possession of one of the seats, and were immediately greeted by her with her accustomed warmth.

"Miss Gould is here, of course?" asked Katharine.

"Yes, she is dancing. How well you are looking, Katharine! I see you are wearing your diamonds to-night; very becoming indeed; that serpent is beautiful. You have such taste, Mrs. Streightley."

"Come, Robert, we must really try to make our bow to Mrs. Pendarvis," said Katharine, rather impatiently; and they proceeded on their journey to the second floor. There they found Mrs. Pendarvis, and several of Katharine's habitual partners. In a minute she had joined the throng in the dancing-room, and Robert was engaged in the double task of squeezing himself into as small a space as possible along the door-jamb, and trying to follow his wife's graceful figure through the distracting evolutions of a valse. When he had succeeded in seeing her through two or three rounds, he thought he would go down and find Lady Henmarsh · and he was just moving for the purpose, when a lady and gentleman came past him from the dancing-room, and the lady stopped and held out her hand. It was Hester Gould, beautifully dressed, in the highest spirits, and looking unusually well, even handsome, as Robert felt instinctively in the moment during which his eyes rested on her. It was only a moment, however, for they turned to her companion. The gentleman with whom Miss Gould had been dancing, with whom she was now going in search of Lady Henmarsh, was Gordon Frere.

Katharine had seen him also. In a whirl of the valse her eyes had met his as she and her partner passed him and his. She saw his fair hair, his blue eyes, the smile she remembered so well; she heard his low, pleasant laugh, and at the same instant he looked at her and she at him, and they were apart again. Then he led Hester from the dancing-room, and down to the canopied recess where Lady Henmarsh sat, and where he remained for some time laughing and chatting with his animated and attractive partner. He had seen Katharine, and the result had been just what he had told Yeldham he knew it would be. He was ready to acknowledge her as beautiful and fascinating as ever, but he did not mind seeing her a bit now. He would have been an ass to have married at all in his circumstances, and she did quite right to make a good match when she got the chance. She shouldn't have flirted with him and jilted him as she had done, to be sure; but then women were all alike, and it hadn't hurt him much after all. He was delighted to see her looking so well, and to believe that she was very happy; and, by Jove, he was going to enjoy himself, and not think about love and marriage until he could afford such luxuries.

Lady Henmarsh had felt an acute pang of fear when she recognized Gordon Frere; but she soon quieted it by the timely reflection that no one could prove her share in the transactions of the past, and no one could unmarry Katharine, or take the money he had made by the marriage out of cousin Ned's pocket.

"I hope Katharine won't make a fool of herself," she thought, as she watched her ascend the stairs with her husband, and thought of the inevitable meeting before her; "but if she is inclined to do it, nobody can prevent her, and it's no business of mine. What can have brought the idle young fool back, I wonder? I thought he was safe for five years at least, and then promotion to Russia, or some equally desirable place." And when Hester Gould brought Gordon Frere down to the recess, Lady Henmarsh read in her face that she was pleased with the young man, and desirous that she should be gracious to him; so, as Lady Henmarsh found it convenient to further Miss Gould's pleasure just then to the utmost of her power, she was gracious to Gordon Frere, congratulated him on his return to London, and gave him to understand that Sir Timothy would be charmed to see him at Cavendish Square.

The ball terminated as brilliantly as it had begun, and Katharine was the gayest of the gay, the brightest of the bright. She staid very late,

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and she danced incessantly. Again and again she found herself close to Gordon Frere, and once she was so placed that she had to choose between speaking to him and "cutting him dead." She took counsel of her pride; she remembered that if, as seemed likely, he was remaining in London, she must necessarily meet him often, and she decided on speaking to him. They were on the staircase, she going down, he coming up, with Hester on his arm—he had danced several times with her that night, as Katharine had remarked—when she bowed to him and said,

"How do you do, Mr. Frere? Have you been long in town?"

"A few days only, Mrs. Streightley. I hope Mr. Guyon is well?"

"Quite well, thank you."

Again she bowed, and passed him; and thus they met and parted, who, when last they met, had parted with the brightest and most blessed hope which ever gilds life for youth and love.

Robert and Katharine drove home in silence, which each hoped might be imputed by the other to fatigue. With her remembrance was busy, with him remorse and shame.

CHAPTER XX.

MARRIED FOR LOVE.

Mrs. Streightley met Gordon Frere frequently during the remainder of the month of June. She met him at balls and dinner-parties, at fêtes and promenades, and riding in the Park. She was distantly civil on these occasions; and he carefully, but reluctantly, modeled his demeanor on hers. "She is so awfully stiff and stand-offish," he would say to himself, when Katharine had bowed to him coldly or spoken in a tone of icy indifference; "it seems almost as if she couldn't forgive herself. I'm sure I forgive her; more than that—by Jove! I'm very much obliged to her. We should both have been up a tree by this time if we had been married, Treasury appointment notwithstanding. What a beauty she is, though! and Streightley's not half a bad fellow either, though we used to make such fun of him. 'The City man' she called him, like a deceitful minx as she was, and she going to marry him all the time! However, I must not think of that, or I shall be getting angry again." And from this soliloquy, and from others like it, in which he indulged, it would appear that Mr. Gordon Frere's sentiments were not of the deep and lasting order, and that his friend Yeldham had formed a tolerably correct estimate of his character. He was of that constitution, and at that time of life, when a few months seem like an eternity; and he had come back to London fancy-free, and if a little wiser, a little more capable of acting from interested motives, not materially corrupted. He would not, probably, allow himself to fall in love with any woman for the future whom it would be imprudent to marry, but neither would he marry any woman, no matter how rich, whom he could not love.

Katharine's demeanor toward Gordon Frere was an unspeakable relief to Robert Streightley, whose first impulsive feeling on seeing Frere was dread of an explanation, which might lead to a discovery. His brief vision of happiness was dispelled by the sight of the young man's face, and he shrunk with a painful reluctance from the interchange of the ordinary civilities of society with one whom he had so deeply injured. In vain did he try to find relief in the remembrance of all that Katharine had gained by her marriage with him; in vain did he watch the happy *insouciance*, the heart-whole gayety of Frere, and argue from them the lightness and instability of the sentiment with which he had regarded Katharine. His conscience was awake, and not any sophistry could lull it to sleep again.

Mr. Guyon had been among the earliest of Gordon Frere's former acquaintances to hear of his abandonment of diplomatic life and his return to London. He was aware of these circumstances before he received one of cousin Hetty's confidential little notes, in which she mentioned, in a tone of alarm and judicious warning, having seen Mr. Frere at Mrs. Pendarvis's ball. Mr. Guyon had met his young friend a day before that festivity; had joked with him pleasantly about his "butterfly" qualities; had congratulated him upon his return to the centre of civilization; and had asked him whether he had met the Streightleys—all with a pleasant impudence which Gordon Frere was fairly forced to admire, and found it impossible to resent. Mr. Guyon was not for a moment visited by the misgivings which had disturbed his more sensitive son-in-law; but he divined that Robert, for whom he entertained, in certain respects, a good-natured contempt, would be uncomfortable about Frere's return, and he resolved to console him, at the risk of offending his pride by the momentary revival of a subject never mentioned between them. Accordingly, he dropped in to breakfast at Portland Place two days after the ball and the meeting, and found, as he expected, his son-in-law alone.

"Katharine not down? Nothing wrong, I hope?" asked the affectionate parent.

"Oh no; she's a little tired after the Opera and a couple of parties, and she is going to Richmond to-day, so she is resting this morning."

"Indeed! very sensible of her. She staid late at Mrs. Pendarvis's, didn't she?"

"Yes," replied Robert, shortly and uneasily.

Mr. Guyon looked at him, and their eyes met.

"So Frere was there?" said the indomitable Mr. Guyon, as airily and pleasantly as if he were mentioning the most agreeable trifle. "Rather awkward, on the whole; and yet I don't know—all for the best, perhaps. He will probably marry well, and the sooner the better for him and for us."

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"For us?" asked Robert, timidly. And there was a shade of pain, and something like shame on his face, which would have hurt a sensitive observer, but which merely annoyed Mr. Guyon, who found it difficult to repress a sneer as he replied,

"And us, of course—that is, if we need care about the matter one way or the other, which I don't see that we need."

"But if Katharine should have any conversation, any confidence with him?" faltered Robert.

"There is not the faintest possibility of any such danger," said Mr. Guyon, with equal composure and decision. "I understand Katharine much better than you do, Robert, and I know that our invulnerable safety"—the younger man flushed and winced a little at the words—"consists in her indomitable pride. The one individual of all her acquaintance who will never exchange a confidential sentence with Katharine is Mr. Gordon Frere." And then Mr. Guyon promptly dropped the subject, and talked of money, racing, betting, and other serious pursuits of life, and after a short time took his leave of Robert, leaving him reassured, but with a fresh and bitter sense of humiliation.

The time which had wrought so rapid a change in Gordon Frere—which had taught him to regard with forgiveness, which almost bordered on approbation, the fickleness and treachery of the woman against whom he had delivered the valedictory philippic—which Charles Yeldham remembered with wonder and bewilderment—had worked considerable alteration in Katharine's mood as well. Her fine nature had been hardened, her generous temper had been warped; a crust of worldliness and selfishness had formed over the hot heart, and the trustful impulses of youth were dead within her; but the maddening anger, the intolerable mortification, had subsided. A momentary thrill of these former emotions, mingled with the yearning of the heart toward the object of a passion, or even a fancy, had passed over her when, in the crush and whirl of the ballroom, she had recognized Frere. But her strength of will and self-command had effectually put it down before the moment came when she found herself obliged to speak to him.

Something like the tumult of the past renewed itself in her mind when she found herself alone that night, and at liberty to think of the occurrences of that evening; but it did not last. Mr. Guyon was right. Any calculation founded on Katharine's pride could not fail, and that pride helped her in the very first hour of the resuscitation of the past. Believing as she did that there never had been any sincerity in the sentiment which Gordon Frere had affected toward her, she did not recognize change in the gay and unembarrassed manner which she had immediately observed; she imputed it to the discarding of the mask, the abandonment of the comedy, and so thinking, she wondered that she felt so little anger, so little disdain, so little emotion of any kind, all things considered. She recalled to memory every circumstance of that terrible day which had undeceived her; she recollected it, hour by hour, in its anguish of suspense, in its paroxysms of grief and anger; she remembered the faint deadly sickness which had come over her, and the dreadful despairing hours of the night. But she only remembered these things; she did not feel them again; and Katharine knew that with the last throbs of anger had passed away the last lingerings of her love for Gordon Frere. It had been real, very true, and fervent; and no doubt, had he returned it, as he had taught her to believe he did, it would have lasted through all the chances and changes of this mortal life; but it was dead and gone now, and the sight of him taught her that it was so. Before Katharine's eyes closed that night, after her long vigil of remembrances and reflections, she knew that she should, in all the future, meet Gordon Frere without any painful emotion beyond a little irrepressible contempt.

She was soon put to the test; for the acquaintance between Frere and Lady Henmarsh progressed rapidly, and Katharine was not spared the sight or the mention of him. Lady Henmarsh would not have put herself out of her way to annoy Katharine, but she was not unwilling to do so when it happened to come in her way; and she took an early opportunity of confiding to her her impression that Hester Gould was decidedly smitten with the good-looking young fellow, who really had no harm in him, and whose only fault was want of money.

"He is really charming, Kate," Lady Henmarsh observed, with an air of candidly admitting a former error in judgment. "I was quite too hard on him in old times—an age ago—and I am ready to admit it. Of course *that* would never have done; but every thing is all right now, and I am sure you are the happiest girl in the world; and as for that dear Mr. Streightley, he is a perfect prince."

Katharine had to bear this sort of thing, and she bore it well, wondering sometimes that it did not pain her more keenly. She gave little heed to Lady Henmarsh's hints about Hester Gould, which she imputed to a general impulse of spite, and simply contented herself with smiling rather bitterly as she thought how accurately they would once have hit their mark. When she met Gordon Frere now, there was no glamour between her eyes and him. He was not invested with the golden halo of a girl's fancy. The time which had gone over Katharine's head, though brief in duration, had been long in meaning, and she was no longer the slave of her imagination. She saw him as he really was—a pleasant, kindly, genial, well-bred, well-looking, shallow young man, with brains enough and heart enough for the exigencies of society, and admirably fitted to be rich and idle, with distinction and popularity. She knew now that he was not a man who would ever accomplish any great or noble purpose in life—not a man on whom a woman's heart could stay itself in trouble. Somehow she felt that she had outgrown and outlived Gordon Frere.

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While one woman, to whom he had been the incarnation of the fondest and fairest visions of youth, was thus thinking of Mr. Frere, he had assumed a position of immense importance in the estimation of another—a woman widely different from Katharine in every thing. When Hester Gould met him at Mrs. Pendarvis's ball, she had been attracted toward him chiefly by curiosity. She remembered him well as the fair-haired young man whom she had seen at the memorable promenade, and whom she had immediately discerned to be Katharine Guyon's lover. She strongly suspected that he and the girl had both been victims of some foul play, the full details of which her subsequent acquaintance with the affairs of Mr. Guyon and his son-in-law had not enabled her to ascertain; but that he, at least, had suffered at Mr. Guyon's unscrupulous hands she did not doubt. Gordon had heard that the "old cat," as he had irreverently called Lady Henmarsh on a former occasion, was "taking a new heiress about with her;" for such was the simple phrase in which the ingenuous youth of his set described Hester's relations with her friend; and when, on his paying his respects to Lady Henmarsh at Mrs. Pendarvis's ball, she had presented him to Miss Gould, he concluded, as he led his partner to the dancing-room, that she was the "new heiress" in question. Thus he too felt some curiosity about the girl, whose tranquil, easy manner, keen dark eyes, elegant and tasteful dress, and conversation utterly free from the missishness and the vapidity common to young ladies just "out," made her an interesting person, apart from the very large fortune which she undoubtedly possessed, and which was multiplied by rumor with its accustomed liberality. Gordon would have been considerably astonished had he known that Miss Gould saw the glance in which his eyes and Katharine's met, and perfectly understood and appreciated the position; had he known that she marked the short dialogue which passed between them on the staircase, and noted the coldness and distance of its tone with distinct satisfaction. He and she talked with more animation, and of subjects of more worth and interest, than those usually discussed at a ball; for even a shallow man like Gordon Frere was forced to think a little when he found himself talking to a woman like Hester Gould, and they got on together very well indeed; but the unconscious accord of their thoughts was greater and closer still.

Curiosity, interest, and the spontaneous admiration which he was certain to excite in every woman whom he addressed, had been the first feelings with which Hester Gould had regarded Gordon Frere on that evening. Before she entered the carriage to which he escorted her and Lady Henmarsh, her admiration had increased, her interest had deepened. The calm, well-governed heart, which held itself aloof from passion, and had never loved any living being entirely without calculation and caution, had been surprised, like the weakest, like the least-guarded. Hester Gould had fallen in love—ay, like the veriest sentimental school-girl—at first sight, with Gordon Frere.

She did not deny the fact to herself—she did not deceive herself. It was characteristic of her to be perfectly conscious that she was weak, but not to disguise from herself the weakness. Hester Gould had never been visited by even the most transient feeling to which she could assign the name of love before; and now, when it came, she knew it, she recognized it, she acknowledged it—not with misgiving, not with despair, not with self-contempt. When she was alone that night, or rather in the early summer morning, her ball-dress laid aside, her maid dismissed, she threw open the window of her dressing-room, and sat down where the cool morning air came in and fanned her dark but radiant face. The time wore on, and the sun came out strongly, and the stir of life began, but still Hester sat, gazing out toward the stately leafy trees in Kensington Gardens, and thinking. For the first time in her life she suffered the tide of strong emotion to sweep over her unchecked; for the first time in her life she felt its fullness. Secretly but desperately she had rebelled against poverty and obscurity; secretly, thirstingly, she had longed for wealth. Poverty and obscurity were things of the past; wealth had come to her, and she had taken it calmly. No human being could ever have guessed at the exultation with which Hester Gould had entered upon the possession of her fortune; no human being could ever have divined the intense secret pleasure which every day's enjoyment of it gave her. But what was it all to this? What was it all to the strange new delight, the sweet, subtle hope that stole upon her now? Not until she had thought long, deeply, delightfully, over every little incident of the evening, did Hester's mind revert to Katharine Streightley; and then, so potent was the influence of the spell under which the calm self-possessed woman had fallen, that there was only an acknowledgment of the strangeness of the coincidence; there was not a single thrill of vindictive exultation in the remembrance that they, the rivals, had changed places; that the man whom Hester told herself she loved, told herself she hoped to win, was the man whom Katharine had loved and lost. All such thoughts seemed infinitely beneath her now, quite lost in the immensity of this new interest in her life, and they could never more have any power over her. But, though passion had suddenly invaded the well-guarded territory of Hester Gould's heart, romance had no place in her nature, and she did not for a moment forget or undervalue the advantages of her wealth. "*If* he only comes to love me," she said, "there will be no obstacle. I am rich enough to make it a wise thing for him to marry me." And with this, the last waking thought in her mind, Hester Gould slept, with a smile upon her face which had never before irradiated it.

It was not until they had met several times

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that Gordon Frere began to think seriously about Hester Gould. He had been asked to two dinner-parties at Lady Henmarsh's, and had been especially distinguished by the gracious attentions of the hostess. On neither occasion had he met Katharine; but on both Mr. Guyon had been present, and they had got on capitally. The convenient memory and the *savoir vivre* of cousin Ned were displayed to perfection in circumstances of the kind, and Gordon Frere felt quite at his ease. They talked of the Streightleys. Mr. Guyon described Middlemeads; hoped that his young friend would have an opportunity of judging of its beauties for himself; jocularly counseled his young friend to marry, provided he could do it *well*, as soon as possible. "Never too soon, my dear fellow—never too soon. I was a mere boy myself," said Mr. Guyon, with a comic sort of confidential sentiment; and discovered that he was keeping his young friend away from the ladies.

When Mr. Gordon Frere had been seen a few times riding with Miss Gould in the Row, and had been observed dancing with her in an abnormal number of dances, his friends began to make remarks of the kind elegantly called "chaff" on the occurrences. It is not to be supposed, because they have not appeared in these pages, that there were not many aspirants to the hand and fortune of the shipowner's heiress. Their name, indeed, was legion; but they had all fared equally ill, and not one of the number had any reason to feel himself personally aggrieved by the evident progress of Frere in Miss Gould's good graces. So the chorus was rather congratulatory, the aspirants were good-natured in the main; and though each would have been delighted to secure Miss Gould's fortune for himself, they all agreed that Frere was a good fellow, though an idle dog, who would never make any hand of himself, and it would be a doosid good thing for him. As for Hester, though she made no unfeminine or unladylike advances, she was far too sensible to risk her happiness on punctilio. "I am not the first woman he will have loved, if he ever comes to love me," she thought; "but he is the only man I ever have loved, I ever can love, and that makes all the difference." So she treated him from the first with undisguised though unostentatious preference; and, fully acknowledging to herself that her heart's desire and prayer was to become his wife, never endangered her chance by the slightest coquetry or insincerity.

The light and facile nature of Gordon Frere was exactly calculated to insure the success of such a policy, which, however, was rather the instinct of Hester Gould's good sense. He liked her, he thought her handsome and clever. "Not a star of beauty, not a queen of grace and loveliness, like *her*, you know," said Mr. Frere to a friend of his with whom, in times which seemed very long past now, he had been wont to take counsel, and who listened to him with a gravely-amused expression of countenance and much internal satisfaction—"nothing of that kind, but a real nice girl. As sensible as a judge, sir!—a long way more so than some of them, I believe—and really fond of me. Don't think me a coxcomb, Charley, or an ass, as I was before. This is quite another case; and, by Jove, I am as sure as that I am sitting here in this everlasting old glory-hole, where I don't believe the very dust ever changes or blows away, that if I asked Miss Gould to-morrow to marry me, she would say yes."

"Very good, Gordon," returned his friend. "Then, if you want her to marry you, and you are positively sure you would marry her if she hadn't sixpence—which is the extreme proposition you have stated here three times over, and which is one of those things of which no man can be more than comparatively sure—ask her to-morrow, or on the first opportunity, and come and tell me the result. And now I must turn you out. I have an appointment with Claypole in five minutes, and some papers to look over before he comes."

Mr. Frere went gayly away, and Charles Yeldham did not turn immediately to the papers which lay upon his desk. He walked up and down the room, his hands deep in his pockets, and his head bent. At length he sat down with an impatient sigh and a muttered sentence:

"To think that fourteen months ago he considered himself madly in love with Katharine Guyon! What a blessing it must be to a man to be endowed with the nature of a butterfly!"

Gordon Frere's modest statement of his hopes and expectations was justified by the result, and the flagging spirits of society at the end of the season were raised by learning that a marriage was "arranged" between Miss Gould, who was of course beautiful and accomplished for the occasion, and Mr. Gordon Frere, whose ancestral glories and diplomatic connections were also duly paraded.

Katharine had left town some little time before this announcement had supplied a fresh topic for discussion to the few scores of people who knew or felt any curiosity about the respective parties. Her premature abandonment of the delights of London arose from the condition of her husband's health. Robert had been constantly looking and occasionally complaining of feeling ill for several weeks, and at length had acknowledged to his sister that he exceedingly desired the rest and tranquillity of the country.

"I don't think he is so much ill as worried," Ellen had said to her sister-in-law. And the simple girl was right. Robert was worried—worried about money-matters, worried about Mr. Guyon's affairs, and his insatiable, irrepressible scheming. But, worse than all, he was worried by self-reproach.

It was no sacrifice to Katharine to leave town; but if it had been one, she would not have hesitated to make it. It was therefore at Middlemeads, in the tranquil enjoyment of her beautiful home, invested with all the first golden glory of the autumn, that Katharine learned the news,

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the great news, which lent eloquence to Ellen Streightley's pen, and caused her to "gush" on paper as she was wont to do in speech. It was not, however, to her ingenuous sister-in-law that Katharine owed her knowledge of the brilliancy of the marriage, the number and importance of the guests, the details of the bride's dress, the high spirits of the bridegroom, the *itinéraire* of the bridal tour, and the winter plans of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Frere. When the event had taken place, and Lady Henmarsh's occupation as a chaperone was for the second time gone; when she had inspected and sufficiently admired the costly set of rubies which she had received as a parting gift from the heiress, and had declared that she detested weddings, and was tired to death, she could think of no more agreeable way of passing an idle evening than in writing to Mrs. Streightley. Her letter was very smart, clever, and skillful, as all her letters were, and if it did not wound Katharine's feelings so much as the writer intended, its failure was to be imputed to a change in her mind and feelings, of which Lady Henmarsh was entirely ignorant.

The engagement had not been a long one; neither party had had any motive for delay; but it was by quite an accidental coincidence that Gordon Frere and Hester Gould were married on the anniversary of Katharine Guyon's wedding-day.

CHAPTER XXI.

MARRIED TO MONEY.

The time, so often deferred, at which Mr. Guyon was to pay his first visit to his daughter in her country house had at length arrived, and the old gentleman made his appearance at Middlemeads with all the advantages of a very juvenile toilet and a new stock of those adjuncts to his personal beauty which he was in the habit of carrying about with him. It was not without reluctance that Mr. Guyon bade adieu to London, which he was accustomed to speak of as "the little village," and its delights; but he felt it absolutely necessary to make himself personally acquainted with that country house which he had so often depicted to his boon companions in the most glowing terms, and with those country families whom, to the same confidants, he had represented as reveling in the elegant and unostentatious hospitality of the British merchant. He had been a little chaffed by these friends about the calm manner in which his daughter had borne his long-continued separation from her. Some of them compared him to King Lear, some to Captain Costigan; and Mr. Guyon, who knew very little about either of the historical personages between whom and himself a comparison was instituted, thought it was "dam' low," and that the sooner all chance of a repetition of such joking was put a stop to the better.

So the old gentleman came down to Middlemeads, and took up his quarters in one of the best spare rooms, and strove to make himself agreeable to other people and to enjoy himself simultaneously. This was not very difficult, for he had a grand capacity for living; and his small-talk and geniality, and stories of grand people, made quite an impression among the neighboring families, who thought Mrs. Streightley rather conceited, and Mr. Streightley very dull. Mr. Guyon in a very short time had made himself thoroughly at home, and had taken upon himself—not without Katharine's tacit consent; indeed, the whole affair rather amused her than otherwise—the direction of affairs at Middlemeads, and the regulation of the manner in which the day should be spent. He it was who organized the *tableaux* to which the whole county was invited, which were such a grand success, and which were commemorated in the *Morning Post*. He it was who arranged for the first meet of the season of the stag-hounds on the Middlemeads lawn, and for the hunt-breakfast at his son-in-law's expense. Robert Streightley was unfortunately compelled to be away in London on business on that interesting occasion; but in his absence Mr. Guyon took the chair, in which he comported himself with the greatest dignity and hospitality; and when the deer was uncarted, waved his hat to the ladies, and rode away after it on one of his son-in-law's horses, to his own intense satisfaction.

Robert Streightley was very frequently compelled to be away in London on business just at that time; and when he was at home, he seemed to have left his mind behind him among the ledgers, and the invoices, and the share-lists, and to have left his spirits—God knows where! He was thoroughly preoccupied and gloomy, never speaking except when spoken to, and then replying with an obvious effort at the collection of his wandering thoughts. Mr. Guyon noticed this immediately after his arrival, and tried to rally his son-in-law, commencing with much pleasant badinage about the accumulation of wealth by the sale of one's self to the Evil One; an oft-used joke, which he had never known to miss fire hitherto, but which on this occasion was received with perfect silence. Over the quiet dinner, which as it once or twice happened, Mr. Guyon ate with Katharine and her husband, or in the midst of a large party, it was all the same—Robert never entered into any thing that was going on, but always remained in the same gloomy, silent, preoccupied state.

Mr. Guyon could never, even in his most amiable moods, have been called a patient man; long-suffering was not one of his virtues, and under his son-in-law's long face and absent manner he suffered acutely. His little *mots* passed unsmiled at, his anecdotes of the aristocracy evidently had not been listened to; he felt that he was throwing the pearls of his West-End refinement before City swine, and he was highly indignant. But not with Streightley—or at least he dared not openly declare his indignation to his son-in-law—it was on Katharine that he turned the heavy guns of his wrath, and re-

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buked his daughter with an acrimony which might have had serious effect on a less self-possessed young lady.

"I come here," said Mr. Guyon one morning in the library, where he had gone to write a letter, and where he found Katharine similarly employed, "I come here to your house, and I find your husband an altered man. He has lost that cheerfulness, that energy, that buoyancy which distinguished him, and, in fact, he's become a doosid unpleasant dreary bird. How's this? Cheerful before marriage, and miserable after; looks as if marriage were the cause, doesn't it, Kate? And to think that my daughter has not—not striven to—to what d'ye call—bless the lot of the man who—doubles his joys and halves his sorrows, and all that kind of thing? Am I to think that you—but no, that could not be! I must remember—"

"You must remember, papa, if you please," said Kate, looking him full in the face, and speaking in a low, stern voice, "you must remember the manner in which and the conditions under which I married my husband! And, remembering them, you must be good enough never to dare—it is a strong word to use to one's father, but I repeat it—never to dare to address me in this way again. I know my duty to my husband, and—according to my lights, and under the peculiar circumstances of our union—I do it!"

It was not to be supposed that Katharine, however devoid of that instinctive perception of love which will make the dullest of women quick to see when trouble is hanging over one dear to her, was either blind or indifferent to the depression of Robert's spirits and the change in his appearance. Toward her, individually, he was always the same—studious and eager to forward her wishes, and bounding his to making her happy; but he was preoccupied and gloomy. He was beginning to look old, too; the vigorous upright look which had been the first thing in his appearance to strike an observer, was less conspicuous than it had been, and his step was slower and heavier. His wife was not blind to the alteration, and she put it all down to the account of "business." In this general conclusion she was quite right; but Katharine had not the remotest glimmering of a suspicion that misfortune and loss were constituents of this "business." She believed her husband to be a very rich man, whose ambition it was to become very much richer, and whose life was devoted to the realization of that ambition. She had never ceased to regard him as the "City man" of their first acquaintance; and though her ideas respecting the transactions carried on by City men had undergone considerable alteration since that time, she was as far as ever from a real comprehension of the risks and the anxieties which her husband's life included. The making of money in larger or smaller sums Katharine understood to be his calling, and so far as the variation was between larger and smaller, she comprehended anxiety being involved; but as to serious loss, as to ruin, she had not the faintest notion of such a possibility. Of Mr. Guyon's transactions with her husband Mrs. Streightley was also profoundly ignorant. Robert had taken care she should be so, for his sake as well as for her own. He knew Katharine's delicacy of feeling and her pride perfectly, and he also appreciated her acuteness and keenness as they deserved. From hurt and indignant mortification at discovering that her father had taken such means to "*exploiter*" her marriage, to questioning why a clever and shrewd man of business, such as Katharine well knew Robert to be, should admit such unscrupulous demands on her father's part, would be an easy and natural transition, and Robert shrunk with terror from the idea that any such clew should ever find its way to his wife's hands. No symptom of such danger had shown itself; the feelings with which Katharine regarded her father had ceased to be of a kind to prompt her to much personal interest in his affairs, and by nature she was not inquisitive. That Mr. Guyon's pursuits were frivolous in the extreme; that he presented that most contemptible of spectacles —an old man aping the dissolute manners of an objectionable order of youth, Katharine was becoming more and more painfully aware; but she looked no deeper into his life than the surface, from which she turned away with a feeling which, had she investigated it, she must have acknowledged to be contempt.

The nobility of Katharine's nature asserted itself in the manner in which she regarded the marriage of Gordon Frere and Hester Gould. That the intelligence should not cost her a pang of exceeding keenness was impossible; but she did battle with herself against the temptations to bitterness and enmity against Hester which beset her, and she came nobly out of the strife. Little did she dream how closely her demeanor was scrutinized; little did she imagine that the bright dark eyes of the obsequious Mr. Daniel Thacker, perhaps the humblest of Mrs. Streightley's servants and the most respectful of her admirers, were steadily directed to her face for many days during his stay at Middlemeads, with the purpose of reading what might appear on that fair dial indicative of storm and turmoil in her heart. She had no suspicion that she was watched; but, as she also had nothing whatever to hide, there was no danger in her unconsciousness. The brief sharp pain she endured had come and passed when she was alone. She remembered how she had envied Hester Gould her wealth only because it left her free to marry as she liked; she remembered her own bitter saying, "she may buy instead of being bought," and she thought it had been strangely realized. But she would not be unjust either to Hester Gould or to her own false lover. She would acknowledge that Hester had many attractions other than her wealth; she would acknowledge her fair share of beauty, her talents, her good manners, the numerous charms which might easily secure a genuine attachment. She was

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ready to believe that Gordon Frere might really love Hester, and the more ready, as she had reason to know the shallowness and fickleness of his nature. "I dare say he cares for her as much as he cared for me," Katharine thought, "and in this case he can afford to indulge his fancy—in mine he could not. She is fortunate that he can love her and marry her, otherwise she too would find that he would love her and leave her, as he left me, to the ridicule of her friends, and a broken heart, were she fool enough to break her heart for him. And he—he has only done exactly what I did, even supposing he does not love her. He has only married for money. With this difference, to be sure—that I would have shared poverty with him, and he would not face it for me; with this other difference too, that I was in earnest, and he was only amusing himself. Our positions are pretty much the same in the end; we are both rich, we are parted from each other, and satisfied to be so, and another has the first claim on each. I have no right to despise him for the marriage he has made, nor dares he to despise *me*."

So Katharine wrote to Ellen Streightley, and expressed interest in the marriage, and hope of its happiness, which were perfectly sincere, and were most welcome to the recipient of her letter. She treated the subject with polite indifference in her reply to Lady Henmarsh. She understood cousin Hetty tolerably well, and disdained the spitefulness which she perceived too thoroughly to stoop to retaliation. It was a fortunate circumstance for Robert that his sister had remained with her mother at the Brixton villa after Miss Gould's marriage, and thus no occasion arose for the lengthened and frequent discussion of the event. Had Ellen been at Middlemeads, she would have talked about the wedding to an embarrassing extent. As it was, his reluctance to mention Gordon Frere's name —a reluctance which Katharine did not suspect—was seconded by her own, which Robert's state of mind prevented him from surmising; and after a mere formal comment, whose insufficiency, considering the intimacy subsisting between the Streightleys and Miss Gould, did not fail to strike Mr. Thacker, the subject was dropped. He tried to talk about the wedding, at which he had been present, and at which his sisters had officiated as bridesmaids, but he had not courage to persevere in the face of Robert's silence and the well-bred coldness of Katharine's manner, which plainly implied that the matter was one wholly devoid of interest to her; but, of course, if Mr. Thacker chose to pursue that topic of conversation, she was bound to listen and to reply.

Life at Middlemeads proceeded much as usual, except that the amusements of autumn were substituted for those of spring. There was no other change in the aspect of affairs at the stately and luxurious country house over which Katharine presided with grace and dignity which seemed to grow more and more remarkable. Her beauty was at its zenith now, and no doubt the subsidence of all angry and impetuous feeling, the "settling down" which had taken place within the past year, had told upon her physically as well as morally. She had not, indeed, acted upon Mrs. Stanbourne's advice in its spirit. She had not faced the fact that the greatest of all her obligations toward her husband was the obligation to love him. She had not tried to realize that, and in so far the change in her was maimed and incomplete. But she had kept the letter of her promise to her friend, and ruled her life with more consideration for her husband than in the earlier days of their marriage. Had there been no obstacle, as unfortunately there was, in the secret bound in Robert's conscience, to a perfect understanding between the husband and wife, it might have come about at this period, when Gordon Frere's marriage had completed the severance of the past from Katharine's present life.

Mrs. Stanbourne was at Middlemeads shortly after the marriage of Gordon and Hester, and had been even more anxious than before to find Katharine on good terms with Robert. She was about to leave England for an indefinite time, and she would fain have gone away leaving her young kinswoman more intent on happiness, and less intent on pleasure, than she had found her on her first visit to Middlemeads. Observation had but increased her respect and regard for Robert Streightley, and she now noticed his depressed and careworn manner with sincere regret. She was at a loss to what origin to ascribe it, for things were far better, in a domestic point of view, than they had been in the spring. Had Mrs. Stanbourne met Mr. Guyon at Middlemeads, she might have discerned at least a portion of the truth, bringing, as she would have done, clearer notions of "business" than those of Katharine to aid her observations; but that gentleman avoided her with a persistent caution, for which, while far from divining its motives, she was unfeignedly grateful. Mrs. Stanbourne could not have thoroughly understood Mr. Guyon, had she had ever so favorable an opportunity of detecting him; but she despised him intuitively, and had often taken herself to task for the unreasoning dislike with which he inspired her.

"My dear Kate, what quantities of money you spend on furniture!" said Mrs. Stanbourne to Katharine a day or two before she left Middlemeads. She had entered the morning-room, and found Mrs. Streightley looking over an upholsterer's pattern-book, while a "young man" stood by, awaiting her decision and her orders. She had given them, and the young man had taken his departure, charged by Katharine to have certain articles ready for her inspection by a certain day of the ensuing week.

"Do I?" asked Katharine, absently. "Well, perhaps I do; but I did not choose the things here myself, you know; and then, I like change."

"May I ask what you are changing now, Kate?"

"Oh dear, yes, of course. It's my dressing-

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room furniture. I hate that walnut-wood, it looks so brittle; and I was quite delighted with Lady Kilmantan's rooms, so I am going to have just the same. They will be charming, with a conservatory and an aviary thrown out on the western side—just the aspect, you know."

"But your present conservatory is a splendid one, Kate, to say nothing of your acre of glass at the gardens."

"But I don't care for that great show thing; I want one of my own, that no one can go into except I specially invite them, and where I can choose the flowers myself, and put common flowers in if I please, and not be dictated to by the gardeners. See, here are the plans; charming, are they not? Here's to be a delicious little fountain, and the floor is to be white marble."

"Very pretty, Kate, but also very expensive. Don't think me intrusive, dear, or impertinent, if I say again I think you spend a very great deal of money. Mr. Streightley is very rich, I believe; do you know how rich?"

"N-not exactly," said Kate, hesitatingly. "I know nothing about his income, except that he tells me to do just as I like. People talk of him to me as a 'City magnate,' and as if there were no end to his money."

"Have you any idea how much you spend yourself, Kate, in a year?"

"No, I have not. Every thing of this kind"—and she waved her hand, to indicate the room in which they were sitting, with its luxurious appointments—"Mr. Streightley arranges for. I have nothing to do with money except for my private expenses, dress, and that, and I have not had any bills yet."

"I fancy they will surprise you when they arrive, Kate. But, if Mr. Streightley has said nothing, I am perhaps taking fright unnecessarily." And then Mrs. Stanbourne rather abruptly turned the conversation to her approaching departure from England. She was to winter at Rome with her daughter and her son-in-law, and she and Katharine indulged in talking about a proposed plan for the Streightleys joining the party there. It did very well to talk about, if nothing more came of it, and the vague prospect softened the pain with which Katharine bade her friend adieu a few days later.

The alterations at Middlemeads went on briskly, and, like all alterations, exhibited a tendency to extend their scope and increase their variety. The dull wintry weather had come now, and the comfort of the luxurious house was somewhat interfered with by the presence of workmen and the disarrangement of some of the rooms. Under a momentary impression created by what Mrs. Stanbourne had said, Katharine had spoken to her husband about the cost of her intended improvements, which had now extended far beyond the narrow sphere of her own apartments. It was the first time the subject of money had been mooted between them, and Katharine's manner was slightly constrained, her pride slightly touched. She shrank from the least possibility of a rebuke, from the shade of an imputation that she had interpreted the *carte blanche* which her husband had given her too liberally. A different and more painful kind of embarrassment possessed Robert; and his over-eagerness to hide it from his wife, his stern resolution to carry out to the letter the tacit contract between them, induced him to reassure her with so much vehemence, that Katharine never gave the subject another thought, but plunged into her plans with fresh vigor and heedless extravagance.

Mrs. Streightley found the distance from London inconvenient when each day required her to pronounce a judgment upon some new pattern in furniture or hangings, or to decide for or against some piece of *virtù* or ornament of a rare and costly description. The season was dull down in Buckinghamshire; and though London was in a certain sense—the fashionable one—dull also, it would at least offer that dear delight to all who lead such lives as hers—a change, so she assented very gladly to a proposition which Robert made to her at the beginning of November that they should remove to the house in Portland Place for a month. The reason he assigned for this arrangement, on his own part, was the plea of "business," which Katharine never inquired into; and in a few days, with the ease and celerity with which rich people make even the most out-of-the-way arrangements, Katharine found herself settled in her town-house, if not with all the luxury and completeness of "the season," in very perfect comfort. She had not thought it necessary to apprise Mr. Guyon of her intention of coming up to town, nor did she let him know immediately that she had done so. On the second afternoon after her arrival in London she called at his house, but without any expectation of finding him at home. She was, however, shown into the dingy dining-room—more dingy than ever, and there her father joined her after a few minutes. He expressed all the fit and appropriate sentiments on beholding her with his usual fluency, but he did not express surprise quite successfully. This did not strike Katharine at the time; but as she drove back to Portland Place, having invited her father to dinner on the following day, she thought of it, and felt sure that he had not been surprised—in fact, that he knew she was in town.

"How very odd!" she thought; "has Robert been to see him? And if he has, why should papa not have mentioned it, and said at once he had been expecting to see me?"

"I called on papa this afternoon," she said to her husband that day at dinner, at which meal she could not help observing Robert's unusual gloom and thoughtfulness. "He is coming to dine with us to-morrow. Have you seen him yet?"

"Yes," said Robert; "he came to the office yesterday."

Some feeling like anger, but which she could not precisely define, caused Katharine to turn

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red and hot for a moment. Her husband said no more, and seemed lost in thought. Had their mistress chanced to look toward them, she would have seen a very expressive glance exchanged between the servants in attendance. The "situation" was not quite a mystery for the servants' hall, and the opinion there for some time had been that "the old 'un was a-comin' of it a deal too strong, and he'd find Streightley wouldn't stand it much longer."

Katharine felt uncomfortable, she did not know why, and she watched her father on the following day with a degree of attention she had seldom bestowed upon him of late. His manner was as jaunty, his conversation was as fluent, his juvenility was as marked, as well-preserved as ever. He was delightfully facetious; and when he told Katharine that he had all sorts of messages in charge for her from cousin Hetty, and that—gad! he had nearly forgotten the chief news of all—sentence of death against Sir Timothy; couldn't live a month, the doctors said; and as they had the power of proving the soundness of their own judgment, of course he wouldn't live a month—he made the little joke quite fascinating. Still there was something about him, and about Robert, who was a poor dissembler, which Katharine did not like, did not understand, and which made her uncomfortable. There was a fourth person present, a circumstance which each felt to be a relief. This was Ellen Streightley. Katharine had gone that afternoon to the Brixton villa, and had paid Robert's mother a visit, during which she had been as charming and agreeable as she could be when she chose. She had brought Ellen home with her, and an instinct now made her doubly glad she had done so. Robert had thanked her warmly and gratefully for her prompt attention to his mother and to Ellen, and had looked as happy as ever for a little. Somehow Katharine liked his thanks, liked his kind words; and when she wondered what was amiss, found herself hoping it was nothing involving any distress of mind to Robert.

Mr. Guyon went away early, having told his daughter he should come to breakfast on the morrow. "But I dare say I shall not see you, my dear," he added, "for Robert and I have business to talk over, and we mean to shut you out—don't we, Robert?" And the affectionate father-in-law nodded in his most airy and jovial way to Mr. Streightley. But Robert only bowed. He was immovably grave, and Katharine almost made up her mind that she would ask him what was the cause of his restraint and gloom. She never did ask the question, however, for the following day found her full of all the delightful occupations which she had planned for herself in town—found her bent on enjoying all that London had to offer during its partial eclipse, and also found her father and Robert apparently on as good terms as ever. Robert had noticed his wife's transient uneasiness, and, determined to adhere to his fatal resolution of concealment, he had applied himself to the task of hiding the truth, this time with success.

CHAPTER XXII.

STAKED.

The pallid footman, who still remained in attendance on Mr. Guyon in Queen Anne Street, had been of late leading such an easy life—had had so much time for the enjoyment of social carouses at his club, for the cultivation of female society, for the promotion of the growth of his whiskers, and other large-souled pursuits—had, above all, been enabled to indulge in his favorite luxury of lying in bed late o' mornings to such an extent since his young mistress's marriage, that he received his master's announcement that breakfast for two must be ready at nine o'clock the next morning with disgust which he felt it difficult to restrain. As, however, he knew from experience that Mr. Guyon possessed a temper which he never gave himself the trouble of placing under much restraint, and which had hitherto vented itself in strange but particularly strong oaths, and which, as the pallid domestic feared, had a strong leaning toward the use of sticks and horsewhips, he thought it better to say nothing, and took care that the meal was ready at the appointed time.

At the appointed time Mr. Guyon entered the dining-room, seized the newspaper, and turned hurriedly to a particular spot in its columns, laid the sheet down again with a reassured air, glanced through his letters, and then, leaning his elbows on the mantel-shelf, carelessly glanced at himself in the glass. The careless glance became more attentive, more strained, and more fixed, as he noticed a curious odd expression of puffiness round his eyes, a tightness across his forehead, a full, heavy, bloodshot look in the eyeballs, and a sallow, bloated look generally. He had had a strange singing in his head the last few days, a sense of fullness and dizziness, a disagreeable notion of black specks flashing before his eyes; and as he regarded his altered appearance in the glass, he remembered these various ailments, and shook his head gravely. "This won't do, Ned?" he soliloquized, leaning his chin on his hand, and looking at his reflected image; "this *won't* do! You've gone to grief most infernally within the last few months, and you're showing signs of shutting up. You can't carry on at the pace, Ned! It's all very well for the young fellows with whom you've been living; they're fresh and strong, and can stand any thing; but you're a doosid old bird, Ned, and you're getting stiff and cranky, and all this night-work plays the devil with you! You must cut it," continued Mr. Guyon, tweaking a gray hair out of his whiskers; "you must cut it, and lie fallow for a bit. If this thing only pulls through to-day," he said, after a pause, "I'll drop the whole lot, and go off quietly to some German baths, and simmer, and stew, and drink the waters, and

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come back a new man. If it comes off! phew!" and here Mr. Guyon ran his hand through his hair. "Well, if it does not, I shall go abroad all the same, and try the sea-breezes of Boulogne."

Whether the mention of such an excursion had a singular effect on him, or whether he was really in a bad state of health, it is certain that Mr. Guyon felt so flushed and strangled at this moment that he reeled to a chair, and undid his very elaborate blue bird's-eye cravat, and loosened his shirt-collar, and sat puffing and panting for a few minutes, when he rang the bell, and ordered the pallid footman to bring him some brandy and soda-water. He had taken a few sips of this beverage, and was beginning to feel a little more himself, when a phaeton drawn by a splendid pair of chestnuts came dashing up the street, and stopped at Mr. Guyon's door. The natty groom sprung to the horses' heads; the gentleman who had been driving descended, and gave a tremendous rap, and presently the pallid footman announced "Mr. Stallbrass!"

Mr. Stallbrass, of Wood Street, Cheapside, and the Willows, Tulse Hill, was, at the former address, a Manchester warehouseman in a very large way of business; at the latter, a fine old English gentleman of large means and decidedly sporting tendencies. Cramped in early youth by the objectionable attentions of a father of commercial habits and evangelical tendencies; married when very young to the daughter of his objectionable father's senior partner, a pale little woman with drab hair and a weak spine; condemned thus to lead his City life amid long flat pasteboard boxes, and his home life amid short round Claphamite divines, Mr. Stallbrass—thanks to his glorious constitution—had had the good fortune to outlive both his father and his wife, to inherit both their fortunes, and to be able to indulge his peculiar tastes in the freest and the easiest manner. Although he still was "the firm" in Wood Street, he attended to business but rarely. How could he, indeed, when he never was absent from any of the great race-meetings in the summer, from any steeple-chase or "pugilistic revival" in the winter? To know sporting-men of all kinds, from the highest to the lowest; to call them by their Christian or nick-names; to get the office on all sporting events; have his name mentioned in *Bell* as "that real Corinthian," or as "among the *élite* present we observed—;" to have the red-jacketed touts touch their hats to him—these were the delights of life which Mr. Stallbrass coveted and which he *now* enjoyed. He had made Mr. Guyon's acquaintance in some fast society, and had been greatly impressed by the old gentleman's manners and tone, which he afterward affirmed to be "the real thing, and no flies;" and he determined to cultivate his acquaintance, though he saw at a glance all the flaws of his character. For Mr. Stallbrass was, as he himself expressed it, "a long way off a fool," and saw in an instant that any intimacy between him and Guyon could only be carried on by his opening his purse-strings, and consenting to pay, as Telemachus usually pays, for Mentor's countenance and counsel. But in this case Telemachus, though not a youth, was decidedly an aspiring man, aspiring to be one of a good set, and hitherto he had soared no higher than the outside ring of the fast stock-brokers. Old Guyon undoubtedly went into good society of its kind, and could, if he chose, pull Stallbrass up with him; so Stallbrass's house, horses, traps, and hospitality were very much at Mr. Guyon's service, and there was only one thing appertaining to Mr. Stallbrass which the old campaigner was warned off, and that was Mr. Stallbrass's purse. Of course old Guyon had made the assault in that quarter at a very early period of their acquaintance, but had been met with such a straightforward rebuff, delivered without the slightest possibility of being misunderstood, that he had from that time contented himself with his right of "free warren" over the appanages above mentioned, and never renewed the attempt.

But in every other way Mr. Stallbrass surrendered to the superior abilities, and bowed down before the more exalted position of his friend. See him now as he comes into the room—a tall, big, burly man, with a heavy grizzled beard and mustache, light drab overcoat, cutaway undercoat, blue bird's-eye cravat with a big dog's-tooth set in gold for a pin, long waistcoat, horsey tight trowsers, and gaiter boots. Mr. Stallbrass has a big white hand, on the little finger of which he wears a big horseshoe ring; a keen sunken eye, a pair of bushy brows, a swaggering gait, and a loud, strident voice. In Mr. Guyon's house, in Mr. Guyon's company, the swagger is left out of the gait, and the tones of the voice are modulated. "Chesterfield"—that is the playful name by which Mr. Stallbrass passes among his friends on the Stock Exchange—"Chesterfield," they say, "tears and ramps awfully this side Temple Bar, but old Guyon could drive him in a basket four-wheeler!"

Mr. Stallbrass, following close upon the announcement of the pallid footman, found Mr. Guyon finishing the soda-water and brandy, and stopped in the doorway, shaking his uplifted forefinger.

"Halloo, my noble Captain! Comed and cotched you in the werry act, as the man says, did I? That won't do, Major—that tells all sorts of stories of last night's hanky-panky, that does!"

"Ah! Stallbrass, my good fellow!" said Mr. Guyon, wiping his lips and rising much refreshed, but still rather tottery; "glad to see you—doosid glad. You're punctual as to—as to—you know!"

"I know! Lord bless you, I *always* know, as the man says. We're goin' to have a fine day, after all."

"I hope so; it looks like it. Make all the difference to us, eh?"

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"Well, yes. If there was to be much more mud, it would tell against Devilskin, it would! He's a light 'oss, you know, though a rare plucked 'un; but mud's the devil. Get into one of those sticky quagmires, and where are you? as the man says."

"Did you hear any thing after I left last night?"

"Yes. The Marquis came up to Jack Green's—you know old Jack Green?—and an out-and-out tout the Marquis is! He'd seen Devilskin that morning, and says he's first rate, head and tail up, fit to jump a town! The Marquis—you know why he's called the Marquis—no? Why, because he was cab-boy to Lord Waterford in the old days—the Marquis saw Griffin, who's going to ride Devilskin to-day, and he's put the pot on so far as he can go, and says there's nothing to touch him in the lot."

"I see Devilskin holds his place in the betting."

"Yes. Vixen came with a rush yesterday afternoon, I understand, but her temper's so awful her people never know what she's going to do. That's good for our side, as the man says; and besides, she can't hold a candle to the black horse—if he's meant."

"*If* he's meant! Why, good Lord! there can't be a doubt about that."

"There's *always* a doubt about any turf event, my noble Captain; and these Davidsons, who own Devilskin, are reg'lar legs, you know—legs, as the man says! But Griffin swears he means to ride on the square, and—what's the matter with you now?"

"Nothing, my dear boy, nothing. I've been a little queer these last few days, that's all. I—I suppose you've not hedged?"

"Not a penny! My book ain't so heavy as yours; at least so I gathered from what they said at Pommeroy's last night. You must have done a heavy lot, you must; but you West-End swells can stand it—that's one thing, as the man says."

"If the man said that," said Mr. Guyon, with a very ghastly smile, "he talked about what he knew nothing of. However, let's have breakfast now, and then get down to Croydon."

The breakfast, an elaborate one of the heavy sporting order—many kidneys, large chops, ham and eggs—was done ample justice to by Mr. Stallbrass, whose digestive powers were never out of order, while Mr. Guyon merely picked at a sardine with a shaking hand, and drank tea feverishly. In the course of the meal Mr. Stallbrass said,

"Saw Bob Streightley going to the Great Western as I drove through. Going down to his place in Bucks, I suppose; and going early, as if it was to his business. He is a rum 'un—as Jack Green says, 'The early bird's worth two worms in the bush.' He don't look well, don't Bob Streightley, though; pale in the gills, and seems to me to have aged a good deal."

"The anxieties of a gigantic business, my dear Stallbrass—"

"Yes, a little too gigantic if he doesn't look out, and likely to be a good deal less before he's done with it!"

"What do you mean by that? you're so infernally enigmatical, my good fellow," said old Guyon with great irritability, "that, damme, one might as well talk to the—the riddle Egyptian thing."

"Oh, I'm sorry I spoke—never holler! as old Jack Green says," replied Mr. Stallbrass, who was easily offended. "I'll be as mum as the dumb cove at Manchester for the rest of the day."

"What a doosid provokin' fellow you are!" screamed Mr. Guyon, in a fresh access of petulance. "Didn't you understand that I asked you to speak, and not be silent? What was that you were saying about Streightley?"

"It's not what I say, but what every body—old Jack Green and the rest of 'em—are saying, that he's going too much ahead; that he was hard hit by that bank smash; that, instead of pulling up, he went ahead after that; and that he must look out!"

Whether the information thus conveyed was new to Mr. Guyon or not, could not have been guessed by the expression of his features. A twitch passed across his face; but when he spoke his looks expressed scorn rather than astonishment, and he said, "Parcel of dam cackling fellows; let 'em leave Streightley alone. He'll be a merchant-prince when they've returned to their native gutters, by Jove!" The old gentleman braved it out nobly; but it was only by a strong effort, for his heart sunk within him, and he felt a presentiment of impending evil.

After breakfast Mr. Stallbrass lighted a very big cigar, and, as a thin soft rain was beginning to fall, put on a very big driving-coat, with double-sewn seams, which asserted themselves in a very prominent manner, with innumerable pockets, which either gaped wide-open or hid themselves under pent-house ledges, and with a large collar, which, when raised, took in all Mr. Stallbrass's beard and a huge portion of his face. Mr. Guyon having also muffled himself up to the best of his ability, they climbed into the mail phaeton and started, Mr. Stallbrass driving his splendid pair in excellent style, cutting in and out in the most workmanlike manner, and eliciting great admiration from the cabmen and boys. Before they had gone very far the rain ceased, and Mr. Guyon began to feel the reviving influence of the fresh air, which, with some new information about Devilskin which he received from a mysterious and shabby man, who stopped their phaeton at the foot of Westminster Bridge, made the old gentleman perk up again, and talk in his usual frivolous rattle to his companion, though that strange, puffed, bloated look had not faded out of his face.

Mr. Stallbrass was not given to conversation when he was driving, his attention being almost entirely occupied with his horses, which he had brought to a great state of perfection and simul-

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taneous stepping, so that, with the exception of pointing with his whip to one or two houses where "old Jack Green" had either lived, or had known some one who had lived there, which gave the place quite an interest in Mr. Stallbrass's eyes, he was silent during the drive, and his companion was left to his own reflections. And these were not of a particularly pleasant kind. Mr. Guyon had backed the favorite for the steeple-chase now about to be decided to a far greater extent than any one, even his sporting friend beside him, knew of, and until that present moment had never seriously attempted to realize his position in case his horse should be beaten. Floating through life in his usual airy manner, with good clothes on his back and a few pounds in his pocket, which prevented him feeling the pressure of any immediate necessity, "handsome Ned Guyon" closed his eyes to disagreeable objects in his old age as readily as he had done in his youth, and sturdily refused to look at the shadows of any coming events. Should his horse win—and he must, damme, he must—Mr. Guyon would, on the settling-day, come into possession of what he termed "a hatful" of money; enough to pay off all his most pressing creditors, without the necessity of seeking aid from Streightley, whose stern face was like a very baleful vision before his father-in-law's imagination. And if the horse were beaten—the old gentleman took off his hat and wiped his brow, on which great beads of sweat had burst out at the mere supposition—well, if the horse were beaten, he should quietly drop across to Boulogne, and stay there until matters were blown over. Katharine would send him pocket-money, and that sort of thing; and there was life in the old dog yet, and, damme, they should see he wasn't beaten.

Such was the tenor of Mr. Guyon's concluding reflections as Mr. Stallbrass turned the spanking chestnuts, who had spanked so much all the way from town as to be covered with foam and lather, into the muddy lane leading to the race-ground, which was already lined on either side with crowds of countrymen and village loafers, gathered together to gape and chaff in that blunder-headed manner so pleasant to the English rustic. There were plenty of drags both before and behind them, and Mr. Stallbrass—who affected the coachman whenever he had the reins in his hand—was perpetually jerking his little finger into the air, or waving his whip in answer to recognitions, feeling all the time perfectly happy at being seen in the company of such an unmistakable and well-known "West-End nob" as Mr. Guyon. Paying the entrance-fee, they turned up through a gate on to the turf; no sooner had they reached which than Mr. Stallbrass had a new excitement and a new triumph, for the Hon. William Trafford, known as "Tit Trafford" from his love of horse-flesh, ranging up alongside in his drag, and knowing both Guyon and Stallbrass, proposed to the latter to "have a spurt," and away went Tit Trafford's four bays and Stallbrass's chestnut pair careering off in a race in which the latter had by no means the worst of it. Mr. Guyon disapproved of this proceeding, which caused him to clutch wildly at different portions of the phaeton, and shook and bumped him woefully—disapproved of it so much that he pronounced it "infernally stoopid," and only fit to have been the act of a "dam school-boy." It was not until they had secured a good place in the rank, horses had been removed, and a capital lunch spread, that the old gentleman recovered his equanimity.

But long before luncheon—in fact, within a minute of the phaeton's stopping, Mr. Guyon had descended into the ring and learned the latest odds about Devilskin. There, in the bawling, fighting, seething, jostling crowd, he made his way, listening to scraps of information given to him now and then by men who muttered mysteriously behind their betting-books, or took off their hats to whisper behind them into Mr. Guyon's ear. It was all right—nothing to touch him; fit to run for a man's life, Sir Harvey had said that very morning. Oh, here was Sir Harvey. "Ah, my dear Sir Harvey, one word—only one!" and Mr. Guyon laid his trembling hand on the arm of a big stalwart Yorkshire squire, Sir Harvey Boyce, one of the keenest patrons of the turf, and owner of Devilskin. The two men stood aside for a moment, and Guyon said,

"About the horse? He's right?"

"Right as the mail."

"And—and—he's meant?"

"Meant? d—n it, Guyon—"

"Oh, don't blaze out at me, Sir Harvey; don't be in a rage. If you knew how heavily I stand on this race! Ever since you put me on in the autumn I've been backing the horse, long odds and short odds; I've not got off a penny, and—" he stopped for breath, and the big burly Yorkshireman, looking at him and noticing how ill he appeared to be, and how the wrinkled hand clasping his arm shook and trembled, said kindly,

"Keep your pecker up, Guyon! I've stood all my money on the horse, and I know there's nothing to beat him in the field."

So, comforted and pleased with this interview, Mr. Guyon made his way back to the phaeton, where Mr. Stallbrass's grooms had already unfastened the hampers and spread the lunch, and where Mr. Stallbrass had now gathered round him two or three men "of the right sort," who were drinking sparkling Moselle, and wondering "what had become of old Guyon."

The luncheon and the wine had a still farther revivifying effect on that gentleman's spirits; and feeling justly that he was regarded by Mr. Stallbrass and his friends in the "cock-of-the-walk" capacity, he sought to be particularly agreeable, and, having quite a new audience, told some of his best stories—accommodating the principal characters therein with titles freely distributed—with very great success. There

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were two races before the great event of the day, but they attracted littleat tention; the first came off while the gentlemen were at luncheon, and they walked down to look at the jumps while the course was being cleared for the second.

They turned down from the starting-place, and looked first at a low gap, then at two or three flights of turf-covered hurdles, at all of which Sir Harvey Boyce laughed contemptuously, and declared that any donkey could clear them; then they struck across a corner of the field, and came upon a clean ditch with a high bank on its farther side, separating a plowed field from a bit of turnips. The ditch was rather broad, and the bank was high and slippery; then came grass with more hurdles, then grass again, and then, just before turning into the straight run home, a stiff post and rail, old, worn, and mended here and there in places with rough stakes and railings, with a drop of six or seven feet into the course below. All the gentlemen regarded this with great curiosity, and Sir Harvey Boyce said, "This is what'll try 'em! There are seven of 'em to start, and except Vixen and Devilskin, all the rest know nothing but flat racin', and have just been taught jumpin' enough to clear those hurdles. But they'll be bumped before they come to this, and nothing's over here but the chestnut mare and my horse, I'll take my oath!" Then they returned to the stand on their carriages, and shortly afterward the second bell rang and the great race commenced.

There were seven starters, and the race was twice round the course. They got away all together, through the gap and over the first flight of hurdles all in line; a little scattering of them in the plowed field, where the first symptoms of tailing-off began to be manifested; then came the ditch and bank, where there were three dead refusals, the four safely on the other side being Devilskin, Vixen, a mare called Gray Duchess, whose performances were all unknown, and who belonged to a sporting saddler —and Billy Button, an old steeple-chaser, entered to make running for Vixen. Through the grass they came, Vixen and Devilskin leaving the others about a couple of lengths behind, over the light hurdles, then straight heading up for the drop fence. A crowd had gathered at this point to see the jump taken; and as the horses came up, each thundered out the name of his favorite. With his face dead set, his teeth clenched, and with every muscle of his limbs like steel, Griffin brought his horse straight at the jump, and Devilskin, scarcely needing the slightest lifting, cleared it in one great rushing bound, blundered a little on touching the ground, but was up and away ere any of the others were over. Vixen came next, fretting and fuming, her foam-flecked chestnut coat heat-stained and mud-dabbled; her jock, who evidently knew her temper, riding her with a light yet firm hand, and never touching her until she was just preparing to take her spring, when he rammed the spurs home, and brought her over cleverly and safely. Close upon her followed the saddler's gray mare, heavily built and somewhat clumsy in her gallop as she came thundering along, but rising at the jump and skimming it like a bird. It was the prettiest thing that had been seen that day; the people cheered till they were hoarse; and Sir Harvey Boyce turned a trifle pale as he whispered to Tit Trafford that "that was an Irish mare, he'd take his oath, and that he was d—d if he liked her looks." Now past the stand all, Devilskin leading, but Vixen close upon him, and away into the open, Gray Duchess following three lengths behind. Now all excitement, hoarse roar, and wild clamor, for Vixen and Devilskin were neck and neck, over the light hurdles, through the plowed field and nearing the high bank. Griffin seems to feel that Devilskin wants a lift here, gathers his horse well up in hand, and comes down heavily on his quarters as he rises to the leap. Cleverly done, Griffin, for Devilskin clears it better than he did the first round. Not so Vixen, also whipped, who rears, boggles, tumbles, and rolls. Devilskin wins! Devilskin! Devilskin! Up goes the clamor from a thousand hoarse throats. What is that cry? The Gray! the Gray! Gray Duchess slips over the high bank like a mist, like a dream, collars Devilskin in the grass, and side by side with him clears the last set of light hurdles, and rounds the corner facing the drop fence. Now, Griffin, for your life! bring all the knowledge, all the pluck learned and nurtured in far-away Yorkshire spinneys to this one test—you have a foeman worthy of your steel spurs; show that you know yet a better thing than he, and win the race! Up came up the horse, blown, panting, with red eyeballs, drooping crest: in the hollow it looked as if it were all over; but Griffin steadied him quietly, and then brought him at the leap with a rush. One tremendous welt he gave him, one home-dig with the spurs, and Devilskin rose at the post and rails—rose to fall helplessly into the midst of them staked and dying; while, so close as almost to brush his writhing carcass, Gray Duchess slips by, and gallops in the winner and sole survivor of the fray.

Mr. Stallbrass closed his race-glass, muttered a strong word, and turned to speak to his friend; but as he turned he felt a heavy weight on his shoulder, and heard the words "Ruined—ruined, by God!" muttered in his ear. The next moment Mr. Guyon was lying on his back at the bottom of the phaeton, livid in the face, and breathing stertorously. An alarm was raised, and a mounted gentleman, announcing himself to be a doctor, rode up to the phaeton, threw himself from his horse, and after a hasty examination, pronounced Mr. Guyon to be in an apoplectic fit, and shook his head very dubiously as to the result.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

"IN THE DEAD UNHAPPY NIGHT."

The first confusion and alarm which had ensued on Mr. Guyon's sudden illness had subsided, and had been succeeded by the orderly hush of a house in which mortal sickness had assumed its irresistible sway. Mr. Guyon had been carried up stairs to the large bedroom formerly occupied by Katharine, and which he had used since his daughter's marriage. The doctor who had been found and brought to his assistance upon the race-course, and his own physician, for whom the housekeeper had sent at once, before she had dispatched the footman to carry the evil tidings to Mrs. Streightley, were busily but silently occupied with the insensible form. The servants, frightened and helpless as servants generally are, were standing about on the stairs and landing-place, ready to obey such orders as were transmitted to them from time to time from the grave gentleman in that awful room, through the medium of the housekeeper. They whispered together solemnly at intervals, and started when the door on which all their attention was fixed opened a little, and Mrs. Clarke beckoned one of the two women toward her. Mr. Stallbrass was in the dingy dining-room, awaiting the award of the solemn tribunal up stairs. He was a kind-hearted fellow enough, and having done so much, "having picked up the poor old boy," he thought, "I may as well see it out." Mrs. Clarke had entreated him to remain; her master's daughter, she said, would be here immediately, and she would want to hear how it happened. So this modern type of Good Samaritan, useful but not officious, and rather sheepish about his good-nature, staid. The rain, which had begun to fall just as they were getting Mr. Guyon away from the race-course, was now falling in cold, pitiless, ceaseless streams, and the early darkness of a winter's evening had added its gloom to the scene. The gas had been lighted in the dining-room of Mr. Guyon's house, but the window-shutters were unclosed, and Stallbrass walked disconsolately up and down from the door to the window, stopping each time as he reached the latter boundary to look out into the damp dreariness of the street. His spirits were beginning to flag under the monotony of this occupation, and he was seeking relief by furtive snatches of reading—odd paragraphs in the *Field* for last week, and little bits of the current *Punch*—when Mrs. Clarke came in, looking very pale and scared.

"Well," said Stallbrass, abruptly, but kindly, "what news is there? Has the lady come? She can't have come, though, or I should have seen her."

"No, sir, she has not come; and I dread she won't while the breath is in her father, which it's all it is, as far as I can understand the doctors."

"Really! I'm very sorry—poor old gentleman! Has he not recovered consciousness at all, then?"

"No, sir, not a bit; he has groaned a few times, and then they thought he were coming to, but he didn't—but there, sir, there's a carriage—there's Mrs. Streightley—" And the housekeeper ran excitedly out, followed by Mr. Stallbrass, and threw open the door, through which a gust of wind and a cold dash of rain drove into the hall.

Stallbrass saw a tall young lady, whose face, pale and agitated, struck him even then as being one of the most beautiful he had ever seen—who passed into the room he had just left, followed by the housekeeper. He stood in the hall, the noise of wind and rain outside mingling with the stamping of the horses, the jingling of their harness, and the sound of the women's voices.

"What is all this, Clarke? is it true?" asked Katharine, as she hurriedly untied her bonnet and flung it down, and threw off her pelisse of velvet and fur.

"Yes, ma'am, it's all true. But oh, why did you not come sooner? James has been more than an hour gone to fetch you."

"I was out—they had to find me," she said, in the same hurried tone. "What do they say it is? Let me see the doctor. Let me go up stairs."

"Yes, ma'am, directly," said Mrs. Clarke, down whose rosy and unrefined cheeks tears were beginning to flow. "But first you must see the gentleman that brought him home; he knows all about it; he breakfasted with master this morning. If you please, sir—Lord ha' mercy, if he hasn't been left out in the hall!"

Katharine stepped hastily toward the door as Mrs. Clarke, with many voluble apologies, brought Mr. Stallbrass in. She thanked him briefly, and entreated him to tell her all that had happened. She listened to his story with painful eagerness, turning paler and paler as he went on; and when she had heard it all, she thanked him again.

"And now I must go to him," she said, and held out her hand to the stranger.

"I will wait a little longer, if you will allow me, for the chance of a more favorable report," he said.

"Do so," she returned. "My carriage is at your disposal. Tell them to come back here, Clarke, when they have taken this gentleman home." Then she again bade him farewell and left him.

He walked up and down the room for half an hour, at the end of which time the housekeeper came down stairs again, this time crying unrestrainedly.

"There's not a bit of hope, sir; but they think he will live for some hours; and they hope he will get his senses back, and speak to his daughter, or at least look at her before he dies."

"I hope so, I am sure," said Mr. Stallbrass, solemnly.

"I was to ask your name, if you please, sir," said Mrs. Clarke, with some hesitation.

"Certainly; there is my card," and he laid one on the table. "I shall call in the morn-

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ing." Then he took up his hat and went away, having declined the offer of the carriage. Mrs. Clarke ordered the coachman to return to Portland Place, adding that his mistress would remain with her father. "I wonder your master hasn't been here afore this," said the housekeeper, in conclusion.

"Master's out of town; worse luck!" was the sympathetic answer of the footman, as he jumped up beside the coachman, and they drove off.

Mrs. Clarke went slowly up the long staircase to the room about which such awful suspense and interest gathered, unmindful of the card which lay upon the table in the dining-room, and was swept away with other rubbish afterward and forgotten; and when she stood beside Katharine by the dying man's bedside, all remembrance of the stranger had faded out of the minds of both.

The dying man! Yes, the fiat had gone forth—he was dying. Ned Guyon, the *ci-devant jeune homme par excellence*, the trifler by vocation and profession, the man of all others with whom it was impossible to associate an idea of solemnity, the dandy in dress, the *roué* in morals, the *persifleur* in religion, the man in consideration of whom it would have been particularly pleasant to disembarrass the mind of belief in present and future accountability—this man was dying; not slowly, with time and opportunity for reflection, for repentance, for "setting his house in order," but quickly, dumbly, as a stricken animal might die—as men die in whom the brain is killed first, and the machine has but a little while to labor on afterward. His daughter saw it all, realized it all in a minute, even as she crossed the threshold of the room she had never entered since her wedding-day, and there mingled with the horror and anguish of the moment a sudden sense of recognition, and yet of strangeness, as she saw, without looking at them, in the inexplicable vividness of perception which comes in moments of strong emotion, the "soulless things" she had lived among for so long in the old life gone forever. And here was another life going away forever. She did not doubt it for one instant; and when the physician, who had known her from her girlhood, gravely took her hand, and whispered to her that there was no hope, the dying man lying insensible to any sight or sound, she shuddered strongly from head to foot, but she did not weep, or shrink from the touch or the voice.

From the senseless figure upon the bed, over which the strange doctor was stooping, his fingers busy with hopeless investigations at the heart and the wrist—from the ghastly distorted face, so much more terrible, with its rouge and cosmetics, its wig and its pearl powder all removed, than any face of reverend old age, however worn and wasted, can ever be—from the limp, bluish hand lying upon the coverlet, with the heavy seal-ring and its pretentious blazon, with the showy golden buttons hanging from the loosened sleeve—Katharine's haggard gaze roamed over the room almost unconsciously. It was in most respects the same as when she had inhabited it; but several of her father's special belongings had been brought from the den, and occupied the place of the feminine properties dispossessed. Her dressing-table, none too large for Mr. Guyon's requirements, was in its accustomed place, and the long glass had not been moved. But the writing-table she had been accustomed to use was there no longer, and in its place, in the recess beside the fireplace, stood a large cabinet, whose heavy doors closed over a range of wide, shallow shelves, and also shut in a desk. A basket, half full of scraps of torn paper, stood between the burly carved legs of this old-fashioned piece of furniture, and in front of it was the well-worn red-leather arm-chair which Katharine remembered from her babyhood. The clothes which had been taken off the insensible man were lying in a heap over the back of this chair—bright in color, juvenile in cut, and painful to see, when one glanced from them to their wearer of a few hours ago. A bunch of keys had fallen from the gaping coat-pocket upon the ground, where it lay with a few crumpled papers, a card of the races being conspicuous among them.

"I believe I can do no more," said the strange doctor, as at length he relinquished his hopeless task. Then the two left the room together, and after a little Katharine's old friend returned. By this time she had drawn a chair to the bedside, and was seated there, gazing fixedly on the rigid face, which looked as though death itself, when it should come, would not seal it more utterly up from all impressions of the outer world. She was lost in thought, and was quite passive while the doctor gave his final directions to the housekeeper, who was to remain all night with the dying man. She understood him to say that he must go home now (he lived close by), but was to be summoned if any change took place. He gave a few simple directions, which the two women could carry out, and which were of a merely perfunctory character, and designed to relieve them by giving them occupation, rather than the patient, for whom there was nothing more to be done until the undertaker's turn should have arrived; and he went away, whispering to Katharine that if he were not sent for sooner, he would be with her at seven on the following morning.

The night wore on, and Katharine and Mrs. Clarke kept their terrible watch. They were for the most part quite silent; the one in the chair beside the bed, the other seated at the fireside, and coming from time to time to gaze disconsolately upon the dying man. No weariness came upon Katharine as the hours crept on. The strong excitement kept her up; and as she administered the few cares of which her father's condition allowed, the enforced composure of her manner did not break down. The silence of the room was awful, as silence under such circumstances always is; the clock upon the chimney-piece ticked loudly, the showy gold watch, with its trumpery bunch of trinkets,

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which had been deposited upon the dressing-table, also ticked on, till late in the small hours, when it stopped. The fire burned low and dim, and flickered upon the housekeeper's weary figure in the deep arm-chair, and upon the ribbons of her cap, as her head nodded abruptly forward, in the uneasy snatches of broken slumber. Sometimes a little flame sprung out and glimmered upon the silken folds of Katharine's rich dress, upon the gold bracelet of the arm laid upon the bed, upon the pale stern face keeping its wakeful watch.

There were times during those dread hours when the dying man groaned heavily; and then the two women would bend eagerly over him, using the prescribed restoratives, and trying to discern some symptom of consciousness, even of pain; but it never came. Ned Guyon had spoken his last words—had experienced his last emotion in this world, and what they were has already been told.

It was about four in the morning, and the cold dismal chill peculiar to that ghastly hour had stolen over the room, and Katharine had begun to shiver and yawn under its influence. Mrs. Clarke woke with a guilty start, softly raked the fire together and replenished it, and, in answer to Katharine's beckoning finger, approached the bed.

"There's no change—no, no change," said Mrs. Clarke; and she shook her head gravely.

"Are you sure?" said Katharine; "I thought his face looked colder and grayer. Don't you think the eyelids are heavier and more nearly shut?"

Mrs. Clarke took a candle and held it close to the wan face. There was no change perceptible to her; and the "muffled-drum" beat of the heart told of life still lingering.

"No, my dear," said the old woman, compassionately, "he is not gone yet, nor going; but Lor' ha' mercy, how cold you are! why, you're shivering. I'll go and fetch a teapot and a kettle, and make some tea. No; the kitchen-fire is alight. If you don't mind being alone, I'll make it down stairs; it's quicker done; and I am sure you want it."

"I do want it, Clarke," said Katharine, shuddering. "The dawn is coming, I suppose, and the cold strikes into my blood. I shall be glad of the tea."

Mrs. Clarke went away on her errand. Katharine, all her senses quickened, heard her step upon each stair until she reached the hall. A strange, lonely, nervous feeling came over her, and she rose from her seat by the bedside and went over to the fireplace. As she stood idly by the chimney-piece, an unusually strong flicker of the flame shone upon something bright which lay upon the ground. Katharine stooped, and picked up a bunch of keys and a handful of crumpled papers. She laid the keys upon the mantel-shelf, and mechanically turned over the papers. The card of the races she threw into the fire, the others she smoothed out; and finding some memoranda apparently containing calculations among them, she thought it would be well to put them away safely. With the intention of doing so, she took up the keys again, and opened the heavy door of the oak cabinet.

Mr. Guyon, like many men devoted to the business of pleasure, was very orderly in his arrangements, and kept all his papers with an enviable degree of precision. The long, shallow drawers of the cabinet had each its neat parchment label, indicating the contents, and the lowest of the range bore the superscription "miscellaneous letters." Katharine pulled the pendent brass ring attached to this drawer with a little more force than was necessary to open it. The drawer slid out easily, and the whole of its contents were exposed to her view. At the back, in the right-hand corner, lay a small packet, slipped into an elastic band, on which her quick eye caught her own name, written in a hand she knew well—her own name, as it had been—"Miss Guyon"—and a date scrawled in the corner. The blood rushed hotly into Katharine's face as she took the packet out of the drawer and carried it to the fireplace, where she examined it by the light of a shaded lamp. It consisted of four letters; the uppermost that on which her name was written; the undermost was placed in the band, so that the address did not show; but a line was written on it in Mr. Guyon's hand—"shown to R. S."

Katharine sat down in the chair vacated by the housekeeper and deliberated. In her hand she held a packet of papers which she felt concerned her deeply. Here was a letter in Gordon Frere's hand—a letter whose date was that of the very day which had begun her hopeless watching and waiting, in the time which, until this moment, had seemed so far, so illimitably past, but now in an instant was brought near again, and revived in all its pain and anger. Here was a letter which must have been written that day when he had sent her the music and his card, as she had believed without a word. A vague sense of treachery, something which led her intuitively to an approximate suspicion of the truth, came into Katharine's mind. She glanced at the bed, and turned away trembling. What was she about to learn? Something, she felt instinctively, which must change all her life. Then she drew out the note directed to "Miss Guyon," and read it. It was that which Gordon Frere had written to Katharine, from Cramer's, after he had left Charles Yeldham, with the intention of starting by the next train, on his pilgrimage of hope, to his father's rectory. It was a bright gay note, with a pleasant allusion to their talk about the music; a strong expression of disappointment about Katharine's not being at the ball; an intimation that his absence would be as short as he could make it, and that he hoped to see her immediately on his return. Katharine dropped the hand that held the note heavily into her lap; had she received it, what might she have been now? An undefined fear stole over her; this was foul play; this letter had been intercepted. What did it mean? She

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drew out the second in order, and opened it. Again, a letter from Gordon Frere; again a letter to her—a passionate, tender, pleading, frank, hopeful letter—such a letter as a girl might well be glad and proud to receive from the man she loved; such a letter as Katharine had dreamed of, had hoped for, had longed for, in the days that were gone. It was that which Gordon had written from his father's house in the full flush of his delight, and the perfect but not presumptuous assurance of her love. Deadly cold and sickness crept over Katharine as she read this letter; her limbs grew heavy, her sight grew dim, her head grew dizzy. "I must be near fainting," she thought; "and they are not all read." She forced herself to rise from her chair, and went to the dressing-table, where she found water and *eau-de-cologne*. She drank a glassful of the mixture, and then returned to her task. All this time—it was in reality only a few minutes—the insensible form upon the bed lay motionless and silent.

The third letter was a short one, also written by Gordon Frere, and addressed to Mr. Guyon. It was a straightforward, manly letter, in which the writer acknowledged his unworthiness of the blessing he asked with more sincerity than such matter-of-course acknowledgments usually convey, and set forth his modest confidence in Miss Guyon's consent to become his wife. Gordon stated the prospects then opening upon him; and finally, in accordance with his father's wish, formally requested Mr. Guyon's permission to address his daughter. (The old-fashioned punctilio of the good rector had helped the unscrupulous schemer considerably, as the virtues of good men are not seldom found to aid the devices of knaves.)

The fourth letter, which was endorsed with the words "shown to R. S.," and was the last contained in the packet, was in Mr. Guyon's handwriting. As his daughter read it, all the truth revealed itself to her; all the baseness of which she had been the victim stood in its revolting nakedness before her eyes. As she read the flowery sentences in which Mr. Guyon condoled with his "dear young friend," and pitied himself for being the medium of so painful a communication, a grasp seemed to tighten upon her throat and to press down her heart: still she read on—read that her father had written, on her behalf, to the effect that, feeling she had been so unfortunate as to have conveyed a totally unfounded impression to Mr. Frere, she had shrunk from a personal explanation, and felt sure that, when Mr. Frere should know that she was engaged to Mr. Streightley, and their marriage was to take place very shortly, he would excuse her making a written one—read that, though Mr. Guyon hoped their future friendship would be quite unaltered, he trusted Mr. Frere would abstain from any communication, either personal or by letter, for the present, as such would agitate Miss Guyon, and cause much unpleasantness; and that she and her father united in every good wish for Mr. Frere's future welfare.

Katharine read this terrible letter over many times—not before she understood and believed the revelation it made, but before she got the reality of it into her mind—before it connected itself with her own self, and showed her the past and present laid utterly waste. It was her father who had done this—her father! who had been kind to her, too, after a fashion—her father! Ay, *and her husband!*

Shown to R. S. Shown to Robert Streightley—shown to the rich man who had bought her. Well, she had often told herself, bitterly enough, that it was a bargain, a purchase, but now it was more—it was a theft! Stolen from the man who loved her! made to believe him false, duped—wretchedly, ignominiously duped! Good God! how was she to bear this knowledge! *Shown to R. S.* There were the words, the fatal, damning proofs which convicted the two men who were her nearest friends, her only protectors, of the foulest conspiracy that ever two rascals concocted against an unhappy woman. She crushed the letters in her clenched hand and rose to her feet. She had taken a step forward, her eyes flaming, her face white and fixed—far more changed than by the earlier, weaker shock of this dreadful night—when the door was softly opened, and the housekeeper came in, carrying a trayful of tea-things. At the sight of Katharine's face she set the tray down, and said, in a hurried whisper,

"Were you coming to call me? Is he worse?"

"I—I don't know," stammered Katharine; "I think so."

"Poor dear!" said the woman, compassionately; "no wonder you are frightened. I shouldn't have left you alone."

Then she bent down to look closely at the patient. Closer and closer still: she felt the hand, the heart; she touched the chill forehead. Katharine stood still and watched her, quite silent, the papers in her clenched hand covered by the folds of her dress. The woman's touch suddenly became more reverent as she raised the chin and made the passive blue lips meet, as she pressed her fingers on the half-shut eyelids, and closed them over the sightless eyes. When she had drawn the sheet over the still, stiffening face, she turned to the dead man's daughter and said,

"Come away, my dear. It's all over. I must send for the doctor, as he told me."

* * * * *

The wintry sun had been up for many hours when Mrs. Streightley returned to her own house from that in which her father lay dead. She had sent for Mr. Guyon's solicitor, and had a long interview with him in the dingy dining-room. She had been wonderfully calm and collected, the servants said, but she had not reentered her father's room, though "the corpse is laid out beautiful, to be sure," said James to the coachman from Portland Place, while that functionary awaited his mistress or her orders. She came out looking pale and absent, and she

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took no notice of the sympathizing looks of her maid when she reached home. She went at once to her room, declined all attendance, and directed that she was not to be disturbed.

The servants wondered whether their master had been sent for; had James been sent to the telegraph office, did coachman know? Coachman knew nothing about it; but the lawyer was there—perhaps he had sent for master. And then they discussed the death, and the dead man, with much freedom and candor.

At about two o'clock in the afternoon, the footman, doing his turn of duty by looking out of window in the hall of Mr. Streightley's house, was surprised by seeing his mistress come down stairs in her bonnet and cloak, with her veil down, and carrying a square parcel in her hand, "which it looked like a box done up in paper," the man said afterward, when questioned concerning the circumstance.

"Open the door, William, if you please," said Mrs. Streightley.

The man obeyed, wondering.

"I am going to Queen Anne Street. I don't require the carriage," said Katharine. And she passed out of the door, and out of the footman's sight.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RETRIBUTION.

While the events recorded in the last chapter had been taking place, Robert Streightley had been down to Middlemeads to give the necessary orders for the immediate reduction of the establishment there. It was an act over which a great many people would have been sillily sentimental, but one which affected Robert Streightley very little indeed. The stately old mansion had never been his home, though it had contained his wife and his household gods; he had never had the same regard for it as for the dingy Brixton villa, where every thing was so old, and mean, and common. Even when he first bought the place, and inhabited it in the early days of his wedded life, long before the falseness of his position and the chance of some day being compelled to return to his old and quiet mode of life had dawned on him, he had felt uncomfortable and out of place at Middlemeads. But latterly, as speculation after speculation "went wrong" in the City, and as scarcely a week passed without the addition of some new improvement, the importation of some fresh luxury by Katharine's orders, the negative feelings with which he had regarded that estate, for the possession of which he was so much envied and hated, grew into positive dislike; he remembered that the first time he had seen the place was the day before he had had that fatal conference with Mr. Guyon, and he began to associate most of his troubles with the name of Middlemeads.

He would have sold the place at once but for two reasons; the first and chiefest of which was, that Katharine took great pleasure and interest in it—more pleasure and interest than she had taken in any thing else during her married life; the other, that the sale of his country estate, which, with the county people who visited there and the swells whom he entertained, had been so much talked of among his friends in the City, would be a confession of weakness which Robert Streightley shrunk from meeting. Besides, all would probably come right very soon; the house of Streightley and Son was too firmly established not to be able to stand a shock or two; and by reducing the establishment at Middlemeads he should effect a considerable saving, while the sale of a portion of the valuable timber on the estate would bring in a sum of ready money, of which he was greatly in need. This done, he drove off to the railway, caught the up-train, and was on his way to London.

He was alone in the railway carriage; there was no old gentleman rustling a newspaper, no young gentleman playing with his watch-chain, no humorous children to trample on his feet, nothing to disturb the train of thought into which he fell. By no means a pleasant train of thought, for a dead weight was at his heart, and he felt a horrible sense of something—he knew not what—but some calamity hanging over him. Something, some trifle had reminded him of the day on which Mr. Guyon had told him of Frere's proposal for Katharine's hand, and now he could not get the subject out of his head: the words seemed to ring in his ears; and when he closed his eyes, that peculiar look with which Mr. Guyon had suggested the suppression of Frere's letter seemed to rise before him. What had his life been since then? He had married Katharine! Oh yes, she was his wife; but had he ever obtained from her one grain of confidence, one look of love? Had not his business transactions gone wrong ever since? Had he not suffered under perpetual qualms of conscience ever since he became a silent confederate in that monstrous fraud of which Katharine his wife was one of the victims? In his case, at least, retribution had not been long delayed; the first mutterings of the avenging storm had been long since heard, and now something told him that the storm itself was close at hand. He would welcome it in all its fury, though it stripped him of all his wealth and left him to begin life anew, if it only could bear away on its wings the barrier existing between Katharine and himself; if it only enabled him to prove to her his worship of her; if it only raised in her for him one tithe of the love with which he regarded her.

It was a dark, dull, damp evening when Robert Streightley alighted from the cab in which he had driven from the railway, and knocked at his own door in Portland Place. The enormously stout middle-aged man, who for a by no means poor wage consented to pass his life in alternately sitting in and getting out of a porter's chair, like a leathern bee-hive, was usually sufficiently on the alert to recognize his master's rap, and give him speedy admission; but on this

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occasion Mr. Streightley had to knock three times, and when the porter opened the door there was a strange odd look on his face, which made his master think he had been drinking. Robert passed by him quickly and went into the library, where he rang the bell. It was answered by William, the footman who had opened the door for Katharine when she left the house.

"Is your mistress in the Cedar-room? is there any one with her?"

"Missus is not in the Cedar-room, sir, and there is no pusson with her, as I knows of. Missus ain't at home, sir?"

"Oh, very well. What time did she order the carriage to fetch her?"

"The carriage isn't ordered at all, sir. Missus said she wouldn't want the carriage."

"Do you know where your mistress is?"

"She said she was goin' to Queen Anne Street, sir."

"Very good. I'll go across myself and bring her home."

"Begging your pardon, sir, I don't think you'll find missus at Queen Anne Street, sir."

"No! what do you mean?"

"Why, sir, Mamzell Augustus went across about six o'clock, sir, to know whether missus was comin' home to dress, sir, and they said at Queen Anne Street that she'd never been there since she left in the morning."

"Never been there? and—oh, she's probably gone out with Mr. Guyon."

"Good Lord, sir!" said the footman, startled out of all propriety, "I forgot, sir, you didn't know—the hold gent's dead!"

"Dead? Mr. Guyon dead?"

"Yes, sir; had a fit at Croydon races last evening, sir, and died hearly this morning. Beg pardon, sir, shall I tell Anderson to bring you a glass of brandy, sir?"

"Eh? No, thank you, William—yes—you may, if you please. I feel—" and Robert Streightley clutched at a chair near him, and sunk into it, with trembling limbs and beating heart.

Mr. Anderson, the staid butler, brought a small decanter of brandy, filled a liqueur-glass, and handed it to his master, whose hand shook so that the glass rattled against his teeth. After the discreet domestic had withdrawn, Robert Streightley sat in his chair, glaring straight before him, revolving in his mind a hundred subjects, all equally dismal. Katharine's absence, first of all, what could that mean? what could have induced it? was it in any way connected with Mr. Guyon's death? Mr. Guyon's death, poor man! not one with whom he had any thing in common except—that horrible conspiracy always cropping up! Mr. Guyon dead? well, then, there was an end to the chance of any betrayal of that mystery; he might rest secure that — Good God! where could his wife have gone to? Could she have learned—no; that was impossible. Still, why had she left his house without leaving any trace of her whereabouts? Lady Henmarsh was not in town; but she might have gone to some other friend's house, where she could receive that womanly kindness and consolation which, in the first shock of her grief, her heart sought for. It was absurd in him to have imagined that, under such circumstances, she would remain in her own house alone, without a soul to speak to in confidence. She would return soon; he would wait up to receive her.

So through the long hours of that night, having dismissed the household to rest, Robert Streightley sat in his library, the door of which opened on the hall, in eager anticipation of his wife's return. The sharp ticking of the clock on the mantel-piece seemed running a race with the silent ticking of the clock in the hall; the rumble of the cabs outside, the footfalls of the passers-by, fell with monotonous solemnity on his ear; the dead silence at the back of the house, broken only by the wailing of dissipated cats, oppressed him; and the keen anguish of his own thoughts made him occasionally clasp his forehead and utter some ejaculation; but still he sat there, looking out into the dimly-lighted hall, and waiting for his wife's return. That Mr. Guyon was dead, had died suddenly and in a ghastly manner, he yet scarcely realized: he had heard the fact, and that was all; he had not thought over it; his thoughts were entirely occupied with the fact of his wife's absence. To account for this he had now no possible satisfactory theory. Had she been persuaded to remain at the house of any friend to whom she might have gone, a message to that effect would surely have been sent to Portland Place. The shock of her father's death might have been too much for her, and in walking to the house of some friend she might have been seized with illness; at that moment she might be lying unknown in some hospital, or—and as the thought came across him Robert Streightley started to his feet, his mind half made up to sally forth at once, and set the detective force at work to discover Katharine's whereabouts. But before he had advanced a few steps his cautious common sense came to his aid. He was a weak, hot-headed fool, and his usual powers of reasoning had been, he argued to himself, a little impaired by the mental strain to which, during the last few weeks, he had been subjected. Nothing was known yet of his wife's disappearance. Even to the household their mistress's absence was a mere subject for discussion over the supper-beer, where no one had a substantial theory to broach, but all arrived at a general conclusion, originally propounded by the cook, that "master not being at home, she'd gone away, poor soul, to some other friend's nigh by; and not expecting him, they'd kep her, as was only right and jest when she was in trouble." If he were to raise a hue and cry, it would become at once a public scandal; and from a public scandal, from the mere thought of the knowledge that his friends were discussing his domestic affairs, Robert Streightley shrunk in horror and dismay. No, he would take no step, at least for the next few hours; morning

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must bring the solution of the mystery, and for that solution he would wait. Arrived at this determination, he turned out his lamp, and crept up stairs to bed.

To bed, but not to sleep. For hours he lay tossing on his hot pillow, racked with dismal doubt. Where was his wife? To whom had she gone in her time of trouble? That she had not remained to share her grief with him would have been, under other circumstances, a sufficient cause of dissatisfaction for her husband; but Robert, calmly reviewing—as calmly as he could, poor fellow—his real position in the dull dead watches of the night, was forced to acknowledge to himself that there had never been any confidence between him and Katharine which would warrant him in looking for such a display of affection. On the other hand, a doubt of her having infringed the strictest rules of propriety never crossed his mind. Never, during the whole course of her married life, had she given him occasion for the slightest suspicion of jealousy. With all her undeniable beauty, with all the attention she perforce commanded, she had not shown the smallest symptom of coquetry. If she had not come heart-whole to him, if hers had not been a love-match, if he had not been the *beau ideal* of her girlish fancy, by no act of hers could that have become patent to the ever-watchful, always censorious world. Where, then, was she gone? Her position was so peculiar, even to Robert's unworldly view; she had lived so self-contained a life since her marriage, that she could scarcely be said to have any special friends. Acquaintances she had by the score; but one does not go to acquaintances in the time of trouble; while her quondam chaperone, Lady Henmarsh, her only intimate, was away, and Mrs. Stanbourne, from whom she might justly have sought consolation, was far from England. Where could she have gone? Still revolving this question in his mind, Robert, just as day was dawning, fell into a fitful feverish sleep, haunted by horrible dreams, in which he and Katharine, the dead man and Gordon Frere, all played conspicuous parts, being mixed up in that dreadfully grotesque manner only possible under dream-influence.

He seemed only to have closed his eyes—in reality he had been asleep but a couple of hours —when he was aroused by a knocking at the door, and the voice of his servant, who, according to usual custom, had brought the post-letters to his bedroom door. In an instant Streightley sprang up, all the events of the previous day—Guyon's death, Katharine's absence, his own misery—all flashing upon him at once, opened the door, and there, on the top of the little heap, saw a letter in Katharine's well-known hand. He seized it instantly, was about to tear it open, and stopped—stopped, for his heart was beating loudly, and there was a choking sensation in his throat, and a film over his eyes. He sat down on a chair, placed the letter on the table beside him, and passed his hand over his brow. The whole room reeled before him; he felt that he must, and yet that he dared not break that seal. The answer to the question that had been tormenting him all night, the key to the enigma of his wife's departure, lay before him, and yet he hesitated to avail himself of it. He remained irresolute for some minutes; then he took up the letter quietly, opened it, and read as follows:

"This is the last time I shall ever hold communication with you, and therefore it is well that I should be explicit. By the merest accident I have become acquainted with the plot by which the whole of my life was maimed and perverted, my happiness blighted, my feelings trampled on, and my girlish pride mortified and humbled. In that plot were two conspirators; one who basely sold an honest, trusting, loving girl — his daughter; the other, who, by the mere accidental advantage of his wealth, was enabled to buy that girl for his wife. By neither, save as a mere matter of barter, something to be bought and sold, was I, that girl, considered. One of the plotters has been removed beyond the reach of my vengeance, and I shall take care to prevent the other from any opportunity of further villainy, so far as I am concerned. I have turned my back upon my father's corpse, and I turn my back on your house. I leave behind me all the price at which you purchased me; I take nothing with me but my mother's jewels, to which I suppose I have a right, and the unalterable determination which I have formed, and that is, in this world or the next, living or dying, never to forgive you, Robert Streightley, for your share in my degradation, and never to look upon your face again.—K. S."

CHAPTER XXV.

"IN BATTALIONS."

It was perhaps fortunate for Robert Streightley that the pressure of an immediate necessity for exertion was put upon him at the same time that he received his wife's letter. The blow was so frightful that it might have completely crushed him had he not been forced to rouse himself from its first effect, to put the meaning of the terrible communication aside for a time, while he attended to the stern duties which were his, as the only representative of the dead man. The subdued bustle, the ceaseless coming and going, the people to be seen, the letters to be written, the innumerable demands upon his attention in reference to his deceased father-in-law, to say nothing of the exigencies of his own affairs, from which he had not an hour's respite, controlled him in spite of himself, and by suspending softened the intensity of the knowledge of the punishment that had overtaken him.

The suspense and perplexity into which Katharine's unexplained absence from home had thrown the household on the preceding day had prepared them to expect that some important intelligence was contained in the letter which had reached their master that morning, and the

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unhappy man comprehended the necessity of making some communication on the subject. He briefly informed Katharine's maid that she had left town for the present; and on being asked whether the woman was to join her mistress at Middlemeads, he said Mrs. Streightley was not there; that she had better wait for orders, and in the mean time ask no more questions. An injudicious answer; but Robert neither knew nor cared what would have been the judicious course to pursue. He knew only that his sin had found him out; that the chastisement had come; and that the woman whom he had so loved and so wronged had left him forever—left him hating and despising him.

The hours of that dreadful day wore through somehow. Robert had been engaged during many of them in making arrangements consequent upon Mr. Guyon's death; he had been at Queen Anne Street, and at his office in the City, transacting business of different but invariably unpleasant kinds. He had seen several persons, but not any by whom the domestic calamity which had fallen upon him was suspected. He had written to his mother, informing her of Mr. Guyon's death, and requesting that Ellen would not come to Portland Place for the present, but giving no explanation of this request. All the day he had carried about with him the dreadful knowledge of what had befallen him—had been oppressed by its weight, darkened by its shadow; but he had not examined his burden: he had gone his appointed way, and done his relentless task, and the day had been got through somehow. Now he was going to look the truth in the face; he was going to force his mind to understand it, to take it in fully, and to suffer the torture at his leisure.

He shut himself up in his "study," and gave orders that no one was to be admitted. Then, with the door locked and sure of solitude, he read Katharine's letter again—not that he needed to do so; every one of its few remorseless words seemed to have burned themselves into his brain; and then he read the letter which hers had inclosed—the letter indorsed "Shown to R. S." He had not looked at it in the morning; it had sufficed him to know that the letter which Mr. Guyon had shown him on the day which had witnessed their disgraceful compact —the letter which they had tacitly agreed to suppress, still existed, for his conviction, for his condemnation, and had reached the hands to which it had been addressed at last: he had put it away with a shudder. But now he read it—steadily, and with utter amazement. There it was; and on the blank side of the sheet, in Mr. Guyon's hand, were the words, "Shown to R. S." But this letter was all in Mr. Guyon's hand, and Robert had never seen it—had never heard of it; this was not the letter from Gordon Frere to Katharine which her father had shown to him; there was a dreadful mistake somewhere. As Robert read the heartless words in which Mr. Guyon rejected Gordon Frere on *his* daughter's behalf, he understood for the first time how the conspiracy which had resulted in so sad a success had been carried out. This, then, was the method Mr. Guyon had adopted, and into which Robert had never inquired. He saw it all—he understood it all now, and he honestly recoiled at the baseness by which his triumph had been secured. He even thought he would not have consented had he known how the thing was to be done; but his conscience was not so deadened as to accept that sophistry, and another moment's thought taught him that he was as guilty as ever.

But how came the letter to be indorsed with words, intended by their writer only as a private memorandum, which were not true? This puzzled Robert until he guessed, what really was the case, that Mr. Guyon had put Frere's letter and his reply away together, and had mistaken the one for the other. Why had he kept them at all? thought Robert; why had he put such dangerous and useless documents aside, thus running the risk of detection now realized? "He never could have intended to use them as a weapon against me," thought Robert, who had arrived at a tolerably correct appreciation of the character of his deceased father-in-law. "They convict him directly; me, though conclusively *to her*, only indirectly to others. Why on earth did he keep them?"

Ah! why? Why is half the mischief that is done in the world done by the instrumentality of letters, which ought to have been read and destroyed, being treasured up instead by foolish women, or read and left about by men whom experience has not availed to teach? If Robert Streightley had quite understood Mr. Guyon's character, he would have known, in the first place, that that gentleman had never been in the habit of contemplating the contingency of his own death, or of making any preparation, temporal or spiritual, for that event; in the second, that his vanity was of so ominous a kind that he liked to indulge in the recollection of successful enterprises, no matter what their nature, and treasured up the trophies of his fortunate *coups* as other people might keep love-tokens or relics of departed friends—a ghastly perversion, it is true, but a characteristic trait of Mr. Guyon, as Robert came to learn, when he had to examine all the dead man's papers and personal effects.

After all, it did not matter very much that this mistake had been made. Any one of the papers concerning this transaction, so indorsed, would have equally convicted her husband in Katharine's eyes. For a moment, when Robert perceived the error and recognized how it had occurred, a faint hope had sprung up in his heart that all might be explained, in explaining that he had never seen the draft of Mr. Guyon's letter to Gordon Frere; but it lasted only for a moment, and then left Robert more shame-stricken, more despairing than before.

The bitter remembrance of his resolutions of the day before came to torment him now. How futile they were! made all too late, and use-

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less; how ridiculous they seemed, too! Would he ever have had the courage to tell the woman he had wronged the truth concerning himself and her? Cowering as he was now under the blast of her scorn and anger, he could not believe that he would; he heaped upon himself all the reprobation which the sternest judge could have measured out to him. His sin had found him out indeed, and nothing could save him now from the fullest retribution. It had come in its worst form, complicated with the death of his accomplice, as a double horror. Robert Streightley was not a man who could coldly contemplate such an event as Mr. Guyon's death. He had indeed retained but little personal regard for him; but that fact, the growing knowledge of the man which rendered such regard impossible, invested his death with additional horror to Robert. That such should have been the manner of the detection and the punishment, impressed him with awe. Standing, as he had done that day, by the dead man's bed, he had bowed his head submissively to the tremendous lesson which the scene conveyed. Where was their fine scheme now? Where was the wealth for which the father had sold the daughter? Gone—almost all gone; and if it had remained a million times told, what could it avail to the form of clay which lay there waiting for the coffin and the grave? Where was the beautiful wife whom the father's accomplice had purchased at the price of his honor? Who was to tell that to the wretched husband, who knew nothing but that she had detected them both, and fled from them both—from the living and the dead?

As he thought these thoughts, and a thousand others which could find no utterance in words, no expression by the pen, the long hours of the night were wearing by. Up and down the room, long after the fire had died out, unnoticed, Robert Streightley walked, buried in his tormenting thoughts, full of horror, remorse, shame, the sense of righteous retribution and torturing grief. She was gone — his darling, the one treasure of his life, the beautiful idol of his worship: the desolation of that knowledge had not come to him yet; he had had no time to think of the meaning of life without her; the fear, the excitement, the strangeness of the fact were all that he had as yet realized. The awful sorrow, the hopeless bereavement were for the future. The strokes of the rod were beginning to fall upon him; strokes which were to continue, ceaseless and stinging, until the end. Any one who has ever battled, quite alone, with a tremendous sorrow in its first hours of strife, knows how vain is the effort to collect his thoughts at the time, and to recall their order afterward; knows how the merest trifles will intrude themselves on the attention at times, and at others how the faculties will seem to be suspended, and a kind of dull vacuity will succeed the access of raging pain. The story of Robert's suffering in no way differed from that of any other supreme agony. It had all the caprices, all the fantasies of pain; it had the dreadful vitality, and the intervals of numbness and wandering. Many times in the course of that night Robert sat down in a chair and fell asleep, to wake again—with a start, and an impression that some voice had uttered his name—to the renewed consciousness of his misery.

It was very long before he began to think about the circumstances of Katharine's flight from her home, before he began to speculate upon how she had gone, and whither. From the moment he had read her assurance that in this world he should never see her face again, he had been seized with a horrible conviction that this was literally true: he would seek her, of course; he would find out where she had gone—he did not even stop to think whether there would be much, or any difficulty about that—but he should see her face no more. No such wild notion as that Katharine would relent and forgive him ever crossed Robert's mind. He knew how cold and proud she was—how cold and proud when she was ignorant of his sin against her, and when he had lived only in the hope of winning her love some happy day before he died; he knew how insensate any hope would now be, and he never cherished such a delusion for a moment. She was dead to him, and all the gorgeous fabric of the life he had built up for himself had crumbled away.

The new day was dawning when Robert Streightley went wearily up stairs, and stopped at the door of his wife's dressing-room. He had hardly courage to enter the deserted chamber — it was as though she lay dead inside. There had been so strong a likeness to her face in that of the dead man he had stood beside that day, that it had had a double awe for him. When at length he opened the door and went in, the cold dim dawn was there before him, and the orderly emptiness of the splendid chamber struck him to the heart.

No picturesque disarray was there, but the trimness of a swept and garnished apartment. He had not entered this room on the preceding night—he had not thought of looking for any explanation of Katharine's absence there. But, now that she had furnished the explanation herself, he remembered the servants had told him she had been some time in her dressing-room after her return from Queen Anne Street. He drew back the curtains and admitted the misty light; he sat down on a sofa and leaned his head wearily upon his hands. Gradually fatigue overcame him, and he fell into a deep sleep, which gave him merciful forgetfulness until late in the morning.

Robert was roused from his slumber by Katharine's maid, who told him that Lady Henmarsh had arrived and was waiting to see him. "There's another lady with her, sir," said the maid—"Mrs. Frere."

Robert started perceptibly. "I can not see any one yet," he said. "Say I am not dressed, but will call on Lady Henmarsh as soon as possible."

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The woman hesitated. "Lady Henmarsh wants to know what day is fixed for the funeral, sir; and she has been asking about my mistress."

"Just tell her what I have said," returned Robert, impatiently, "and say no more."

The maid left him, and Robert went to his own room. His injunction was useless. Lady Henmarsh, who had felt more discomposure when the news of Mr. Guyon's death had reached her than any other intelligence respecting her fellow-creatures could have caused her to experience, had hurried up to town, had gone to Queen Anne Street, and learned from the housekeeper the strange disappearance of Katharine. While her message was being conveyed to Robert, she was engaged in cross-examining the footman; and she had elicited all that any one, save Robert himself, could tell her before she went away, obliged to be contented with the promise of a speedy visit from Mr. Streightley.

The news of Mr. Guyon's death had been received by Mrs. Streightley and her daughter as such news would naturally be received by such persons. They were shocked and sorry; shocked, because they knew Mr. Guyon to be a "worldly" man, and they could not but regard his unprepared death with awe; sorry, because he was Katharine's father, and Ellen at least loved Katharine, and grieved for her grief. Ellen would indeed have gone to her sister-in-law, and sought to soothe her in her simple fashion, had not Robert's note forbade her doing so. This note had excited no fresh alarm; the ladies agreed that Katharine was not able to see any one, not even Ellen, just yet, and were quite content to wait for the subsidence of a feeling so natural. Thus, when Robert made his appearance a little before noon on the day following the receipt of his note, they were wholly unprepared for the intelligence he had to communicate, and they received it with mingled horror and incredulity.

"My wife had grave cause of complaint against me," Robert had said, "and she has left me."

To this plain but not explanatory statement he limited his disclosure, and he left his mother and sister in much perplexity and distress. It did not occur to them that Robert was ignorant of his wife's plans; they accepted the situation as a simple separation; and Mrs. Streightley's comment upon it to her daughter, made after Robert had left them, was,

"I don't care what her cause of complaint may be, nothing can justify her leaving Robert. Don't let us speak of her, my dear; time will bring things right, and, at all events, will console him."

Thus Ellen had not any information to afford Mrs. Gordon Frere when she surprised her by a visit that same afternoon. It was Hester who repeated to Ellen the particulars which Lady Henmarsh had extracted from the footman that morning, and Hester who suggested that Robert might find it more difficult than he imagined to open any communication with his wife.

"Lady Henmarsh went to Mr. Guyon's solicitor," said Hester; "and he evidently can tell nothing. Mrs. Streightley had a long interview with him after her father's death, but he declares she never gave him a hint of her intention, and was singularly quiet and composed. He wondered, indeed, at the composure with which she bore her father's death. I believe Mr. Streightley expects her to communicate with him, or you, or some one, by letter?"

"I suppose so. Oh, of course," said Ellen; "but the whole thing bewilders me. What fault can she have to find with Robert? Surely no woman ever had a better husband."

Mrs. Frere assented to this proposition, and the two talked over the mysterious occurrence. With none the less *goût* that no amount of talking could render it less mysterious. Hester had a certain degree of knowledge, and a greater degree of suspicion; but she did not confide either to her guileless companion, who was distracted between her admiring affection for Katharine and her absolute belief in Robert's faultlessness.

The interview between Robert and Lady Henmarsh was not more communicative on his part than that which had taken place at the Brixton villa, in so far as the motive of Katharine's flight was concerned. "Cousin Hetty" had so much to say about Mr. Guyon's death, and was so much agitated by it, that Robert's kindness of heart would, under any circumstances, have prevented his telling her any thing derogatory to the memory of the dead man. He therefore confined himself to a general statement of the circumstances. Lady Henmarsh was genuinely astonished, and honestly concerned. She thought in her heart that Katharine was the "greatest fool" in existence. "The other man is married," said she to herself, "and therefore out of her reach. She has not run off with any one else; and unless she was really too well off, and bored to death by having every thing she wished for, I can not understand her conduct." Her manner was perfect in its sympathy with Mr. Streightley, and in her condemnation of his wife, whose flight she, however, took care to represent as merely a caprice, a little bit of temper—"she always had an ungovernable temper," said Lady Henmarsh, in a parenthesis—but of the worst possible taste under the circumstances.

"Did I understand you rightly, that Katharine was with her poor dear father when he died?" she asked.

"Yes, she was with him," said Robert; "she was with him all night, and until near eleven o'clock next day."

"How very extraordinary and how very shocking!" exclaimed Lady Henmarsh. "Well, Mr. Streightley, I am sure, no matter what you and she have quarreled about, the fault is not yours, and her friend will speedily send her back to you."

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"Her friend?" said Robert, interrogatively.

"Yes; Mrs. Stanbourne I mean. Of course she is gone to her. Do not you think so? She does not say so, I suppose, just to keep you in suspense, and make a sensation; but no doubt she is gone to her: she did so in all her troubles formerly; poor Ned and I were not good enough for her," and Lady Henmarsh sniffed spitefully. "My advice to you is to take no notice; she must come off her high horse when she wants money."

Robert started. He had not thought of that; he had not thought of his wife being reduced to any material distress. The mere idea gave him acute pain; and yet what better chance for her to communicate with him, and some faint hope arising out of such communication? The divided pain and relief of the thought struggled in his expressive face.

"I have no idea," he replied; "there is no clew, no indication in her letter—nothing but the terrible, bare truth; and I don't know whether she has money with her or not."

"She had a private banking account, I know, among the other luxuries of her *vie de princesse*," said Lady Henmarsh, with a spiteful emphasis; "you had better see to its condition. I have no doubt she has gone to Mrs. Stanbourne. It is unfortunate; and she is foolish to have made such a scandal as, let us all keep the matter as close as we may, it must make, for it will not be easily lived down by her, or forgotten by the world. However, it can not be helped; she must only come back, and propitiate society more than ever."

Robert hardly heard her; his thoughts were far distant, in pursuit of the beloved fugitive. The trivial talk of the woman of the world passed him by unheeded. He roused himself to tell Lady Henmarsh what were the arrangements for the funeral of Mr. Guyon, and to utter a few sentences of kindness toward the dead man, and concern for her grief. Then he was going away, when he remembered something he had to say, and turned again to speak to her.

"No papers can be removed until after the funeral," he said; "but I have looked over the greater part of poor Mr. Guyon's, and I have set aside a large packet which I consider you are the proper person to dispose of. I will send them to you carefully."

Lady Henmarsh thanked him; but her manner was confused to a degree which did her habitual *sang froid* a great wrong, and a genuine blush dyed her face from the chin to the forehead. "To think of his being such an idiot as to keep those letters," she said, when Robert had left her. "Who could have believed it? I should not be surprised if he had kept some letter, some memorandum, which has opened Kate's eyes; and if so, knowing what a devil she is when she's roused, I'm not surprised at any thing."

Robert found that Katharine had not drawn on her private banking account for more than a fortnight. More than ever puzzled by this discovery, he questioned her maid, inquiring if she could tell what money her mistress had had in her possession. She had only a few sovereigns in her purse, the maid knew, when she went out that fatal day in the carriage. Katharine had forgotten her purse, and sent her up stairs for it just as she reached the hall door; so she had seen the purse, and taken particular notice of it, as it lay open on the dressing-table. Robert went with the woman to examine the drawers and wardrobes in Katharine's room. He was intensely anxious now to be assured that she had the equivalent of money with her, for he was far from really sharing Lady Henmarsh's confident anticipations, though he tried to persuade himself that he did so. All Katharine's possessions were in perfect order—not a trinket, not a jewel was missing—not one, at least, that Robert had given her, or that she had bought since their marriage; nothing but the old-fashioned case containing her dead mother's diamonds, her sole dowry, was gone from its place. Then Robert despaired; then he seemed to understand the terrible and final meaning of this event.

He was standing before the open doors of a cabinet in which Katharine's jewels were symmetrically arranged, and had just satisfied himself that only the case of jewels had been removed, when a servant came to seek him.

"What is it?" said Robert. "I am busy; I can not see any one."

"It is one of the clerks from the City, sir," returned the man, "and he wants to see you on important business."

Robert went down to the study and saw the clerk from the City. His business was important and his news serious. New and heavy loss had fallen on Streightley and Son. Troubles had indeed come to Robert, "not by single spies, but in battalions."

CHAPTER XXVI.

DELIBERATION.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning, and Mr. Charles Yeldham was hard at work, his oak rigidly closed, the sleeves of his dressing-gown turned up, his hair in a grand state of "towzle," caused by the frequent passage of his hands through it, a shower of fresh ink-spotches dotting the carpet close by his desk, and other indubitable signs of a hard case of "treadmill." It had occurred to Mr. Yeldham, in the midst of applying a wise saw to a modern instance, that somebody was tapping at his outer door; but, entirely engrossed by the vastness of the application, he had given himself to rubbing his hands together under his desk, and had wholly ignored the knocker. In the act of taking a fresh dip of ink preparatory to the elaboration of a sentence which should utterly confound his adversary the opposition chamber-counsel, Mr. Yeldham paused, and, recognizing the peculiar

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taps at the door as those known only to the affiliated, Charley, with some faint idea that it might be Gordon Frere coming in for a chat and a smoke, laid down his pen, and, unbolting the door, admitted Robert Streightley.

Very pale, with a bright hectic flush under the eyes, and with an unnatural brightness in the eyes themselves; with his hat drawn over his brow, and his shoulders far more rounded than when Yeldham had last seen him, Robert Streightley wrung his friend's hand, entered the room, and, without invitation, flung himself into a chair by the desk. The appearance of the man was so changed, the action was so contrary to his usual custom, that Charles Yeldham looked hard at him, and looking, noticed the restless quivering of his lips, the odd manner in which he plucked at his chin with his hand, the way in which from time to time he pressed his side, as though to check the beating of his heart. Yeldham noticed all these points; but his voice never betrayed him, and he said perfectly calmly,

"Well, Robert, old man, it's not often you venture into my quarters—afraid of the law, eh, old fellow?—think that I shall entangle you into a dispute with Rothschild, or show how easily you could promote a claim against the Barings? However, I'm glad to see you now you are come."

"I'm sure you are, Charley; and I know you'll be more glad to see me—I mean more ready with your sympathy and advice—when you learn that I have come to you—in trouble."

"In trouble? Oh yes, I recollect; I saw in the papers. Dreadful thing about Mr. Guyon; so sudden, and at such a place! Dreadful for your wife too; I suppose she feels it acutely?"

"I suppose she does. I can't say—I don't know!"

"You can't say—you don't know! Why, Robert, old fellow, Mr. Guyon's death must—"

"I didn't come here to talk to you about Mr. Guyon's death, Yeldham; I came to speak of my own affairs."

"Why, Robert, how you—what on earth's the matter with you, man?"

"What on earth's the matter with a man whose wife—whom he adores and worships—has left him forever?"

"Has left him forever? Good God, Streightley, what's the matter with you; you've not been—"

"No, I'm not drunk, Charley, if you mean that; and grief has not turned my brain yet; at all events, I know what I said, and I mean it—read that!" and he handed him Katharine's note.

Yeldham read it through with contracting brows and pursing lips. He read it twice; then Streightley said, "That note was posted to me, and reached me the morning after my wife left her home. You see that it does not give the slightest clew to her whereabouts."

"It does not—it—"

"Why do you hesitate?"

"Well—there was no occasion for you to show me that letter; and you would not have shown it to me, I presume, if you intended your confidence to end there."

"I have come here to ask your advice and help, and with the full intention of concealing nothing from you."

"That is the only condition under which advice, to be worth any thing, can be given. Mrs. Streightley in that letter speaks of some plot or conspiracy of which you were cognizant, by which her whole life was warped and spoiled. I'm not quoting exact words, but that remains upon my mind as the sense of the passage. What does she mean by that?"

"She means that I, whom you have always known as an honorable man, acted on one occasion like a sneak and a scoundrel; she means that I was so mad in my pursuit of her before we were married that I descended to the use of foul means to carry my point—that I was base enough to be party to an arrangement which, as she says, warped and spoiled her life, for the sake of getting her for myself."

"This is strong language, Robert! Knowing you as I do, I should think your conduct even in this matter can hardly have been such as to justify this self-condemnation."

"Wait and hear the story before you judge. You know how I loved Katharine Guyon. I told you all about it that first day we went down to Middlemeads; I told you how, the first time in my life, I was passionately, madly in love with her. We spoke, if you recollect, of your friend Gordon Frere; but I did not tell you what I then knew—that he had paid great attention to Miss Guyon; that these attentions had been very well received by her, and that there was a very strong flirtation—if not an understood engagement—between them."

"You did not tell me, but I knew it. I had been told of it by Gordon himself."

"You knew of it, and yet listened to my love-ravings? However, the flirtation, engagement—whatever it was—was gall and wormwood to me. I had seen them together on several occasions, and the recollection of the pleasure which she always showed in his society used to madden me. I made all kinds of excuses to go to her house; I lent her father money whenever he asked for it; each time I saw her I was more madly in love, but she was no nearer to me than before. One morning her father wrote to me to come to him on urgent business. I thought he wanted more money, but he explained that it was to consult me—I, who was so calm, and clever, and far-seeing, God help me!—as to the future of his child. He had that morning had a letter from Mr. Gordon Frere making a formal proposal for Miss Guyon's hand, and inclosing another letter to Miss Guyon herself."

Here Charles Yeldham shifted his position, leaning forward in his chair, and fixing his eyes on Streightley's face.

"I did not read either of these letters," con-

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tinued Robert; "but Mr. Guyon explained to me their purport, and I knew at once my doom. Mr. Guyon expressed his dislike to the proposed connection, stating that Mr. Frere was too young, too frivolous, and too poor to be intrusted with Miss Guyon's future. In an instant, and almost without knowing what I did, I proposed to Mr. Guyon for his daughter. He accepted me instantly, declared himself delighted, and assured me that he would smooth matters for me with Miss Guyon. But there was Frere's letter. We both knew that she was fond of the young man; we both knew that she would accept his offer; we—yes, we both agreed that the letter should be kept back from her, and that she should never be informed of Frere's proposal."

"Good God!" exclaimed Yeldham, "and that intention was carried out?"

"At once. Frere was answered by Mr. Guyon that his daughter was engaged to me, and—there! I can not go through the sickening details of that time again, nor describe the manner in which that girl was cheated of her lover and made over to me. Since then the knowledge of my treachery has never left me; I may fairly say I haven't had one happy hour; and, could I only get my wife back, and prove to her how sincere is my desire to atone for my part in this plot, I should not repine at its having come to light. You don't speak, Yeldham; you despise me—you—"

"I don't despise you, Robert; I pity you from the bottom of my soul," said Yeldham, in a hard, dry voice. "I don't think, much as I have heard it talked of, that I ever believed in what men call the power of passion before. That it made whole idiots of the half-brained people who chose to let it get the mastery of them, I understood; but that under its influence you should have permitted yourself to have your sense of right and wrong warped and degraded—that you should have suffered yourself to become a conspirator with, if not the tool of, such a thorough-paced scoundrel as old Guyon, is to me most marvelous. I confess I thought there was something queer in the case, but I never dreamed of this."

Yeldham stopped speaking for a minute; but as Robert Streightley remained silent, his head buried in his hands, Charley rose to his feet and began striding up and down the room, as was his fashion when very much excited.

"I should be no true friend to you, Streightley, if I did not tell you all I feel in this matter," he said, "though I can not express in strong enough terms my horror at what has been done. When I recollect how that poor fellow Gordon Frere went away almost heartbroken, and soured in temper, at the way in which he thought he had been treated by Miss Guyon—his visits unacknowledged, his letters unreplied to, his proposal rejected—when I think how he stormed about her conduct and cursed her—yes, cursed her, poor girl, as a heartless coquette; cursed her for what it now appears she had not merely had nothing to do with, but was a fellow-victim in—when I think of all this, I feel I must be drunk or dreaming when connecting my old friend Robert Streightley with such a deliberate piece of villainy! Don't start, Robert; it was a hard word, but it was the right one. I'm not a friend of yesterday; we've been like brothers since we were boys, and you know I'd give my life for you if it were wanted; but I claim the right to speak out plainly in this matter. Why, it was but the other day that Frere, who, thank God, came home quite cured of all that early romance, was here talking of you and your wife, and saying how lucky she was to have chosen for her helpmate in life such an honest, genuine, sterling good fellow."

"Charley," pleaded Streightley, crossing his hands behind his head, "for Heaven's sake spare me this! To know what I was, what I seem to be, and what I am, is too much!"

"There, then," said Yeldham, pausing by his friend and laying his hand on Robert's shoulder, "I've done. No talk will mend the matter, and, besides, immediate action is needed. You say Mrs. Streightley had left your house?"

"She had; that letter came by the post the day after her father's death—the day on which she went away."

"And at present you have no clew to her whereabouts?"

"Not the slightest."

Charles Yeldham sat down at his desk, and, leaning his head on his hands, remained for a minute or two in deep thought. Then he turned to his friend and said,

"Mrs. Streightley was, I should imagine from the little I saw of her, a woman of great force of character, and not likely to do a thing on the spur of the moment without calculating results. You see this letter, by its postmark, must have been written some hours after she left home. During those hours she was deliberating and forming her plan, and, whatever that was, she'll hold to it, I'm sure. She has determined that you sha'n't trace her, and it's my opinion you'll have the greatest difficulty in doing it."

"We might employ the detectives, don't you think?" asked Robert.

"Detectives! There's been no detection done by the detectives since they were made the heroes of sensation novels; and, besides, we don't quite want to place your domestic history among the archives of Scotland Yard. No; whatever is to be done—and, as I said before, I fear the chance is small enough—must be done among ourselves. Who were her female friends—intimates, I mean; dear and dearest, and all those things that women say and write to each other?"

"I—I scarcely know," said Robert, looking blank. "She never appeared to me to have what one could call an intimate friend. There was Lady Henmarsh, who used to take her about before we were married, but there's not been over-much cordiality between them lately, I should say; and Mrs. Stanbourne, who is a relative of Katharine's, and a very charming

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woman, the kindest and best—so particularly nice to me, made me feel quite at home—but she's not in England, or I would have sent to her at once; and there's my sister Ellen, and Hester Gould—Mrs. Frere, I mean—but of course, under the circumstances, she would not go to either of them."

"Of course not," said Yeldham, rubbing his head. "It's a tremendous knot—a most tremendous knot. I don't see my way in it the least. Motive for leaving plain enough—discovery of this plot. Inducement for her to go any where in particular? none. 'Never will forgive you—never will look on your face again'—that means concealment, or I don't know but she's just the woman whose spirit would induce her to—no, not that either. Too much pride; hates the world's talk and pity—no, no. What does she say about having taken nothing of yours? Hadn't she any money?"

"She had a private banking account of her own, but I find she has not drawn a check for weeks. She has only taken with her some jewels which belonged to her mother, and which—ah, my darling! my darling!" and the strong man, who had borne up with such fortitude hitherto, broke down and wept like a child.

"Robert—old fellow—for God's sake, any thing but that! Have some brandy; have some—"

"If she should be in want—she, who never yet knew an ungratified wish—if she—oh, Charley, I know I'm making a fool of myself, old friend, but I love her so! Oh Heaven, I love her so!"

There were tears in honest Charley Yeldham's eyes as he sat himself down by his friend, and took his hand and said, "Come, Robert, be a man. I know it's hard to bear, horribly hard, and no preaching, and no attempt at consolation will make it any better. It must be faced and battled with. She's gone, and we must find her. It's one consolation to know that, wherever she may be, she'll be certain, by that wonderful something which I have often felt, but which I can't explain, and which is innate in her, to command the respect of those she is thrown among. But the money-test is decidedly an awkward one. She has some jewels, you say; but she'll know nothing of the way to convert them into cash, and she's sure to be awfully done; and I suppose she was like most women, had not the least knowledge of the value of money?"

"Well, no, poor child—not much, I think; you see, she has never had to—"

"Of course not—I know. Look here, Robert; you must take a blunt question from a blunt man, and give a blunt answer if you choose. Is what is beginning to be murmured about you in the City true?"

The color flushed up into Robert Streightley's pale face at the question. The pride in his wife, in his position, had been things of later days; the pride in his City stability had been borne in him, and nurtured in his youth.

"I will answer you, Charley, in all truth," he said, with quivering lips; "but you must tell me first what the report is."

"The report is, that, hit heavily by the failure of Hicks's bank, you have been trying to recover leeway by—well, what they call wild speculation; that you've got some tremendous bills in hand, and that—"

"There—quite enough. Public rumor is, as usual, considerably in advance of the truth. We were hit by Hicks's failure, but you'll find that Streightley and Son will weather the gale yet. Pshaw!" Streightley exclaimed, suddenly changing his tone; "I got relief from one confession, why should not I from another? I won't disguise from you, my dear Charley, that we have been very heavily hit, and that our present situation is—well, what may be called precarious; but I hope, and think, we shall pull through."

"Has this state of things been for long?"

"Well—for some months."

"And Mrs. Streightley knew nothing of it?"

"God forbid! Knowing how she had been purchased, was I to yield up the sole influence I possessed over her by telling her that the gold for which she had been sacrificed was only dross and dead leaves, and that the 'merchant prince' was on the brink of ruin? Not I. And what has it come to now? She is gone, and I am left alone in my misery and desolation." His head fell on his breast as he said this, and the big tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Look here, Robert," said Yeldham, laying his hand heavily on his friend's shoulder; "this won't do at all. You're all unstrung and out of health. Get you home—if you're not absolutely wanted in the City—and rest a bit; you need it, heaven knows. Leave this business to me—you know I'm a capital ferret—and I'll take it in hand at once, and you shall see me to-morrow with my report."

Robert Streightley wrung his friend's hand, and very shortly left the chambers; but Charley Yeldham remained for more than an hour with his chin buried in his hands, and his mind full of all he had heard. At length he put on his hat and walked into Fleet Street, where, close by the top of Middle Temple Lane, he encountered Mr. Daniel Thacker.

It is scarcely necessary to say that, though they were acquainted, there was very little friendship between Mr. Yeldham and Mr. Thacker. The Hebrew gentleman regarded the lawyer as a plodding snob; the conveyancing barrister regarded the West-End money-lender as an unscrupulous scoundrel; but they had met and been introduced, and were in the habit of stopping to exchange verbal civilities, and they did so on this occasion. After the first compliments had passed, Mr. Thacker expressed his regret at not seeing more of Mr. Yeldham in society; but added that he perfectly well understood how it was—there must be bees as well as drones; and Mr. Yeldham had the credit of being one of the most hard-working as well as one of the most

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deservedly successful bees in the legal hive. Mr. Yeldham—in his coldly formal politeness one could scarcely have recognized the warm-hearted Charley, Robert Streightley's friend—Mr. Yeldham was compelled to leave society to those who adorned it, like Mr. Thacker; and, "talking of society," said Mr. Yeldham, "this is very sad news about our poor friend Mr. Guyon."

"Sad enough for me," said Mr. Thacker, with charming frankness. "Mr. Guyon was a client of mine; a client for whom I—like a soft fool as I was—however, that's neither here nor there—I shall have to stand the racket in that quarter, and be a considerable loser, I can tell you."

Mr. Yeldham expressed his concern, and attempted to terminate the interview; but Mr. Thacker caught him by the lappel of his coat. "And talking of that," said he, "this is a pretty business in Portland Place!"

In Portland Place? You would have gathered from the expression of Mr. Yeldham's face that it was the first time he had ever heard of that locality.

"Yes, yes, you know what I mean," said Mr. Thacker, impatiently; "Guyon's son-in-law—Streightley, the City man."

"Streightley, the City man?" repeated Yeldham; "ah! of course, dreadfully cut up at the sudden death."

"Dreadfully cut up at the sudden death! I hope that's the only way in which he'll be cut up dreadfully. Haven't you heard the news?"

By a shoulder-shrug which would have done credit to Frederic Lemaitre, Mr. Yeldham intimated his ignorance.

"Well, then, Mrs. Streightley has gone away from her home—left her husband, sir; and no one knows where she's gone to."

"That's a very awkward statement to make, Mr. Thacker," said Yeldham; "Mrs. Streightley, too, of all persons in the world! I suppose you have—you must have—excellent authority for such a story, or you would scarcely venture, a man of your perspicacity, to repeat it."

"All I know is, that a—well, in point of fact, a client of mine, Mrs. Frere, was with Lady Henmarsh, Mr. Streightley's great friend, and heard it when they called in Portland Place."

"Mrs. Frere—a client of yours? ay, ay! ay, ay! a strange story indeed, but one which we lawyers must take *cum grano*, as we say. Good-morning Mr. Thacker." And Yeldham bowed to his acquaintance and passed on.

"A dry stick that," said Thacker, looking after him; "a very dry stick. How much of that story did he know? Every bit; more than any of us are acquainted with, for he was an old friend of Streightley's, and has doubtless been consulted about the business. I've underrated that chap hitherto, I imagine; he did that very neatly—very neatly indeed. Shook me off at the right instant too, at the very moment when I intended to pump him about Streightley's liabilities; a deuced cool, clever hand. I'll remember you, my friend, when I want clear-headed advice."

"'In point of fact, a client of mine,'" said Yeldham to himself as he went his way. "That's it, is it? Mrs. Frere a client of Thacker's! Fishy that—deuced fishy, considering her relations with the Guyon-cum-Streightley case. Something to be made out of that, I fancy. I'll just take a turn round the Regent's Park before going back to head-work, and think that out."

CHAPTER XXVII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

The return of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Frere to England had been almost simultaneous with the double catastrophe of Mr. Guyon's death and Katharine's flight. They had returned to Hester's house in Palace Gardens, and had no intention of leaving London during the winter. Gordon was excessively tired of Continental life, and had conceded to fashion rather than consulted his own inclination by spending his honeymoon out of England. Hester, who had never seen any foreign country until after her marriage, had been enchanted with every thing, and would have prolonged her stay with much pleasure, but that she had perceived her husband's weariness, and desire to find himself in England again. Gordon was too essentially sweet-tempered and good-humored to thwart any one, or to press his own wishes unduly; but his wife was as keen of perception as she was devotedly attached to him, and she read him like a book. A glance at the page, on which incipient boredom was written, was enough for her. With admirable tact and grace, she discovered a score of good and sufficient reasons for returning to England; and no one would have guessed, who saw her step gayly into the railway-train at the Embarcadère du Nord, that she was experiencing a keen disappointment, and renouncing a pleasure to which she had ardently aspired. Quiet and persistent self-will, which never failed in its object, but rarely hurt other people in attaining it, was a strong characteristic of Hester; but the stronger had come in—Love, the conqueror, the invincible—and self-will had promptly surrendered. There was a good deal of unconscious selfishness in Gordon Frere's nature—the light, airy, pleasant selfishness which is frequently combined with a large capacity for enjoyment and constitutional indolence, but which in his case would have been easily dispelled on any given occasion by a remonstrance, and never made itself offensive. To this quality his wife's excessive love was particularly calculated to minister, detrimentally to his general character; for her devotion knew no bounds. It was not unnatural that, having departed from the rule and practice of her previous life, by allowing a passion to gain possession of her, Hester should have departed from it by the widest possible divergence. It would have been touching as well as curious to watch the subjugation of the proud, calculating,

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intellectual woman to the love that filled her whole soul and ruled her whole life. From her wedding-day to that which saw her return to London, and her acquisition of the knowledge of Mr. Guyon's death, by a note dispatched from Lady Henmarsh's half-dismantled house in Cavendish Square, on the chance of her arrival, she had never bestowed a thought on Middlemeads, on the embarrassments of Robert Streightley, or the equivocal confidence which existed between herself and Daniel Thacker. She had indeed thought much and often of Katharine—thought of her with exultation; occasionally with a touch of pity, when she satisfied her jealous, passionate soul that no remembrance of her, except in the most ordinary casual way, ever cropped up in Gordon Frere's mind. Hester was destined to learn the truth of a certain proverb about "the letting in of water;" for, having opened the floodgates for the admittance of love, she had no power to stop the tide, and the tumbling waves of jealousy thundered in the distance. But, as Hester was, above all things, a reasonable woman, the danger was still far off; indeed, its foretaste was sweet. She liked to assure herself that she had no rival with her husband, whose character, in all but one or two points, she really did understand as thoroughly as she believed she understood it on all. She liked to remember that his was a light, gay—if it must be so called, shallow nature; that all traces of a former rule had passed away, and the sceptre of this kingdom was securely in her hand. How safely she would hold it! how tender and watchful her rule should be! She felt, when this great love laid its grasp upon her, as though she grew ever so many years older in its hold. She mentally compared herself with her husband, and smiled at the difference which existed between them, though her years were fewer by many than his. She utterly laid aside, she completely forgot, her hatred of Robert and Katharine—that hatred which had grown on her unperceived, which she had never deliberately fostered, but had acknowledged, nevertheless, with the strange candor in self-judgment which characterized her. She made no mistake in her estimate of her husband's feelings toward her. She did not look for more than he could give; but she knew exactly how much was comprised in that *all*, and she joyfully and rightly believed that she possessed it. She knew that Gordon could no more give her the same amount and intensity of love that she gave him than he could read the same books which she read, or be moved by the same impulses, the same associations of thought and feeling. She never repined at the knowledge, she never wished him other than he was; his handsome, refined face, was a constant delight to her; she sunned herself in the light and warmth of his joyous, kind, careless, life-enjoying disposition; she watched him with an intense secret pride; in short, she loved him in all the depth and strength of that word of inexhaustible meaning. He loved her, in return, honestly, heartily, and after his careless, joyous fashion. He thought her very handsome and "deuced clever," and was fond of mentioning the latter article of his creed. "Knows every thing, my dear old fellow, and reads every thing, and can talk of every thing; not a bit blue, you know—not in the least; can't bear that sort of thing. Not a bit of show-off in her, I assure you, but a first-rate head, and a splendid woman of business."

As Gordon Frere had, in acquiring wealth and its responsibilities, by no means acquired a taste for business of any kind, and had developed no practical talents whatever, except for getting out of life all the enjoyment attainable by large means, youth, high spirits, and a splendid constitution, it was fortunate for the prosperity and good management of the Frere *ménage* that its mistress merited the commendation he delighted to bestow. They were both singularly free from littleness of character; and there was not the least danger of jarring susceptibilities being disturbed by the fact that Hester owned all the wealth, and kept the management of affairs in her own hands. Gordon Frere was not a man who could understand the petty pride and that kind of egotism which make a man married to a rich woman perpetually uneasy because she is rich, and perpetually desirous of reminding her and the world that he is the legal proprietor of herself and her money. Hester Frere was not the sort of person to understand that, having given him herself, a woman could estimate her money more highly in the transaction, and aim at keeping her husband mindful of the secondary and comparatively insignificant concession. In the case of these two persons, therefore, wealth had fewer snares than it ordinarily spreads to insure the troubling of peace, and the destruction of self-respect, in marriages of this kind.

It was Gordon's happy, pleasant way to like every body instinctively, and to be difficult to persuade into disliking them, even when he had discovered for himself, or been convinced by others, that certain persons were not estimable or admirable. Thus, he liked Mr. Thacker, and never thought whether he was not just a little vulgar and presumptuous; whether there was not something about him suggestive of a pronounced talent for scheming, and a remarkably low estimate of his fellow-creatures. He liked Ellen Streightley, and never asked himself whether she was not rather silly, and did not border on the tiresome as a companion. The nearest approach he had ever made to such an idea was when he proudly thought of the advantages which Ellen must derive from Hester's society, and concluded that it was "a splendid thing for her, by Jove!" It did not occur to him to remember that his wife's intimate friend was Mrs. Streightley's sister-in-law, and that it was presumable that his once-adored Katharine's influence was also available for her benefit. He did not feel so cordially toward Lady Henmarsh as might have been desired, it is

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true; but then he had known her in the old times; he had habitually spoken of her as "the old cat;" he had prided himself immensely on detecting under the veneer of fashion the ingrained vulgarity of her mind, and, like all persons when exercising a talent which they possess in an infinitesimal degree, he was very proud of his perspicacity in this instance, and felt that he was bound, in consistency, never to like Lady Henmarsh. "It isn't as if she really cared about Hester," he would say to himself, or to the friend with whom he was almost as confidential; "but she doesn't, you know; she only cares to make Hester give parties for her purposes—parties by which the old cat pays off all her own obligations; and to have the use of Hester's carriage, and the advantage of Hester's popularity—for every one likes my wife.—I understand her. I'm a sharp fellow in some things, dear old boy, though I never could take to pens and parchment, and look wise and bilious, like you." And Charley Yeldham thought what an enviable nature was this young man's, and what a pity it would be to disturb his serenity by any revelations, supposing it ever came within his power to make them. Perhaps it may appear that Yeldham's cogitations were needless, and that Frere's was not the kind of serenity to be disturbed by any discovery which only touched the past; but this was not so. The one or two points on which Hester did not know her husband's character were precisely those on which his old chum and faithful friend understood him best.

No unmanly laziness, no idle abandonment to the mere surface follies of existence, dictated Gordon Frere's ignorance of the details of the management of his wife's fortune. He knew she was, as he said, "a deuced clever woman, and a first-rate hand at business," and he simply acted, having no meanness in him, on his belief. He never thought at all about the nature of the investments in which his wife's money was placed, neither did he ever think about her former relations with the Streightleys; and had he known that Robert was Hester's debtor to the large amount which she had advanced to him through Thacker, he would not have seen in the transaction any thing beyond the merest ordinary matter of business.

Gordon Frere was excessively shocked by the intelligence of Mr. Guyon's death. Not that he had any regard for him; indeed, rather because he had not, and because he knew him better (though far from thoroughly) than most of Mr. Guyon's friends, who had not had "business" transactions with the departed gentleman, knew him; and such a death, come to after such a fashion, had a grim and painful effect on a mind which was not callous or irreverent, only frivolous and untrained.

Hester had only waited to impart the intelligence conveyed by Lady Henmarsh's note to her husband before she went to offer her condolences to her *ci-devant* chaperone, who had urgently requested to see her. But in her manner of telling him there was something that jarred upon Gordon's sensibility. Coldness and curiosity were in her tone, and he did not like it. The event was terrible in itself, and had terrible meaning to Lady Henmarsh and to Katharine Streightley. Gordon thought honestly of the latter as his wife's friend, not as the woman he had loved, and he winced at the little touch of unwomanliness which Hester betrayed. He understood her very incompletely; and though he knew she loved him, he did not know that she loved no one in the world but himself—and herself. The good-natured fellow did not get over the novel sense of annoyance with his wife easily, and, to divert the pain of it, he thought he would go and look in on Yeldham, and talk over things with him. But he did not succeed in this. When he reached the Temple, he found Yeldham hopelessly immersed in a consultation with an inexorable solicitor; and the fiat went forth, in a whisper at the door, "Heavy case, my dear fellow, and quite impossible to spare five minutes; see you to-morrow, any time." So Gordon went away, in sufficient discontent, and less in love with law and hard work than ever; and so it fell out that not from him, but from Robert, did Yeldham hear the news of Mr. Guyon's death, and that the next interview between the friends was destined to be of a painful and memorable nature.

Hester did not see Gordon Frere, after her visit to Lady Henmarsh, until late in the afternoon, and then they were not alone, so that there was no conversation between them on the additional circumstances which had transpired. In the mean time Hester had seen Thacker, and made communications to him of which the result has been shown in the preceding chapter. Of all these circumstances Gordon Frere was profoundly ignorant. He had left a card for Mrs. Streightley during the afternoon, and made the customary inquiry, to which the well-taught servant had made the invariable answer; and Gordon had turned away from the door without learning that a second calamity, infinitely outweighing the first, had fallen upon the household. When he saw his wife again, she was engaged with visitors; and though he remarked that her face was somewhat flushed, and that she was less gracefully easy in her manner than usual, he imputed these uncommon appearances to the agitating nature of her visit to Lady Henmarsh, and he was rather pleased to think she had not taken the dreadful occurrence, which had affected him powerfully, quite so easily as he had at first supposed. They were not alone at dinner, and Aunt Lavinia, in the pleasure of seeing her niece again after her absence, had affectionately accompanied her to her dressing-room, so that she had had many hours in which to think over the events of the day before she had an opportunity of discussing them with Gordon. During these hours Hester's bad angel had surely been in the ascendant; and Hester's good sense had failed her for once, in the temptation of success, in the consciousness of power

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where she had been powerless, and of superiority where she had been dominated. For once she lost sight of that which was generally the first, the greatest object of her attention, her husband's approbation, and made the first false step in a career which had hitherto been marked by circumspection.

Gordon ran lightly up the stairs after he had carefully consigned Aunt Lavinia to the carriage and the special care of the servants, and found his wife standing by the fire, whose light was shining on the folds of her velvet dress, and on the few well-chosen jewels she wore. There was a flush of excitement in her face which added to its beauty, but which made Gordon look at her with surprise. Before he could ask her if any thing had happened, she said, in an eager voice,

"Have you heard the news?"

"No; what news? Any thing more about Mr. Guyon?"

"No; there's only one more event possible for him, and it is to take place on Thursday. Have you heard nothing of the Streightleys?"

"No; I called there to-day. What's the matter, Hester? is any thing wrong with Katharine?" His face was pale, and his voice hurried. Hester started at the word. Why did she not remember; why did she not take warning? Who can tell? It was but another illustration of "the letting in of water." In a harsh voice, through her set teeth, she answered him,

"Yes, there is something wrong with 'Katharine,' as you call her—something very wrong. The bubble has burst—she has run away from her husband!"

"Good God!" was Gordon's only answer; but the tone in which he uttered the exclamation angered Hester, and hardened her.

"Yes," she went on, "there is no doubt about it; I have it on the best authority—Mr. Streightley's own. She has left her husband at a nice time, too—on a proper filial occasion—when her father's dead body is unburied."

Gordon looked at her; and had she been wise she would have taken warning, she would have seen the dawning of a suspicion that she was different to that he had believed her, in that look, and paused before she flung into the gulf of a new and cruel passion the gem of all her treasures, whose pricelessness she knew well. But she was not wise, and she mistook the meaning of that look; she did not know that its sorrow and its misgiving were for her; she gave them to another in her excited fancy, and she rushed upon her ruin.

"You are deeply concerned, Gordon, are you not, and very anxious to learn all the particulars? You shall hear all I know." He was standing close to her as she spoke, and they were looking steadily at one another.

"I am indeed, Hester," he replied, mildly. "I trust there is some terrible mistake; tell me what you have heard."

"There is no mistake; Mrs. Streightley has run away from her husband, leaving a letter for him, like the young ladies in the plays, who elope with a lover when 'Gardy' wants to marry them; only in this case there is no lover, I believe, or he is so very well hidden that nobody knows who he is."

Still Gordon looked at her, but now there was relief in his face. "Thank God there is no infamy in this," he said, "though I deserve to be shot for having believed for a moment there could be infamy in any act of Katharine Guyon's."

"Katharine *Streightley's*, you mean," said Hester, with a sneer; "it strikes me there is some little infamy in her conduct as it is, though there may be no lover in the case."

"No," said Gordon Frere, in a tone of manly decision, "there is no such thing. Misery and misunderstanding, possibly mischief, there may, there must be, but no infamy, no disgrace. I will never hear it said or hinted. This will be set right, I am convinced."

"You are as sanguine as you are chivalrous, Gordon," said Hester; "but there is a little difficulty in setting such matters right, either in the private or the public sense. Mr. Streightley is very generous, we all know, and he gave his wife the love she did *not* marry him for, as well as the money she *did;* but he may have his wrongs as well as his faults, and—"

"Why are you so hard and bitter, Hester?" said Gordon, in a quick, unsteady voice. "How have these people offended you? They have always been your friends, have they not? I thought you had known them intimately for years, and always received kindness from them—I am sure you have told me so—and now you speak of their trouble in this sneering way. When you told me of poor old Guyon's death, I was shocked at your want of feeling; and now, God forgive me, but I am not able to resist the suspicion there is something horribly like gladness in your heart. How can this be? What is it all? What has Robert Streightley, what has Katharine done, that you should regard their misery as you do?" He took her hand gently; he looked at her with pity in his clear blue eyes. She saw the "pity," and it maddened her; she did not see that he was thinking of her as much as of that other whom she hated. What! *he* had reproved her, and on Katharine's account; the first cloud that had obscured the glorious light of her wedded happiness, the first ripple on the ocean of her unimaginable bliss, had come through *her!* In an instant, in one pang of exceeding agony, her fancy transported her to the gay garden where she had first seen this man, who was now *hers*—this man whom she loved with all the intensity of a nature whose power and passion she herself was only beginning to understand. In one of those terrible spasms of feeling, which, when we think of them afterward, make us understand the mystery of eternity, she lived through one memorable day again. She saw the sunshine and the flowers; she felt the perfumed air; she

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heard the strains of music; she saw the flitting crowd, the gay groups, the fluttering dresses, the rich colors, the young faces; she heard the sounds of talking and laughter, and the soft rustling and flapping of the flower-tents; she saw Katharine and her party, Mr. Guyon and Streightley, and Yeldham, and she saw Gordon Frere; he was walking beside Katharine, and looking at her as lovers look; had he ever so looked at *her*, his wife—she who loved him with a love in which she now knew there were untold possibilities of suffering—she who lived only to love him? In the instant during which this vision filled her brain and wrung her heart, Hester Frere lived through hours of anguish; and yet there was not a perceptible pause between her husband's question and her reply. She spoke it with her hand in his, with her eyes on his, with her face growing paler and harder with every word,

"You do well to ask me such questions," she said; "you do well to suspect me of such feelings. This is as it should be; this is what I should have expected. Perhaps *you* can answer for Mrs. Streightley's purpose in this flight; perhaps *you* know why she found her home intolerable, and the bondage into which she sold herself for money unendurable. You answer glibly for her, there is no infamy in her flight—indeed, are you sure there was no infamy in her marriage? Are you sure this is the first time she has deceived Robert Streightley?" She loosed her hand from his hold and sat down, panting for breath. Gordon still stood and looked at her, but his face had darkened, and an angry look had come into his eyes. He spoke very slowly, and cold fear came upon Hester as he said,

"Explain yourself, if you please. Such unwomanly, such base insinuations shall have no reply from me. Say what you think—ask what you wish to know, plainly; but first let me say this—that I have been utterly mistaken in you; that I believed you a woman incapable of a meanness, and honored you as such—"

"Yes," said Hester, in a voice so low that it was hardly audible, "*honored me!* I believe you; but you loved *her*. Yes; don't start and stammer, and seek to deny it," for Gordon, in sheer astonishment, had started, and tried to speak. "It is useless; I know all. I know how she played with you, and jilted you, and threw you over for the rich man, whom she despised. Do you think because I was only a music-teacher, and not 'in society,' I never heard what society talked about, and had no eyes to see? I tell you, I read your secret and hers the first time I ever saw your face; and I read it again when I, the new heiress, and the 'great prize of the season,' went up the staircase at Mrs. Pendarvis's ball with you, and *she* came down with the *millionnaire* for whom she had discarded you. I don't know why this woman has left her husband, but I can guess; perhaps you *do* know. I don't care."

"Hush, Hester!" said Frere, and his tone forced her into silence. "Beware lest you reveal to me more of your nature than I can endure. Never venture to speak such words to me again. I am ignorant of Katharine's movements, as you know as well as I do; but I would stake my life on her honor, and I trust her motives, as I trust her actions. If there be, as there must be, a serious misunderstanding between her and Streightley, I pity him with all my heart. I know little of him; but as I have come to know that little, I have learned to respect and esteem him. I will help him to the utmost of my power."

"Will you?" said Hester, with a sneer. "Your will and your power are both likely to be taxed. Mrs. Streightley timed her departure well; she had got all there was to be had out of her great marriage. Robert Streightley is a ruined man!"

Gordon Frere turned a shade paler as he said, quietly,

"Is this true, Hester? Are you sure?"

"It is perfectly true, and I am perfectly sure," she replied.

"Then how do *you* know it?"

She laughed a low, quiet laugh.

"Ah! that is *my* secret," she said.

"So be it," he replied. "And now, understand me. You have taunted me with my love for Katharine Guyon, and her rejection of me. I avow both. I loved her dearly, and I believed she loved me. I asked her to be my wife, and she rejected me. I don't question her motives; I only know that I suffered the keenest misery in consequence. But I say to you, as I would say to any other who dared to accuse me of sullying the purity of Katharine Streightley by an unauthorized word, or look, or wish, that it is a base and dastardly lie. She has been to me, since her marriage, as distant as a star—an object of admiration and reverence indeed, but no more, as she never can be less. Now—I would do any thing in the world to prove to her, and to her husband, that I am the warmest of her friends and the most devoted of her servants. And now, Hester, one word of ourselves. You are not a foolish woman, speaking random words and swayed by every gust of temper. I presume you have not so spoken to-night, and I give all you have said its weight of sober seriousness. I think you would have done better to have left these words unsaid; but remember this, they can never be unsaid now, and the fruit they are likely to bear will be no sweeter to your taste than to mine. I am going to see Yeldham in the morning, and will breakfast with him. Good-night."

So he left her, and she let him go without a word. The time crept on, and still she sat beside the fire, with the flickering light upon her jewels and her velvet dress, with her dark eyes stern and fixed, and her hands clasped and motionless. It was not until a servant came to ask if the lights might be put out that she roused herself and went up stairs to her room. There she found her maid, shivering and yawning in the protracted weariness of waiting.

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She dismissed the woman at once, who went out of the room, not without having looked sharply at her mistress. Hester caught the look, and, when she was alone, went to her dressing-table and gazed fixedly at the reflection of her face in the glass.

"Yes," she said, "I am to lose that too, I suppose—power over my feelings first, then over my words, lastly over my features—and become the weak thing I have always despised. Fool! fool!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WINGED IN FLIGHT.

For many weeks after Mr. Guyon's death, the inexorable pressure of business, increased by a commercial crisis long impending and now arrived in full severity, obliged Robert Streightley to put his sorrow as far as possible from his thoughts during business hours, and bring all his intellect to grapple with the conduct of his affairs. That the old house of Streightley and Son was in any thing but a prosperous condition —that its cool, calculating manager had rushed wildly into almost impossibly beneficial speculations, was now pretty generally talked of, and various reasons were assigned for Robert's conduct. Some people, of course, roundly stated that they had never believed in him at all; that all his previous success had been the result of luck, or "flukes;" and that he was merely finding his proper level. Others lamented that spirit of flunkeydom which had led a sharp fellow like Streightley to marry the daughter of an insolvent West-End swell, who had spent all his money in reckless extravagance, and, it was said, had bolted from him now the money was gone. Few—very few—had a word of pity for him; he had been too successful for that; and though, during the long years of his triumph, he had always been generous and kind-hearted to a degree, in the hour of his fall this was not remembered; and it was not even allowed, by those who knew nothing of his private history, that he "took his punishment" well, or that he exhibited a proper pluck under his defeat and downfall.

It mattered little to Robert Streightley what was thought of him even in the City now. The mainspring of his life was broken; she, for whom, up to the very last, he had plotted, and schemed, and speculated, had left him. All his efforts now—and he struggled hard—were made to save the reputation of the house. Hour after hour did he and Mr. Fowler spend in going over the books, looking at lists of outstanding debts, the recovery of which was hopeless, and liabilities which it was impossible to evade. Hour after hour did the result of their work show them the hopelessness of their position, and the fact that the final crash was every day drawing nearer. Poor old Mr. Fowler was a pitiable spectacle; to him the fact that "the house" was in difficulties was infinitely more distressing than the thought that with it would go all the savings of years, from time to time invested with it, and all chance of that comfortable pension on retirement on which he could fairly have reckoned.

After Katharine's departure, Robert Streightley seemed to have struck his flag and given up the battle, so far as his business was concerned, endeavoring only to steer his wrecked fortune safely into port. This, notwithstanding all his losses and the bad position of his affairs, he might have been able to do but that, within three months of the catastrophe, he was obliged to make a payment of five thousand pounds to Mr. Daniel Thacker, as Robert imagined, but in reality to Mrs. Gordon Frere. Streightley had found Thacker hitherto very kindly disposed toward him, and after some consideration he wrote, stating that the security was as good as at the time of the loan; that he would pay the interest, but that it would be a great convenience to him if the repayment of the capital could be postponed for a few months. To this application he had had a reply from Thacker, stating that he would turn it over in his mind, and write again in a few days.

"Turning it over in his mind" meant, of course, consulting his principal. So, as soon as he had sent his answer to Robert's note, Mr. Thacker drove to Palace Gardens, and had the honor of a private interview with the lady of the mansion in her boudoir. Hester was looking very handsome, as Mr. Thacker thought, though there was a little too much set intensity about her lips for that gentleman's rather full-flavored taste. After some ordinary conversation, Hester said,

"And now, Mr. Thacker, state the special business of which you wrote to me, and which has brought you here to-day."

"It is one of Streightley's matters, Mrs. Frere. He had, if you recollect, some five thousand and odd pounds from us some months ago, for which we hold as security the assignment of the house in Portland Place, and one or two other minor deeds. That money is, I see, due on the third of next month — a fortnight hence, that is to say; and I have received a letter from Mr. Streightley—who, of course, only knows me in the matter—asking for a renewal of the loan on payment of the interest, and on the continuance of the same security."

"Have you that letter with you?"

"I have."

"Be good enough to let me see it."

As he handed it to her, Thacker said,

"I know that I have no right even to make a suggestion in this matter; but I think, Mrs. Frere, that unless you have any special objection, you might comply with his prayer. The security is undeniable; and Streightley has been so much knocked about lately, poor fellow, in several ways, you know, that—"

"It is impossible for me to read the letter while you talk, Mr. Thacker," said Hester, firmly.

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Thacker bowed, and turned very red; and Mrs. Frere, leaning back in her chair, opened the note and applied herself to its perusal. She remembered the bold, firm handwriting, which she had first seen—ah! how long since it seemed!—in little formal notes addressed to herself, or inclosing young-ladyish scraps from Ellen. She recollected how she had lingered over those notes in the old days, weaving little romances of the future, in which their writer played a very different part from the one now filled by him. There was not an atom of tenderness in these recollections; on the contrary, as Mrs. Frere thought of the difference between her day-dreams and what had actually occurred, a bitter smile flitted across her face, and as she read the letter her lips were set tighter than ever.

She read it through twice carefully, then folded it up and handed it to Mr. Thacker, saying calmly,

"I can not agree to that proposition."

It was Mr. Thacker's rule in life never to betray astonishment at any thing. He did not depart from his rule in the present instance; but he must have involuntarily raised his bushy eyebrows a little higher than usual, for Mrs. Frere said to him,

"Did you expect any other answer?"

This was a home question, and Mr. Thacker objected to being called upon to answer home questions. He had not been exactly sure of the state of Mrs. Frere's feelings toward Streightley (of the feeling with which Miss Hester Gould had regarded the same individual, it will be recollected, he had arrived at a perfect knowledge), and he knew that her reply would be entirely governed by them. So he contented himself with saying,

"It is a mere business question with me. You do not require the money elsewhere—at least so far as I know—and the security is undeniable. As to the sentimental view of the matter, I know, from the experience of that morning at Middlemeads, that you are not likely to be biased by any silliness of that kind. Only you see, things have changed since then, and poor Streightley is in a very different position now."

"I don't think we need discuss Mr. Streightley's altered position, except so far as this proposition is concerned, and on that you have my decision, Mr. Thacker," said Mrs. Frere, coldly.

"And that decision is final? I shall probably be asked to reverse it, and therefore may as well have my cue," said Thacker.

"Quite final. I prefer not to discuss Mr. Streightley or his affairs for the future."

"As you please," returned Mr. Thacker; and then he excused himself for his abrupt departure on the plea of business, and took his leave.

Mr. Thacker had not felt comfortable in Mrs. Frere's society of late; there was an alteration in her manner toward him—a gradual withdrawal of confidence, as he took it, but which was, in reality, only preoccupation of mind, and which Mr. Thacker could very ill brook. Nor were his relations with Gordon Frere at all of a satisfactory kind, that gentleman being accustomed to speak to his wife of Mr. Thacker, as "your Hebraic agent, my dear," and to his friends of the same gentleman as "a Jew fellow, who's my wife's trustee, or something."

As Mr. Thacker lay back in his brougham on his way to the City, he fell into a fit of musing over all that had occurred. He drew poor Robert's letter from his pocket-book, and read it through, then laid it down on his lap, and recalled the scene that had taken place—recalled Mrs. Frere's words and looks at certain parts of the interview, and said to himself,

"She's a wonder—she certainly is a wonder. Sticks to what she has made up her mind to like a leech; and as to moving her to pity, you might as well clap a blister on the monument. I'm certain I'm right in my old opinion that she played for Streightley, and that she was as wild as possible when he did not see it, but married that pretty Miss Guyon instead. She'll never forgive him. And the next thing will be that he won't be able to pay up the first installment either, and then she'll have Middlemeads. Yes, and I shall have helped her to it too. Well, it must have come, I suppose, in the long run, even if he had pulled through for a little; but I fancy this will smash him up at once. He must sell the house; that will get wind, and then—by Jove, poor fellow! I'm afraid it's all u-p!" And Mr. Thacker looked and felt much more sorry than might have been supposed. The next day he found it a very difficult and unpleasant task to write to Messrs. Streightley and Son, telling them that, "owing to circumstances over which he had no control," it would be impossible for him to comply with their request, but that he trusted, etc. However, there was no help for it; so, on the receipt of this note, Robert had an interview with Thacker, and within a week the house in Portland Place was stuck all over with bills, announcing the sale of the furniture and of the lease at an early date.

Perhaps during the whole of his trouble this period immediately antecedent to the sale in Portland Place was the most distressing to Robert Streightley. With the exception of an old woman and her daughter—mysterious people who lived in the kitchens, and were supposed to "do for the good gentleman"—every body had left the house but himself, and he used to roam through the various rooms, thinking of Katharine and of her associations with each. Not merely

"In hanging robe and vacant ornament"

did she present herself to his thoughts, but each article of furniture spoke of her taste; wherever his eye fell he was reminded of her. For many weeks after her departure he had kept her dressing-room locked, and retained the key in his own possession. This room opened into her boudoir, and there, on her writing-table, long after dust had gathered thick upon its leaves, lay her blotting-book open, as she had left it; on it a note just commenced. He had been re-

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quested by Katharine's maid to compare the jewels which she had left behind with the list in his own possession, and he had done so. Then he replaced them all as they had been when she turned away from all the luxury with which he had surrounded her. Often in the evenings, his dreary task of battling with the rising tide of ruin done, he would visit the forsaken shrine of his idol, and feel the pang of her absence all the more keenly for these mute evidences that it was all real, that she had once been there, where silence and emptiness now dwelt. When the blow fell, and he knew the house and furniture must be sold, his wife's rooms were the last to be dismantled. With his own hands, and alone, he packed up every article of her personal property for safe keeping, wherever he should be. When he entered her dressing-room to commence his task, he caught sight of his own reflection in the looking-glass doors of a large wardrobe, and started to see how worn and pale he looked. Some of her dresses were hanging up in the first wardrobe which he opened, and, obedient to an impulse, he caught hold of one of them and kissed it, and went staggering blindly from the room.

A few days before the time announced for the sale in Portland Place the commercial crisis so long dreaded swooped down upon London. Continental politics, unsettled since '48, had been seething and simmering, and daily the aspect of affairs had become more bellicose. Big German states looked at little German states with longing eyes and watering mouths, and consoled themselves by the reflection that if awkward and powerful neighbors snapped at them and went off with a mouthful, they could revenge themselves on smaller fry. Italy moaned in her sleep, tormented by the old but unfulfilled dream of freedom from the Alps to the Adriatic; and France and Russia were looking on expectant. Things in the City had for some time had what is called "a downward tendency." Consols were at 82, and French Rentes lower than they had been known for years. People shook their heads at Spanish Passives, and Egyptian Scrip was at a discount. One of the great discount houses, the Brotherly Bound—formed out of the old firm of Ready, Rowdy, and Dibbs—had recently failed (partly on account of the old partners having taken all their capital out, partly on account of all the new capital which was brought in having been spent by the managing directors in giving banquets to the aristocracy), and the shareholders in similar concerns were beginning to be seriously alarmed. Under the alarm of shareholders, managers drew in their horns, and talked of limiting their business, refused all questionable paper—in which they had been dealing wholesale—and looked not too well pleased at good bills, such as they had never had before. There was gloom on the Stock Exchange, and Clapham dinner-parties were, if possible, duller than usual. No actual outbreak yet though, and chance of peace, so the papers said. If war could only be averted, the crisis would pass. The crisis! it was on them as they spoke. At that moment the clerks in Lothbury were reading off a telegraphic message containing the few words spoken by the emperor to a provincial mayor; and when those words appeared in print, it was known that war was meant, and three of the largest establishments in the City suspended payment that afternoon. Up went the Bank rate of discount, and the panic commenced.

These events happened late in the afternoon of a bright spring day, so immediately before the cessation of business that they were only known to those actually concerned in the City, and it was not until the next morning that the general public was apprised of all that had happened. The news sprawled over the placards of the newspapers in the biggest type; the newsboys at the suburban omnibuses and railway stations were "sold out" at once; people rushed to tell their friends what had happened; the panic spread to all stock and shareholders, and even to the depositors in banks. Then toward noon the City began to be filled with a set of people to whom its ways were strange, and who were unfamiliar with its customs. Elderly maiden ladies and rich widows from prim Peckham paradises; old boys, club bucks and fogies, from Bury Street or St. Alban's Place lodgings, who had little annuities on which they lived; artists and actors hurrying down to see the special stock-brokers in whom they implicitly believed; newspaper reporters on the look-out for matter from which to concoct a sensation article; mooners and loungers of every kind were blocking up Lombard Street and pouring into Cornhill. The old-established banks never quivered for an instant; wild customers brandishing checks rushed up to the counter, and felt abashed as they were met by the calmest clerks, who, without a hair of their parting or a fold of their cravat displaced, asked them in the most mellifluous voices "how they would have it?" the copper shovels plunged into the drawers, and came out, as usual, full of sovereigns, the forefinger of the clerks duly moistened counted off rolls of notes with the accustomed precision. "Panic?" they seemed to say; "pooh! it must be something more than panic that can affect us."

But three or four of the smaller houses, which had been battling for months with the exigencies of the times found it impossible to hold on any longer, and succumbed—among them the house of Streightley and Son. No stone had been left unturned, no effort untried; but the state of the money-market was such that it was found impossible to realize the securities which they held; and at length, bowed down with despair, old Mr. Fowler wrote with his own hand the notice that "owing to the crisis in the money-market having caused a run on the house, and having failed to procure advances on the securities, or obtain the slightest temporary assistance, we find it necessary to suspend our payments." The notice went on to say that the

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step had been taken with the view to protect as far as possible the interest of the friends of the firm, whose forbearance was confidently relied on, and added that the books had been placed in the hands of Messrs. Addison and Tottle, and that the early realization of a satisfactory dividend was anticipated.

It was not to be expected that such an old-established firm could fail without plenty of comment. They talked over "Streightley's smash" that day at City conferences, on the flags of 'Change, and the Gresham Club, and many and various were the opinions expressed.

"'Protect as far as possible the interest of their friends!'" said an indignant merchant, who, when first starting in commerce, had received the greatest assistance from Robert Streightley's father. "Like their d—d impudence! What do they mean by that?"

"Better have protected their friends' principal, and not minded the interest, eh, Jenkinson?" said the wag of Capel Court.

"I'm afraid that the realization of the satisfactory dividend is all bunkum," said a third. "Lucky if we get fourpence in seven years, I should say."

"It's a good thing old Streightley can't come out of his grave and see this," said a white-bearded patriarch; "he was of the old school—slow and sure."

"Deuced slow and not very sure," said Ralph Elgood, the Rupert of the Stock Exchange. "Bob Streightley's a thundering good fellow, but has been hitting out wildly of late, and now he feels it."

"Nonsense; hitting out wildly!" said young Porunglow, junior partner (of three weeks' standing) of Shaddock, Porunglow, Quaver, and Porunglow, great West-Indian merchants, who had been three months in business, and who frequented the vortex of West-End society. "Streightley might have gone on all right if he had not married old Guyon's daughter; a splendid gal, who made the tin fly like—like old boots! Thundering fine parties they had, sir. None of the Belgravian nobs did it up browner in the way of foreign singers, and Edgington, and Coote and Tinney, and real flowers and all that kind of thing. I s'pects it's that that's settled Streightley's hash."

"I shall take deuced good care to attend the meeting of creditors," said the first speaker; "and, unless the personal expenses are decidedly moderate, I shall take the opportunity of saying a few words on that subject."

This was the tone in which the matter was talked over in the City, and then the talkers turned to the discussion of other things. Of the firm of Streightley and Son nothing soon remained save the name on the door-posts in Bullion Lane: the winding-up and the meeting of the creditors were duly reported in the City Intelligence; and shortly afterward a new firm took the old house, and the erasure of the name from the doors and of the memory of the firm from their friends were almost simultaneous.

So there was a smash in Bullion Lane and a sale at Portland Place, and Robert Streightley, the quondam "City magnate," the merchant-prince, had lost his place among rich men, of consequence to mankind and human affairs, and had returned to his former quiet life in his mother's suburban house (for her income had happily been secured against the vicissitudes of business), and had not even begun to "look about him," but was stunned and silent under the reiterated shocks of calamity.

His mother and sister had taken the intelligence of his ruin as most women do take the tidings of a calamity in which the affections are not concerned—that is to say, quietly and resignedly. If so many other persons had not also been ruined, it would have been much harder to bear, because then inconsiderate, hasty people might have blamed Robert; but as it was, he was only one of many; and they thought about the matter much as they would have thought about a war in Russia, or a revolution in Venetia, the rinderpest, or a railway accident.

As for Robert, he had little personal feeling in the affair. Poverty or wealth made little difference to him. He could have faced the one with courage and confidence had Katharine remained with him, and bid him grow rich again for her sake; he had valued the other only because it had won her. And now the money which had enabled him to do the evil he had done was gone, and the wife it had purchased was gone; and days had melted into weeks, and weeks into months, and brought no word or sign of her. No language can tell how Robert suffered during all the time that his attention was externally claimed by his business; with what agony of hope deferred he would ask Yeldham, day after day, if there was any chance of discovering her place of retreat. Foremost in Robert Streightley's memory was the mind-picture of his desolate home; keenest of all his torturing thoughts was the idea of his cherished one, so daintily reared, now perhaps exposed to privation or absolute want. Compared with the horror of this feeling, the disgrace of his failure, the loss of his City position, which at another time would in themselves have been sufficient to crush him, now fell upon him with lightness—the world thought with extraordinary lightness—for such a sensitive man. But Yeldham, who alone was in his confidence, knew what were the secret yearnings of his heart. "O God! if we could only find her, Charley; if I could only see her once again, only hear her say she forgave me, I think I'd be content to die, and slip out of it all."

The inquiries which Yeldham had instituted in every possible quarter had all been without result, and already many weeks had elapsed, when one morning Robert received a letter from Mrs. Stanbourne, to whom he had written immediately on Katharine's departure, but from whom, up to that time, he had received no reply. He had had no exact knowledge of her address,

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and his inquiries had elicited no more precise indication than "Rome;" so he had no resource but waiting—with little patience indeed, and but poorly rewarded, for the letter ran thus:

"Florence.

"MY DEAR MR. STREIGHTLEY,—Your letter has been following me about for several weeks—I believe for months, indeed—and has only just reached me. I can not—I need not tell you how greatly the news which it conveys has pained and distressed me. I am sure you will understand this without my dwelling upon the point, and that you personally will be assured of my sympathy in this your hour of grief. I am old enough to be allowed to speak plainly in these matters, even to one with whom I have not been very long acquainted, and I may tell you, therefore, that not merely did I see in you many qualities which any girl might be proud of in a husband, but I took the opportunity of showing to Katharine that I had observed them. I am sure furthermore, not merely from the manner in which those remarks were received, but from the general tenor of her conduct, that she had not one thought which she would have been ashamed of sharing with you, and I therefore am disposed to hope that her departure may have been caused by childish petulance, provoked by some little 'tiff,' which you have not explained to me—that it has been merely temporary, and that now, ere this note reaches you, she has returned to you and her duty. If this be so, you will throw this letter into the fire and think no more of it. But if it be not so—if she is still holding aloof from you through self-will, and which I suppose, as her relative, I may venture to call obstinacy, I think it best to give you all the aid and information in my power. I need scarcely tell you that she is not, that she has not been, with me. I do not know that she would have sought me; but, at any rate, my frequent changes of address would have prevented her finding me. Had I seen her, I should have put aside my own ill health (which is, I suspect, a great deal laziness, and hatred of England in the dull season), and, starting off at once, never left her until I had restored her to you. But I remember that two or three years ago a great friend and old schoolfellow of hers, Annie Burton—of whom I know Katharine had a very high opinion—went to live at the Convent de St. Etienne, in Paris, and, as I believe, ended in taking the veil there. If all the other inquiries which you have doubtless set on foot have failed, would it not be well to make a search for our poor lost girl at this convent? Such a place would be likely to attract her in her then frame of mind. She would have the solace of the companionship of her old friend; and as boarders are received at the convent, she could command perfect privacy and peace, and, so far as she knows, avoid every chance of discovery. This is rather a vague idea, but it is a foundation upon which pursuit may improve. I sincerely trust it may not be needed, but not I think it advisable to send it. In any case, I shall be most anxious to hear from you again, and to assist you in any way in my power.

"Yours very sincerely,

"MARGARET STANDOURNE."

The perusal of this letter brought light into Robert Streightley's eyes and comfort to his heart. For the first time since Katharine's departure he felt that there was a chance of recovering her for himself, of seeing her once again, and telling her all he had suffered—all he hoped. His heart beat violently as these thoughts came across him, and he trembled from the intensity of his feelings. He would have gone at once to Yeldham's chambers and shown him the letter, but he felt unable to move, and remained for a few minutes panting and palpitating in his chair. He was weak and dizzy, and had a strange oppressive feeling that he should die before he could get upon the clew just given him. But after a short time these feelings passed away, and he managed to rouse himself and drive to the Temple, where he found Charley, as usual, hard at his "treadmill."

As his friend entered the room, Yeldham looked up from his writing, uttered a short cry of alarm, and came hurriedly toward him.

"What's the matter with you, Robert?" he said—"white as a ghost, dark circles round your eyes—what the deuce is it? No bad news?"

"No, Charley, I'm all right—or shall be in a minute; a little knocked down by what's in this letter. I think there's something in it—some clew at last. Read it, and tell me how it strikes you."

Charles Yeldham took the letter and read it through carefully, then put it down and looked across at his friend.

"Well?" said Streightley, anxiously.

"Well, Robert, of course it's a new light, and—and there may be something in it; but I'm not very much impressed. I scarcely think—but then I know so little, that I'm not a fair judge—that a convent's exactly the place to which a lady of Mrs. Streightley's temperament would retire. However, of course one can send over and ascertain."

"Send over!" cried Robert; "nothing of the kind. I think far more highly than you seem to do, Yeldham, of this information. I think so highly of it that I shall start at once for Paris and pursue the track."

"You? No, Robert, I would not do that. You're not well, my good fellow; you're not strong; any excitement of this kind might knock you up, and that would never do, you know."

"I know that I shall start by the tidal train to-morrow morning, Charley. Now don't argue with me, for my mind is made up."

But Robert Streightley did not start to Paris by the next morning's tidal train. As he sat that night talking over his intended journey with his friend, Yeldham saw the color fade out of his face, the light out of his eyes—finally saw

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him go off in a dead swoon. Yeldham carried him to his own bed, and sent for a doctor, who peremptorily forbade any notion of his being moved for days. "It might cost him his life," he said. And Robert, made acquainted with the veto, after some murmuring, acquiesced in it, and fell back, weak and wavering, to sleep.

"I don't like your friend's symptoms, Mr. Yeldham," said Dr. Mannering to Charley. "Has he had any great mental strain or worry lately? Ah! I thought so. I'm afraid there's very little doubt that his heart's affected."

CHAPTER XXIX.

FAILURE.

ROBERT could not leave Yeldham's chambers for several days after the astute doctor for whom Charley had sent had hazarded his guess about the "mental" sources of his patient's illness; and as the strictest quiet was enjoined, reference to the agitating subject of Katharine and Mrs. Stanbourne's letter had to be strictly avoided. Such avoidance was much less difficult than Yeldham had apprehended it would be; for Robert's exhaustion was extreme, and he readily accepted his friend's assurance that he knew what he wished to have done, and that it should be done without any delay.

"I've sent a line to your mother, Robert, and told her not to frighten herself; and I've had a bed put ready for me in the corner; so you've nothing to do and nothing to think about except getting well."

"And Katharine?" said Robert, with a vague, wan, painful smile.

"Well, and Katharine; but there's nothing to be done until you get well—think of that, my dear fellow, and try—except what I have done, what I did last night when you were asleep."

Robert's hollow eyes questioned him eagerly.

"I wrote to Miss Annie Burton," said Yeldham, sitting down by the bed, "telling her the circumstances briefly, and entreating her to give us any information in her power. I assured her, in case her friend should have reposed any confidence in her, either as to her residence or otherwise, which she might hesitate to violate, that no attempt would be made to control Mrs. Streightley's movements in any way; that the object of the inquiry was to rectify a misapprehension on her part, and to procure some relief of mind for her husband, whom her departure, and his ignorance of what had become of her, had nearly killed. I said that, Bob; I made it strong; and, indeed, I believe it, old fellow."

Robert covered his face with his hands and groaned. Yeldham jumped up immediately, at once remembering the doctor's injunctions.

"This will never do," he said; "I must leave you, Robert. The 'demd horrid grind,' you know!"

"We have only to wait, then?" said Robert, wearily.

"Yes, to 'wait and hope,' as Monte Christo told his young friends," said Yeldham, with a very poor attempt at gayety. "I'm off now, to engage in an interesting question about Farmer Shepperton's ten-acre meadow."

During the few following days the grind which Mr. Charles Yeldham had instituted for himself, and had, without interruption or question, kept up for several years, received many irruptions and incursions at this period of his life, was broken in upon here, and suddenly put a stop to there, in a manner that would have annoyed any but the best-tempered and largest-hearted man in the whole world. While Robert Streightley lay ill in his bed, it was not to be expected that Charley Yeldham could remain quiet, poring over his law-papers, without running in now and then to see how his friend was getting on; whether he wanted any thing; whether the perpetual scratching of the pen disturbed him; whether the preternatural silence did not drive him mad; and other queries, such as men in rude health propose to those whom, being ill, they take to be fanciful. Then there was the doctor's visit, the consultation afterward, the getting the sick man to acquiesce in all the necessary arrangements, the dispatch of Charley's lad for the medicines, and a hundred other little performances, all of which Charley had to take part in, thus giving up his work and withdrawing himself from his desk. He did not mind so very much; for Charles Yeldham's position was now secured, and he knew that the attorneys must await his pleasure. His was no bumptious self-conceit; he had won his spurs in fairest fight and by hardest exertion, by sheer determination and indomitable energy; and he was as incapable of affecting a deprecation of his legitimate success as he would have been of swaggering before that success had been legitimately obtained. So, notwithstanding his innate love of work, he had no hesitation in tearing himself from "treadmill" to attend to his friend, whom he pitied with all his large heart, with a profound pity which had long ago buried blame out of sight.

One morning, when Robert Streightley was sitting in the easy-chair at the open window looking on to the Thames, gazing, with that calm, uninterested feeling which comes to us in illness, on the life below—the nursemaids and valetudinarians in the Temple Gardens; the squad of Inns-of-Court volunteers in private clothes, but carrying their rifles, being put through the mysteries of company drill by the attendant sergeant; the steamboats on the river, cutting in and out among the heavy barges; the distant bridges crowded with traffic, and the shore immediately in front resonant with the work of the Embankment—as he sat, very weak in body, very anxious in mind—for no answer had as yet come to Yeldham's letter to Miss Burton — Charley Yeldham opened the door, and, coming up to him, laid his hand gently on his shoulder, and asked him how he was.

Robert answered that he was better; "progressing—quietly, he thought he might say."

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"That's good hearing, old boy! that's glorious hearing! You certainly have more color to-day, and your eyes are brighter, and you look more yourself. How do you feel about your nerves?"

"What a wonder you are, Charley! No other man in the world would ask such a question, knowing perfectly that if my nerves were in a queer state, there is nothing so likely to knock them over as being asked after them. However, they're tolerably right, thank God! Why?"

"Well, I suppose it was a very stupid question, and I'm not about to mend it by what I'm going to say now. I was going to say, if your nerves are tolerably right, and you feel decently strong and able to bear it, there's somebody in the sitting-room—Good God, Robert!"

He might well exclaim, for Robert Streightley had fallen forward on the table, his face ghastly pale, his hand shaking and trembling, his voice, sunk to a whisper, muttering, "Has she come at last? has she come?"

"No, no, my dear fellow—a thousand times no. Compose yourself, for heaven's sake. What a tremendous ass I am in any matter like this—sure to make a mess of it! No, no, there's no 'she' there at all—only an old friend of mine and an acquaintance of yours; and I thought, if you were well enough, you might like to see him. I may as well tell you at once it's Gordon Frere."

Streightley started as though he had been cut by a whip, seemed about to speak, hesitated for a moment, and finally said, "I'll come in and see him at once."

"You will?" said Charley Yeldham, overjoyed beyond measure; "you will? That's first-rate. I'm delighted, Robert."

"Why should I not?" said Streightley. "If he were to refuse to see me, I could understand that well enough; but now when I, who—and I'm determined that I won't let slip this opportunity of telling him—"

"Robert, Robert, what nonsense you're talking! Frere, of course, like all the rest of the world, has heard of Mrs. Streightley's departure, and as he has a tolerably clear head, he might be of use in our difficulties; but as for going back into by-gones, I forbid it utterly. Now, will you see him or not?"

"Give me your arm, Charley, old fellow, and help me into the other room at once."

The few days' illness, with all the suffering and suspense which had preceded it, had had a grievous effect on Robert Streightley's appearance, so that Gordon Frere—usually impassive, as society required him—gave a great start when he saw him entering the room leaning on Yeldham's arm, and, hastily advancing, took him by the hand and murmured a few words of kindness and sympathy. Robert Streightley was in a very weak state still; his eyes filled with tears, and the pressure with which he endeavored to return Frere's manual greeting was a very feeble one.

"Now sit down, Gordon, here, close by Streightley—for we mustn't let him exert himself too soon after his illness—and let us have a quiet talk," said Charley Yeldham. "Our friend Frere is an old friend of mine, as you know—and—well—what the world talks of, you know—in fact, he's heard the story of Mrs. Streightley, and—having known her and taken some interest in her—he has come, hearing you were here, to inquire for you, and ask what news we have of her. I've told him what I know—what we all know; but as for particulars, Lord help us, who could give them?"

"Our dear old Charley here," said Gordon Frere, "puts in his own peculiar way—which of course you know, Mr. Streightley, as well as or better than I—the state of affairs. I heard at the time of what had happened; but I, like every one else, I suppose, expected it would all blow over in a few days. I should have liked to have seen you then, and tried to cheer you up, but I thought it better not. However, as my wife sees a good deal of your sister, we have heard that things are not as we hoped they would have been; and yesterday I heard of your illness, so I have come, having long had the pleasure of Mrs. Streightley's acquaintance, and having—if you will permit me to say so—a great esteem for you, to ask Yeldham if I could be of any assistance in the matter."

The old courtly manner—how well Robert remembered it! As Gordon Frere spoke to him, he saw him taking leave of Katharine on horseback in the Park, bending over her in the opera-box, whispering to her at the Botanical Gardens, in that happy time now so far away. He remained perfectly quiet, thinking over this for a minute or two; then he said, in a deep voice, and with his eyes cast down,

"No one has a stronger claim to confidence in this matter than Mr. Frere."

Gordon looked astonished, both at the words and the solemn tone in which Streightley spoke: but Charles Yeldham interposed, nervously,

"Yes, yes, of course. Gordon is an old friend of the Guyon family—known Miss Guyon—Mrs. Streightley, that is to say—since—ever so long."

"Not merely on that account, but on another—"

"For God's sake, Streightley! You're weak and ill, and not yourself—"

"My dear Charley Yeldham, I'm weak—and ill—and—well, not my former self, at all events; but I can not see that you are justified in stopping me in what I was about to say."

"But did you not promise me?"

"Certainly not. I came into this room with the full intention of saying what I am now going to say. When Mr. Frere knows that the saying it will have given me relief—and I need relief—I think he will comprehend my anxiety on the point."

Frere glanced from one to the other in mute amazement. He was not what is generally called "quick at taking things," and this dia-

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logue was unintelligible to him. Robert continued:

"You are aware, Mr. Frere, that Mrs. Streightley has long left her home, and that, as yet, we are unhappily in ignorance where she may be?"

"I had heard so, to my very great regret."

"But you can not be aware of what is really the fact—that you are to a great extent implicated in her departure."

"I? Mr. Streightley—"

"Hear me out. Our good friend here thinks I am in the wrong in entering into this story to you."

"I don't see the necessity for it," growled Charley Yeldham.

"Very likely not; but then you have not carried the weight about in your bosom for months, or you would hail such a chance of relief with delight. A chance indeed; but I have often contemplated seeking you, and telling you what you are now about to learn. I am fortunate indeed in an opportunity offered by your kindness." He was speaking clearly and steadily now, so he spoke until the end. "Mr. Frere, I owe you an explanation of my last remark to you, and I'm proceeding to give it; but you will have to pardon my feebleness and give me time. You were acquainted with Miss Guyon long before I was introduced to her?"

"I was."

"And—I am speaking to you frankly of yourself; you shall see how frankly I will speak of myself presently—and you admired her very much?"

"I thought—I think," said Frere, after an instant's hesitation, "that there never was a more beautiful woman."

"Nor a more heartless one, I suppose you would add. That woman, as you imagine, fooled you to the top of your heart; gave you every encouragement to seek her hand; and when you did so, frankly and honorably, deliberately threw you over for the richer prize which came in her way."

"Mr. Streightley," said Frere, in an earnest voice, "I'm sure you must have some very strong motive, or you would never touch upon a subject which must be so painful to both of us."

"I have a strong motive, sir, as you will speedily find. Your calls were unnoticed, your letters disregarded, your honorable and manly offer rejected, almost with contempt. Shortly afterward Miss Guyon was married to me. Now, Mr. Frere, I am coming to my point. Katharine Guyon's rejection of you and her acceptance of me were alike the result of a base conspiracy against you and her. In matters concerning you she was hoodwinked and deceived; your visits were not mentioned to her; your letters were kept back from her. The very offer of your hand she never received, and, until the day of her father's death, she was in ignorance of its having been made."

Gordon Frere had started back at the beginning of this disclosure, and now sat staring wildly, scarcely able to comprehend what he had heard. After a pause he said, "Good God, how awful! And by whom was this treachery perpetrated?"

"By two men, one of whom has gone to his account, with all his imperfections on his head; while the other, mercifully spared so far to repent and make such atonement as lies in his power, is before you."

At these words Gordon Frere started from his chair; for an instant remained erect, taking no heed of Yeldham's hands outstretched in warning; then, as his eyes fell on Streightley's worn and haggard face, he sank quietly back into his seat.

"I can fully understand what you must feel, Mr. Frere," said Robert, "and I shall shrink from nothing you may say to me. But there is a little more to be told yet, and I may as well finish it. I said that you were somehow concerned in my wife's flight, and what I meant was this. Her discovery of this plot, the rage and humiliation which she felt at having been made one of its victims, led her to leave her home. I am confident she had no other motive. She—" Robert stopped for a moment, and then continued: "I can't say much more. I'm not strong yet, and—I only wanted you to know that my crime has not been unpunished. God knows my share in that miserable compact has never been absent from my thoughts, and now retribution has overtaken me."

He ceased speaking, and leaned back in his chair, faint and pale. Nor was Gordon Frere much less pallid as he rose and said,

"I'm taken so aback by all this, that I can say nothing at this instant. I want ten minutes by myself to collect my thoughts. Charley, give me your key; I'll go into the Gardens for a few minutes, and then I'll come back to you."

Although the Temple Gardens were Mr. Yeldham's favorite and only exercising ground, and although Gordon Frere, in the old days, lazily lounging out of the window with his pipe in his mouth, had often seen his friend tearing round and round them, doing his constitutional in the intervals of "treadmill," it is probable that the young man himself had not been in them more than half a dozen times in his life, and knew nothing of their various beauties. Certain it is that he saw nothing of them on the present occasion. He walked among the nursemaids and the town-made children, and the misanthropes and the valetudinarians, but he saw none of them. He saw the staircase at Mrs. Pendarvis's house, and the conservatory and the landing, and Katharine with her head bent down, listening to his soft familiar phrases—which are not, indeed, the language of love, but which form such a pleasant prelude to it. He saw the saucy toss of the head with which she would greet his late arrival in society where they had arranged to meet, and that half-bashful, half-earnest look in her eyes when they were about to part. Gordon Frere's heart beat

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very rapidly as he thought of these things, and he bit his lip impatiently; but he was a thorough nineteenth-century man, with a horror of giving expression to or even indulging in any strong feelings, and he had long outlived the boyish passion for Katharine which had glorified that past time. His pride was sharply hurt, and the gentlemanly sense of honor which alone among a man's feelings the nineteenth-century code does not require him to repress, revolted against the story he had just heard from the shattered invalid within there. How right he had been, when he first heard from Hester of Katharine's flight, and had instinctively justified her, even though he then believed she had treated him so badly! So, while he was regarding her as a jilt, she was thinking that he had basely trifled with her. Poor Katharine! he pitied her. Did he pity himself? Well, not much; it was over—the glamour was gone, and he was none the worse; but she, sold to this man—a poor man now—homeless, self-exiled, with burning anger in her proud heart. He never for a moment thought of the possibility that Katharine might love him, Gordon Frere; still something he did not pause to analyze told him she did not—that the dream was over for her as for him. The waking was very different though. Father and husband lost; home and position forfeited; a wanderer, and poor, Katharine Guyon was all this. How bright was his own fate in comparison! Mr. Guyon's part in the transaction galled him. He had so heartily despised the dressy, boasting, foppish, frivolous, false old man, and had so often laughed at his little tricks and cheateries, that to have been so thoroughly, so completely *done* by him was, even in such distant retrospect, decidedly humiliating and unpleasant. He had that letter somewhere, with its infernal hypocritical condolence, and its coolly impudent messages from Katharine. All a lie, was it—infernal old scoundrel! Dead though, that must be remembered, even in the utmost scorn and anger. And Streightley, how he pitied him! The man knew so little of the world, and Guyon had made him so completely his tool. He liked Robert, and all the more since Hester had behaved so ill about it all. He wished now he had seen him at once, when this happened—had not been kept back by any fear of Hester's "queerness," as he called it. Things had never been quite comfortable between them since, and he had avoided the subject. But now why should he be angry with this poor broken fellow, who had lost Katharine too, if it came to that? No; he pitied him, and he would help him to the best of his ability, and now he would go and tell him so.

Such is a rapid *résumé* of Mr. Gordon Frere's thoughts as he walked round the Temple Gardens, and such was the conclusion at which he arrived before he again entered his friend's rooms.

He walked straight up to the chair in which Robert Streightley sat, and, taking his thin, wan hand, said, "I've thought carefully over all that you have told me, Mr. Streightley, and the result is, that, so far as I am concerned, the matter is put away and buried forever. It shall never be mentioned by me again, and I think I may say it shall never rise in my mind to your prejudice. The only thing that I will say about it is, that I am glad I have heard this explanation, because by it Miss—Mrs. Streightley is freed from the suspicion of double-dealing and —well, I must say it—heartlessness, which at one time I attached to her. And now," said Gordon, changing the tone of his voice, and laying his hand kindly on Streightley's shoulder— "now we must devote all our energies to finding her and bringing her back. I'm sure, when she hears that I have—I mean when she knows that you've told me all—and—yourself so ill— and—that she'll give in at once—eh, Charley?"

"My dear fellow, I agree with you entirely; I have very little doubt that if we could communicate with Mrs. Streightley, who is a particularly sensible woman, all might be arranged happily at once. But the difficulty is to find her."

"Have you no clew?"

"We had not until quite recently; and even what we now have is very slight indeed." Then Yeldham repeated to Frere all that has been already told respecting Mrs. Stanbourne's letter, and that which he had written to Miss Burton.

"She has not yet answered my letter," he went on to say, with a glance of significant anxiety at Robert, which Gordon understood. "But she may be away from Paris."

"Certainly," said Frere; "nothing more likely. She may have gone home, you know, and the people at the convent may have sent on the letter. We must not be discouraged by a little delay, must we, eh, Charley?"

"Oh dear, no," said Yeldham; "there is nothing to be discouraged about. We must have patience, and Robert must gain strength. Suppose we got a letter now, and knew where she is, he wouldn't be fit to go to her."

"Oh yes I would!" cried Robert. "I should get strength for that. Be sure of me, so far as that goes."

"Well, well, we will discuss that when the time comes," said Yeldham, who was impatient for the termination of this agitating interview. "And now, Gordon, I'm going to turn you out."

"All right, old fellow," said Gordon, cheerfully. "I'll soon come and see you again, Mr. Streightley; meantime, if you have any good news, you'll let me have the pleasure of sharing it. I understand now why Yeldham has never spoken much of you to me; but that's all over, is it not?" And the handsome, happy young man held out his hand, with all the irresistible grace of his peculiar manner, to Robert, who clasped it fervently in his poor thin fingers. Yeldham left the room with Gordon, and the two held a brief colloquy on the landing.

"Will you find her, do you think?"

"I fear not. If ever a determined woman lived, she is that woman. And he has no hold

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on her—no knowledge of her past, no intimacy with her intimates."

"She hadn't any, I believe," said Gordon. "I don't think she had a friend in the world. She was dangerous, you see, being so handsome and so poor; and her father was so deuced disreputable. Did she make many friends since her marriage?"

"I fancy not; I never heard—except Mrs. Frere."

"Oh, she knows nothing about her," said Gordon, hurriedly. "Good-by, Charley. Go back to the poor fellow; he wants you."

Gordon Frere had taken a step down the stairs, and Yeldham's hand was on the door, when the former turned and came back.

"By Jove, Charley," he said, "I was just going away without telling you one of the principal things I came to say. That fellow Thacker, you know, he manages all Hester's business—as far as she allows any one but herself to manage it, that is to say—and very well he does it, I fancy. However, that's not the news, and this is. She gave him a lot of money to invest on one occasion, and he invested it, it appears, in a thingummy—a loan—you know what I mean—where you get the place if you are not paid up to time."

"Yes; a mortgage. Go on, Gordon."

"Well, then, a mortgage on Middlemeads; and of course, then, you know, Streightley smashed; and the end of it is, Middlemeads belongs to us—to her, I mean—and she wants to go and live there when the season's over. Deuced unpleasant, isn't it, Yeldham? especially after the story that poor fellow has just told us; looks as if I did it out of spite to Katharine. I can't explain to Hester; and there's no reasonable reason why she shouldn't have the place, is there, Charley? 'Pon my life, I don't know what to do."

"It's a strange coincidence, Gordon, and that's all that can be said about it. And, after all, it is only strange to us three, because only we know that it is a coincidence at all. To other people Mrs. Frere is much more strictly allied with the Streightleys than you are. As for Robert, he won't mind it in the least; he never thinks about the place. He was eager enough about it, poor fellow, when he and I saw it first, but I don't think it ever costs him a thought or a regret now. You may go and live there without a scruple, take my word for that."

"Do you really think so, Charley? That's very nice indeed, and a great relief; for I would not hurt Streightley for the world. Good-by again."

He ran down stairs gayly, and his friend stood for a minute looking after him, thinking of the story that had been told to him, thinking of his own confidences about Katharine in the very same room, and wondering at, a little envying, perhaps a little despising, his invincible light-heartedness.

There was something odd, he thought, about the Middlemeads transaction. He had never heard Robert mention the mortgagee's being Mrs. Frere; but he would say nothing about it; it might agitate him. So he dismissed the matter from his mind, and went cheerfully back to Robert, whom he found pale and depressed, and willing to talk only of the one engrossing topic—*when* an answer must surely come from Miss Burton.

"What a fine fellow he is!" Robert thought, sadly, in Yeldham's absence, as he reviewed Frere's conduct in their interview. "How nobly generous and forgiving! What a contrast to me! And yet he can not have loved her as I loved her, or no generosity could avail to make him pardon the man who robbed him of her. Ah! no; who could ever love her as it is my torment, my punishment, and yet my life, my pride to love her?"

A few hours more, and suspense, so far as the clew with which Mrs. Stanbourne had furnished Robert was concerned, was ended. The following morning brought a letter to Mr. Yeldham from Miss Burton, written, not from Paris, but from an obscure village in the Pyrenees, where a religious house of the order to which she belonged had lately been established. Its contents were conclusive. She had never heard from or of Katharine from the time she had received the intimation of her marriage; she had it not in her power to afford the slightest information or assistance, beyond writing to the superior of her former convent in Paris, and entreating her, should Mrs. Streightley make inquiry there for her, to detain her if possible, but in any case to communicate with her friends. She expressed the liveliest concern and inquietude concerning Katharine, and the deepest regret for her own inability to help in this sore strait.

Profound discouragement fell upon the friends when they had read this letter; nevertheless, Robert bore the disappointment better than Yeldham expected. He had a settled sense of the sin he had committed upon him, and a resigned conviction that the punishment was not to be escaped or lessened. The uttermost farthing was to be the sum of the payment to be exacted from him; he did not rebel against the conviction he suffered. "I will never give up seeking her, though I don't believe I shall ever see her face again," he would say to Yeldham, when his friend strove to encourage him, to exhort him to a hope he himself was far from feeling.

Yeldham answered Miss Burton's letter, thanking her warmly for her good wishes, and the precaution she had taken in their behalf; and then he had nothing more to do—the weary waiting had to be resumed.

Many were the councils held by the three friends, as the days, which resembled each other only too closely to him, to whom not one of them brought hope or relief, passed by. Robert had returned to Brixton shortly after the arrival of Miss Burton's letter, and had improved since then in health. The demands of society on

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Gordon Frere were not quite so insatiable as in his bachelor days, and many a long summer evening found the friends together, sometimes on the river, sometimes in some quiet country nook a little railway-run from town, and secluded as a desert, but oftener still in Yeldham's chambers.

Robert was a busy man again to a certain extent, though now he worked for others, in a subordinate position, which seemed to hurt his pride but little, if at all. "I can't live in idleness on my mother, Charley," he said; "and—and, if I never see her face again"—that sentence in her letter haunted him—"I should like to leave her something."

Charles Yeldham encouraged Robert in these resolves, and had the satisfaction of seeing him become more tranquil and cheerful when with him. He had always the gratification of knowing that to others he never afforded an indication of the suffering of his mind.

"You are clear, then, Charley," said Gordon Frere on one occasion, when he had "run up to town" from Middlemeads—they were living there now, and it was late in the autumn—"you are clear, then, that there is nothing, positively nothing to be done? She is certainly not within the limits of the United Kingdom, for I am confident we have fished out every mortal creature she ever knew, intimately or slightly, and no one has heard of her directly or indirectly."

"I am perfectly clear on that point, Gordon. The case stands thus: we have exhausted all private sources of information known to us, and must now wait until some others discover themselves. Mrs. Stanbourne is keenly interested in our success, and she has access to such foreign information as we could not command. The only other likely clew is that secured to us, in case of its usefulness, by Miss Burton. I have always maintained that this was not a case for detective work; because, in the first place, it would not avail; and, in the second, Katharine never would pardon the employment of such means. The fatal loss of time at first—the only time in which detective work is ever good for any thing—disposes of that resource, if no other objection existed. Robert, Lady Henmarsh, and myself having concluded, most naturally, that she had gone to Mrs. Stanbourne, the trail was effectually lost before we knew that we were mistaken. She had more than time to hide herself long before it ever occurred to us that she intended concealment; for you must remember, Gordon, the desperate defiance of her letter to Robert by no means necessarily implied that."

"You are sure she had no other friends abroad but Mrs. Stanbourne and Miss Burton—no friends among foreigners, I mean?"

"Quite certain. Lady Henmarsh knows; and, indeed, Katharine had told Robert herself that she had never been abroad for more than a fortnight, or farther than Paris, till their marriage, and she knew no foreigners."

"Where did they go to after the marriage?" asked Gordon.

"To Switzerland. But they returned very soon, and did very little tourist business, I fancy, for Katharine had a severe illness at Martigny which upset all their plans. No, no, there's not a chance in that direction. Robert and I have not left an incident undiscussed, not a speculation untried."

And they believed so. But one individual connected with their stay at Martigny had entirely escaped Robert's memory and mention. Had he remembered Dr. Hudson, however, it would never have occurred to him that in that direction any help could lie. He knew nothing of the profession and the promise with which the doctor and his beautiful patient had parted.

So, like the children in their games of hide-and-seek, Gordon had unconsciously strayed near to the concealed treasure of knowledge when he asked his careless question, but had wandered away again—no hint given, no warning cry, "You burn! you burn!"

CHAPTER XXX.

HESTER IN POSSESSION.

Time went on, and Robert Streightley received no fresh intelligence to guide him to the one object for which he now cared to live. The terrible disappointment of the hopes inspired by the only suggestion he had received had utterly prostrated him; and now, even the revived conviction that news of her *must* come in some way—that, though he might never see her again, this cloud of absolute ignorance of her fate must drift away, had yielded to the slow influence of the passing days. Charles Yeldham had succeeded in inducing him to be calm and quiet; in convincing him that no means of discovering what he wanted to find out should be neglected; and that the best way to insure success was to allow some time to elapse, after which Katharine's precautions would probably relax of themselves. Robert knew his friend's zeal and fidelity; and in his depressed state of mind, and weakened condition of bodily health, he was obliged, and thankful, to rest in that knowledge and security, not indeed from his sorrow, but from exertion on his own part. He had once more begun to tax his intellectual energies by application to business, and the former habits of his life were regaining their dominion over him. He had resumed his residence in his mother's house at Brixton without the smallest regret for the luxurious abode he had quitted. He had regarded all the surroundings of the brief period of display and luxury which had succeeded to his marriage with perfect indifference on his own account, and now he forget them. He was to all outward appearance, in habits and tastes, the same man who had gone City-wards from the same house, year after year, before the brilliant interruption; the difference was un-

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seen, undiscernible by any eyes but those of the Father of Spirits.

It is probable that at this time Mrs. Streightley was as happy as she had ever been in all her blameless but uninteresting life. She did not care much about public repute except in the sense of the impugnment of commercial honesty, and as Robert's character stood as high as ever, in spite of his pecuniary disasters, she cared not at all that the world should talk about his domestic affairs. The world which did so talk was not her world. Brixton and Clapham, the Pratts and the Perkinses, the "connection," and the ministers thereof, said little about the separation between her son and his beautiful "high-flying" wife, and that little had a consolatory tendency; for these good people seemed to think Robert's eternal prospects improved by the occurrence, and it was no part of their creed to trouble themselves about those of Katharine. The old lady had her son with her again; the former routine was resumed: if Robert was unhappy, he did not show it, and she could not understand how he could fret after a woman who had never been a wife to him—"not what I call a wife, at least," she would say, on the very rare occasions when she mentioned the matter. She was a good woman in her way; but she essentially belonged to the narrow-minded order of human beings, and was quite incapable of realizing the fact that, though she had seen nothing to like, and little even to admire, in Katharine, her son had seen in her all the value and the glory of life to him, and was living, under her kind, motherly, but unobservant eyes, a broken-hearted man.

Ellen, whose weakness of character rendered her amiability and her enthusiasm almost valueless, had begun to forget Katharine. She had been charmed by her beauty and kindness, but she had always felt a little restrained, a little puzzled by her; and as she had never thought of applying such intellect as she possessed to the solution of the puzzle, it had remained, to make her uncomfortable. From the first Katharine's flight had been a silent subject between her brother and her, and by degrees Ellen had ceased to think of it much, and the image of her sister-in-law had become faint in her memory. Besides, the Rev. Decimus had always decidedly disapproved of her; and he had improved the occasion, entirely to his own satisfaction, and very nearly to Ellen's conviction, by his eloquent exposition of the dangers of riches, the snares of fashion, the undesirableness of beauty, and the enormity of self-will. The reverend gentleman, who was a good creature in his small way, had one or two defects of character not altogether unknown in his class. He was uncharitable in his judgments, and implacable—piously so, of course, and with the utmost deprecation of such a sentiment—in his resentments. Robert's marriage had been distasteful to his brother-in-law elect from every point of view, personal and professional, and he had never been able to perceive the slightest concession to his influence on the part of Katharine; indeed, he felt perfectly certain that on the few occasions of their meeting she had never remembered his existence after giving him the prescribed bow or word of recognition. If he could have believed that Mrs. Streightley had disliked or feared him or his doctrines, he would have been far less bitter against her than he really, though secretly, was; for he mourned over her in the true unctuous style of self-exaltation, and depreciation of the sinner, familiar to "professors" of his sort; he would then have been enabled to *poser en martyre*, a sufferer of contumely for conscience' sake, and great would have been his reward in Brixton and Clapham circles, where Katharine was utterly unknown, except as an object of holy detraction and affected pity, in the days of her pride and prosperity. But no such resource was open to Mr. Dutton; he knew perfectly well that Mrs. Streightley had never thought of him, had never formed any opinion about him at all; that he had simply been completely indifferent to her. Strange are the complications of human nature, the self-delusions of the best among us. Here was a really good man, disinterested, zealous, perfectly sincere—a man indifferent to wealth (except for missionary purposes), and with whom Ellen Streightley outweighed in attraction the whole of womankind—a man to whom the smallest, the most transient infidelity, either as lover or husband, would have been as impossible as picking a pocket or forging a bill—filled with resentment because a woman—a rich and beautiful woman—had shown herself politely oblivious of him. And he a clergyman too! Ah! there was the rub—the egotism of the good creature was a divided egotism, after all; he could not understand feminine indifference to the cloth! His experiences were partly Polynesian and partly Claphamite, and he judged, as he lived, according to his lights.

When the Rev. Decimus, then, spoke of Katharine with solemn horror as an utterly lost sheep, and without the slightest suggestion that it was any body's business to follow her into the wilderness and bring her back, Ellen listened to him with her usual adoring respect, and made no protest. As her future husband, and a clergyman *in esse*, Decimus was doubly a law to her, and obedience was as deep-seated in Ellen's nature as revolt is in that of some women. Her curiosity respecting the cause of Katharine's flight, the "cause of complaint" against her brother which Robert had assigned, without explaining, remained in her mind long after her sorrow and her affection for the lost sheep had subsided. There was not the least probability that it would ever be gratified, and she began to take the view of the matter insinuated by Mr. Dutton, though he had not the smallest grounds for such a conjecture, and was innocent of intentional slander in the suggestion. "Rely upon it, Ellen," he had said, "Robert's generosity leads him to shelter his unhappy wife from additional disgrace by assuming the blame of this

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wretched business himself. I dare say he made some discovery concerning her former life—the life of a worldling and an unbeliever, my dearest, has no doubt always disgraceful secrets in it —and this is the result. Your brother is very generous, and I am sure capable of such a sacrifice."

This was quite a new idea to Ellen, and it took some time to absorb; but at length she said, with a little air of wisdom,

"Well, but, Decimus, in that case he would know where she is, and all about her."

"And how do you know that he does not know? He never says a word on the subject, does he? I think I understood from you that he never mentioned her since he came back to live here."

"Oh no, never; not to mamma even, or to old Alice. He has never once pronounced her name. My reason for thinking he does not know any thing about her is because Hester says she feels sure he does not, and that he and his friends—friends we know nothing about—are making every effort to find out where she is."

"Mrs. Frere is always right, to be sure; but in this case, I think, she would be certain to know it positively if such were the case. Frere would know it—he is so great a friend and ally of Robert—and he would tell her. No, no, Ellen; on this point I stick to my own opinion." Which was, indeed, the reverend gentleman's habit in all matters wherein he differed from his fellow-creatures."

Mr. Dutton's dislike of Katharine Streightley was only exceeded by his regard for Hester Frere. This sentiment, like all his sentiments, was entirely disinterested, and had sprung into existence long before Hester had taken any active interest in his affairs. According to her usual wise custom, Miss Gould had made herself agreeable to her friend's lover before she was in a position which enabled her to patronize him, and he had conceived a genuine liking for her, into which the element of gratitude was now introduced. Hester had brought her common sense, her unfailing tact, and her powers of deferential persuasion to bear upon Ellen's betrothed respecting the missionary question, and as she understood the good little man's weaknesses as well as she understood his narrow sincerity and stupid zeal, she came out of the discussion with entire success. Mr. Dutton was brought to recognize the force of the reasoning which maintained that English savages are as well worth saving as Polynesian savages, and that the labor implied in the task is at least as arduous, and considerably more repulsive. Hester had her own notions as to his fitness for either task, but she kept them to herself, being supremely indifferent to the spiritual welfare of the world on either side of the equator. "I dare say his parishioners won't swallow his doctrines," she said to herself, contentedly, "but then neither will they swallow his wife." And she derived very great satisfaction from the promptitude and skill with which Mr. Thacker had executed the commission intrusted to him, before the great absorbing interest of this woman's life had arisen to overpower every other. A living had been found in a situation which almost realized the conditions prescribed by Hester, and the marriage of Ellen and Decimus was to take place immediately.

To this, as to most other external circumstances, Robert was indifferent; he had lost his interest in such things now: his only feeling about it was regret that he could not give his sister a large dowry, as he had once hoped to do. He had been consulted in a formal way by both Decimus and Ellen, and he had agreed to all their plans; then, his duty being done, he turned away again, and fed upon his sorrow in silence—in a silence growing submissive, full of repentance and humility. His sin had found him out, and the chastisement was heavy upon him; but Robert was discerning more and more clearly that the hand which was dealing it was God's hand, and he was learning to kiss the rod. Very, very slowly were these lessons learned: the progress of the human soul in the school of the wisdom which is not of this world is never rapid, but neither is it ever arrested, turned aside, or ineffectual.

The long winter, the bright spring, the gay summer had twice come and gone since that November day which had witnessed Katharine's flight, and the rich tints of autumn were upon the beautiful beechwoods of Middlemeads. The place that was to know her no more, never again to be adorned by her graceful presence or enlivened by her beauty, was, to all outward appearance, not a whit the worse for the privation. It was still splendid, still luxurious, still gay—still the home of youth and beauty, of fashion and frivolity. It was Hester Frere's home now; and Gordon was master of the house from which the woman whom he had loved and lost had turned resolutely away, to be lost in utter obscurity. He thought of this at times with keen pain, for a change had passed upon him too, and he was more serious than he had been, which seriousness his wife marked, and, assigning to it as a primary cause one which was but secondary, bitterly resented. Gordon had learned with displeasure as well as astonishment that his wife was the possessor of Middlemeads; the "profitable investment" had no charms for him to counterbalance the unpleasantness and what he felt to be the difficulty of such a position. But what could he do? His wife's friendship with the Streightleys was no reason why she should not live at Middlemeads, since it was evident that not one of those concerned had any notion that her living there was any offense to that friendship. The real reason against it was confined to his knowledge, and must not be imparted to his wife. Had he arbitrarily crossed her wishes, he would have been gratuitously unkind, and that it was not in Gordon's nature to be; and so he went to Middlemeads against his will, and remained there, deriving very moderate

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pleasure from the abode, and feeling that the coldness and restraint which had sprung up between him and Hester since the occasion of their conversation about Katharine were inexplicably increased by the possession of the place.

Since that memorable night Katharine's name had never been spoken between them. Hester knew that her husband and Robert Streightley were much more intimate than they had previously been, and this knowledge fed the jealous passion which devoured her. "They meet to talk of her, these two men whom she took from me," she would think; and her once-powerful and well-trained common sense failed to come to her aid here, when her need was at its utmost. She would have been desperately angry had she known that Gordon had told Robert his objection to living at Middlemeads, and that it was Robert who had quieted his scruples.

"Don't mind about me, Frere," Robert had said. "What does it matter to me? I could never see the place again, you know, and it makes no difference to me who lives there. Hester always liked it, I remember, and I am glad to think she has it now. I am indeed, Frere—I am, upon my honor."

And he was. All this was only a trifle, a secondary point of delicacy, a nothing; it had no influence upon his fate, it did not wound his feelings; the calamity that had come upon him left him no sensitiveness to spare for minor suffering. He never saw Hester now; but that was accident, not design: he had not the remotest notion that she had any meaning in his life beyond the trifling meaning she had always had; he never thought of her at all, indeed. When she was in town Ellen was much with her, he knew, and he also knew that she had procured the living whose charms had diverted Decimus from those of black heathendom; he knew that Ellen was to pass some time with her at Middlemeads in the autumn, but that was all. It had occurred to him to wonder a little how Ellen would feel at Middlemeads without Katharine. But Robert knew his sister, and he smiled at the passing thought and at himself.

So Hester was in possession. The dream she had dreamed had become a reality. She was mistress of Middlemeads, owner of the home of her unconscious enemy, and of the possessions which had belonged to the man who had preferred another before her. More than this, she was the wife of the man her enemy had loved—still loved, perhaps: she had no clew to Katharine's thoughts, no power to read the change which time had wrought in her. Was ever revenge so safe, so sure as hers? was ever revenge so complete? And it had not compromised her in the least: she was all the richer in money, and none the poorer in friends; she could talk of Mrs. Streightley with polite pity, and if by any extraordinary chance the fugitive should ever again come to the surface of society, she could even meet her, unsuspected, unrebuked. Truly her success had been marvelous, her good fortune and her good management unsurpassed; and her secret was so entirely her own. A little impetuousness, the least loss of self-control, and she might have betrayed herself to Thacker. (Hester was quite unconscious of the tone in which she had spoken in the church-porch on the occasion of Robert's marriage.) But she had never lost her self-control, and he knew nothing. Supposing him to suspect, what matter? she dreaded not suspicion, but knowledge.

Hester was happy, then. Happy in her wealth, her popularity, her authority, in her success and prosperity. Happy, as she sat with Lady Henmarsh, who was clad in the deepest and glossiest of widow's weeds, having been disembarrassed of Sir Timothy by the kind hand of death early in the preceding spring, and was now enjoying Hester's hospitality, which she proposed to enjoy as fully and for as long a period as possible. The scene suggested happiness. The two ladies were seated at the large French window of the room which the former mistress of Middlemeads had occupied as a dressing-room, and which was furnished in a style at once sumptuous and tasteful; yet it was not furnished as in Katharine's time. The conservatory, with the fountain and the marble floor, the aviary, and the flight of marble steps by which the Italian garden was to be reached, were there, but the "Lady-Kilmantan" hangings and furniture, the subject of Mrs. Stanbourne's remonstrance with Katharine, had disappeared. Hester, consistent even in the novel defects she was acquiring, had sent all these things to Ellen's future home. She would dissociate herself as far as possible from Katharine—her private rooms should bear no trace of her; but she would make a judicious use of articles of property, notwithstanding Gordon noticed the alteration, and gave his wife offense by doing so.

"Didn't you like the blue-and-silver things in your dressing-room, Hester? I thought them very pretty."

"No," she answered, shortly; "blue is horribly unbecoming to me. I have not a faultless fair complexion, you know."

"I didn't know complexion had any influence on the choice of furniture," said Gordon, smiling, and quite unconscious of the feelings his careless remark had excited.

"Didn't you? No, I don't suppose men understand those things. Read the Duchesse d'Abrantes, and you'll be wiser."

The obnoxious blue-and-silver had been replaced by the freshest and prettiest of chintzes, and the apartment, if less splendid, was even more elegant and inviting. Traces of Hester's intellectual tastes were to be seen about it, and Hester herself was no insignificant ornament. The development of her beauty had been steadily going on, and now the new mistress of Middlemeads need not have greatly feared competition with the former. With all the accessories of wealth and refinement around her, Hester Frere was a beautiful woman to the most critical eye—more beautiful indeed to the critic-

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al than to the careless; for hers was the beauty of form and expression, the accuracy of feature and symmetry of form, the correct loveliness which is less sympathetic but more satisfying than the lighter, more brilliant, and more striking kinds of beauty.

"And you actually had Mr. Thacker's sisters down here for a month, Hester? How very good of you! Were they very dreadful?"

Hester smiled. "You forget," she said, "that I lived all my life among similar people, and am of them. You can't expect me to admit that they are dreadful."

"Oh, I know all that; you need not talk like that to me, Hester, or pretend that you ever were like the Thacker girls. They are like human peonies. I shall never forget Rebecca's parasol, with a pink-coral handle, and her opera-cloak with amber buttons."

"They are very fond of bright colors and jewelry, certainly. I don't dispute that, or hope to correct it; but they are old friends, and I am very constant to them."

"So you are to all friends, Hester, and in that wonderfully unlike most women of the world; and you know the world as well as any one, I think. But, talking of old friends and constancy, what about that silly girl—Streightley's sister—that Katharine, and you too, Hester, bored one to death with last year?"

"She is coming to me shortly, to stay with me while Gordon goes to the Scotch moors, and I shall keep her until we go to town. Then she is to be married early in the winter."

"Indeed!" said Lady Henmarsh, in a dissatisfied tone, which referred to the earlier portion of the reply. "I wonder her brother likes her coming here; it must be rather awkward for her, and for him too."

"Oh no, I think not," replied Hester, quickly, and with a slight change of color. "She does not mind, I am sure."

"That's well," said Lady Henmarsh. "Do you see much of poor Streightley? I have not heard of him for an age. I never can get over his unfeeling conduct to poor Ned Guyon. I know all about it, you know, for Ned wrote me every thing—refusing him money when he was on the brink of ruin — horrid, wasn't it? So I really know nothing of him. I suppose nothing has been heard of that unfortunate mad woman?"

"Mad woman! Why do you call Mrs. Streightley a mad woman, Lady Henmarsh?" asked Hester, with surprise.

Lady Henmarsh was rather confused. She felt she must make some reply, and she did not know exactly how to make a judicious one, for she had forgotten for a moment the strange complication in the position of the woman she was speaking of and that of the woman she was speaking to.

"Well, really," she answered, awkwardly, "you have only to look round you and out of window for an answer. No sane woman would run away from such a home as this, I presume."

"But she could not have remained here," said Hester; "Mr. Streightley's affairs were embarrassed before she went away."

"Yes; but then she did not know it," said Lady Henmarsh. "I suspected always that she knew nothing about her husband's affairs, and Streightley admitted that she did not. No, no, worse luck for him; he declares that it was his own fault that she left him; and I know Katharine well. She has, as her poor father used to say, 'a devil of a temper;' and she is as proud as Lucifer, and gave me an immense deal of trouble; but I am perfectly sure, if she had known the truth, and the trouble Streightley was in, she would have forgiven him."

"Forgiven him what, Lady Henmarsh? Do you know—did he ever tell you?"

"No, never. He only said he was to blame —that she had a cause of complaint against him—you know exactly what he said. However, she is the chief sufferer by her folly, and it is no concern of ours."

Hester was a remarkably keen observer, even where she was much less interested than, since her fatal revelation of her jealousy to Gordon Frere, she had been about every thing which concerned Katharine, and her quick observation now revealed to her that Lady Henmarsh knew more than she was willing to tell, and was very anxious to conceal her knowledge. She did not allow her discovery to appear, and soon after the two ladies separated to dress for dinner.

An hour later Mrs. Frere stood at one of the windows of the long drawing-room, gazing thoughtfully out with eyes that took no heed of the objects they saw. She was beautifully dressed in sheeny satin and soft rich lace; she looked proud, composed, and beautiful, and the thoughts she was thinking were these:

"She will know sooner or later that misfortunes have come on him, and she will return. Then Gordon will see her again, when the little love he ever gave me is dead; when he has become her husband's friend; when there is no confidence between him and me—and *she* has been the means of its withdrawal. Yes, it was she, not myself, not my betrayal of my feelings —how could I help that? how could any wretched creature like me avoid that?—it was *she!* he is always thinking of her. What is his friendship for Robert but love of her? I know he works for him; he goes to him whenever he goes to town; and ah! how often he goes! He does not like this place—I can see it—because it ought to be hers—forsooth, ought to be hers! and bought with my money. But he does not care for my money, and he does not care for me. *I wish—I wish I was dead!*"

You see Hester's success had been complete, and the mistress of Middlemeads, reigning in her rival's stead, must needs be perfectly happy.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

A SPLIT IN THE CAMP.

Town was getting empty, and business of every kind was getting slack, so that it chanced one day that Mr. Yeldham found himself writing letters at abnormal hours, and with no very pressing engagements on hand. He was just thinking what a pleasant thing a little leisure, not too pronounced, was, when his clerk rushed in and announced "Mr. Thacker."

"You're surprised to see me, Mr. Yeldham," said Thacker, as, after a quick survey of the apartment, he sat himself calmly down in a chair by Yeldham's desk.

"Well—if you ask the question—yes," said Charley, with perfect coolness.

"And not too well pleased, perhaps?"

"I should have left you to say that in any case, Mr. Thacker. I presume you come to me on business. Have the goodness to explain its nature."

Charley Yeldham had not been gifted by nature with great powers of making himself disagreeable, but on this occasion he exerted all he possessed.

"I always heard you were a cool hand, Mr. Yeldham," said Thacker, in admiration, "and I find they did not say a bit too much. You don't mind my smoking a cigar, do you, while I stop?"

"Not in the least," replied Mr. Yeldham, with immovable gravity, "if you find smoking conducive to the dispatch of business."

Mr. Thacker looked at him with an unmoved expression of countenance, and Yeldham began to experience a strong inclination to kick him. He restrained it, however, and kept his seat and his countenance, while Mr. Thacker lighted a peculiarly fine cigar by the aid of a peculiarly fine light-box which hung from his prodigious watch-chain.

"I allow all that," said Mr. Yeldham; "so, Mr. Thacker, fire away."

"You wonder what brings me here," said Thacker, settling himself into his chair, "but you'll wonder a great deal more when I tell you. I suppose you think I'm not particularly friendly to your friend Streightley, eh?"

"I didn't think about it one way or the other," said the imperturbable Yeldham.

"But you knew that I held the mortgages on most part of his property—that place down in the country where the Freres are living, and his town-house—you knew I held those, and that it was I who mainly helped to sell him up?"

"Yes, I knew that; but as I also knew that gentlemen in your profession were men of business, and not usually swayed by sentiment, I did not see much to wonder at in the proceeding. I imagine any one else would have done the same."

"You're complimentary to what you call my profession — you are, by George! but that's neither here nor there. Suppose—I only say suppose—that I've had little or nothing to do with any of Streightley's money transactions; that, though I've conducted them and carried them out—though he has had my checks for the cash, and I've had his signature to the deeds—suppose all the time that I've not been acting for myself, but merely as agent to a third party, who wanted to lay their claws on R. S. What do you think of that? Ah! I thought I'd make you look interested at last."

"This is true, Mr. Thacker? you're not romancing, or trying to trot me out in any way, are you?"

"As true as that I'm sitting before you at this present moment."

"Then I must ask why, having kept up the delusion so long, you come here now to disclose it? The motive requires a little elucidation, Mr. Thacker. It's not spontaneous penitence, I suppose?"

"Of course I know you'll want to know the motive," replied Mr. Thacker, daintily removing the cigar from his full red lips, and as daintily replacing it, wholly unmoved by Yeldham's observation, "and I'll tell you: Because I've been badly treated by my principal. Ah! you smile and shrug your shoulders! the usual 'discharged servant's' tactics, you think. Only understand, I discharged myself."

"I must ask you to be more explicit, Mr. Thacker. I have no time for circumlocution. In the first place, who is your principal?"

"That's coming home at once," said Mr. Thacker; "but I don't mind. Miss Hester Gould that was—Mrs. Gordon Frere that is."

Even Charles Yeldham's placid equanimity—placid by nature, more placid by training—gave way under his astonishment at this revelation, and Thacker's quick ears heard him mutter "The devil!" under his breath.

"Ah! I thought that would astonish you," he said, triumphantly. "You're not one of those that have much to learn, Mr. Yeldham, but there are very few people of my acquaintance that I couldn't wake up one way or another, I fancy. Yes, sir, that lady is my principal. Her husband don't know or care much about business, I dare say, and so much the better—a good fellow, I dare say, but soft, sir—soft."

"And so Mrs. Frere is your principal, Mr. Thacker," said Yeldham, after a moment's pause, to recover his equanimity, "and was her friend's principal creditor, eh? Well, well, that's strange enough. And you and she don't put your horses together now? What can have made you agree to differ?"

"You've a very insinuating manner, Mr. Yeldham. It's a pity you're not in the courts instead of in chamber practice. You'd get it out of them wonderfully there. But it's only due to myself to tell you that I see your every move, and that I should not tumble to it in the least if I had not previously made up my mind to have it all out."

Charles Yeldham smiled and bowed, and Mr. Thacker proceeded.

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"You know these women don't understand business; and because it had suited my book, for other than mere monetary reasons"—and here he settled his cravat and looked conscious—"to do work for Miss Gould, she began to look upon me as a mere clerk. She forgot, this young woman, that while she was a poor governess, glad enough to come up to Hampstead and have tea with my sisters, I was one of the leading financiers of the West-End. She forgot that in my bureau I had the names of half the peerage on stamped paper; that I dined here, and lunched there, and was hand-and-glove with some of the best men in London. She forgot that—I see you grinning, Yeldham, and all this time that I'm swaggering you're waiting to get at the story. Well, I'll tell it you as shortly as I can. You're too well posted up in these matters not to know that a tremendous smash like that in the City two years ago could not have passed over without touching most of us at the West-End. We've been all of us under the harrow, more or less, ever since, and I found it hard work to pull up the losses of that time. I just did that, however, and no more. But there are two or three affairs in which I'm largely interested, which have been excellent, and which will be better still, only just at this particular moment they want a little bolstering. All I could do for them I have done; but a lot of my money was still locked up, and I knew that these things only wanted backing to be splendid investments. So, a short time ago, I went to our friend Mrs. F., and told her all about it; took her a sheet of paper full of figures—women always like that; most of 'em can't understand 'em, but she can—and went thoroughly into it with her; proved that it would be a good thing for her, and urged it as a personal favor to myself. Damme, sir, she refused to have any thing to do with it!"

Mr. Thacker brought down his fist upon the table with a bang. Then, seeing Mr. Yeldham was not particularly moved, he went on. "I was not to be beaten at the first go off; so, after she had spoken, I asked her, if she would not go into the matter herself, whether she would let me have the money—of course, on unexceptionable security. She refused point-blank; and when pressed to give her reasons, said she did not want to go into any more speculations. I never saw a woman so altered in my life. I don't know what the devil has come over her—gone mad on her money, I suppose. I don't know what induced me to say it—I can generally manage to take these things quietly enough—but I was a little bit annoyed, I suppose; but, at all events, I *did* say, 'This is not quite the manner in which you answered me when I proposed to you to take that mortgage on Middlemeads, Mrs. Frere.' The words were hardly out of my mouth when she turned round on me as quick as lightning, and said, 'You think of nothing but the interest on your money. I had another motive in that investment.' 'And that was—?' I asked. 'To serve my—my own purposes,' she replied. 'I had a long-standing account to settle with Robert Streightley, and that was the method I chose of doing it.' You would not have liked the expression of my lady's face when she said this. For the first time in her life she seemed to drop the mask. I saw her eyes glowing, her lips livid, and then I felt certain of what I had always suspected."

"And that was—"

"That when she was down on her luck, and intimate with his people, she had really intended to make Robert Streightley marry her; and that, when she found he did not care for her, and eventually married Miss Guyon, she determined to be revenged on them both."

"Certainly, Mr. Thacker, your boast of being able to tell strange things is fulfilled in the present instance. I had no idea of this."

"How should you have? But it's fact, nevertheless, take my word for it. I suppose I let on by the expression of my face—for she is as downy as a cat—that I had spotted her game, for she tried in every possible way to wriggle out of what she had said. 'Middlemeads was such a good investment.' 'Money wasn't so scarce then.' 'In these times one ought to be particularly careful,' etc., etc. But I wasn't to be put off with any such humbug as that; I just asked her plainly once more whether she would make the advances I suggested on the security I offered, and when she again decidedly refused, I took up my hat and wished her good-morning. And I took my oath, as I crossed her hall-mat, that I'd go out of my way to do her a bad turn, and, as luck would have it, now I'm able to do it without going out of my way."

"That is splendid! we're really coming to it!"

"You're still chaffing me, Mr. Yeldham. I might have told you that interest in Streightley was the sole motive for my coming here to tell you what I am going to tell you presently, whereas I don't disguise for a minute that the hope of doing Mrs. Frere a bad turn entirely governs me in the matter. I thought at first that what would annoy her most would be to see Streightley's business doing well again. And, mind you, that could be very easily managed. He came out of his troubles with a high character, and money is getting plenty. There are heaps of fellows who, from old respect and friendship, would come forward to help to put Robert Streightley on his legs again. I'd do my little share—from another motive. I thought of that plan; I've got it all down in detail at home; it may be of use some day; but, in the mean time, something else has turned up which looks infinitely more promising, in the way of sticking a dagger into my lady's breast."

"Don't soar into metaphor again, Mr. Thacker, please. It delays your point most confoundedly."

"That Streightley is ruined—partly by her

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act—is nuts to her, but nothing like such nuts as that his wife has left him. She and that old cat Lady What-do-you-call-her—Marsh something—have talked that poor girl over ever since—regular old Tabby that Lady Thingammy—and so I changed my mind, and thought to myself, 'No, nothing would make Mrs. Frere so wild as to see Mrs. Streightley restored to, and happy with, her husband,' and I determined I'd do my best to carry that idea into effect."

"My good fellow, you only determined what all of us have determined and tried, but without the smallest possible result."

Mr. Thacker settled his elbows comfortably on the table, and replied in a tone of easy confidence,

"Ye-es, that's exactly the difference between me and 'all of us.' But listen to me, and I will show you I have come here on no fool's errand. You know that, pending the great gathering together of all of us at Jerusalem, our people are spread over the whole face of the earth. Thus those among us who are well known, or who take a leading part, have ramifications and correspondents in every large city in the world. I myself am in this position; and it was my intention to have set the whole of the machinery in motion, with the view of discovering where Mrs. Streightley lay hidden, when, by a most fortunate accident, I believe I have been spared the trouble, and have at once accomplished my end."

"God grant it!" said Yeldham, earnestly. "But how? how?"

"You must let me tell my story in my own way, and this part of it involves rather a lengthened explanation. When I was a lad, my bosom-friend was a boy of my own age named Hartmann. He was of German origin; but his family had been for a long time settled in this country, and he and I were sworn chums. I do not know why; I never could make out why, except perhaps"—and here Mr. Thacker set his teeth, while the color mounted into his cheeks—"except perhaps that we were both Jews; and the other boys stood aloof from us, and used to chaff and call us names. D—n 'em! I've made some of 'em pay for that fun since. There was nothing else in common between young Hartmann and me. I was always pushing and energetic, looking to the main chance, and doing all I could to make something out of every body, while he was a dreamy, quiet kind of fellow, with no interest for any thing in the world but music. He was a wonderful musician. By George! sometimes even now, when I'm in a quiet mood, and get thinking of him, I fancy I hear the sounds that he used to draw out of his violin. There he would sit, scraping away hour after hour in play-time, so that when we left school, which we did about the same time, he'd had great practice for such a young chap, and was quite a proficient. His friends talked about getting him into a house of business, but I knew how much that would do. When you've got what your friends call artistic, and your enemies Bohemian tendencies, you had better give way to 'em at once, for they'll prevent your settling down to any thing else, and they're sure to claim you in the end. Poor Nat Hartmann prayed so hard to be allowed to follow his bent, that his friends never attempted to struggle with him, and he went off, very soon after leaving school, to some connections of his family at Vienna, where he was to finish his musical education. He was not long absent before we had news of him. He was in the highest spirits, making excellent progress. Then he wrote that he had been noticed by the emperor, and taken into the imperial private band, of which, in about three years, he became leader. His name began to be known in musical circles, and his arrival in England was announced for the approaching season. Then suddenly there came a rumor that he was under a cloud—how or why we could never ascertain. I wrote to him twice or thrice, but my letters were unanswered, and I gave it up in despair.

"It must have been ten years after this that, one night as I was coming out of the Opera, I felt a gentle pull at my coat, and, turning round, I saw Nat Hartmann. I knew him in an instant, though he was utterly changed from my friend of years before. All his color was gone; his face was thin, and pinched, and haggard; his eyes sunk deep in his head; his lips, which had been so full and ruddy, were now thin and pallid. I stepped aside to satisfy myself that it was he; then I made him get into my brougham, and drove him to my rooms. To my dying day I shall never forget that man's appearance as he stood in his thin, wretched clothes under the lamplight; I shall never forget the manner in which he rushed to the fireplace, knelt down on the rug, and spread out his transparent hands to the blaze; I shall never forget the manner in which he gulped down the wine which I handed to him, or the ravenous way in which he tore at the food. When he had eaten and drank, had warmed himself, and nature seemed revived within him, I talked to him, and bit by bit managed to drag from him his story. He was a long time telling it, and it was disconnected and jerky to a degree, interspersed with loud railing at fortune, with sighs and tears, and dolorous ejaculations, and I had a hard task to follow him; but I gleaned from him this: His first downward step had been caused by his having married a Christian girl, a singer at the Grand Opera in Vienna, with whom he fell desperately in love. This had so exasperated his relatives, that after trying, by every means in their power, to prevent the marriage, when they found it had actually taken place, they repudiated him, and did every thing possible to ruin him and his wife. One of the principal Jewish bankers, who had originally introduced Hartmann to the imperial notice, now became his bitterest enemy, used the influence which had formerly been exerted in

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the young man's favor to debase him, and finally, under some pretext, got him removed from his position as leader of the emperor's private band. From that time onward misfortune seemed to have seized him; his wife, after a long illness, died in childbirth, leaving him with one little girl. In his misery he took to drinking, and sunk from bad to worse. One night, while drunk, he struck an officer who had mocked his playing, and, to save his life, fled with his little child to England. He had been in London a week, and had haunted the streets in the hope of meeting me—and the meeting was only just in time, by George! for he and his little child were nearly starved.

"This is a long story, but it's pretty nearly over now. Of course I did what was possible to be done for this poor fellow; I gave him money and clothes, and sent him to the doctor, and all that; but he was very proud in all his misery, and would not accept what he called 'charity,' but insisted upon working for his living. Poor Nat, poor fellow! the drink had ruined him, mind and body—all his crisp touch, all his wonderful execution, gone, sir, gone never to return; but he could still play the fiddle very decently—better than most, at any rate; so I spoke to Wuff and some operatic people I knew, and got him playing at concerts and theatres, and that sort of thing. But it didn't last long; the drink had done its work, and he could not get on without stimulants; then he got ill again, and broke up suddenly, sending for me when he was on his death-bed, and imploring me to take care of his little girl—his little Louise. I promised readily enough, for she was a sweet little child, and I had always been fond of her; and as soon as we had buried the poor fellow, I sent the girl over to a school in Paris, intending to have her brought up as a governess; but with a splendid violinist for her father, and a first-rate opera-singer for her mother, it wasn't to be expected that she'd go in for steady respectability, though she's as good a girl as ever breathed; moreover, she inherits her mother's voice, and I believe—from what I hear from friends of mine over there, who know all about this kind of thing—that she'll some day be a splendid singer, and astonish the world. So, when all these representations were made to me, I could not hold out any longer; and when Louise left school, eighteen months ago, I got her admitted as a pupil at the Conservatoire, and there she is working away, and I am told is getting on gloriously—was getting on gloriously, I should say, up to within the last month; but she has been very ill, poor child, and that has pulled her down and put her back; and—that's exactly what I'm coming to. I dare say you've been horribly bored up to this point, Mr. Yeldham, but I think, when I've finished, you'll say it was worth your listening to."

"Only you carry out the hopes you've raised, Mr. Thacker, and you may depend upon it I won't complain," said Yeldham.

"Well, I had been wondering that I had not heard from this girl. She must be sixteen or seventeen now, and she writes most capital letters. I assure you, when I am regularly dry and stony with business, feel as if I was stuccoed all over like, one of this girl's letters refreshes me and cheers me up, and makes me remember there is something else in the world to live for besides money-getting. I had been wondering I had not heard from Louise, when this morning a letter came. In it she told me that she had been very ill with a fever, which had completely prostrated her, and that—but I may as well read this part out to you."

Mr. Thacker then produced a letter from his pocket-book, and read the following passage:

"You know, my dear guardian, notwithstanding my foreign extraction and half-foreign bringing-up, the horror I have always had of French doctors; and it is certain I should have been left to the mercy of some of these dreadful creatures if it had not been for Lucy Elliott, who is a fellow-pupil of mine at the Conservatoire, and who knew Dr. Hudson, who is our great English physician over here. She came and saw me when I was first taken ill, and promised to send Dr. Hudson to me. Within an hour he was by my bedside, and I can never express to any one his kindness and attention. He asked me, without the smallest impertinent curiosity, about myself; and when I told him that I was all alone in Paris, and had no relations on whom I could depend, he shook his head, and said it was absolutely necessary that I should have some one to nurse me. I suggested Sister Agatha, who used to come and see us so often at the *pension*, and who, I know, is a skilled and practiced nurse; but Dr. Hudson said he thought he could do better than Sister Agatha for me, and that he would try to get an English widow lady of his acquaintance to come and nurse me." ("Ah ha! you start, Yeldham, my friend! Hold on a bit, my boy; the scent's only just warming yet; hold on a bit longer.") "I went to sleep after Dr. Hudson left me, and when I woke that evening I found a stranger sitting by my side—a tall, elegant young woman, very young still, but looking as though she had seen a great deal of sorrow; for her beautiful face—I can't explain to you how wonderfully beautiful it is, so calm, and classical, and statuesque—is marked here and there with deep lines, and there is a gravity about her which I am sure has been brought on by mental suffering. She motioned me to keep silent, and then told me, in oh, such a sweet voice, that I was to be quite quiet, and that she had come to nurse me and attend upon me, and, under God's help, get me well again. From that night until now—she has only just gone away, and she will be back this evening, though I scarcely require any assistance now—she has been my best and dearest friend, my nurse, my consoler, my sister. In all that dreadful fever I had the sense of her constant presence, knew the touch of her cool hands to my hot head, recognized the cheering tone of her voice, when, in my pain and misery,

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I could scarcely see her. To her and my kind Dr. Hudson I owe my life; and as I know, my dear guardian, that you are good enough to prize that life, I am sure you will be grateful to these good friends. And here I come to a point where I require your advice and assistance. I told Dr. Hudson that, though I was only a struggling pupil at the Conservatoire, I had connections in England who, I was sure, would take care that his kindness to me was not forgotten. I presumed so much, my dear guardian; for I felt certain that your goodness of heart"—("That's nothing," said Mr. Thacker, abruptly; "hem! hem! here it is")—"but now I don't know what to say about Madame Sidney. She is evidently not rich, though a thorough lady born and bred; and I am sure you will think with me that some recompense should be made her, though what it is to be, and how it is to be managed, I must leave to your better sense and knowledge of the world to suggest. One thing I have discovered, and that is, that this is one of the most trying, if not *the* most trying, occasions on which Madame Sidney has acted in the capacity of sick nurse, and that discovery I made in this way. When I was first coming into convalescence, when I first had a glimmering of what was passing around me, I heard the doctor say to her, 'Well, I knew I was not mistaken; the child owes her recovery, under Providence, to your care and ceaseless attention. It's your greatest experience; it's the opportunity which you have so much wished for, of showing that you possessed the patience, the energy, and the long-suffering for which you have so long fervently prayed, but all of which *I* knew were your attributes, when, under different circumstances, neither you nor I thought you would ever be called upon to employ them, for they were not wanted then for others, but they were wanted for yourself—I mean during that week's illness at Martigny."

"Stop!" cried Charley Yeldham, bringing his hand down heavily on the table, and then rising and pacing hurriedly up and down the room; "stop! that seems to me to be conclusive."

"Ah ha!" cried Thacker, in exultation; "we're hot at last; we're burning now, ain't we? When I came to that passage in Louise's letter, the whole thing flashed across me. I recollected having heard Streightley talk of his wife's illness at Martigny. I said to myself, 'Here's a go; the lost bird's found!' And in an instant I saw my way—I confess it; I don't go in for any high moral dodges—I saw my way to being revenged on Mrs. Gordon Frere, and to shooting a bolt between the joints of her armor, and hitting her in the very place where she was most vulnerable, and would least like to be hit." And Mr. Thacker looked up in Yeldham's face, and rubbed his hands with the greatest glee.

"By Jove, Thacker, I think there's very little doubt about the co-identity of Mrs. Streightley and Madame Sidney," said Yeldham, after a few minutes' deliberation. "It will be a wonderful thing if it turns out so. I never thought that—" and Yeldham stopped.

"Never thought that I should be the means of furnishing you with such pleasant information? Never thought that the Jew-discounter could ever do a man a good turn without an ulterior view to his own advantage? That's it, eh? Don't be bashful; speak out."

"Not exactly that," said Charley Yeldham. "I am in the habit of speaking out, and so I'll say that I never thought—how could I?—that the man whom we have all regarded as the active agent in Robert Streightley's financial ruin would probably turn out to be the means of securing his domestic happiness."

"I hope to God I may!" said Thacker, earnestly. "Look here. I don't pretend to be a particularly moral or a strait-laced kind of person; and I acknowledge, as I have done from the first, that my promptings in this matter have been to be revenged on Hester Gould—Mrs. Frere, I mean; but if, by any act of mine, I could do a good turn to Streightley, whom I believe to be an honorable man and a devilish clever fellow, and to his wife, who is certainly the handsomest woman I know, I—well, it would be a deuced pleasant thing to think over by-and-by, and I wouldn't let money be any obstacle to my carrying it out."

"You said I didn't like you, and wasn't pleased to see you, when you came in," said Yeldham, taking Thacker's hand and wringing it. "Put that opinion to the test some day—you'll find yourself mistaken."

"That's the ticket," said Mr. Thacker. "And now good-by, and God speed you! I swear all the notions of revenge on Mrs. F. with which I came here seem to have disappeared, and I can think of nothing now but the chance of having done a good turn to Streightley. Ah! old Shakspeare knew all about it: 'Hath not a Jew what's-his-names'—you remember the quotation."

And Mr. Thacker waved his hand jauntily in adieu and left the chambers.

As may be readily supposed, Yeldham lost no time in communicating to Robert the main points of Mr. Thacker's valuable information. He kept that gentleman's revelation of the virtuous motives which had animated him strictly to himself; they did not bear upon Robert's interests, and a knowledge of them could only tend to distress him.

Robert's agitation was extreme when he learned the unmistakably reliable nature of the clew now placed so unexpectedly in their hands. He remembered the English doctor who had attended Katharine in her illness at Martigny perfectly, and he was desperately vexed and impatient with himself that he had not remembered him sooner. Yeldham did not try to stem the tide of his self-reproach, but he did not set himself very seriously in opposition to Robert's determination, that the evening of the day then passing should see him *en route* for Paris.

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"Suppose you find her—and you must remember, Robert, that, though most probable, it is not certain—and she positively refuses to see you? What are you to do? You can not force yourself into her presence. Suppose she learns your intention, and she is resolved to carry out her purpose, she will fly away again, and then we shall be worse off than before. Be guided by me, Robert; let me go in your stead. If I am to succeed, the pleasure will not be lessened; if I am to fail, better I than you. You can trust me, I know; and you know, in the best case, I only precede you by a few hours; in the worst—well—we won't talk of that beyond saying that you'll bear it better coming through me."

These arguments and his own secret despondency induced Robert to consent. He was immeasurably grateful to Yeldham for undertaking the task for him, but he said little. He was "not strong," as he was accustomed to say, and easily upset; so Yeldham got up a great deal of unnecessary bustle and discussion to cover his emotion; and, indeed, on this and some other late occasions, the lawyer displayed great womanish tact and affectionate cunning. Yeldham could not go that same evening, and the little delay tried Robert; but he strove to hide his impatience, and his friend seconded the effort, and arranged to leave London on the morrow.

A short note from Yeldham to Gordon Frere had informed the latter that Charley was about to start for Paris. He had not time to enter into written explanations, and he greatly desired to secure for Robert during his absence the comfort of Gordon's cheerful companionship and invariably hopeful counsel. So he had merely said, "We have got a clew, a safe one this time, so far as finding the person we want goes, and I am off to follow it up. Can you come up for a day or two? I want to see you before I start."

Gordon Frere announced his intention of going to town for a few days immediately after he received this note, but gave no explanation of its motive. He had dropped into habits of the sort of late, and he and his wife were quite a fashionable couple, independent of each other in all their arrangements, and models of courtesy.

Having reached the Temple, he found Yeldham in the midst of a vast confusion of books and papers, and, to his great satisfaction, alone. He had rather expected that Robert would be there to the last moment, clinging to his emissary, and urging upon him superfluous entreaties concerning speed and earnestness.

Yeldham explained to Gordon briefly and clearly what had happened, merely suppressing Hester's share in Thacker's revelation. He had no inclination to make mischief between Mrs. Frere and her husband, though he could not avoid thinking what a sufficient kind of punishment for her lay ready to his hand, had he chosen to use it. But Yeldham disdained to do so; the woman would be punished by the restoration of her innocent rival to her husband, if such a blessed event were indeed to be; and if it were not—he could not waste a thought on her meanness and her malice. He knew Gordon would not ask for more information than he was disposed to give, and would not take the trouble of looking beneath the surface of any thing; so he told him as much as he thought proper; and Gordon, his first surprise and curiosity abated, questioned him concerning his anticipations of success.

"What are the chances, Charley?" he asked, earnestly—"what do you really think they are?"

"That they are terribly small—small enough as to the finding of the lady, and smaller still as to getting her to return. However, I do think that in all respects it is better that Robert Streightley should not go himself. His wife would be much more likely to hear of his presence there than of mine."

"And do you think if she did hear of it she would avoid him?"

"She would go off somewhere else like a shot. She is just a temperament difficult to deal with. Smarting under the sense of a great wrong, she is capable of any thing."

"She was always strong-minded—I mean self-reliant, and that sort of thing," said Frere; "but she had plenty of common sense."

"So I should imagine from what I saw of her. Of course I would not have dreamed of hinting such a thing before our poor friend; but the difficulty of arranging the matter will arise not so much from Mr. Streightley's want of sense as from her want of heart. A woman who could see her husband suffering from the anxieties which beset Robert long before the crash came, and yet persist in a course of thoroughly reckless extravagance, is not very impressionable, you may depend upon it."

"Do you imagine that—"

"My dear Gordon, it's not a nice thing to say, but I imagine that, though she did not know the terms of the bargain, she felt that she had been purchased by her husband, and she was determined to have the entire price. Now, you know, dealing with such a woman as that, where questions of feeling are concerned, is difficult."

"It's but a poor look-out, I'm afraid," said Frere, rising from his chair; "and I don't envy you your mission, Charley, though I don't know any one who would do it so well; and if honesty and warm feeling are to win the day, you'll be successful. So, God bless you! Mind you let me know how you prosper. Better write to me at the club, I think," added Mr. Frere, with a sudden recollection that news of Katharine Streightley was ever too welcome to the lady who was now his wife.

Yeldham shook hands warmly with him, grinning the while. None of these little evidences of character were thrown away on the old bachelor, who may have derived solace and instruction from them.

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Robert was to accompany him to the station, and the hour of his arrival drew near. Yeldham's packing was quickly done, and he had a few minutes' leisure to think of the strangeness of the freak of fortune which was sending *him* in search of the only woman toward whom his heart had ever been attracted, with the object of winning her back to another. Perhaps he had censured her too harshly in talking to Gordon Frere—to that other man, who had also loved her, after his fashion. Then he heard Robert's step ascending the stairs, and sighed as he thought that it was hard indeed to look at his suffering face, and acquit Katharine of heartlessness and cruelty.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PLEDGE REDEEMED.

In one of the old-fashioned hotels of the Rue de l'Université, in that quarter of Paris around which cling some of the saddest and noblest memoirs of a history which is but a succession of acts in a great pompous tragedy, Dr. Hudson had occupied a suite of apartments for many years. There were other and younger English physicians in Paris than he, but he had made and kept a solid reputation, and his friends comprised a large number of the native denizens of Paris, and all his own compatriots "of standing," as the Yankees say. His *clientèle* was of wider range; for the English doctor was as well known to the poor of Paris as to the rich, and he labored among them as assiduously.

On the selfsame day which had witnessed Mr. Thacker's visit to Middlemeads and the failure of his application to Mrs. Gordon Frere—on which he had expressed himself with so much resentment to Charles Yeldham, and at the selfsame hour at which the project of his vengeance began to take shape in the brain of the angry Hebrew, Dr. Hudson was seated in his study conversing earnestly with a lady who wore the mournful garb of widowhood in the English form. The frank, thoughtful face of the physician was clouded, and his voice was low and troubled as he spoke to the lady.

"I don't like to let you go, Katharine. You have been doing too much. This long attendance upon poor Louise has been too much for you already; and now the care of an old blind woman—no, no, it ought not to be."

"The care of your mother, my best friend!" returned the lady, in a tone of remonstrance; "does *that* not make all the difference? Besides, what does it matter—here or in Brittany? The work has to be done, and place does not make the smallest difference. You can not bring the old lady to Paris, and since Marion's death you have had no peace of mind, no confidence about your mother. Let us look at this rationally. Is there any one in whom you have such confidence as in me?"

"Certainly not, Katharine, though—"

"Though I do not return it. Well, in one sense I do not; but let us not discuss that for the present. If you do not let me go to Morlaix, to your mother, you must send some one in whom you have less confidence. That's a 'logical sequence,' as you learned people say, isn't it? and I should also call it a very silly proceeding. Next, you must provide me with work here; and I can assure you, you can give me none I should like half so well. I am free too, and I don't know that any other of your helpers are: let me see the list."

She took a manuscript volume from the table, turned to a certain page, and ran over a list of names.

"No, I thought not. All busy, and with serious cases—'long jobs,' as the 'regulars' call them. You see Fate and my self-will are against you, and I must go; so that's settled. And now, Mr. Doctor, let me make my report."

"This was your last visit to Louise, I think?" he asked, absently.

"My last regular visit. She is quite well now; but I shall never lose sight of her, I hope. She is a good girl and a grateful; and, so long as she has this illness, and I have Martigny to talk about and the same rescuer to praise—though she little knows how small an item in the account between him and me Martigny is—we are not likely to tire of each other's company. Where are your wits wandering to? you are not listening to a word I am saying to you."

He turned his face fully toward her, and the serious expression it bore increased. He took an ivory paper-knife from off his desk, and beat it softly upon his open palm as he spoke.

"My wits are wandering to speculations about *you*, my dear. How long are you going to lead this life? and when am I to know the meaning of it all? It is not fit for you, Catharine; you must rest."

"No, no," she said, nervously, "you know the only thing I can not do when you bid me is rest. Besides, I am going to be very quiet, you know, down in Brittany—"

"That will not be for long, if even I let you go. My poor old mother's life is nearly ended; and then—"

"And then—for I mean to go; it is quite settled—are there no more duties for me? are the poor and the sick to cease out of the land?"

"No, it is not that; I am thinking of you seriously, Katharine, and wondering whether I am doing right by you. I had no doubt, when you came to me, and claimed the fulfillment of the promise I made to you at Martigny—there was such desperation, such utter self-abandonment about you—that I, who knew the symptoms of despair, and their deadliness, could not hesitate about what was to be done. But now, Katharine, now, has not time made any difference?—it has made a great alteration in you, my dear—a very great and blessed change; not time alone, I know, but life, and suffering, and self-knowledge, and a higher wisdom still—has it not changed circumstances too? You told

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me your return to your husband's home was an impossibility then, and I knew I felt it was so. You never told me why; you never placed the secret of his sin, whatever it may have been, in my possession. Now I ask you—the matter has been pressing long upon my mind, and is daily growing heavier—is the same impossibility in force still?"

Katharine did not make any answer, but she looked at him, pale and tearful. Then he continued:

"Think of your youth, Katharine. Your life is almost all before you, and you have no friend but me. Supposing I were to die, my dear, how would it be with you then? for though you are not so helpless and so ignorant of the world's ways as when you came to me that winter's night, and told me I must hide you, and that without a question, and I did it—you are as little fitted as any woman I know for the loneliness of a friendless life. Is this offense quite past forgiveness? is there no way of reconciliation?"

"None, none," she murmured. "Oh, do not talk to me of the past."

"Katharine," he said, with deeper solemnity still, "think, be very sure, before you answer. Remember that nothing but the extremest injury can justify the course you are persuing. Your name is false, your position is false, your very dress"—he stretched out his hand and touched it—"is a lie!"

"My widowhood at least is real," she said, in an abrupt and bitter tone.

"My poor child, I don't doubt that. I know it is; but the evils dealt by man's hand are often of God's sending. Are you resisting God, and not man only? I am talking to you in the dark about many things, but there are some broad truths applicable to all circumstances. One of them is, that no self-imposed duties can stand in the place of those which God has appointed. When I watch—and I watch it closely—your exemplary life of usefulness, your self-denial, your promptitude in doing good, and see that *you are not at peace in it*, I can not but think that you are doing this—that you are trying to do your own will, and not God's will; and that you are reaping the inevitable consequences."

Her head was bowed now, and she was crying.

"I don't know why I have felt forced to say all this to you to-day, Katharine. Something has forced me to say it, certainly. Think of it, my dear; and if there be any possible way to reconciliation with your home and your former life, turn your steps toward it."

"Are you weary of the charge of me? are you tired of the thankless task?"

He smiled very slowly and tenderly, then rose, and, arranging some papers on his desk, said,

"Do you think to turn away my meaning by such a silly subterfuge? I am going out now: think of what I have said, Katharine; and, remember, if I have hurt you, it is because of my ignorance. I don't reproach you that you have kept me in it, but you must not wonder if it sometimes tells against yourself. Be sure of this, Katharine, there is no life so acceptable as that in which we carry *our own* burdens, without selecting them, and no spirit so safe as that which takes trials as they are sent, not sought for—kissing the rod."

He was leaving the room, when she rose impetuously and went up to him. She caught his arm and pressed it to her closely as she said,

"Don't say more to me now; I can't bear it. I wonder why you have spoken like this again—it is so long since you did so before. Let me go to your mother, and think it all out there—all you know and all you don't know, and when I come back I will tell you every thing."

"My dear, you mistake me. I don't want to know; it is from no feeling of that kind I speak; it is for your own sake, and because of the treacheries and changes of life—"

"Yes, yes, I know. When had you any but good motives, or did any but good deeds? Just give me this little time, and keep your vow to me that you will never answer a question about me, or give any human being a clew to finding me, and when I come back you shall know all, and judge for me."

"Agreed," said Dr. Hudson; "I will keep my promise, and you will keep yours."

A day or two later Katharine Streightley left Paris.

. . .

"I give you my word of honor—I will take the most solemn and sacred oath you can dictate to me, that nothing you can tell me, of what I ask you, can harm the lady. I am here on behalf of her husband."

"Her husband!" said Louise Hartmann, with a disdainful smile; "now I know you are deceiving me. She is a widow—her husband is dead."

"Indeed—indeed he is not, my dear young lady; for God's sake listen to me! Her husband is alive, and he loves her better than his life. Indeed he is dying, I truly believe, because he can not find or hear of her. A quarrel — a misunderstanding parted them, and he has sought her vainly ever since. Just think of the dreadful weary time, and have pity on this poor man."

Charley Yeldham's friends would have been only less astonished than himself had they heard him thus eloquently pleading the cause of Robert to the inflexible little German girl, who stood before him, the very image of immovable fidelity.

"See! look at her portrait again; you have acknowledged that you know it, and that it is Madame Sidney's likeness. Well, I tell you her husband has worn it on his breast night and day for nearly three years, and would not have parted with it for a moment for any less object than enabling me to trace her by it. He asks nothing but to know where she is—nothing but the means of communicating with her. Surely you will tell him that much?"

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"Have you asked Dr. Hudson? he knows her better than I," was the cautious questioning reply of the German girl.

"Yes," said Yeldham, incautiously; "I went to his house at once, and I waited a long time to see him, but all in vain. He knew Madame Sidney, but he would tell me nothing about her—not even whether she was now in Paris, or ever in the habit of residing in Paris."

"And yet Dr. Hudson is her best friend, and knows more about her than any one in the world."

"Yes, yes, we heard that: then so much was right at least."

Louise Hartmann deliberately sat down, tucked her feet comfortably under her chair, and folded her hands in her lap. Yeldham waited, breathlessly anxious for her to speak. She kept him waiting for some time; but at length she said, slowly and emphatically,

"Soh! you fine English gentleman, who give your word of honor and your sacred and solemn oath, you come to a poor girl like me, and you try to make me tell you about Madame Sidney—who nursed me, and was more good to me than ever any one in the world was before—what the good doctor, her own friend, refuses to tell you. You may go away, sir, back to England; I will tell you nothing—no, not one single word. If this lady's husband is alive, he has done something that makes her think of him as dead, and she knows best. He has made her miserable; for she is not happy, I know that—I often saw that; and he shall never render her miserable again through help of mine."

Yeldham was utterly confounded by the girl's calm speech, and the resolution which showed itself in her face and sounded in her voice. He stood bewildered and silent for several minutes. At length Louise spoke again:

"Please to go away, sir; you have nothing to hear from me, and nothing to say to me more."

He caught joyfully at the anxiety she expressed to get rid of him. Was it not a proof that Katharine was in Paris still—was near; that she was then expecting or fearing her coming? He made another appeal.

"Listen to me, my dear young lady," he said. "No one can honor your fidelity to your friend, or respect you for keeping your word so firmly, more than I do; but I swear to you you are acting under a mistake—a most fatal and lamentable mistake. At all events, I, who am *not* this lady's husband, can not injure her—can not force her to do any thing against her will. Let me see her. I swear to you, if you will, that if she bids me be silent, I will not utter a word; and I will neither follow her nor have her followed. I ask you this, because, if you will only do it, you shall see for yourself the error there is in all this, and you will probably be the means of richly rewarding your friend for all she has done for you by restoring her confidence in her husband.

Louise had looked at Charles Yeldham with earnest intentness all the time he was speaking, and the incredulous scorn which had possessed her wholly during the earlier part of their interview began to give way. She dropped her eyes, put her hand to her brow, and thought intently.

"I dare not believe you," said she at last; "I dare not listen longer to you, lest I might be persuaded to do Madame Sidney a wrong. So now you must go away. You had better; if you stay here a month, I will tell you no more than this—and it can not harm her if her husband, and you too—and perhaps you are her husband—bah! how can I tell?—were ever so wicked and cruel. She is not in Paris. Now go; you shall not get another answer out of me."

She rose, and stepped toward the door, as though about to open it for his departure.

"Thanks!" he exclaimed, "a thousand thanks, even for that information; and, as you say, it could not harm her if we, who are her devoted servants, desired to do so. Yes," for she had her hand on the latch of the door, "I will leave you immediately; only let me say a few words more."

Louise frowned. "I will give you no answer," she said, sullenly.

"Oh yes, I think you will, when I have spoken them. If Madame Sidney ever comes back to Paris—I don't ask whether you expect her—(here he stole a quick glance at her, but she was prepared to meet and conquer it—there was not the smallest change in her face from its expression of sullen waiting)—but if she comes back, and comes to see you, tell her about my visit; tell her I came from her husband—here is my card. There can be no harm in telling her, you know, and then it will depend on herself——not on you, or on me, but on herself only—whether she will let any one who loves her see her again in this world. You understand me in this, do you not, mademoiselle? You see that I am speaking now what must be the truth, and can not by possibility deceive any one."

Louise appeared to be moved by this direct appeal to her understanding. She took up the card, which he had laid on the table, and read the name aloud.

"Mr. Yeldham! Yes; I understand that if I tell her you have been here, she will be free to choose whether you shall come again; and unless she or I tell you, you can never know whether she comes again. So it will be her own affair, and I can not be betrayed into injuring her. Yes"—she looked up suddenly at him—"I will tell her if she comes here ever again."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Yeldham, in a tone of infinite relief; "then all will be right, and it is only waiting a little longer, for I am sure she will come back at some time. God bless you for that promise! You do not know all the good you may do, all the ill you may prevent, by keeping it."

"I always keep my promises," said Louise, coldly, rather offended by his thanks.

"Yes, yes, I know that; but oh, if I could

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but make you understand! *She* will make you understand, some day, all I could never explain. A word more, and I leave you. When you tell her that I was here, and the story I have told you of my business and my hopes—*she* will believe it, though it is quite natural and right that *you* should hesitate to do so—tell her this, that I entreated you to write to me and let me know that she had returned to Paris. You will do this too, will you not? You see it is only a part of what you have already promised: it is not a new thing. I can not know that she has returned unless she permits you to tell me, and so only can harm her. You see I take your own view, with her own consent."

"I see that," said Louise; "it follows from the first. Yes, if she gives me leave, I will write to you."

He contented himself with a more moderate expression of gratitude than was natural to him under the circumstances; and then, having written his address in full, and very distinctly, on the card Louise had consented to keep, he took his leave.

He had been defeated in the greater purpose, but he had achieved a less one, whose gain would have seemed to the friends priceless good fortune a little while ago, but which was robbed of its fair proportions by the larger hope unfulfilled.

Yeldham communicated to Robert the result of his expedition by letter the same evening, and the following day he returned to London.

"I am thankful, Charley, for the light I have been granted. It is dawn after dark, and now I will wait and hope for the day," said Robert; and Yeldham rejoiced to see his fortitude.

So October passed, and November; and December came, and it was only twilight still.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SUCCESS.

The wintry rays of the sun were contending unsuccessfully with the strong and cheerful blaze of a bright fire in Charles Yeldham's outer room one morning in December, when that hard-working gentleman emerged from his bedroom at an unusually late hour, and glanced with an expression of satisfaction at the fire, the preparations for breakfast, and the heap of letters and other papers which occupied one end of the small table. Charles Yeldham was looking troubled on this particular day, but not as he usually was, full of the care and preoccupation of his work; his generally concentrated gaze was abstracted; and any one familiar with his expression would have recognized that the subject of his thoughts was not present to his bodily eyes. He seated himself and began to open his letters, having first poured out his tea. They were numerous and various: one from his father, one from his sister, a note from Frere, a number of business letters, and one from Paris. His face changed as he took up this one, changed still more as he read:

"Rue d'Alger, No. —, 9th Dec. 186—.

"Sir,—I fulfill my promise, relying on yours, and believing all you told me of your intentions for the dear lady's good. She is dear and good. She has come back to Paris, and I have seen her. I am, sir, your servant,

"Louise Hartmann."

Yeldham's first impulse was to jump up from his untasted breakfast, take his hat and coat, and rush off to find Robert Streightley; but he resisted the impulse, and set himself to consider what would be the best thing to do. Robert had been ailing lately; Yeldham had noticed his altered looks with pain, and he dreaded telling him news except such as was undeniably and completely good. This could not be said to be so. There was no doubt now that the way was opened to communication with Katharine; but much more than communication was involved. So long a time had elapsed, so obstinately had her determination been adhered to, so intense and keen had been her husband's suffering—suffering which none but Yeldham had divined, under Robert's quiet and reticent bearing—that the matter had assumed to Yeldham's mind an aspect of even additional importance. Should he act on the information contained in this note at once, and only tell Robert when he should have seen Katharine and ascertained the state of her feelings, or should he communicate with Robert immediately, and allow him to proceed at once to Paris in search of his wife? In favor of the latter method of proceeding there was the consideration that the mutual position of the estranged pair was one of the utmost pain, and requiring the most delicate handling, and that undoubtedly the husband and wife could alone discuss the matters which divided them with propriety and authority. There was also the consideration of Katharine's excessive pride, which would lead her instinctively and vehemently to resent the interference of a third person. Both these were gravely pondered by Charles Yeldham. In favor of the former method of proceeding were the comparative composure and hopelessness with which Robert had begun to regard his fate since Yeldham's unsuccessful expedition, the patience with which he acceded to Yeldham's advice that they should not unnecessarily discuss the matter of their most constant thoughts, and the consequent risk, in case all overtures should prove unavailing, of exciting Robert to dangerous agitation and increased grief. Yeldham understood Streightley better than Streightley understood himself; and when he would say, as he constantly did, that he would ask nothing more than to know where his wife was, to be sure that she was more content than he without her, that he had no hope of ever seeing her more, Yeldham knew that he entirely believed what he said, but that he deceived himself; and that with the first intelligence of Katharine

new feelings would arise, whose disappointment would be terrible. Added to this, he knew that Robert could not plead his own cause as he, Charles Yeldham, would plead it for him; if she should refuse to see him, Robert, conscience-stricken, would not persevere. Thus the subject had two sides, and he had to regard first the one, and then the other, with great care and deliberation. He did so, and finally decided, all parts of the question balanced, that he would tell Robert he had received the letter for which they had looked so long in vain, and leave it to him to decide on what should be done. "If I went, and failed, he must know it sooner or later," was the result of Yeldham's cogitations; "so he may as well know about this at once."

So Charles Yeldham wrote a note to Robert, requesting him to call on him late in the afternoon, when he should be comparatively at leisure, and proposing that they should dine together in the City afterward. Then he dismissed the matter from his mind as far as possible, and went to his "treadmill."

There was nothing unusual in the tone of Yeldham's note — nothing to excite Robert's hopes or fears. He had had several such notes from the writer, and yet he was agitated while he read it, and nervous when he laid it down. He was always nervous now, he said to himself, as he rebuked his own tremors. How unmanly, how weak, how foolish he was becoming — less and less like a man whom *she* ever could love, he would think, with a degree of despondency which might have proved to him, had he considered his own case in a philosophical light, how much hope had really lurked at the bottom of his abnegation. This nervousness increased as the hour drew near for his interview with Yeldham; and at six o'clock, when the streets were bright with gaslight, and the crisp cold of a clear wintry night had set in, Robert Streightley's hand trembled as he knocked at the outer door of his friend's chambers, and his face was pale. Yeldham observed him closely, and decided on deferring his purposed communication until a later hour. Accordingly, he easily gave a plausible turn to his summons of Streightley; the two dined together; and Robert's spirits rose, as they invariably did, under the influence of his old friend's genial temperament.

Yeldham knew that Robert would not deliberately break through the established rule of silence on the subject of Katharine, but that he might be easily led into doing so, and he accordingly gave the conversation a turn which brought it to bear upon the past, and then seized the opportunity. Robert took the communication which his friend made to him with more calmness than Yeldham had anticipated, but he was not in the least sanguine.

"The question now is, Robert, whether you or I shall go to find her and bring her back," said Yeldham, in the most cheerful tone he could command.

Robert kept silence.

"I expected you to have been quite elated," said his friend, in almost a tone of reproach. "You take it very quietly. At all events, you must be thankful to know that we shall find out where she is, and all about her circumstances."

"I am thankful, God knows," said Robert, "as well as He, and He only, knows what I have suffered, in my ignorance, in the innumerable fears that have beset me, and," he said, with a heavy sigh, "that may all be realized yet. I am thankful; but this intelligence, and my gratitude for it, do not bring me nearer to *her*. No, no, Charley, I shall never see her face again — never see her face again!" he repeated drearily; and, leaning his elbows on the table, he laid his face on the open palms of his hands.

Yeldham looked uneasily at him. He knew that he was quoting Katharine's own words.

"Robert," he said, impressively, "you must not despair, you must not give way in this fashion. You will see her face again, please God; you will see it as beautiful as ever, and with no cloud between you and it. I feel convinced of this, my dear fellow; and you must feel convinced of it too, if you will listen to your reason and not to your self-reproach. Just think what time does in all sorts of cases, and remember how much time has gone over since your wife left you."

"*I* think of it, Charley? Do you think I have not felt the passage of every hour of it?"

"I know you have," said Yeldham; "but I want you to think of it in another sense—its own sense. It effaces every thing—kingdoms and flies, men's strength and women's beauty, the deepest loves, the bitterest hatreds, the cruelest injuries, the firmest resolves. Believe me, Katharine has outlived her anger, and has been held to her purpose by pride and circumstances. She must always remain your wife—she must always remember that she is so; and, depend upon it, she will not be sorry to return to a quiet home with you, to whom she is still so dear. Three years have had their effect upon her, be sure of it. Rely upon it, she thinks more of her duty and less of her resentment now."

"Her duty!" said Robert, looking up from the palms of his hands with hollow, burning eyes; "her duty! Oh, Charley, how can you or I talk of her duty *to me*?"

"I certainly can," returned Yeldham. "I don't wish to go back over the past, but nothing can absolve her from that duty; and I look to the faults for which each has to forgive the other as the strongest bond between you for the future."

Robert sighed, but made no reply. Yeldham continued: "And now, Robert, you will go to her at once, of course?"

"I—I don't know, Charley," returned Robert, in a low and broken voice; "I don't know. I am—I am almost afraid."

"Afraid, Robert, of what? That she will not see you? Well, that risk must be run;

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but I feel so confident that there is no danger of her refusing to do so, that I can hardly excuse your hesitation. I know I can not inspire you with the confidence I feel, but at least act as if you felt it; and remember that the influence of time has been all in your favor. She has had leisure to forgive, if not to forget, one injury, and to remember and miss the innumerable proofs of love you gave her. You will start to-morrow, will you not?" Yeldham put the question in a business-like tone, which dismissed discussion, and obliged Robert to rouse himself from thought to action.

"Yes, yes; since you think I ought, I will go to-morrow. Can you come with me, Charley?"

"I don't know; if you wish it very much, I will try. Send round in the morning, and I will let you know."

These were almost the last words spoken between the friends before they parted, Robert going his way to Brixton, and Yeldham returning to his chambers, to pass several hours of the night in so arranging his work as to admit of a brief absence from London.

The morrow brought Robert's messenger, but not the expected question. On the contrary, Robert sent word to Yeldham that he wished to see him, feeling too ill to "keep his appointment."

The first glance which Charles Yeldham gave at his friend showed him that he must revert to the second alternative which had presented itself to his mind. Old Alice had admitted him, and had told him "Master Robert" was bad again with "them spazims;" and the state of prostration in which Robert lay on a large sofa, drawn as near the dining-room fire as its size would admit, fully bore out her assertion. Mrs. Streightley was not at home, her daughter requiring her services just then, and the interview between the friends was quite uninterrupted.

Robert's complete inability to undertake a journey to Paris being admitted, his nervous impatience for Yeldham's departure in his stead became uncontrollable. Yeldham did not attempt to contest it, but assured him that the following day should see him at Paris, and, if by any effort or exertion the thing were possible, in Katharine's presence.

"And I'll bring her back to you, my dear fellow—I'll bring her back to you—rest assured I will."

"No, no, never; I can't believe it; nevertheless go, and tell her all. See her; let me see a face that has looked on hers, though I am to see hers no more. Tell her—tell her—"

"Yes, yes," said Yeldham, "I know, Robert, I know; have trust in me; be assured I will tell her all you wish—every thing—and I will bring her with me—something tells me so—and you know I am not sentimental, or presentimental either. Only keep quiet and get well; it won't do to frighten her with such a face as *that*, you know," said Yeldham, with a dreary attempt at cheerfulness.

"I'll take care," returned Robert; "but, Charley, you won't deceive me, will you? You'll tell me every word she says, no matter how severe, no matter how hopeless. You'll tell me every word, and, as far as you can, every look. I shall be able to see them by the aid of *this*;" and he touched his breast-pocket, in which Yeldham knew he always carried the miniature by whose aid Katharine had been identified. "And, Charley, you'll tell her I never—never blamed her; you'll tell her I suffered; but I know I deserved it all." His eyes were shining now with a feverish light, and Yeldham hastened to terminate their interview. He bent over Robert as he lay upon the sofa, and took his hand.

"Be content, Robert," he said; "I have never failed you yet, and I will not fail you now. All that I know, and all that I can guess you wish to have said to your wife, I will say to her; and as surely as I am talking to you now I will bring her home to you—I never felt more certain of any thing. Good-by, my dear fellow; you have nothing to do but trust me, keep quiet, and get well."

"Yes, I will keep very quiet—as quiet as I can. God bless you! Good-by."

They wrung each other's hands, and Yeldham went away, speaking gravely to Alice in the hall, and reflecting with a queer sense of wonder, when he gained the road, upon the oddity of the fate that made him a messenger, in this supreme crisis, to Katharine Streightley, the only woman who had ever made him think regretfully of his loneliness, the only woman who had ever realized his early dreams of love and beauty.

Robert had kept his face toward the door until the sound told him Yeldham had shut the little garden-gate, and was gone; then he turned his head away, buried his face in the sofa-cushion, and closed his eyes. Thus old Alice found him when she came to see if he required any thing an hour later; and the old woman said down stairs that she wished Master Robert would let her send for the doctor, for he was looking "desperate white and weary, to be sure."

When Charles Yeldham reached Paris in the evening after his interview with Robert, he found the fair city looking beautiful, under the combined influence of clear starlight, sharp frost, and the glow of the best-arranged gaslight in Europe. The scene, striking as it always must be, made but little impression upon him as he drove from the railway station to his hotel, revolving in his mind all the circumstances of the painfdl and difficult business which lay before him, and haunted by the remembrance of Robert's white, grieved face. He was tired, depressed, and more doubtful of the success of his undertaking than when he had spoken so confidently to Robert; but he tried to rouse himself, to shake off the foreboding which beset him, and to arrange some definite plan for the interview with Katharine, which he felt sure would be accorded him. It was no part of his intention to take her by surprise. He knew that she would resent such a *ruse* as an unpardonable lib-

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erty, and did not doubt that it would defeat its own purpose, and lead to her immediate departure from Paris. He made his calculations in this way: "When she receives my request for an interview, she will conclude that no farther effort at concealment will avail; she will remember that no coercion of her is possible; and she will consider it more in accordance with her own dignity to grant me the interview—a concession which does not commit her to any thing. After all, too, she is a woman, and she *must* want to know something about the world she has turned her back on—she *must*, after all this time." So Charles Yeldham felt no apprehension about the first portion of his task, though there was a strange flutter of various emotions in the feelings with which he anticipated finding himself in Katharine's presence.

He wrote briefly to Robert, announcing his arrival, and went early to rest. At noon on the following day he presented himself to the unrecognizing stare of the *concierge* at No. — Rue d'Alger, and having named Mademoiselle Hartmann, passed up the wearisome flight of stairs leading *au quatrième.* He was admitted by the girl herself, and gladly perceived that she was looking much improved in health. The appearance of the neat little apartment also bore witness to improvement of another kind. Modest as before, it was more comfortable, and was now a pleasant snug nest for this lonely bird.

The girl had believed in Yeldham from the first, and was unaffectedly glad to see him. She had expected him, she told him candidly; and she had told the dear lady all about his previous visit.

"You did well," said Yeldham. "I would not have you deceive your good friend in any thing."

"I told her I had promised to write to you when she should return to Paris, but I would not do so if she forbade me; and I asked her what I should do. Then she asked me many questions about you, and I told her all she asked; and she told me I might write to you. I said I knew you would come when you should receive my letter; and she said she thought so too, and if you did come, I was to give you this."

She unlocked a drawer in a little table which stood beneath the window, and handed a folded slip of paper to Mr. Yeldham. It contained an address in the Rue du Bac, and these words:

"*Mrs. Streightley will see Mr. Yeldham. He must inquire for Madame Sidney.*"

"When did she give you this?" he asked.

"I have told monsieur," replied the girl, smiling; "on the day I wrote to you—two days ago."

"And you have not seen her since?"

No, she had not seen the dear lady since; and she trusted monsieur would see her, and give her back all her happiness. She was paler and sadder now than before she went to Brittany; and she was too good, had too much heart, too great compassion for all who suffered, to be left to any sadness. All the world ought to be good to her, who was good to all the world.

Half an hour later Charles Yeldham had realized a hope, a dream which had mocked and eluded him for long: he was in Katharine Streightley's presence. Striving hard and ineffectually when before the eyes of the woman toward whom he had felt the strongest emotion which life had ever brought him for the composure which had seemed so easy at a distance, filled with yearning pity for the man who would have given so much to stand where he was standing, and to see what he was looking upon, Charles Yeldham was quite silent for some minutes. He had been ushered into a room in which Katharine was sitting, and she had risen on his entrance, and stood facing him, her hand resting on the back of her chair—resting there calmly, not grasping the chair, with no nervous flutter in the fingers, no need for support implied in the action. With his first glance at her, every impression, every memory he held of her, flashed freshly through Yeldham's mind—every attitude in which he had seen her, every dress she had worn, every scene in which they had met. The tone of her musical girlish voice sounded in the air around him, while yet this woman he looked upon had not spoken; the graceful form flitted about a flower-decked garden and moved through stately rooms, while yet this woman stood motionless before him. Changed! Yes, she was changed; in the first glance, comprehending all the past, perceiving all the present, he saw the change—saw that whereas Katharine when he had seen her last looked younger than her years, the woman he now saw looked older than those which had been added. The face was pale, more waxen in its delicate clearness, and there was a sterner line about the beautiful lips. The radiant eyes were radiant still, but their light was steady and serious, and the glorious lustre of youth had passed from the face forever. What had replaced it, Yeldham thought, that made her so much more beautiful, that lent her a charm, a majestic influence insurmountable and immortal? He knew afterward that that which had wrought the change was the purification, the strengthening influence of suffering, the teaching of life and experience, the education of the spirit, which first bruises and then heals, which first chastens even to faintness, almost to despair, and then leads to peace and shelters from self-deception. After his first glance at her he did not fear for Robert; he felt that he should fulfill the promise which had sounded so rashly confident. Pardon, and the magnanimity of a large heart, looked out of Katharine's beautiful eyes as she bowed her head to her visitor, and said in a low tone, as she indicated a seat to him and resumed her own,

"You are my husband's friend, Mr. Yeldham, and you come to me from him, I think?"

Yeldham's many troubled speculations had never strayed into the direction of such a reception as this, and the delight with which he heard her words was equaled by his astonishment.

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"You are right, Mrs. Streightley," he answered, "I do come from your husband—from one who, let me assure you, has never for one hour ceased to repent the sin which drove you away from him as bitterly as he has mourned your loss."

She became exceedingly pale, and spoke the next words with some difficulty.

"Is it true, Mr. Yeldham, that my husband has suffered heavy losses—that he is no longer a rich man?"

"It is quite true," he replied; "and it is part of my business here to tell you a fact which I have always believed would have pleaded with you, had you known it. Robert had sinned grievously against you; but I am sure, had you known that when you left him ruin was hanging over his head, you would have regarded that as sufficient punishment. In itself it has been heavy, but to him as much lighter than that which you have inflicted, as his love for you is greater than his care for his wealth. May I ask when and how you learned this, Mrs. Streightley?"

"Very lately—only a few days ago. I accidentally met a Mr. Stallbrass, a person whom I had no recollection of ever having seen, and whose name I had certainly never heard. This gentleman, it seems, had seen me—once—" here she hesitated, and turned paler still—"and he recognized me. He told Dr. Hudson that he had done so, but gave his word of honor to my kind friend that he would never mention the circumstance. He told him all he knew concerning my husband's affairs, being under the impression that ours was a separation by mutual consent, and that I was in possession of the facts."

Katharine paused, and a fresh strong hope sprang up in Yeldham's heart—a hope in which he saw the realization of happiness for Robert far beyond any thing he had dared to dream of for him. With its fresh impulse in his voice, he said eagerly,

"And tell me, I entreat you, what effect had this disclosure upon you?"

"Tell me first, Mr. Yeldham, what message do you bring me from my husband? Yet—no," and she stretched her hand toward him to stay his eager answer, "not so; I owe him much: I owe him reparation for pride and passion, for blind resentment, for selfishness and ungovernable self-will, and I will make it. Before I hear my husband's message, let me tell you mine to him."

A small ivory box stood near her on a table; she drew it toward her, and took from it a sealed letter, which she held in her hand while she spoke. Yeldham listened to her with a painful intensity of attention, and marked with wonder the varying beauty of her sensitive face.

"It is written here, in this letter, which I should have sent to him three days ago, but that a few hours after I had written it I learned how you had sought me out, and that you would come to seek me again. Then I resolved to wait; for I knew whatever communication my husband had charged you with would form the answer to my letter, and it would be better to receive it thus."

"And the letter—what is it?" asked Yeldham, with all the agonizing anxiety and entreaty which he felt in his voice. Katharine laid one hand heavily upon her breast, and breathed deeply.

"It tells him that I ask his forgiveness, as I have long granted him mine; it is to ask his permission to return, and do my duty to him in the future, as I never did it, or understood it in the past. Mr. Yeldham, what is my husband's message to me?"

He rose, came toward her, caught her hands in his, and said hoarsely, while unheeded tears ran down his face,

"His message to you is the message of a dying man to one who holds his life in her gift—of one who loves you with an immortal love; to whom life has been sheer unmitigated agony without you; to whom it has no hope, no ambition, no desire, but your pardon. It is the prayer of the sick for health, of the famishing for food, of the shipwrecked for a sail. 'If I should never see her face again,' he said last night, 'let me look upon a face which has looked upon hers;' and I am here, Katharine—I am here!"

He held her hands in a grasp tight even to pain while he spoke; now he released them. She covered her face with them, and sobbed aloud.

Trembling with delight, he stood by until her emotion had subsided. Then he said,

"Never was embassador so happy to find his mission useless and superseded. God forever bless you for the words you have spoken. Let me leave you now; I must write to Robert. Will you send your letter, or shall I. Perhaps," he went on gravely, "you had better let me inclose it. He has been ill, and even the best-managed communication of such unlooked-for happiness will try him; though joy never kills, they say, it may harm him. Don't be anxious; remember you will bring him health, and happiness, and life."

He took up the letter, once more caught her hands in his, and reverently kissed them; told her he would be with her on the morrow at an early hour, and left her, feeling like a man who walked in a dream.

His success had been so immeasurably beyond his hopes! *His* success? what nonsense was he talking to himself? It had not been his success, but that of circumstances, of an accident—the success of time, of experience, of conscience. How happy Robert would be! How "pure womanly" she was, with her loftiness and her lowliness, her beautiful compassion, her rapid, generous impulse, her ready self-accusation, and thoroughness of reparation! How beautiful too—how very, very beautiful, in her sombre dress! deep mourning too! the sort of mourning widows wear in France, if he

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did not mistake—of course she had passed as a widow—a gloomy dress, but she was too beautiful to heed it. When would she go to England, he wondered; would she return with him at once? he might ask her to-morrow. That would be very soon; but he must go—delay was impossible; and she was likely to do at once any thing she had made up her mind to do at all.

Yeldham's excitement remained so long upon him that it was difficult to him to write the few lines to Robert which were necessary. At length he scrawled them.

"All has succeeded, as I told you it would. The inclosed letter from your wife will explain more and better than I could. Be happy, dear old fellow, but don't agitate yourself; and mind you are quite well when I keep my word, and bring Katharine home."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

COMING HOME.

"ALICE," said Robert Streightley to the old nurse, who had kept an anxious watch upon him from the moment she had heard Yeldham's parting words, "I want to speak to you. Come up stairs with me to Miss Ellen's room."

It was about noon on the second day after Charles Yeldham reached Paris, and Robert had received his letter, with the inclosure from Katharine, that morning. It had been delivered at the hour which usually found Robert at breakfast, and old Alice in attendance upon him, as in the old time, which had had so brief, so brilliant, and so melancholy an interruption. But on this occasion Robert was alone, by his own express desire; and Alice, too much concerned, too seriously apprehensive to be affronted, had acquiesced without grumbling in his request that she would leave him for a little. No human eye, therefore, had seen Robert's perusal of his wife's letter—had witnessed the effect produced on him by such a reversal of his life for the past three years. His heart had known its own bitterness, and neither friend nor stranger was near now to meddle with its joy—a joy too deep for utterance, too supreme almost for endurance—a joy full of keen and piercing pain, of repentance, infinitely more terrible since forgiveness had come, and rich with the divinest blessings of hope. Hours had gone over since the glorious light of this new life had dawned—unheeded hours; and now Robert called to Alice, and she came. As he spoke, the old woman looked at him anxiously, but his face reassured her. It was very pale, and he looked old—he had been looking old of late, she had often thought—but peace, serenity, a calm, which she felt without understanding or questioning, were on the features, and a smile—a sweet and serious smile—lighted them. She followed him without a word to the now disused but always orderly room which had been Mrs. Dutton's in her maiden days. It was a pretty, bright, simple apartment, with gay chintz curtains, carefully pinned up now, and covered with Holland wrappings; with a bright carpet, covered with its linen shroud; and pretty furniture, simple and inexpensive, but in good taste and in perfect order. The day was bright and clear, and the fireless room, though cold, was not cheerless. Robert glanced round the room, placed a chair for Alice, bade her sit down, and shut the door. Then he set his back against the door and said,

"Alice, I want you to get this room made ready for a lady as soon as possible."

"Lord bless us! Master Robert," said the old woman, nervously, "who ever's coming, and the mistress away, and Miss Ellen not fit to be left, I'm sure—not for a fortnight yet, if so soon—"

"Alice, dear old woman!" said Robert, and he bent his tall figure, and laid his hands kindly on her shoulders, "it is for my wife. My wife is coming back to me!"

She looked at him with the timid uncertainty of old age, and began to tremble and cry.

"Yes, she's coming," he said. "You don't know her, Alice—you saw her very seldom; you don't know how good she is—"

"Good, Master Robert! and stay from you so long, and you in trouble, and so fond of her!"

"She did not know I was in trouble, nurse; I never told her any thing of the kind. She thought I was the same rich man I had been when she left me; and it was all my fault. I can not explain; but if you love me—and I know you do, old nurse, I know you do—who so well?—never blame my wife in your heart, or let others blame her in your hearing. But she's coming back to me; think of that."

"When?" was Alice's first practical question; "does my mistress know?" was her second.

"To-morrow, or the next day, I hope; I am not sure until I hear again—no, my mother does not know; no one knows. She will come here to me until I can get a quiet home of our own, then she and I will begin our life again;" and as Robert spoke the words, he could hardly believe in the meaning they conveyed.

Alice had entertained no favorable opinion of Katharine, and had never thought at all of her of late, since she had ceased to be mentioned by Mrs. Streightley. But Robert's joy acted as a revelation of his sorrow to the faithful friend who watched him more closely, and knew him better than any one in the world beside. She listened, therefore, with the utmost attention to his directions, and promised the closest compliance with his wishes. Every thing should be done to make the house fit for Mrs. Streightley's reception; little was needed, indeed, but the fires should be lighted, and the rooms swept and garnished. Robert thought of the suite of apartments at Portland Place, and of the "Lady Kilmantan" hangings at Middlemeads, but not bitterly; he thought of them, indeed, with a

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smile: such things mattered little now to him or to his wife. His wife! He called her by the sacred name, in his thoughts, a thousand times in an hour, and life seemed too short and narrow for all his thankfulness and joy.

The news soon spread through the little household, and was received with much indifference. The three female servants who composed the modest establishment were new-comers; they had known nothing of Robert's wife, and cared nothing about her. But they liked him, and they were rather glad than otherwise that any thing should occur to give him pleasure, more especially as Nurse Alice informed them the "young madam's" residence would be but temporary, for they agreed unanimously that they "couldn't abide two mistresses, and in course it was only natural as Mr. Robert's wife should like to have her own way." Thus they set to work with very tolerable activity and good-will, and the work of preparation went on briskly.

How the hours of that day passed over Robert Streightley he could not have told, had there been any to question him. Should he write? he had asked himself, when he was once more shut up in the dining-room and secure from interruption. What could he say? To Yeldham he might possibly write a few words of thanks and thankfulness; but what would they avail? what a poor mockery they would be! But perhaps he had better write them. Then the strong man, who had seen his fortunes crumble into dust, and stood upright amid the ruins, took a pen in his hand, and tried to form a few simple words, and he could not do it; darkness gathered before his eyes, and his senses reeled. So he went out to the nearest telegraph-office, and he dictated a message to a clerk in three words —"Come home quickly;" and he lingered about until he knew they had been clicked off to Paris, and then he began to count the time as he walked, he hardly knew where, about the clean, frosty suburban roads, and to speculate upon the exact moment when his wife would receive his message. So wandering, while the short hours of the winter's day were waning, he found himself on the borders of Clapham Common, and leant for a few minutes idly against an iron post, watching the omnibuses starting from the Plow, and their conductors warming themselves by brisk exercise, assisted by strong drink. A narrow road led away to his right; and a little way down, a tall, graceful, lance-like church-spire showed solemn and beautiful against the steel-colored vault of the sky; the stars were beginning to twinkle, and the leafless trees rustled sharp and brittle in the frosty air. Looking upward at the spire, Robert turned down the narrow road, and found himself in a minute before the low gate and little paved court in front of a modern Gothic church, small, but of rich and correct architecture. The gate swung open as he came up to it, and several children ran gladly out into the road. Through the porch and the heavy oak door, iron-clamped and half open, Robert saw glimpses of the interior of the church, saw gleams of rich color and bits of quaint Gothic decoration. The grand, sonorous tones of an organ swelled out suddenly, and ceased as he stood idly looking and listening. The notes were the last of the "practice," and accompanied a reiterated "Amen" by children's voices. He passed through the gate into the porch, and, after a moment's hesitation, entered the church. A great longing for the peace of God had come over him, and here was God's house; it mattered not to him that the form of the worship therein was Catholic, not that to which he was accustomed, and he went in. There was no light in the church save the red gleam from the sacramental lamp, swung by long silver chains before the high altar; the gas-jets which had given light to the organist were turned out as he went into the church, and the children went down the gallery stairs and trooped noisily away. A man lingered for a few minutes to arrange some chairs piled against the wall of a side aisle, and then departed, having left all in order for the evening service, to commence in an hour. Robert was quite alone: over the large window, high up in the wall, behind which the guests of the community (for the church was attached to a monastery) were wont to sit and assist unseen at Divine worship, a crimson curtain hung; there was no human eye to witness the emotion of his soul.

Robert sat long, absorbed in thought; then he drew near the altar-rail, and kneeled down upon the marble step. The red light shone solemnly upon his kneeling figure, and upon the paintings glowing on the sanctuary walls. His eyes wandered over these until they rested upon one, and then they staid their wandering. It represented a Man of infinitely benign and sorrowful aspect, in whose figure there was great dignity and power. He stood with outstretched arms and piercing gaze directed out from the canvas, as though he looked into the faces of a multitude. A scroll ran round the top of the picture, and bore these words: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

The light was very dim; he could not have read the written words by its glimmer had he needed to read them; but he did not. Kneeling there, on the altar-step, before the face and the words of promise, Robert took his wife's two letters from his breast, and, like Hezekiah in his trouble, he, in his repentance and his gratitude, "spread them before the Lord."

It was late when Robert reached home, and Alice was anxiously expecting him. He was very cheerful, and listened with pleasure to the old woman's account of all that had been done during the day in the way of preparation of Katharine's reception. He had several matters of business to attend to, and so the hours wore themselves away, and at length he was the only one waking in the quiet house.

"You'll go to bed soon, Master Robert," old Alice had said to him; "and you'll sleep well, I hope, for you'll not like to be looking ill when

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Mrs. Streightley comes; and you're not strong, you know. Promise me, now, that you'll not sit up."

So Robert promised, and he fully meant to keep his word; but as the night wore on restlessness came upon him, and distressing pain in the head and eyeballs. He wondered that any illness or pain could come near him, he was so happy, so thankful—God had been so good to him, and Katharine was coming home! He could not sleep; no, the effort would be useless; so he made up the fire in the sitting-room, and he walked up and down, trying to tire himself into sleepiness. He had lost command over his thoughts; and though he might not have tried to guide them otherwise than they were going, he felt that he had lost it, and they hurried wildly into the past. All his life seemed to pass before him in a strange phantasmagoria, of which he was but a spectator; and innumerable forgotten scenes, and faces which he had not seen for years, rose up before him—the first day he had seen Katharine, the day at the Flower-show, the day Mr. Guyon had shown him the letter. Good God, how terrible that recollection was! But she had forgiven him now, and he might fairly try to forgive himself, with this blessed assurance (and he grasped the letter in his breast with his hand as he walked up and down) in his possession, and the certainty of reading a full pardon in her eyes before long. And then he shuddered, shook through all his limbs with the strong contest of emotion, with irrepressible passionate delight and pain. Anon he rose again, and was whirled away upon another storm of thoughts. Mr. Guyon was present to him — the terrible sudden death. Ah! he had taken that too lightly; he had condemned the dead man too hastily and too heavily; the dead man, who had cared for trifles, who had found pleasure in things he could not comprehend, but was no worse than he; the dead man, who loved money and enjoyment, and naught beside. Well, he ought to have pitied him for that—he did pity him, for he was dead. His daughter could not come to him with soft words of peace, and heavenly smiles of pardon, as she was coming to the husband who had wronged her. He did pity the dead old man. He thought how coldly he had looked on the dead face—the rigid, ashy face; he remembered it well, how forlorn and ghastly it was! how awfully alone! more so than any dead face he had ever seen. And then he remembered how carelessly he had attended the funeral; he had had no thought, no sorrow for the dead; his heart had been rent and wrung with anguish for the loss of Katharine; he had hardly heard the Burial Service at all; he had been glad when it was over, and had turned away to his business and his grief. He remembered some of it now: "Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery." Yes, full of misery; but not now, not now—that was over. "The sure and certain hope"—this was troubling him; he would read it all through, and try to steady his thoughts upon it.

Mrs. Streightley's "church-books" lay upon a shelf near one of the windows. She rarely used the Common Prayer-book, inclining rather to dissenting forms of worship; so Robert found the book without difficulty. He sat down beside the fire, and read the Burial Service throughout, half aloud; and as he concluded it, heavy sleep fell upon him suddenly, as it had done a few times lately since he had not been so strong and well as formerly. He slept on, though the wintry dawn came and the fire died out; and when the housemaid came into the room in the morning, "it gave her," as she described it, "quite a turn to see the master a-sittin' there asleep, and the gas a-burnin' in the broad daylight."

Old Alice came bustling in to rouse and scold him; and Robert, feeling very much ashamed of himself, went off sheepishly to bathe and dress. He looked and felt much better after those restoratives, and assured Alice that it had not harmed him to sleep on a chair instead of his bed; he felt just a little giddy, of course, but it was nothing, he told her. He told himself it was the expectation of the post-hour, and the news it would bring. He did not venture to ask Alice to leave him to breakfast alone this morning, so the old woman was in the room when the expected letter arrived. It was very short, and with his first glance at it he said,

"She will be here this evening, Alice; she comes by the day-mail."

"Thank God!" said the old woman fervently. "I am thankful there's to be no more waiting, for you ain't fit for it, Robert, my boy, and that's the truth."

"The train comes in at six; she will be here before seven. Mr. Yeldham is coming with her. Is every thing ready, Alice?"

"Every thing, Master Robert. I will have the fire lighted in her room immediately, and the things all put straight, and then you can look at it and satisfy yourself. And you won't worry yourself—will you promise me not to worry yourself?"

"I worry myself! no, indeed, nurse. I think that nothing can ever harm, or grieve, or 'worry' me, as you call it, any more."

Then he told her he must go into the City for an hour or two, and he took a kind leave of her and went. The old woman sat down on the chair he had vacated, and burst into an unaccountable fit of crying.

"I am an old fool, to be sure, if ever there was one!" she said, irritably, after a few minutes, "but can't help it: there's something over me, though I'm glad for my dear boy. Now that *that's* over, I'll go and look after those girls, and see what's best to have for her dinner."

It was nearly four o'clock when Robert returned, and he came in a cab which looked like a small conservatory on wheels, for every avail-

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able space in it was filled with flowers. He carried the pots and the bouquets carefully into the house; and having assured Alice that he was not hungry—for her anxiety on that point had not slumbered since his infancy—he asked her if the rooms up stairs were ready.

"I have just come down from looking after them myself, Master Robert, and nothing could be prettier nor nicer."

"Well, nurse, help me to take these flowers up stairs, and show me all your beautiful decorations."

Alice was right: nothing nicer or prettier than the room prepared for Katharine could be seen. A bright fire burned in the polished grate, and a soft white lambskin rug lay before the fender, the chintz curtains shaded the windows cosily, and the uncovered carpet looked fresh and gay; the simple furniture was tastefully disposed; and a low velvet chair, borrowed from the drawing-room, stood invitingly before the fire. Ellen had been fond of flowers, and some pretty Parian vases were among the ornaments of her forsaken chamber. Aided by Alice, Robert arranged the flowers he had brought—and which, though numerous, were not various, for even money will not avail to procure floral variety in December—and disposed the vases as his taste dictated. Then they set the flower-pots in the balcony, and looked round approvingly on their completed task. The two faithful friends stood a while in silence, and then Robert said,

"Is all ready down stairs as well?"

"All ready, my dear; and not long to wait now, God be praised! What are you going to do—not going to the station to meet them, surely, are you?"

"Oh no, nurse, I'm going to wait for her here, and I want you to take care that I'm not disturbed. I have a great deal to think about, Alice, and I want to be alone now until she comes."

"Very well, Robert, no one shall come near you. What time is it now?"

"Half past four. Have plenty of light down stairs, that the house may look cheerful when she comes; and, Alice, I will light the gas here now, so shut the shutters."

He went with her to one of the windows to aid her, and they looked out. The red wintry sun was going down in a fiery ball, and red streaks were lying low upon the sky.

"They have had a pleasant journey, no doubt," said Alice, cheerfully, "and they're on the sea now, I suppose."

Robert made her no answer: he was looking at the sunset, a fold of the shutter in each hand. He closed them together, fastened the bolt, and drew the curtains, while Alice lighted the gas-lamps. His face was very pale, but there was a smile of exultation and delight upon it. He spoke aloud, forgetting his reticence in his joy:

"The last sun has set that I shall see rise without her. All my troubles are over, nurse."

The old woman went up to him, gently lifted her arms, and drew his face down toward her own. She kissed him fondly more than once, and said in a low, broken tone,

"God bless you, my darling boy! Don't forget the Lord, who has granted you your heart's desire."

Then she left the room quickly, and went down stairs, wiping her eyes with her apron.

After a few minutes Robert went into the adjoining room, and returned, carrying a large leather box. He set it upon a small table, near the toilet, and opened it with a key attached to his watch-chain. Then he took from it several cases, which he arranged symmetrically on the dressing-table, opening each and displaying its contents.

"Yes," he murmured, "I am sure it was in just such order they lay that night when she put on the bracelet when I asked her, and put her hand in mine. The amethysts here, and the opal cross beside the pincushion, and the diamonds there." And he placed them as he spoke. The diamond serpent came to his hand last, and he held it, turning it to the light and watching the flashes of rich color which gleamed from the gems. Then he replaced it in its satin case, and laid it upon the stand of the toilet-mirror.

"Yes, my darling," he murmured, "they are beautiful, and worth much money; and I have wanted money sorely since you adorned them last and turned from them with disdain; but I would have starved, I think, before I could have parted with them, for they had touched you."

He sat down in the velvet chair by the fire, took something from his waistcoat pocket, and held it toward the light on his open palm. It was a plain gold ring, and a date was engraved inside it. It was that of the day then passing into evening, and he had had it done that morning.

"This is the true symbol," he murmured; "she will wear this willingly."

He sat for many minutes gazing at the ring upon his outstretched hand; then he put it back into his pocket and started up.

A quarter to six.

Later than he had thought, than he had hoped. His thoughts were confused. Now they were hurrying him away again. This must not be. In this supreme hour of his life there must be no vagueness; he must rule his mind. But how? Her letter—he would read her letter—yes, that would reassure him, would restore his composure. A horrid feeling of unreality was creeping over him. This was not a dream, surely? Katharine, his wife, was really coming—this was her room. The fire and light were real; the doors of yonder wardrobe were lying open to receive her dresses, and the jewels upon the table there were hers—she had worn them. He was really standing in the midst of objects which assured him all was true. Then why had he felt for a moment a wide cold barren heath around him, and seen the sky and the stars? They were shut out, and there was no picture upon the wall opposite? Of course not. There

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was no picture there; he was only remembering the picture he had seen yesterday. He would read her letter, and he would read it on his knees, and remain kneeling until he should hear the sound of wheels—and then? How painful the slow, heavy beating of his heart grew! It quite confused him. He would be much easier kneeling down. He crossed the room to the low white bed, touching the table with his hand for a moment, and knelt down on the side of the bed which faced the door. He took Katharine's letter from his breast, spread it open on the coverlet, stretching his arms out round it like a frame. He was steadier now; that strange hurry had passed away. This was the letter:

"I wrote to you three years ago, on the day after my father died, and I then believed, and intended what I said, that that should be the last communication I would ever hold with you. I left you, full of anger and revenge, full of self-contempt that I had permitted myself to be deceived, and with no thought beyond myself, my injuries, and my vengeance. From that day I never heard your name spoken, or was recalled by any outward circumstance of the recollection of the life I had forsaken, until a few days ago, and the letter I am now writing to you, Robert, is the result of what I then accidentally learned.

"The knowledge I have gained is the knowledge of your loss of fortune—ruin. The person who mentioned it called it in the strong phrase natural to those who love wealth best, and value it above all. I hope it is not so bad as this; but, whatever it be, you are what the world I lived in once, but which has forgotten me, and which I have forgotten, calls a poor man. Thus the great barrier which did exist between you and me exists no longer, and I can address you as frankly and as freely as I will, with my whole heart. You may have ceased to love me, you may not care for my pardon now, but at least you can not say I am tired of obscurity and poverty, and would return to my former position of wealth and luxury as your wife. Neither you nor the world, if it should ever know any thing of me again, nor even my own proud self-doubting heart, which has so often tortured me with suggestions of deceitful motives, can whisper that I have any purpose but the right to serve in this.

"I have suffered and learned since I left you, Robert. That suffering has been good for me, and that learning has changed me, so that I have often wished to do that which I am now doing, but have been held back by pride. For I am asking you to take me back; I am asking you to give me once more the place in your home and in your life which I willfully, in my blind wrath, abandoned. The wrong you did me I have long ago forgiven; will you forgive me the wrong I have done you? I never understood it aright until I knew that your fortunes had fallen, until I knew that you, too, had lapsed out of your place in the world, and then, though you never cared for these things as I cared for them, I came to understand what I had done to you. You hid all your troubles from me; you kept a cheerful face to me when your heart was sad; and you allowed me to lavish money when it was melting out of your hands; you never found a fault with me, or denied a wish of mine its most ample gratification. Foolish, vain, worthless wishes they were, and I think of them with shame; but I remember your forbearance, your generosity, your constant kindness with gratitude, which is no new feeling, for I have been learning life's lessons for a long time in silence and loneliness; and if I could have conquered my pride, if I could have known above all what I know now, I should long ago have told you this. What am I, that I should be relentless to you? what am I, that I should not forgive? I never fulfilled a wife's duties; I never understood them; no one ever tried to teach me but one, and I set my headstrong will against her. I left you to sorrow and perplexity, to humiliation, and to ruin—I, who had enjoyed your wealth, and had married you without love. Your sin was not greater in reality than mine, Robert. I wonder can any sin be really greater than a marriage without love? But I was implacable to you, and you never complained of me. We lived together, the one a mystery for the other, each a lie to ourselves, and there was no confidence between us, and in me no forbearance. God help me, I was ignorant indeed; and it was not until I had become a lonely looker-on at life that I learned the lessons which earlier might have saved both you and me.

"I soon forgave you, Robert, but I have never been able to forgive myself. Perhaps when you have forgiven me, as I know you will, peace will come to me. External quiet I have had, but not peace, though it took me long to learn that I was seeking a vain shadow under that name, and that in doing the right alone can any human being ever find it. In the day when self-delusion fell away from me, it left me as lonely as I had left you, and there was no possibility of substituting self-made duties for those which God's law and my own vow had laid upon me, and which I had forsaken. If you have been unhappy—and, little as I know you, in comparison with the comprehension which a wife's ought to be, I know you well enough to feel only too sure that you have been unhappy—my life has had no joy in it, no serenity. All that ever pleased me in the past has utterly lost its charm. God has had too much compassion on me to suffer me to say, 'Peace, peace, when there is no peace;' and now the end of the struggle has come. Careless words spoken by a stranger have been a revelation to me. You have sought for me in vain, Robert; then you desire to find me? Is it that you love me still, as you loved me in those evil days when I so ill requited your love? Or is it because you, too, would expiate the past for God's sake and the right? Whatever be your motive, there is but one course for me—the course I am taking. If

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you will receive me, I am ready to return to you whenever you shall summon me.

"Do you remember Dr. Hudson, who attended me at Martigny after our marriage? He has been a true and untiring friend to me. Nobly has he redeemed the unasked pledge of fidelity which he gave me when we parted there. I sought him out when I left you, and he has taken care of me ever since. Part of the time I lived in a convent, and was permitted to work among the poor and the sick; but of late I have been living with Dr. Hudson's mother in Brittany. This is a brief history of a long time. If you can forgive me, and bid me come home, I will tell you all the story of my outwardly quiet life, and you shall tell me yours. We are husband and wife, Robert; and yet what strangers we are to each other! I wonder if you are as much changed as I am. Since I have known that you have had other heavy griefs besides those which I laid upon you, I dread to think how they may have altered you. Let me help you to bear them now—I, who never before touched your burdens with so much as a finger—let me be to you in adversity what in prosperity I did not care, did not know how to be. Let our dead past bury its dead. Life must always be sad and serious, I think, to those who are neither foolish nor wicked, and it will be always sad and serious to us. There are shadows cast from the time that is gone upon our paths which no light can wholly dissipate until we emerge into the perfect day, but the shades of anger and resentment are not among them: they have vanished, and can never come again. I do not know where your home is, Robert, and I must direct this letter to your mother's house; but wherever and whatever it may be, I entreat you let me share it. Let me come to you, late as it is, and keep my vow to you, so long and so willfully broken, 'until death do us part.'

"KATHARINE STREIGHTLEY."

A quarter past six.

The hour chimed gayly with a treble ring from the little French clock on the mantel-piece. The fire was burning steadily, as fires burn in cheerful frosty weather; the delicate scent of the flowers had come out under the genial influence of the warmth, and dispersed itself through the room. The sharp roll of cab and carriage wheels upon the road came deadened through the closed windows. Robert still knelt beside the bed, and still framed his wife's letter with his outstretched arms. The stir of expectation and preparation was audible down stairs. The dining-room door stood invitingly open, the lights burned brightly, the table was laid for three, and the snowy table-cloth and glittering glass looked not the least attractive among the items of the welcome prepared for the travelers. The little hall was lighted too, and the very porcelain tiles seemed to have been brightened for the occasion.

Half past six.

Alice comes up stairs from the kitchen, opens the hall door, and listens. The keen air comes in, but the old woman is not afraid of the keen air, and there is no wind. Soon she goes to the stair-head and calls,

"Susan, your clock is slow. The down-train is just leaving the junction. They'll be here directly."

Susan answers from the bottom of the short staircase,

"Let 'em come. Dinner is all ready, and I doubt it'll be spoiled, if they don't come soon, by the time they've got their things off. Where's master?"

"In Miss Ellen's room; he's not to be disturbed till they come. Oh, he'll hear 'em fast enough. There, it's gone the quarter!"

Alice comes back to the door, and, holding it a little ajar, continues to peep out. Many trains from distant places arrive about this hour, and she is disappointed several times by cabs, luggage-laden, which pass the gate.

"I've often heard Master Robert say a quarter of an hour should always be allowed for them foreign trains," the old woman mutters a little impatiently; "but surely they'll soon be here. He'll be worn out with waiting."

Seven!

They are here. A cab stops at the gate, and Alice calls excitedly to the servants. Susan can not abandon the dinner, but the others come and concern themselves about the luggage, while she opens wide the door, and a lady and gentleman enter.

"Well, nurse," says Mr. Yeldham, in an excited voice, "you see I have brought Mrs. Streightley home."

"I see, sir," says Alice, trembling. "God bless you, ma'am; and welcome home a thousand times!"

Katharine puts out her hand hurriedly and takes the old woman's, but she does not speak. She is very pale, and her lips are trembling; but she is very, very beautiful. Alice is startled at her beauty. She looks like a queen, she thinks; her deep-mourning dress drapes her like robes. But she has only time for a glimpse of Katharine, for Yeldham leads her quickly into the dining-room, whence he comes out in a moment, and asks Alice, still in the hall, and watching the servants and the cabman carrying the luggage up the little garden walk, "Where's Robert?"

Alice explains that he is in the room prepared for Mrs. Streightley, but wonders he has not heard the cab, and is bustling toward the stairs to call him, when Yeldham stops her.

"No, nurse; I know the room. I'll take her to him."

So he calls Katharine, and she comes quickly, and they go up the stairs together, Alice following. There is light on each landing, and they are soon at the door. Yeldham taps rapidly, and at the same time turns the door-handle; and Katharine, with a swift, steady step, passes into the room, into the glow of the light, and the warmth, and the perfume of the flowers. She

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sees it all with one quick happy glance; sees the jewels on the table, and recognizes them; sees the light glancing upon the scales of the diamond serpent; sees the outstretched arms upon the bed, and the head now laid down upon them. In a moment she is beside the kneeling figure, her hand upon the shoulder, her breath upon the thick brown curls.

"Robert! I have come—I am here!"

There is no answer. The breathless listeners on the landing hear no sound of glad welcome. An instant, and a faint gasping cry reaches them; for Katharine has knelt beside her husband, and lifted his head from off his outstretched arms, and it has swayed helplessly, and fallen heavily against her bosom.

Death has parted them!

THE END.

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LAND AT LAST.

A Novel

IN THREE BOOKS.

BY EDMUND YATES,

AUTHOR OF "BROKEN TO HARNESS," "RUNNING THE GAUNTLET," &c.

"Post tenebras lux."

NEW YORK:
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,
FRANKLIN SQUARE.
1866.

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LAND AT LAST.

BOOK I.—MAKING FOR SHORE.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE STREETS.

It was between nine and ten o'clock on a January night, and the London streets were in a state of slush. During the previous night snow had fallen heavily, and the respectable portion of the community, which, according to regular custom, had retired to bed at eleven o'clock, had been astonished, on peering out from behind a corner of the window-curtain when they arose, to find the roads and the neighboring house-tops covered with a thick white incrustation. The pavements were already showing dank dabs of footmarks, which even the snow then falling failed to fill up; and the roadway speedily lost its winter garment and became sticky with congealed mud. Then the snow ceased, and a sickly, straggling bit of winter sunlight, a mere parody on the real thing, half light and half warmth, came lurking out between the dun clouds; and under its influence the black-specked covering of the roofs melted, and the water-pipes ran with cold, black, liquid filth. The pavement had given it up long ago, and resumed its normal winter state of sticky, slippery grease—grease which clung to the boots and roused the wildest rage of foot-passengers by causing them to slip backward when they wanted to make progress, and which accumulated in the direst manner on the landing-places and street-corners—the first bits of refuge after the perils of the crossing—where it heaped itself in aggravating lumps and shiny rings under the heels of foot-passengers just arrived, having been shaken and stamped off the soles of passengers who had just preceded them. So it had continued all day; but toward the afternoon the air had grown colder, and a whisper had run round that it froze again. Cutlers who had been gazing with a melancholy air on the placards "Skates" in their window, and had determined on removing them, as a bad joke against themselves, decided on letting them remain. Boys who had been delighted in the morning at the sight of the snow, and proportionately chopfallen toward middle-day at the sight of the thaw, had plucked up again and seen visions of snow-balling matches, slides on the gutters, and, most delicious of all, omnibus horses both down at once on the slippery road. Homeward-bound City-clerks, their day's work over, shivered in the omnibuses, and told each other how they were *afraid* it had come at last, and reminded each other of what the newspapers had said about the flocks of wild-geese and other signs of a hard winter, and moaned lugubriously about the advanced price of coals and the difficulties of locomotion certain to be consequent on the frost.

But when the cruel black night had set regularly in a dim, sleek, soft drizzle began to fall, and all hopes or fears of frost were at an end. Slowly and gently it came down, wrapping the streets as with a damp pall; stealing quietly in under umbrellas; eating its way through the thickest broadcloth; matting the hair and hanging in dank, unwholesome beads on the beards of all unlucky enough to be exposed to it. It meant mischief, this drizzle, and it carried out its intention. Omnibus-drivers and cabmen knew it at once from long experience, donned their heavy tarpaulin capes, and made up their minds for the worst. The professional beggars knew it too. The pavement-chalking tramp, who had selected a tolerably dry spot under the lee of a wall, no sooner felt its first damp breath than he blew out his paper lantern, put the candle into his pocket, stamped out as much of the mackerel and the ship at sea as he had already stenciled, and made off. The man in the exemplary shirt-collar and apron, who had planted himself before the chemist's window to procure an extra death-tinge from the light reflected from the blue bottle, packed up his linen and decamped, fearing lest his stock-in-trade—his virtue and his lucifers—might be injured by damp. The brass-bands which had been playing outside the public-houses shouldered their instruments and went inside; the vendors of second-hand books covered their openly-displayed stock with strips of baize and dismissed their watchful boys, conscious that no petty thief would risk the weather for so small a prey. The hot-potato men blew fiercer jets of steam out of their tin kitchens, as though calling on the public to defy dull care and comfort themselves with an antidote to the general wretchedness; and the policemen stamped solemnly and slowly round their beats, as men impressed with the full knowledge that, as there was not the remotest chance of their being relieved from their miserable fate until the morning, they might as well bear themselves with as much dignity as possible under the circumstances.

It was bad every where; but in no place at the West End of London was it so bad as at the Regent Circus. There the great tide of humanity had been ebbing and flowing all day; there hapless females in shoals had struggled across the roaring sea of Oxford Street, some conveyed by

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the crossing-sweeper, some drifting helplessly under the poles of omnibuses and the wheels of hansom cabs. There the umbrellas of the expectant omnibus-seekers jostled each other with extra virulence; and there the edges of the pavements were thick with dark alluvial deposits kicked hither and thither by the feet of thousands. All day there had been a bustle and a roar round this spot, and at ten o'clock at night it had but little diminished. Omnibus-conductors, like kites and vultures, clawed and wrangled over the bodies of their victims, who, in a miserable little flock, huddled together in a corner, and dashed out helplessly and without purpose as each lumbering vehicle drew up. Intermingled with these were several vagabond boys, whose animal spirits no amount of wet or misery could quell, and who constituted themselves a kind of vedette or outpost-guard, giving warning of the approach of the different omnibuses in much pleasantly familiar speech: "Now, guv'nor, for Bayswater! Hatlas comin' up! Ready now for Nottin' 'Ill!"

At the back of the little crowd, sheltering herself under the lee of the houses, stood a slight female figure, a mere slight slip of a girl, dressed only in a clinging gown and a miserable tightly-drawn shawl. Her worn bonnet was pulled over her face, her arms were clasped before her, and she stood in a doorway almost motionless. The policeman traveling leisurely by had at first imagined her to be an omnibus-passenger waiting for a vehicle; but some twenty minutes after he had first noticed her, finding her still in the same position, he took advantage of a pretended trial of the security of various street-doors to scrutinize her appearance. To the man versed in such matters the miserable garb told its own tale—its wearer was a pauper; and a beggar the man in office surmised, although the girl had made no plaint, had uttered no word, had remained immovable and statue-like, gazing blankly before her. The policeman had been long enough in the force to know that the girl's presence in the doorway was an offense in the eyes of the law; but he was a kindly-hearted Somersetshire man, and he performed his duty in as pleasant a way as he could, by gently pulling a corner of the drabbled shawl, and saying, "You mustn't stand here, lass; you must move on, please." The shawl-wearer never looked up or spoke, but shivering slightly, stepped out into the dank mist, and floated, phantom-like, across the road.

Gliding up the upper part of Regent Street, keeping close to the houses, and walking with her head bent down and her arms always folded tightly across her breast, she struck off into a by-street to the right, and crossing Oxford Market, seemed hesitating which way to turn. For an instant she stopped before the window of an eating-house, where thick columns of steam were yet playing round the attenuated remains of joints, or casting a greasy halo round slabs of pudding. As the girl gazed at these wretched remnants of a wretched feast she raised her head, her eyes glistened, her pinched nostrils dilated, and for an instant her breath came thick and fast; then, drawing her shawl more tightly round her, and bending her head to avoid as much as possible the rain, which came thickly scudding on the rising wind, she hurried on, and only stopped for shelter under the outstretched blind of a little chandler's shop—a wretched shelter, for the blind was soaked through, and the rain dripped from it in little pools, and the wind shook it in its frame and eddied underneath it with a wet and gusty whirl; but there was something of comfort to the girl in the warm look of the gas-lit shop, in the smug, rotund appearance of the chandler, in the distant glimmer of the fire on the glazed door of the parlor at the back. Staring vacantly before him while mechanically patting a conical lump of lard, not unlike the bald cranium of an elderly gentleman, the chandler became aware of the girl's face at the window; and seeing Want legibly inscribed by Nature's never-erring hand on every feature of that face, and being a humane man, he was groping in the till for some small coin to bestow in charity, when from the back-room came a sharp, shrill voice, "Jim, time to shut up!" and at the sound of the voice the chandler hastily retreated, and, a small boy suddenly appearing, pulled up the overhanging blind, and having lost its shelter the girl set forth again.

But her course was nearly at an end. To avoid a troop of boys who, arm-in-arm, came breasting up the street singing the burden of a negro-song, she turned off again into the main thoroughfare, and had barely gained the broad shadow of the sharp-steepled church in Langham Place, when she felt her legs sinking under her, her brain reeling, her heart throbbing in her breast like a ball of fire. She tottered and clung to the church-railing for support. In the next instant she was surrounded by a little crowd, in which she had a vision of painted faces and glistening silks, a dream of faint words of commiseration overborne by mocking laughter and ribald oaths, oaths made more fearful still by being uttered in foreign accents, of bitter jests, and broad hints of drunkenness and shame; finally, of the strident voice of the policeman telling her again to "move on!" The dead faintness, consequent on cold, and wet, and weariness, and starvation, passed away for the time, and she obeyed the mandate. Passively she crept away a few steps up a deserted by-street until her tormentors had left her quite alone; then she sunk down, shivering, on a door-step, and burying her face in her tattered shawl, felt that her end was come.

There she remained, the dead, damp cold striking through her lower limbs and chilling them to stone, while her head was one blazing fire. Gradually her limbs became numbed and lost to all sensation, a sickening empty pain was round her heart, a dead apathy settling down over her mind and brain. The tramping of feet was close upon her; the noise of loud voices, the ringing shouts of loud laughter, were in her ears; but she never raised her head from the tattered shawl, nor by speech or motion did she give the smallest sign of life. Men passed her constantly, all making for one goal, the portico next to that in which she had sunk down helpless—men with kindly hearts attuned to charity, who, had they known the state of the wretched wayfarer, would have exerted themselves bravely in her succor, but whom a London life had so inured to spectacles of casual misery and vice that a few only cast a passing glance on the stricken woman and passed on. They came singly and in twos and threes; but none spoke to her, none noticed her save by a glance and a shoulder-shrug.

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Then, as the icy hands of Cold and Want gradually stealing over her seemed to settle round the region of her heart, the girl gave one low, faint cry, "God help me! it's come at last—God help me!" and fell back in a dead swoon.

CHAPTER II.

THE BRETHREN OF THE BRUSH

The house to which all the jovial fellows who passed the girl on the door-step with such carelessness were wending their way was almost unique in the metropolis. The rumor ran that it had originally been designed for stables, and indeed there was a certain mews-ish appearance about its architectural elevation; it had the squat, squabby, square look of those buildings from whose upper floors clothes-lines stretch diagonally across stable-yards; and you were at first surprised at finding an imposing portico with an imposing bell in a position where you looked for the folding-doors of a coach-house. Whether there had been any truth in the report or not, it is certain that the owner of the property speedily saw his way to more money than he could have gained by the ignoble pursuit of stabling horses, and made alterations in his building which converted it into several sets of spacious, roomy, and comfortable, if not elegant chambers. The upper rooms were duly let, and speedily became famous—thuswise. When Parmegiano Wilkins made his first great success with his picture of "Boadicea at Breakfast"—connoisseurs and art-critics will recollect the marvelous manner in which the chip in the porridge of the Queen of the Iceni was rendered—Mr. Caniche, the great picture-dealer, to whom Wilkins had mortgaged himself body and soul for three years, felt it necessary that his next works should be submitted to the private inspection of the newspaper-writers and the *cognoscenti* previous to their going into the Academy Exhibition. On receiving a letter to this effect from Caniche, Wilkins was at his wits' end. He was living, for privacy's sake, in a little cottage on the outskirts of Epping Forest, and having made a success, had naturally alienated all his friends whose rooms in town would otherwise have been available for the display of his pictures; he thought—and there the astute picture-dealer agreed with him—that it would be unwise to send them to Caniche's shop (it was before such places were called "galleries"), as tending to make public the connection between them; and Wilkins did not know what to do. Then Caniche came to his rescue. Little Jimmy Dabb, who had been Gold-Medalist and Traveling-Student at the Academy three years beforehand, and who, for sheer sake of bread-winning, had settled down as one of Caniche's laborers, had a big studio in the stable-like edifice near Langham Church. In it he painted those bits of domestic life—dying children on beds, weeping mothers, small table with cut-orange, Bible and physic by bedside, and pitying angel dimly hovering between mantle-piece and ceiling—which, originally in oil, and subsequently in engravings, had such a vast sale, and brought so much ready money to Caniche's exchequer. The situation was central; why not utilize it? No sooner thought of than done: a red cotton-velvet coverlet was spread over Jimmy Dabb's bed in the corner; a Dutch carpet, red, with black flecks, was, at Caniche's expense, spread over the floor, paint-smeared and burned with tobacco-ash; two gorgeous easels, on which were displayed Wilkins's two pictures, "The Bird in the Hand"—every feather in the bird and the dirt in the nails of the plow-boy's hand marvelously delineated—and "Crumbs of Comfort," each crumb separate, and the loaf in the back-ground so real that the Dowager-Countess of Rundall, a celebrated household manager, declared it at once to be a "slack-baked quartern." Invitation-cards, wonderfully illuminated in Old-English characters, and utterly illegible, were sent forth to rank, fashion, and talent, who duly attended. Crowds of gay carriages choked up the little street: Dabb in his Sunday-clothes did the honors; Caniche, bland, smiling, and polyglot, flitted here and there, his clerk took down orders for proof-copies, and the fortune of the chambers was made. They were so original, so artistic, so convenient, they were just the place for a painter. Smudge, R.A., who painted portraits of the aristocracy, who wore a velvet coat, and whose name was seen in the tail-end of the list of fashionables at evening-parties, took a vacant set at once; and Clement Walkinshaw of the Foreign Office, who passed such spare time as his country could afford him in illuminating missals, in preparing designs for stained glass, and in hanging about art-circles generally, secured the remainder of the upper floor, and converted it into a Wardour-Street Paradise, with hanging velvet *portières*, old oak cabinets, Venetian glass, marqueterie tables, Sèvres china, escutcheons of armor, and Viennese porcelain pipes.

Meanwhile, utterly uncaring for and utterly independent of what went on up stairs, the denizens of the lower story kept quietly on. Who were the denizens of the lower story? who but the well-known Titian Sketching-Club! How many men, who, after struggling through Suffolk Street and the Portland Gallery, have won their way to fame and fortune, have made their *coup d'essai* on the walls of the chambers rented by the Titian Sketching-Club! Outsiders, who professed great love for art, but who only knew the two or three exhibitions of the season, and only recognized the score of names in each vouchsafed for by the newspaper-critics, would have been astonished to learn the amount of canvas covered, pains taken, and skill brought to bear upon the work of the members of the Titian. There are guilds, and companies of Freemasons, and brotherhoods by the score in London; but I know of none where the grand spirit of Camaraderie is so carried out as in this. It is the nearest thing to the *Vie de Bohème* of Paris of Henri Murger that we can show; there is more liberty of speech, and thought, and action, less reticence, more friendship—when friendship is understood by purse-sharing, by sick-bedside watching, by absence of envy, jealousy, hatred, and all uncharitableness—more singleness of purpose, more contempt for shams, and impostures, and the dismal fetters of conventionality, than in any other circle of English society with which I am acquainted.

It was a grand night with the Titians; no model was carefully posed on the "throne" that evening; no intelligent class was grouped round

on the rising benches, copying from the "draped" or the "nude;" none of the wardrobe or properties of the club (and it is rich in both), none of the coats of mail or the suits of armor, hauberks and broadswords, buff boots, dinted breastplates, carved ebony crucifixes, ivory-hafted daggers, Louis-Onze caps, friars' gowns and rosaries, nor other portions of the stock-in-trade, were on view. The "sending-in" day for the approaching Exhibition of the British Institution was at hand; and the discolored smoky old walls of the Titians, the rickety easels piled round the room, all available ledges and nooks, were covered with the works of the members of the club, which they fully intended to submit for exhibition. A very Babel, in a thick fog of tobacco-smoke, through which loomed the red face of Flexor, the famous model, like the sun in November, greeted you on your entrance. Flexor pretended to take the hats, but the visitors seemed to know him too well, and contented themselves with nodding at him in a friendly manner, and retaining their property. Then you passed into the rooms, where you found yourself wedged-up among a crowd of perhaps the most extraordinary-looking beings you ever encountered. Little men with big heads and long beards; big men with bald heads and shaved cheeks, and enormous mustaches and glowering spectacles; tall, thin, straggling men, who seemed all profile, and whose full face you could never catch; dirty, shaggy little men, with heads of hair like red mops, and no apparent faces underneath, whose eyes flashed through their elf-locks, and who were explaining their pictures with singular pantomimic power of their sinewy hands, and notably of their ever-flashing thumbs; moon-faced, solemn, didactic men, prosing away on their views of art to dreary discontented listeners; and foppish, smart little fellows, standing a-tip-toe to get particular lights, shading their eyes with their hands, and backing against the company generally. Moving here and there among the guests was the Titians' president, honest old Tom Wrigley, who had been "at it," as he used to say, for thirty years, without making any great mark in his profession, but who was cordially beloved for his kind-heartedness and *bonhomie*, and who had a word and a joke for all. As he elbowed his way through the room he spoke right and left.

"Halloo, Tom Rogers!—halloo, Tom! That's an improvement, Tom, my boy! Got rid of the heavy browns, eh? weren't good, those heavy browns; specially for a Venetian atmosphere, eh, Tom? Much better this. How are you, Jukes? Old story, Jukes?—hen and chickens, ducks in the pond, horse looking over the gate? Quite right, Jukes; stick to that, if it pays. Much better than the death of J. Cæsar on a twenty-foot canvas, which nobody would be fool enough to buy. Stick to the ducks, Jukes, old fellow! What's the matter, George? Why so savage, my son?"

"Here's Scumble!" said the young man addressed, in an under-tone.

"And what of that, George? Mr. Scumble is a Royal Academician, it is true; and consequently a mark for your scorn and hatred, George. But it's not *his* fault; he never did any thing to aspire to such a dignity. It's your British public, George, which is such an insensate jackass as to buy Scumble's pictures, and to tell him he's a genius."

"He was on the Hanging-Committee last year, and—"

"Ah, so he was; and your 'Aristides' was kicked out, and so was my 'Hope Deferred,' which was a deuced sight better than your big picture, Master George; but see how I shall treat him. How do you do, Mr. Scumble? You're very welcome here, Sir."

Mr. Scumble, R.A., who had a head like a tin-loaf, and a face without any earthly expression, bowed his acknowledgments, and threw as much warmth into his manner as he possibly could, apparently laboring under a notion that he was marked out for speedy assassination. "This is indeed a char-ming collection! Great talent among the ri-sing men, Mr.—pardon me—President! This now, for instance—a most charming landscape!"

"Yes, old boy; you may say that," said a square-built man smoking a clay pipe, and leaning with his elbows on the easel on which the picture was placed. "I mean the real thing—not this; which ain't bad though, is it? Not that I should say so; 'cause for why; which I did it!" and here the square-built man removed one of his elbows from the easel, and dug it into the sacred ribs of Scumble, R.A.

"Bad, Sir!" said Scumble, recoiling from the thrust, and still with the notion of a secret dagger hidden behind the square-built man's waistcoat; "it's magnificent, superb, Mr.—!"

"Meaning me? Potts!" said the square-built man—"Charley Potts, artist, U.E., or unsuccessful exhibitor at every daub-show in London. That's the Via Mala, that is. I was there last autumn with Geoffrey Ludlow and Tom Bleistift. 'Show me a finer view than that,' I said to those fellows, when it burst upon us. 'If you'd a Scotchman with you,' said Tom, 'he'd say it wasn't so fine as the approach to Edinburgh.' 'Would he?' said I. 'If he said any thing of that sort, I'd show him that view, and—and rub his nose in it!'"

Mr. Scumble, R.A., smiled in a sickly manner, bowed feebly, and passed on. Old Tom Wrigley laughed a great, boisterous "Ha, ha!" and went on his way. Charley Potts remained before his picture, turning his back on it, and puffing out great volumes of smoke. He seemed to know every body in the room, and to be known to and greeted by most of them. Some slapped him on the back, some poked him in the ribs, others laid their forefingers alongside their noses and winked; but all called him "Charley," and all had some pleasant word for him; and to all he had something to say in return.

"Halloo, Fred Snitterfield!" he called out to a fat man in a suit of shepherd's-plaid dittoes. "Halloo, Fred! how's your brother Bill? What's he been doing? Not here to-night, of course?"

"No; he wasn't very well," said the man addressed. "He's got—"

"Yes, yes; I know, Fred!" said Charley Potts. "Wife won't let him! That's it, isn't it, old boy? He only dined out once in his life without leave, and then he sent home a telegram to say he was engaged; and when his wife received the telegram she would not believe it, because she said it wasn't his handwriting! Poor old Bill! Did he sell that 'Revenge' to

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what's-his-name—that Manchester man—Prebble?"

"Lord, no! Haven't you heard? Prebble's smashed up—all his property gone to the devil!"

"Ah! then Prebble will find it again some day, no doubt. Look out! here's Bowie!"

Mr. Bowie was the art-critic of a great daily journal. In early life he had courted art himself; but lacking executive power, he had mixed up a few theories and quaint conceits, which he had learned, with a great deal of acrid bile, with which he had been gifted by nature, and wrote the most pungent and malevolent art-notices of the day. A tall, light-haired, vacant-looking man, like a light-house without any light in it, peering uncomfortably over his stiff white cravat, and fumbling nervously at his watch-chain. Clinging close to him, and pointing out to him various pictures as they passed them by, was quite another style of man—Caniche, the great picture-dealer—an under-sized, lively Gascon, black-bearded from his chin, round which it was closely cut, to his beady black eyes, faultlessly dressed, sparkling in speech, affable in manner, at home with all.

"Ah, ah!" said he, stopping before the easel, "the Via Mala! Not bad—not at all bad!" he continued, with scarcely a trace of a foreign accent. "Yours, Charley Potts? yours, *mon brave*? De-caidedly an improvement, Charley! You go on that way, mai boy, and some day—"

"Some day you'll give me twenty pound, and sell me for a hundred! won't you, Caniche?—generous buffalo!" growled Charley, over his pipe.

The men round laughed, but Caniche was not a bit offended. "Of course," he said, simply, "I will, indeed; that is my trade! And if you could find a man who would give you thirty, you would throw me over in what you call a brace of shakes! *N'est-ce pas?* Meanwhile, find the man to give you thirty. He is not here; I mean coming now. How do you do, Herr Stompff?"

Mr. Caniche (popularly known as Cannish among the artists) winced as he said this, for Herr Stompff was his great rival and bitterest enemy.

A short, bald-headed, gray-bearded man was Mr. Stompff—a Hamburger—who, on his first arrival in England, had been an importer of piping bull-finches at Hull, then a tobacconist in St. Mary Axe, and who finally had taken up picture-selling, and did an enormous business. No one could tell that he was not an Englishman from his talk, and an Englishman with a marvelous fluency in the vernacular. He had every slang saying as soon as it was out, and by this used to triumph over his rival Caniche, who never could follow his phraseology.

"Halloo, Caniche!" he said; "how are you? What's up?—running the rig on the boys here! telling Charley Potts his daubs are first-rate? Pickles! We know all that game, don't we, Charley? What do you want for it, Charley? —How are you, Mr. Bowie? what's fresh with you, Sir? Too proud to come and have a cut of mutton with me and Mrs. S. a-Sunday, I suppose? Some good fellers coming, *too*; Mugger from the Cracksideum, and Talboys and Sir Paul Potter—leastwise I've asked him. Well, Charley, what's the figure for this lot, eh?"

"I'll trouble you not to 'Charley' me, Mr. Stump, or whatever your infernal name is!" said Potts, folding his arms and puffing out his smoke savagely. "I don't want any Havana cigars, nor silk handkerchiefs, nor painted canaries, nor any thing else in your line, Sir; and I want your confounded patronage least of all."

"Good boy, Charley! very good boy!" said Stompff, calmly pulling his whisker through his teeth—"shouldn't lose his temper, though. Come and dine a-Sunday, Charley." Mr. Potts said something which the historian is not bound to repeat, turned on his heel, and walked away.

Mr. Stompff was not a bit disconcerted at this treatment. He merely stuck his tongue in his cheek, and, looking at the men standing round, said, "He's on the high ropes, is Master Charley! Some of you fellows have been lending him half a crown, or that fool Caniche has bought one of his pictures for seven-and-six! Now, has any body any thing new to show, eh?" Of course every body had something new to show to the great Stompff, the enterprising Stompff, the liberal Stompff, whose checks were as good as notes of the Bank of England. How they watched his progress, and how their hearts beat as he loitered before their works! Jupp, who had a bedridden wife, a dear, pretty little woman, recovering from rheumatic fever at Adalbert Villa, Elgiva Road, St. John's Wood; Smethurst, who had a £25 bill coming due in a fortnight, and had three-and-sevenpence wherewith to meet it; Vogelstadt, who had been beguiled into leaving Düsseldorf for London on the rumors of English riches and English patronage, and whose capital studies of birds in the snow, and *treibejagds*, and boar-hunts had called forth universal laudation, but had not as yet entrapped a single purchaser, so that Vogelstadt, who had come down not discontentedly to living on bread-and-milk, had notions of mortgaging his ancestral thumb-ring to procure even those trifling necessaries—how they all glared with expectation as the ex-singing-bird-importer passed their pictures in review! That worthy took matters very easily, strolling along with his hands in his pockets, glancing at the easels and along the walls, occasionally nodding his head in approval, or shrugging his shoulders in depreciation, but never saying a word until he stopped opposite a well-placed figure-subject, to which he devoted a two-minutes' close scrutiny, and then uttered this frank though *argot*-tinged criticism, "That'll hit 'em up! that'll open their eyelids, by Jove! Whose is it?"

The picture represented a modern ball-room, in a corner of which a man of middle age, his arms tightly folded across his breast, was intently watching the movements of a young girl just starting off in a *valse* with a handsome, dashing young partner. The expressions in the two faces were admirably defined: in the man's was a deep, earnest devotion, not unmingled with passion and with jealousy; his tightly-clenched mouth, his deep-set, earnest eyes, settled in rapt adoration on the girl, showed the earnestness of his feeling, so did the rigidly-fixed arms, and the *pose* of the figure, which, originally careless, had become hardened and angular through intensity of feeling. The contrast was well marked: in the girl's face, which was turned toward the man, while her eyes were fixed on him, was

a bright, saucy triumph, brightening her eyes, inflating her little nostrils, curving the corners of her mouth, while her figure was light and airy, just obedient to the first notes of the *valse*, balancing itself, as it were, on the arm of her partner before starting off down the dance. All the accessories were admirable: the dreary wall-flowers ranged round the room, the chaperons nid-nodding together on the rout-seats, paterfamilias despondingly consulting his watch, the wearied hostess, and the somnolently-inclined musicians—all were there, portrayed not merely by a facile hand, but by a man conversant with society. The title of the picture, "Sic vos non vobis," was written on a bit of paper stuck into the frame, on the other corner of which was a card bearing the words, "Mr. Geoffrey Ludlow."

"Ah!" said Stompff, who, after carefully scanning the picture close and then from a distance, had read the card—"at last! Geoffrey Ludlow's going to fulfill the promise which he's been showing this ten years. A late birth, but a fine babby now it's born! That's the real thing, and no flies! That's about as near a good thing as I've seen this long time—that; come, you'll say the same. That's a good picture, Mr. Wrigley."

"Ah!" said old Tom, coming up at the moment, "you've made another lucky hit if you've bought that, Mr. Stompff! Geoff is so confoundedly undecided, so horribly weak in all things, that he's been all this time making up his mind whether he really would paint a good picture or not. But he's decided at last, and he has painted a clipper."

"Ye-es!" said Stompff, whose first enthusiasm had by no means died away; on the contrary, he thought so well of the picture that he had within himself determined to purchase it; but his business caution was coming over him strongly. "Yes! it's a clipper, as you say, Wrigley; but it's a picture which would take all a fellow knew to work it. Throw that into the market—where are you? Pouf! gone! no one thinking of it. Judicious advertisement, judicious squaring of those confounded fellows of the press; a little dinner at the Albion or the Star and Garter to two or three whom *we* know; and then the wonderful grasp of modern life, the singular manner in which the great natural feelings are rendered, the microscopic observation, and the power of detail—"

"Yes, yes," said Tom Wrigley; "for which, see *Catalogue of Stompff's Gallery of Modern Painters*, price 6*d*. Spare yourself, you unselfish encourager of talent, and spare Geoff's blushes; for here he is. Did you hear what Stompff was saying on, Geoff?"

As he spoke there came slouching up, shouldering his way through the crowd, a big, heavily-built man of about forty years of age, standing over six feet, and striking in appearance, if not prepossessing. Striking in appearance from his height, which was even increased by his great shock head of dark-brown hair standing upright on his forehead, but curling in tight, crisp waves round the back and poll of his head; from his great, prominent brown eyes, which, firmly set in their large, thickly-carved lids, flashed from under an overhanging pair of brows; from his large, heavy nose, thick and fleshy, yet with lithe, sensitive nostrils; from his short upper and protruding thick under lip; from the length of his chin and the massive heaviness of his jaw, though the heavy beard greatly concealed the formation of the lower portion of his face. A face which at once evoked attention, which no one passed by without noticing, which people at first called "odd," and "singular," and "queer," according to their vocabulary; then, following the same rule, pronounced "ugly," or "hideous," or "grotesque"—allowing all the time that there "was something very curious in it." But a face which, when seen in animation or excitement, in reflex of the soul within, whose every thought was legibly portrayed in its every expression, in light or shade, with earnest, watchful eyes, and knit brows, and quivering nostrils, and working lips; or, on the other hand, with its mouth full of sound, big white teeth gleaming between its ruddy lips, and its eyes sparkling with pure merriment or mischief; then a face to be preferred to all the dolly inanities of the Household Brigade, or even the matchless toga-draped dummies in Mr. Truefitt's window. This was Geoffrey Ludlow, whom every body liked, but who was esteemed to be so weak and vacillating, so infirm of purpose, so incapable of succeeding in his art or in his life, as to have been always regarded as an object of pity rather than envy; as a man who was his own worst enemy, and of whom nothing could be said. He had apparently caught some words of the conversation; for when he arrived at the group a smile lit up his homely features, and his teeth glistened again in the gas-light.

"What are you fellows joking about?' he asked, while he roared with laughter, as if with an anticipatory relish of the fun. "Some chaff at my expense, eh? Something about my not having made up my mind to do something or not; the usual nonsense, I suppose?"

"Not at all, Geoff," said Tom Wrigley. "The question asked by Mr. Stompff here was—whether you wished to sell this picture, and what you asked for it?"

"Ah!" said Geoffrey Ludlow, his lips closing and the fun dying out of his eyes. "Well, you see it's of course a compliment for you, Mr. Stompff, to ask the question; but I've scarcely made up my mind—whether—and indeed as to the price—"

"Stuff, Geoff! What rubbish you talk!" said Charley Potts, who had rejoined the group. "You know well enough that you painted the picture for sale. You know equally well that the price is two hundred guineas. Are you answered, Mr. Stump?"

Ludlow started forward with a look of annoyance, but Stompff merely grinned, and said, quietly, "I take it at the price, and as many more as Mr. Ludlow will paint of the same sort; stock, lock, and barrel, I'll have the whole bilin. Must change the title though, Ludlow, my boy. None of your Sic wos non thingummy; none of your Hebrew classics for the British public. 'The Vow,' or 'The Last Farewell,' or something in that line. Very neatly done of you, Charley, my boy; very neat bit of dealing, I call it. I ought to deduct four-and-nine from the next fifteen shillin' commission you get; but I'll make it up to you this way—you've evidently all the qualities of a salesman; come and be my clerk, and I'll stand thirty shillings a week and a commission on the catalogues."

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Charley Potts was too delighted at his friend's success to feel annoyance at these remarks; he merely shook his fist laughingly, and was passing on, with his arm through Ludlow's; but the vivacious dealer, who had rapidly calculated where he could plant his newly-acquired purchase, and what per-centage he could make on it, was not to be thus balked.

"Look here!" said he; "a bargain's a bargain, ain't it? People say your word's as good as your bond, and all that. Pickles! You drop down to my office to-morrow, Ludlow, and there'll be an agreement for you to sign—all straight and reg'lar, you know. And come and cut your mutton with me and Mrs. S. at Velasquez Villa, Nottin'-'Ill, on Sunday, at six. No sayin' no, because I won't hear it. We'll wet our connection in a glass of Sham. And bring Charley with you, if his dress-coat ain't up! You know, Charley! Tar, tar!" And highly delighted with himself, and with the full conviction that he had rendered himself thoroughly delightful to his hearers, the great man waddled off to his brougham.

Meanwhile the news of the purchase had spread through the rooms, and men were hurrying up on all sides to congratulate Ludlow on his success. The fortunate man seemed, however, a little dazed with his triumph; he shook all the outstretched hands cordially, and said a few commonplaces of thanks, intermingled with doubts as to whether he had not been too well treated; but on the first convenient opportunity he slipped away, and sliding a shilling into the palm of Flexor, the model, who, being by this time very drunk, had arranged his hair in a curl on his forehead, and was sitting on the bench in the hall after his famous rendering of George the Fourth of blessed memory, Geoff seized his hat and coat and let himself out. The fresh night air revived him wonderfully, and he was about starting off at his usual headstrong pace when he heard a low, dismal moan, and looking round he saw a female figure cowering in a doorway. The next instant he was kneeling by her side.

CHAPTER III.

BLOTTED OUT.

The strange caprices of Fashion were never more strangely illustrated than by her fixing upon St. Barnabas Square as one of her favorite localities. There are men yet living among us whose mothers had been robbed on their way from Ranelagh in crossing the spot, then a dreary swampy marsh, on which now stands the city of palaces known as Cubittopolis. For years on years it remained in its dismal condition, until an enterprising builder, seeing the army of civilization advancing with grand strides southwestward, and perceiving at a glance the immediate realization of an enormous profit on his outlay, bought up the entire estate, had it thoroughly cleansed and drained, and proceeded to erect thereon a series of terraces, places, and squares, each vying with the other in size, perfection of finish, and, let it be said, general ghastliness. The houses in St. Barnabas Square resemble those in Chasuble Crescent, and scarcely differ in any particular from the eligible residences in Reredos Road: they are all very tall, and rather thin; they have all enormous porticoes, over which are little conservatories, railed in with ecclesiastical iron-work; dismal little back-rooms no bigger than warm-baths, but described as "libraries" by the house-agents; gaunt drawing-rooms connected by an arch; vast landings, leading on to other little conservatories, where "blacks," old flower-pots, and a few geranium stumps, are principally conserved; and a series of gaunt, towny bedrooms. In front they have Mr. Swiveller's prospect—a delightful view of over-the-way—across the bit of square inclosure like a green pocket-handkerchief; while at the back they look immediately on to the back-premises of other eligible residences. The enterprising builder has done his best for his neighborhood, but he has been unable to neutralize the effects of the neighboring Thames; and the consequence is, that during the winter months a chronic fog drifts up from the pleasant Kentish marshes, and finding ample room and verge enough, settles permanently down in the St. Barnabas district; while in the summer, the new roads which intersect the locality, being mostly composed of a chalky foundation, peel off under every passing wheel, and emit enormous clouds of dust, which are generally drifting on the summer wind into the eyes and mouths of stray passengers, and in at the doors and windows of regular residents. Yet this is one of Fashion's chosen spots: here in this stronghold of stucco reside scores of those whose names and doings the courtly journalist delighteth to chronicle; hither do county magnates bring to furnished houses their wives and daughters, leaving them to entertain those of the proper set during the three summer months, while they, the county magnates themselves, are sleeping the sleep of the just on the benches of the House of Commons, or nobly discharging their duty to their country by smoking cigars on the terrace; here reside men high up in the great West End public offices, commissioners and secretaries anxious to imbue themselves with the scent of the rose, and *vivre près d'elle*, City magnates, judges of the land, and counsel learned in the law. The situation is near to Westminster for the lawyers and politicians; and the address has quite enough of the true ring about it to make it much sought after by all those who go in for a fashionable neighborhood.

A few hours before the events described in the preceding chapters took place a brougham, perfectly appointed and drawn by a splendid horse, came dashing through the fog and driving mist, and pulled up before one of the largest houses in St. Barnabas Square. The footman jumped from the box, and was running to the door, when, in obedience to a sharp voice, he stopped, and the occupant of the vehicle, who had descended, crossed the pavement with rapid strides, and opened the door with a pass-key. He strode quickly through the hall, up the staircase, and into the drawing-room, round which he took a rapid glance. The room was empty; the gas was lit, and a fire burned brightly on the hearth; while an open piano, covered with music, on the one side of the fire-place, and a book turned down with open leaves, showed that the occupants had but recently left. The new-comer, finding himself alone, walked to the mantle-piece, and leaning his back against it, passed his hands rapidly

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across his forehead; then plunging both of them into his pockets, seemed lost in thought. The gas-light showed him to be a man of about sixty years of age, tall, wiry, well-proportioned; his head was bald, with a fringe of grayish hair, his forehead broad, his eyes deep-set, his mouth thin-lipped and ascetic; he wore two little strips of whisker, but his chin was closely shaved. He was dressed in high stiff shirt-collars, a blue-silk neckerchief with white dots, in which gleamed a carbuncle pin; a gray over-coat, under which was a cutaway riding-coat, high waistcoat with onyx buttons, and tight-fitting cord-trowsers. This was George Brakespere, third Earl Beauport, of whom and of whose family it behooves one to speak in detail.

They were *novi homines*, the Brakesperes, though they always claimed to be sprung from ancient Norman blood. Only seventy years ago old Martin Brakespere was a wool-stapler in Uttoxeter; and though highly respected for the wealth he was reported to have amassed, was very much jeered at privately and with bated breath for keeping an apocryphal genealogical tree hanging up in his back-shop, and for invariably boasting, after his second glass of grog at the Greyhound, about his lineage. But when, after old Martin had been some score years quietly resting in Uttoxeter church-yard, his son, Sir Richard Brakespere, who had been successively solicitor and attorney-general, was raised to the peerage, and took his seat on the woolsack as Baron Beauport, Lord High Chancellor of England, the Herald's College, and all the rest of the genealogical authorities, said that the line was thoroughly made out, and received the revival of the ancient title with the greatest laudation. A wiry, fox-headed, thin chip of a lawyer, the first Baron Beauport, as knowing as a ferret, and not unlike one in the face. He administered the laws of his country very well, and he lent some of the money he had inherited from his father to the sovereign of his country and the first gentleman in Europe at a very high rate of interest, it is said. Rumor reports that he did not get all his money back again, taking instead thereof an increase of rank, and dying, at an advanced age, as Earl Beauport, succeeded in his title and estates by his only son, Theodore Brakespere, by courtesy Viscount Caterham.

When his father died, Lord Caterham, the second Earl Beauport, was nearly fifty years old, a prim little gentleman, who loved music and wore a wig; a dried-up chip of a little man, who lived in a little house in Hans Place with an old servant, a big violoncello, and a special and peculiar breed of pug-dogs. To walk out with the pug-dogs in the morning, to be carefully dressed, and tittivated, and buckled, and curled by the old servant in the afternoon, and either to play the violoncello in a Beethoven or Mozart selection with some other old amateur fogies, or to be present at a performance of chamber-music, or philharmonics, or oratorio-rehearsals in the evening, constituted the sole pleasure of the second Earl Beauport's life. He never married; and at his death, some fifteen years after his father's, the title, and, with the exception of a few legacies to musical charities, the estates passed to his cousin, George Brakespere, Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxon, and then of Little Milman Street, Bedford Row, and the Northern Circuit, briefless barrister.

Just in the very nick of time came the peerage and the estates to George Brakespere, for he was surrounded by duns, and over head and ears in love. With all his hard work at Oxford, and he had worked hard, he had the reputation of being the best bowler at Bullingdon, and the hardest rider after hounds; of having the best old port and the finest cigars (it was before the days of claret and short pipes), and the best old oak furniture, library of books, and before-letter proofs in the University. All these could not be paid for out of an undergraduate's income; and the large remainder of unpaid bills hung round him and plagued him heavily long after he had left Oxford and been called to the bar. It was horribly up-hill work getting a connection among the attorneys; he tried writing for reviews, and succeeded, but earned very little money. And then, on circuit, at an assize-ball, he fell in love with Gertrude Carrington, a haughty county beauty, only daughter of Sir Joshua Carrington, Chairman of Quarter Sessions; and that nearly finished him. Gertrude Carrington was very haughty and very willful; she admired the clever face and the bold bearing of the young barrister; but in all probability she would have thought no more of him, had not the eminent Sir Joshua, who kept his eyes very sharply about him, marked the flirtation, and immediately expressed his total disapproval of it. That was enough for Gertrude, and she at once went in for George Brakespere, heart and soul. She made no objection to a clandestine correspondence, and responded regularly and warmly to George's passionate letters. She gave him two or three secret meetings under an old oak in a secluded part of her father's park—Homershams was a five-hours' journey from town—and these assignations always involved George's sleeping at an inn, and put him to large expense; and when she came up to stay with her cousins in town she let him know all the parties to which they were going, and rendered him a mendicant for invitations. When the change of fortune came, and George succeeded to the title, Sir Joshua succumbed at once, and became anxious for the match. Had George inherited money only, it is probable that from sheer willfulness Gertrude would have thrown him over; but the notion of being a countess, of taking precedence and *pas* of all the neighboring gentry, had its influence, and they were married. Two sons were born to them—Viscount Caterham and the Hon. Lionel Brakespere—and a daughter, who only survived her birth a few weeks. As Earl Beauport, George Brakespere retained the energy and activity of mind and body, the love of exercise and field-sports, the clear brain and singleness of purpose, which had distinguished him as a commoner; but there was a skeleton in his house, whose bony fingers touched his heart in his gayest moments, numbed his energies, and warped his usefulness; whose dread presence he could not escape from, whose chilling influence nor wine, nor work, nor medicine, nor gayety could palliate. It was ever present in a tangible shape; he knew his weakness and wickedness in permitting it to conquer him—he strove against it, but vainly; and in the dead watches of the night often he lay broad awake railing against the fate which had min-

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gled so bitter an ingredient in his cup of happiness.

The door swung open and the Countess entered, a woman nearly fifty now, but not looking her age by at least eight years. A tall, handsome woman, with the charms of her former beauty mellowed but not impaired: the face was more full, but the firm chiseling of the nose and lips, the brightness of the eyes, the luxurious dark gloss of the hair, were there still. As she entered her husband advanced to meet her; and as he touched her forehead with his lips she laid her hand on his, and asked, "What news?"

He shook his head sadly, and said, "The worst."

"The worst!" she repeated, faintly; "he's not dead? Beauport, you—you would not say it in that way—he's not dead?"

"I wish to God he were!" said Lord Beauport through his teeth. "I wish it had pleased God to take him years and years ago! No; he's not dead." Then throwing himself into a chair, and staring vacantly at the fire, he repeated, "I wish to God he were!"

"Any thing but that!" said the Countess, with a sense of immense relief; "any thing but that! whatever he has done may be atoned for, and repented, and— But what has he done? where is he? have you seen Mr. Farquhar?"

"I have—and I know all. Gertrude, Lionel is a scoundrel and a criminal—no, don't interrupt me! I myself have prosecuted and transported men for less crimes than he has committed; years ago he would have been hanged. He is a forger!"

"A forger!"

"He has forged the names of two of his friends—old brother officers; Lord Hinchenbrook is one, and young Latham the other—to bills for five thousand pounds. I've had the bills in my hands, and seen letters from the men denying their signatures to-night, and—"

"But Lionel—where is he? in prison?"

"No; he saw the crash coming, and fled from it. Farquhar showed me a blotted letter from him, written from Liverpool, saying in a few lines that he had disgraced us all, that he was on the point of sailing under a feigned name for Australia, and that we should never see him again."

"Never see him again! my boy, my own darling boy!" and Lady Beauport burst into an agony of tears.

"Gertrude," said her husband, when the first wild storm of grief had subsided, "calm yourself for one instant."

He rang the bell, and to the servant answering it said:

"Tell Lord Caterham I wish to speak to him, and beg Miss Maurice to be good enough to step here."

Lady Beauport was about to speak, but the Earl said, coldly:

"I wish it, if you please;" and reiterated his commands to the servant, who left the room. "I have fully decided, Gertrude, on the step I am about to take. To-morrow those forged bills will be mine. I saw young Latham at Farquhar's, and he said"—Lord Beauport's voice shook here—"said every thing that was kind and noble; and Hinchenbrook has said the same to Farquhar. It—it can not be kept quiet, of course. Every club is probably ringing with it now; but they will let me have the bills. And from this moment, Gertrude, that boy's name must never be uttered, save in our prayers—in our prayers for his forgiveness and—and repentance—by you, his mother; by me, his father—nor by any one in this house. He is dead to us forever!"

"Beauport, for Heaven's sake—"

"I swear it, Gertrude, I swear it! and most solemnly will keep the oath. I have sent for Caterham, who must know, of course; his good sense will approve what I have done; and for Annie, she is part of our household now, and must be told. Dead to us all henceforth; dead to us all!"

He sank into a chair opposite the fire and buried his face in his hands, but roused himself at advancing footsteps. The door opened, and a servant entered, pushing before him a library-chair fitted on large wheels, in which sat a man of about thirty, of slight, spare frame, with long arms and thin, womanly hands—a delicately-handsome man, with a small head, soft gray eyes, and an almost feminine mouth; a man whom Nature had intended for an Apollo, whom fortune had marked for her sport, blighting his childhood with some mysterious disease for which the doctors could find neither name nor cure, sapping his marrow, and causing his legs to wither into the shrunken and useless members which now hung loosely before him, utterly without strength, almost without shape, incapable of bearing his weight, and rendering him maimed, crippled, blasted for life. This was Viscount Caterham, Earl Beauport's eldest son, and heir to his title and estates. His father cast one short, rapid glance at him as he entered, and then turned to the person who immediately followed him.

This was a tall girl of two-and-twenty, of rounded form and winning expression. Her features were by no means regular; her eyes were brown and sleepy; she had a pert, inquisitive nose; and when she smiled in her decidedly large mouth gleamed two rows of strong white teeth. Her dark-brown hair was simply and precisely arranged; for she had but a humble opinion of her own charms, and objected to any appearance of coquetry. She was dressed in a tight-fitting black silk, with linen collar and cuffs, and her hands and feet were small and perfectly shaped. Darling Annie Maurice, orphan daughter of a second-cousin of my lord's, transplanted from a suburban curacy to be companion and humble friend of my lady, the one bright bit of sunshine and reality in that palace of ghastly stucco and sham. Even now as she came in Lord Beauport seemed to feel the cheering influence of her presence, and his brow relaxed for an instant as he stepped forward and offered his hand; after taking which, she, with a bow to the Countess, glided round and stood by Lord Caterham's chair.

Lord Caterham was the first to speak.

"You sent for us—for Annie and me, Sir," he said, in a low, tremulous voice; "I trust you have no bad news of Lionel?"

Lady Beauport hid her face in her hands; but the Earl, who had resumed his position against the mantle-piece, spoke firmly:

"I sent for you, Caterham, and for you, Annie, as members of my family, to tell you that

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Lionel Brakespere's name must never more be mentioned in this house. He has disgraced himself, and us through him; and though we can not wipe away that disgrace, we must strive as far as possible to blot him out from our memories and our lives. You know, both of you—at least you, Caterham, know well enough—what he has been to me—the love I had for him—the—yes, my God, the pride I had in him!"

His voice broke here, and he passed his hand across his eyes. In the momentary pause Annie Maurice glanced up at Lord Caterham, and marked his face distorted as with pain and his head reclining on his chest. Then, gulping down the knot rising in his throat, the Earl continued:

"All that is over now; he has left the country, and the chances are that we shall never see nor even hear from him again." A moan from the Countess shook his voice for a second, but he proceeded: "It was to tell you this that I sent for you. You and I, Caterham, will have to enter upon this subject once more to-morrow, when some business arrangements have to be made. On all other occasions, recollect, it is tabooed. Let his name be blotted out from our memories, and let him be as if he had never lived."

As Earl Beauport ceased speaking he gathered himself together and walked toward the door, never trusting himself to look for an instant toward where his wife sat cowering in grief, lest his firmness should desert him. Down the stairs he went, until entering his library he shut the door behind him, locked it, and throwing himself into his chair, leaned his head on the desk, and covering it with his hands gave way to a passion of sobs which shook his strong frame as though he were convulsed. Then rising, he went to the book-case, and taking out a large volume, opened it, and turned to the page immediately succeeding the cover. It was a big old-fashioned Bible, bound in calf, with a hideous ancient wood-cut as a frontispiece, representing the Adoration of the Wise Men; but the page to which Lord Beauport turned, yellow with age, was inscribed in various-colored inks, many dim and faded, with the names of the old Brakespere family, and the dates of their births, marriages, and deaths. Old Martin Brakespere's headed the list; then came his son's, with "created Baron Beauport" in the lawyer's own skimpy little hand, in which also was entered the name of the musical-amateur peer, his son; then came George Brakespere's bold entry of his own name and his wife's, and of the names of their two sons. Over the last entry Lord Beauport paused for a few minutes, glaring at it with eyes which did not see it, but which had before them a chubby child, a bright, handsome Eton boy, a dashing guardsman, a "swell" loved and petted by all, a fugitive skulking in an assumed name in the cabin of a sea-tossed ship; then he took up a pen and ran it through the entry backward and forward until the name was completely blotted out; and then he fell again into his train of thought. The family dinner-hour was long since past; the table was laid, all was ready, and the French cook and the grave butler were in despair; but Lord Beauport still sat alone in his library with old Martin Brakespere's Bible open before him.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE DOOR-STEP.

It is cheap philosophy to moralize on the importance of events led up to by the merest trifles; but the subject comes so frequently before us as to furnish innumerable pegs whereon the week-day preacher may hang up his little garland of reflections, his little wreath of homely truisms. If Ned Waldron had not been crossing into the Park at the exact moment when the short-sighted Godalming banker was knocked down by the hansom at the corner, he would have still been enjoying eighty pounds a year as a temporary extra clerk at Whitehall, instead of groaning over the villainous extortion of the malt-tax as a landed proprietor of some thousands of inherited acres. If Dr. Weston's red-lamp over the surgery-door had been blown out when the servant rushed off for medical advice for Master Percy Buckmaster's earache, the eminent apothecary would never have had the chance of which he so skillfully availed himself—of paying dutiful attention to Mrs. Buckmaster, and finally stepping into the shoes of her late husband, the wealthy Indian indigo-planter.

If Geoffrey Ludlow, dashing impetuously onward in his career, had not heard that long, low, heart-breaking moan, he might have gone on leading his easy, shiftless, drifting life, with no break greater than the excitement consequent on the sale of a picture or the accomplishment of a resolution. But he *did* hear it, and, rare thing in him, acting at once on his first impulse, he dropped on his knees just in time to catch the fainting form in his outstretched arms. That same instant he would have shrunk back if he could; but it was too late; that same instant there came across him a horrible feeling of the ludicrousness of his position: there at midnight in a London thoroughfare holding in his arms—what? a drunken tramp, perhaps; a vagrant well known to the Mendicity Society; a gin-soddened street-walker, who might requite his good Samaritanism with a leer and a laugh, or an oath and a blow. And yet the groan seemed to come from the lowest depths of a wrung and suffering heart; and the appearance—no, there could be no mistake about that. That thin, almost emaciated figure; those pinched features; drawn, haggard, colorless cheeks; that brow, half hidden by the thick, damp, matted hair, yet in its deep lines and indentations revealing the bitter workings of the mind; the small, thin, bony hands, now hanging flaccid and motionless—all these, if there were any thing real in this life, were outward semblances such as mere impostors could not have brought forward in the way of trade.

Not one of them was lost on Geoffrey Ludlow, who, leaning over the prostrate figure, narrowly scanned its every feature, bent his face toward the mouth, placed his hands on the heart, and then, thoroughly alarmed, looked round and called for aid. Perhaps his excitement had something to do with it, but Geoff's voice fell flat and limp on the thick, damp air, and there was no response, though he shouted again and again. But presently the door whence he had issued opened widely, and in the midst of a gush of tobacco-smoke a man came out, humming a song, twirling a stick, and striding down the

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street. Again Geoffrey Ludlow shouted, and this time with success, for the new-comer stopped suddenly, took his pipe from his mouth, and turning his head toward the spot whence the voice proceeded, he called out, simply but earnestly, "Halloo, there! what's the row?"

Ludlow recognized the speaker at once. It was Charley Potts, and Geoffrey hailed him by name.

"All right!" said Charley in return. "You've picked up my name fast enough, my pippin; but that don't go far. Better known than trusted is your obedient servant, C. P. Halloo, Geoff, old man, is it you? Why, what the deuce have you got there? an 'omeless poor, that won't move on, or a— By George, Geoff, this is a bad case!" He had leaned over the girl's prostrate body, and had rapidly felt her pulse and listened at her heart. "This woman's dying of inanition and prostration. I know it, for I was in the red-bottle and Plaster-of-Paris-horse line before I went in for Art. She must be loked to at once, or she'll slip off the hooks while we're standing by her. You hold on here, old man, while I run back and fetch the brandy out of Dabb's room; I know where he keeps it. Chafe her hands, will you, Geoff? I sha'n't be a second."

Charley Potts rushed off, and left Geoffrey still kneeling by the girl's side. In obedience to his friend's instructions, he began mechanically to chafe her thin worn hands; but as he rubbed his own over them to and fro, to and fro, he peered into her face, and wondered dreamily what kind of eyes were hidden behind the dropped lids, and what was the color of the hair hanging in dank thick masses over the pallid brow. Even now there began to spring in his mind a feeling of wonder, not unmixed with alarm, as to what would be thought of him, were he discovered in his then position; whether his motives would be rightly construed; whether he were not acting somewhat indiscreetly in so far committing himself: for Geoffrey Ludlow had been brought up in the strict school of dire respectability, where a lively terror of rendering yourself liable to Mrs. Grundy's remarks is among the doctrines most religiously inculcated. But a glance at the form before him gave him fresh assurance; and when Charley Potts returned he found his friend rubbing away with all his energy.

"Here it is," said Charley; "Dabb's particular. I know it's first-rate, for Dabb only keeps it medicinally, taking Sir Felix Booth Bart. as his ordinary tipple. I know this water-of-life-of-cognac of old, Sir, and always have internal qualms of conscience when I go to see Dabb, which will not be allayed until I have had what Caniche calls a suspicion. Hold her head for a second, Geoff, while I put the flask to her mouth. There! Once more, Geoff. Ah! I thought so. Her pulse is moving now, old fellow, and she'll rouse in a bit; but it was very nearly a case of Walker."

"Look at her eyes—they're unclosing."

"Not much wonder in that, is there, my boy? though it is odd, perhaps. A glass of brandy has made many people shut their eyes before now; but as to opening them— Halloo! steady there!"

He said this as the girl, her eyes glaring straight before her, attempted to raise herself into an erect position, but after a faint struggle dropped back, exclaiming, feebly:

"I can not—I can not!"

"Of course you can't, my dear," said Charley Potts, not unkindly; "of course you can't. You mustn't think of attempting it either. I say, Geoff"—(this was said in a lower tone)—"look out for the policeman when he comes round, and give him a hail. Our young friend here must be looked after at once, and he'd better take her in a cab to the work-house."

As he said the last words, Geoffrey Ludlow felt the girl's hand which he held thrill between his, and, bending down, thought he saw her lips move.

"What's the matter?" said Charley Potts.

"It's very strange," replied Geoffrey; "I could swear I heard her say 'Not there!' and yet—"

"Likely enough been there before, and knows the treatment. However, we must get her off at once, or she'll go to grief; so let us—"

"Look here, Charley: I don't like the notion of this woman's going to the work-house, specially as she seems to—object, eh? Couldn't we—isn't there any one where we could—where she could lodge for a night or two, until—the doctor, you know—one might see? Confound it all, Charley, you know I never can explain exactly; can't you help me, eh?"

"What a stammering old idiot it is!" said Charley Potts, laughing. "Yes, I see what you mean; there's Flexor's wife lives close by, in Little Flotsam Street—keeps a lodging-house. If she's not full, this young party can go in there. She's all right now so far as stepping it is concerned, but she'll want a deal of looking after yet. Oh, by Jove! I left Rollit in at the Titians, the army-doctor, you know, who sketches so well. Let's get her into Flexor's, and I'll fetch Rollit to look at her. Easy now! Up!"

They raised her to her feet, and half-supported, half-carried her round the church and across the broad road, and down a little by-street on the other side. There Charley Potts stopped at a door, and knocking at it, was soon confronted by a buxom middle-aged woman, who started with surprise at seeing the group.

"Lor, Mr. Potts! what can have brought you 'ere, Sir? Flexor's not come in, Sir, yet—at them nasty Titiums, he is, and joy go with him. If you're wanting him Sir, you'd better—"

"No, Mrs. Flexor, we don't want your husband just now. Here's Mr. Ludlow, who—"

"Lord! and so it is; but seeing nothing but the nape of your neck, Sir, I did not recognize—"

"All right, Mrs. Flexor," said Geoffrey; "we want to know if your house is full. If not, here is a poor woman for whom we—at least Mr. Potts—and I myself, for the matter of that—"

"Stuttering again, Geoff! What stuff! Here, Mrs. Flexor, we want a room for this young woman to sleep in; and just help us in with her at once into your parlor, will you? and let us put her down there while I run round for the doctor."

It is probable that Mrs. Flexor might have raised objections to this proposition; but Charley Potts was a favorite with her, and Geoffrey Ludlow was a certain source of income to her husband; so she stepped back while the men caught up their burden, who all this time had been resting, half fainting, on Geoffrey's shoulder, and carried her into the parlor. Here they

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placed her in a big, frayed, ragged easy-chair, with all its cushion-stuffing gone, and palpable bits of shaggy wool peering through its arms and back; and after dragging this in front of the expiring fire, and bidding Mrs. Flexor at once prepare some hot gruel, Charley Potts rushed away to catch Dr. Rollit.

And now Geoffrey Ludlow, left to himself once more (for the girl was lying back in the chair, still with unclosing eyes, and had apparently relapsed into a state of stupor), began to turn the events of the past hour in his mind, and to wonder very much at the position in which he found himself. Here he was in a room in a house which he had never before entered, shut up with a girl of whose name or condition he was as yet entirely ignorant, of whose very existence he had only just known; he, who had always shirked any thing which afforded the smallest chance of adventure, was actually taking part in a romance. And yet—nonsense! here was a starving wanderer, whom he and his friend had rescued from the street; an ordinary every-day case, familiar in a thousand phases to the relieving officers and the poor-law guardians, who, after her certain allowance of warmth, and food, and physic, would start off to go—no matter where, and do—no matter what. And yet he certainly had not been deceived in thinking of her faint protest when Charley proposed to send her to the work-house. She had spoken then; and though the words were so few and the tone so low, there was something in the latter which suggested education and refinement. Her hands, too, her poor thin hands, were long and well-shaped, with tapering fingers and filbert-nails, and bore no traces of hard work: and her face—ah, he should be better able to see her face now!

He turned, and taking the flaring candle from the table held it above her head. Her eyes were still closed; but as he moved they opened wide, and fixed themselves on him. Such large, deep-violet eyes, with long, sweeping lashes! such a long, solemn, steadfast gaze, in which his own eyes were caught fast, and remained motionless. Then on to his hand, leaning on the arm of the chair, came the cold, clammy pressure of feeble fingers; and in his ear, bent and listening, as he saw a fluttering motion of her lips, murmured very feebly the words, "Bless you!—saved me!" twice repeated. As her breath fanned his cheek Geoffrey Ludlow's heart beat fast and audibly, his hand shook beneath the light touch of the lithe fingers; but the next instant the eyelids dropped, the touch relaxed, and a tremulousness seized on the ashy lips. Geoffrey glanced at her for an instant, and was rushing in alarm to the door, when it opened, and Charley Potts entered, followed by a tall, grave man, in a long black beard, whom Potts introduced as Dr. Rollit.

"You're just in time," said Geoffrey; "I was just going to call for help. She—"

"Pardon me, please," said the doctor, calmly pushing him on one side. "Permit me to—ah!" he continued, after a glance—"I must trouble you to leave the room, Potts, please, and take your friend with you. And just send the woman of the house to me, will you? There is a woman, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, there is a woman, of course. Here, Mrs. Flexor, just step up, will you? Now, Geoff, what are you staring at, man? Do you think the doctor's going to eat the girl? Come on, old fellow; we'll sit on the kitchen-stairs and catch blackbeetles to pass the time. Come on!"

Geoff roused himself at his friend's touch, and went with him, but in a dreamy, sullen manner. When they got into the passage he remained with outstretched ear, listening eagerly; and when Charley spoke he savagely bade him hold his tongue. Mr. Potts was so utterly astonished at this conduct that he continued staring and motionless, and merely gave vent to his feelings in one short low whistle. When the door was opened Geoffrey Ludlow strode down the passage at once, and confronting the doctor asked him what news. Dr. Rollit looked his questioner steadily in the eyes for a moment; and when he spoke his tone was softer, his manner less abrupt than before. "There is no special danger, Mr. Ludlow," said he; "though the girl has had a narrow escape. She has been fighting with cold and want of proper nourishment for days, so far as I can tell."

"Did she say so?"

"She said nothing; she has not spoken a word." Dr. Rollit did not fail to notice that here Geoffrey Ludlow gave a sigh of relief. "I but judge from her appearance and symptoms. I have told this good person what to do; and I will look round early in the morning. I live close by. Now, good-night!"

"You are sure as to the absence of danger?"

"Certain."

"Good-night! a thousand thanks! Mrs. Flexor, mind that your patient has every thing wanted, and that I settle with you. Now, Charley, come; what are you waiting for?"

"Eh?" said Charley. "Well, I thought that, after this little excitement, perhaps a glass out of that black bottle which I know Mrs. Flexor keeps on the second shelf in the right-hand cupboard—"

"Get along with you, Mr. Potts!" said Mrs. Flexor, grinning.

"You know you do, Mrs. F.—a glass of that might cheer and not inebriate. What do you say, Geoff?"

"I say no! You've had quite enough, and all Mrs. Flexor's attention is required elsewhere. Good-night, Mrs. Flexor; and"—by this time they were in the street—"good-night, Charley."

Mr. Potts, engaged in extracting a short-pipe from the breast-pocket of his pea-jacket, looked up with an abstracted air, and said, "I beg your pardon."

"Good-night, Charley."

"Oh, certainly, if you wish it. Good-night, Geoffrey Ludlow, Esquire; and permit me to add, Hey no nonny! Not a very lucid remark, perhaps, but one which exactly illustrates my state of mind." And Charley Potts filled his pipe, lit it, and remained leaning against the wall, and smoking with much deliberation until his friend was out of sight.

Geoffrey Ludlow strode down the street, the pavement ringing under his firm tread, his head erect, his step elastic, his whole bearing sensibly different even to himself. As he swung along he tried to examine himself as to what was the cause of his sudden light-heartedness; and at first he ascribed it to the sale of his picture, and to the warm promises of support he had received at the

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hands of Mr. Stompff. But these, though a few hours since they had really afforded him the greatest delight, now paled before the transient glance of two deep-violet eyes, and the scarcely-heard murmur of a feeble voice. "'Bless you! —saved me!' that's what she said!" exclaimed Geoff, halting for a second and reflecting. "And then the touch of her hand, and the—ah! Charley was right! Hey no nonny is the only language for such an ass as I'm making of myself." So home through the quiet streets, and into his studio, thinking he would smoke one quiet pipe before turning in. There, restlessness, inability to settle to any thing, mad desire to sketch a certain face with large eyes, a certain fragile helpless figure, now prostrate, now half-reclining on a bit of manly shoulder; a carrying out of this desire with a bit of crayon on the studio-wall, several attempts, constant failure, and consequent disgust. A feeling that ought to have been pleasure, and yet had a strong tinge of pain, at his heart, and a constant ringing of one phrase, "Bless you!—saved me!" in his ears. So to bed, where he dreamed he saw his name, Geoffrey Ludlow, in big black letters at the bottom of a gold frame, the picture in which was Keat's "Lamia;" and lo! the Lamia had the deep-violet eyes of the wanderer in the streets.

CHAPTER V.

THE LETTER.

The houses in St. Barnabas Square have an advantage over most other London residences in the possession of a "third room" on the ground-floor. Most people who, purposing to change their domicile, have gone in for a study of the *Times* Supplement or the mendacious catalogues of house-agents, have read of the "noble dining-room, snug breakfast-room, and library," and have found the said breakfast-room to be about the size and depth of a warm-bath, and the "library" a soul-depressing hole just beyond the glazed top of the kitchen-stairs, to which are eventually relegated your old boots, the bust of the friend with whom since he presented it you have had a deadly quarrel, some odd numbers of magazines, and the frame-work of a shower-bath which, in a moment of madness, you bought at a sale and never have been able to fit together.

But the houses in St. Barnabas Square have each, built over what in other neighborhoods is called "leads"—a ghastly space where the cats creep stealthily about in the day-time, and whence at night they yowl with preternatural pertinacity—a fine large room, devoted in most instances to the purposes of billiards, but at Lord Beauport's given up entirely to Lord Caterham. It had been selected originally from its situation on the ground-floor giving the poor crippled lad easy means of exit and entrance, and preventing any necessity for his being carried—for walking was utterly impossible to him—up and down stairs. It was *his* room; and there, and there alone, he was absolute master; there he was allowed to carry out what his mother spoke of as his "fads," what his father called "poor Caterham's odd ways." His brother, Lionel Brakespere, had been in the habit of dropping in there twice or three times a week, smoking his cigar, turning over the "rum things" on the table, asking advice which he never took, and lounging round the room, reading the backs of the books which he did not understand, and criticising the pictures which he knew nothing about. It would have been impossible to tell to what manner of man the room belonged from a cursory survey of its contents. Three-fourths of the walls were covered with large book-cases filled with a heterogeneous assemblage of books. Here a row of poets, a big quarto *Shakspeare* in six volumes, followed by *Youatt on the Horse*, *Philip Van Artevelde*, and Stanhope's *Christian Martyr*. In the next shelf Voltaire, all the Tennysons, *Mr. Sponge's Sporting-Tour*, a work on Farriery, and *Blunt on the Pentateuch*. So the *mélange* ran throughout the book-shelves; and on the fourth wall, where hung the pictures, it was not much better. For in the centre were Landseer's "Midsummer-Night's Dream," where that lovely Titania, unfairy-like if you please, but one of the most glorious specimens of pictured womanhood, pillows her fair face under the shadow of that magnificent ass's head; and Frith's "Coming of Age," and Delaroche's "Execution of Lady Jane Grey," and three or four splendid proof-engravings of untouchable Sir Joshua; and among them, dotted here and there, hunting-sketches by Alken, and coaching bits from Fores. Scattered about on tables were pieces of lava from Vesuvius, photographs from Pompeii, a collection of weeds and grasses from the Arctic regions (all duly labeled in the most precise handwriting), a horse's shoe specially adapted for ice-traveling, specimens of egg-shell china, a box of gleaming carpenter's tools, boxes of Tunbridge ware, furs of Indian manufacture, caricature statuettes by Danton, a case of shells, and another of geological specimens. Here stood an easel bearing a half-finished picture, in one corner was a sheaf of walking-sticks, against the wall a rack of whips. Before the fire was a carved-oak writing-desk, and on it, beside the ordinary blotting and writing materials, were an aneroid barometer, a small skeleton clock, and a silver hand-bell. And at it sat Viscount Caterham, his head drooping, his face pale, his hands idly clasped before him.

Not an unusual position this with him, not unusual by any means when he was alone. In such society as he forced himself to keep—for with him it was more than effort to determine occasionally to shake off his love of solitude, to be present among his father's guests, and to receive some few special favorites in his own rooms—he was more than pleasant, he was brilliant and amusing. Big, heavy, good-natured guardsmen, who had contributed nothing to the "go" of the evening, and had nearly tugged off their tawny beards in the vain endeavor to extract something to say, would go away, and growl in deep bass voices over their cigars about "that strordinary f'ler Caterham. Knows a lot, you know, that f'ler, 'bout all sorts things. Can't 'ceive where picks it all up; and as jolly as old boots, by Jove!"

Old friends of Lord Beauport's, now gradually dropping into fogiedom, and clutching year by year more tightly the conventional prejudices instilled into them in early life, listened with elevated eyebrows and dropping jaws to Lord Caterham's outspoken opinions, now clothed in

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brilliant tropes, now crackling with smart antithesis, but always fresh, earnest, liberal, and vigorous; and when they talked him over in club-windows these old boys would say that "there was something in that deformed fellow of Beauport's, but that he was all wrong; his mind as warped as his body, by George!" And women—ah, that was the worst of all—women would sit and listen to him on such rare occasions as he spoke before them, sit many of them steadfast-eyed and ear-attentive, and would give him smiles and encouraging glances, and then would float away and talk to their next dancing-partner of the strange little man who had such odd ideas, and spoke so—so unlike most people, you know.

He knew it all, this fragile, colorless, delicate cripple, bound for life to his wheel-chair, dependent for mere motion on the assistance of others; a something apart and almost without parallel, helpless as a little child, and yet with the brain, the heart, the passions of a man. No keener observer of outward show, no clearer reader of character than he. From out his deep-set melancholy eyes he saw the stare of astonishment, sometimes the look of disgust, which usually marked a first introduction to him; his quick ear caught the would-be compassionate inflection of the voice addressing him on the simplest matters; he knew what the old fogies were thinking of as they shifted uneasily in their chairs as he spoke; and he interpreted clearly enough the straying glances and occasional interjections of the women. He knew it all, and bore it—bore it as the cross is rarely borne.

Only three times in his life had there gone up from his lips a wail to the Father of mercies, a passionate outpouring of his heart, a wild inquiry as to why such affliction had been cast upon him. But three times, and the first of these was when he was a lad of eighteen. Lord Beauport had been educated at Charterhouse, where, as every one knows, Founder's Day is kept with annual rejoicings. To one of these celebrations Lord Beauport had gone, taking Lord Caterham with him. The speeches and recitations were over, and the crowd of spectators were filing out into the quadrangle, when Lord Caterham, whose chair was being wheeled by a servant close by his father's side, heard a cheery voice say, "What, Brakespere! Gad, Lord Beauport, I mean! I forgot. Well, how are you, my dear fellow? I haven't seen you since we sat on the same form in that old place." Lord Caterham looked up and saw his father shaking hands with a jolly-looking, middle-aged man, who rattled on—"Well, and you've been in luck, and are a great gun! I'm delighted to hear it. You're just the fellow to bear your honors bravely. Oh yes, I'm wonderfully well, thank God! And I've got my boy here at the old shop, doing just as we used to do, Brakespere—Beauport, I mean. I'll introduce you. Here, Charley!" calling to him a fine, handsome lad; "this is Lord Beauport, an old school-fellow of mine. And you, Beauport—you've got children, eh?"

"Oh yes," said Lord Beauport—"two boys."

"Ah! that's right. I wish they'd been here; I should have liked to have seen them." The man rattled on, but Lord Caterham heard no more. He had heard enough. He knew that his father was ashamed to acknowledge his maimed and crippled child—ashamed of a comparison between the stalwart son of his old school-fellow and his own blighted lad; and that night Lord Caterham's pillow was wet with tears, and he prayed to God that his life might be taken from him.

Twice since then the same feelings had been violently excited; but the sense of his position, the knowledge that he was a perpetual grief and affliction to his parents, was ever present, and pervaded his very being. To tell truth, neither his father nor his mother ever outwardly manifested their disappointment or their sorrow at the hopeless physical state of their first-born son; but Lord Caterham read his father's trouble in thousands of covert glances thrown toward the occupant of the wheeled chair, which the elder man thought were all unmarked, in short, self-suppressed sighs, in sudden shiftings of the conversation when any subject involving a question of physical activity or muscular force happened to be touched upon, in the persistent way in which his father excluded him from those regular solemn festivities of the season, held at certain special times, and at which he by right should certainly have been present.

No man knew better than Lord Beauport the horrible injustice he was committing; he felt that he was mutely rebelling against the decrees of Providence and adding to the affliction already mysteriously dispensed to his unfortunate son by his treatment. He fought against it, but without avail; he *could* not bow his head and kiss the rod by which he had been smitten. Had his heir been brainless, dissipated, even bad, he could have forgiven him. He did in his heart forgive his second son when he became all three; but that he, George Brakespere, handsome Brakespere, one of the best athletes of the day, should have to own that poor misshapen man as his son and heir!—it was too much. He tried to persuade himself that he loved his son; but he never looked at him without a shudder, never spoke of him with unflushed cheeks.

As for Lady Beauport, from the time that the child's malady first was proclaimed incurable she never took the smallest interest in him, but devoted herself, as much as devotion was compatible with perpetual attendance at ball, concert, and theatre, to her second son. As a child, Lord Caterham had, by her express commands, been studiously kept out of her sight; and now that he was a man, she saw very much less of him than of many strangers. A dozen times in the year she would enter his room and remain a few minutes, asking for his taste in a matter of fancy costume or something of the kind; and then she would brush his forehead with her lips, and rustle away perfectly satisfied with her manner of discharging the duties of maternity.

And Lord Caterham knew all this; read it as in a book; and suffered, and was strong. Who know most of life, discern character most readily, and read it most deeply? We who what we call "mix in the world," hurry hither and thither, buffeting our way through friends and foes, taking the rough and the smooth, smiling here, frowning there, but ever pushing onward? Or the quiet ones, who lie by in the nooks and lanes, and look on at the strife, and mark the quality and effect of the blows struck; who see not merely how, but why the battle has been undertaken,

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who can trace the strong and weak points of the attack and defense, see the skirmishers thrown out here, the feigned retreat there, the mine ready prepared in the far distance? How many years had that crippled man looked on at life, standing as it were at the gates and peering in at the antics and dalliances, the bowings and scrapings, the mad moppings and idiotic mowings of the puppets performing? And had he not arrived during this period at a perfect knowledge of how the wires were pulled, and what was the result?

Among them but not of them, in the midst of the whirl of London but as isolated as a hermit, with keen analytical powers, and leisure and opportunity to give them full swing, Lord Caterham passed his life in studying the lives of other people, in taking off the padding and the drapery, the paint and the tinsel, in looking behind the grins, and studying the motives for the sneers. Ah, what a life for a man to pass! situated as Lord Caterham was, he must under such circumstances have become either a Quilp or an angel. The natural tendency is to the former: but Providence had been kind in one instance to Lord Caterham, and he, like Mr. Disraeli, went in for the angel.

His flow of spirits was generally, to say the least of it, equable. When the dark hour was on him he suffered dreadfully; but this morning he was more than usually low, for he had been pondering over his brother's insane downfall, and it was with something like real pleasure that he heard his servant announce "Mr. Barford," and gave orders for that gentleman's admittance.

The Honorable Algernon Barford by prescriptive right, but "Algy Barford" to any one after two days' acquaintance with him, was one of those men whom it is impossible not to call by their Christian names; whom it is impossible not to like as an acquaintance; whom it is difficult to take into intimate friendship; but with whom no one ever quarreled. A big, broad-chested, broad-faced, light-whiskered man, perfectly dressed, with an easy, rolling walk, a pleasant presence, a way of enarming and "old boy-ing" you, without the least appearance of undue familiarity; on the contrary, with a sense of real delight in your society; with a voice which, without being in the least affected, or in the remotest degree resembling the tone of the stage-nobleman, had the real swell ring and roll in it; a kindly, sunny, chirpy, world-citizen, who, with what was supposed to be a very small income, lived in the best society, never borrowed or owed a sovereign, and was nearly always in good temper. Algy Barford was the very man to visit you when you were out of spirits. A glance at him was cheering; it revived one at once to look at his shiny bald forehead fringed with thin golden hair, at his saucy blue eyes, his big, grinning mouth furnished with sparkling teeth; and when he spoke his voice came ringing out with a cheery music of its own.

"Halloo, Caterham!" said he, coming up to the chair and placing one of his big hands on the occupant's small shoulder; "how goes it, my boy? Wanted to see you, and have a chat. How are you, old fellow, eh? Where does one put one's hat, by-the-way, dear old boy? Can't put it under my seat, you know, or I should think I was in church; and there's no place in this den of yours; and—ah, that'll do, on that lady's head. Who is it? Oh, Pallas Athené; ah, very well then, *non invitâ Minervâ*, she'll support my castor for me. Fancy my recollecting Latin, eh? but I think I must have seen it on somebody's crest. Well, and now, old boy, how are you?"

"Well, not very brilliant this morning, Algy. I—"

"Ah, like me, got rats, haven't you?"

"Rats?"

"Yes; whenever I'm out of spirits I think I've got rats—sometimes boiled rats. Oh, it's all very well for you to laugh, Caterham; but you know, though I'm generally pretty jolly, sometimes I have a regular file-gnawing time of it. I think I'll take a peg, dear old boy—a sherry peg—just to keep me up."

"To be sure. Just ring for Stevens, will you? he'll—"

"Not at all; I recollect where the sherry is and where the glasses live. *Nourri dans le sérail, j'en connais les détours.* Here they are. Have a peg, Caterham?"

"No, thanks, Algy; the doctor forbids me that sort of thing. I take no exercise to carry it off, you know; but I thought some one told me you had turned teetotaler."

"Gad, how extraordinarily things get wind, don't you know! So I did, honor!—kept to it all strictly, give you my word, for—ay, for a fortnight; but then I thought I might as well die a natural death, so I took to it again. This is the second peg I've had to-day—took number one at the Foreign Office, with my cousin Jack Lambert. You know Jack?—little fellow, short and dirty, like a winter's day."

"I know him," said Caterham, smiling; "a sharp fellow."

"Oh yes, deuced cute little dog—knows every thing. I wanted him to recommend me a new servant; obliged to send my man away; couldn't stand him any longer—always worrying me."

"I thought he was a capital servant?"

"Ye-es; knew too much though, and went to too many evening-parties; never would give me a chance of wearing my own black bags and dress-boots—kept 'em in constant requisition, by Jove! A greedy fellow, too. I used to let him get just outside the door with the breakfast-things and then suddenly call him back; and he never showed up without his mouth full of kidney, or whatever it was. And he always would read my letters—before I'd done with them, I mean. I'm short-sighted, you know, and obliged to get close to the light: he was in such a hurry to find out what they were about that he used to peep in through the window and read them over my shoulder. I found this out; and this morning I was ready for him with my fist neatly doubled-up in a thick towel. I saw his shadow come stealing across the paper, and then I turned round and let out at him slap through the glass. It was a gentle hint that I had spotted his game; and so he came in when he had got his face right, and begged me to suit myself in a month, as he had heard of a place which he thought he should like better. Now can you tell me of any handy fellow, Caterham?"

"Not I; I'm all unlikely to know of such people. Stay, there was a man that—"

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"Yes; and then you stop. Gad, you are like the rest of the world, old fellow: you have an *arrière pensée* which prevents your telling a fellow a good thing."

"No, not that, Algy. I was going to say that there was a man who was Lionel's servant. I don't know whether he has got another place; but Lionel, you know—" and Lord Caterham stopped with a knot in his throat and burning cheeks.

"I know, dear old boy," said Algy Barford, rising from his seat and again placing his hand on Caterham's shoulder; "of course I know. You're too much a man of the world"—(Heaven help us! Caterham a man of the world! But this was Algy Barford's pleasant way of putting it)—"not to know that the clubs rang with the whole story last night. Don't shrink, old boy. It's a bad business; but I never heard such tremendous sympathy expressed for a—for a buffer—as for Lionel. Every body says he must have been no end cornered before he—before he—well, there's no use talking of it. But what I wanted to say to you is this—and I'm deuced glad you mentioned Lionel's name, old fellow, for I've been thinking all the time I've been here how I could bring it in. Look here! he and I were no end chums, you know; I was much older than he; but we took to each other like any thing, and—and I got a letter from him from Liverpool with—with an inclosure for you, old boy."

Algy Barford unbuttoned his coat as he said these last words, took a long breath, and seemed immensely relieved, though he still looked anxiously toward his friend.

"An inclosure for me?" said Lord Caterham, turning deadly white; "no further trouble—no further misery for—"

"On my honor, Caterham, I don't know what it is," said Algy Barford; he doesn't hint it in his letter to me. He simply says, 'Let the inclosed be given to Caterham, and given by your own hand.' He underlines that last sentence, and so I brought it on. I'm a bungling jackass, or I should have found means to explain it myself, by Jove! But as you have helped me, so much the better."

"Have you it with you?"

"Oh yes; brought it on purpose," said Algy, rising and taking his coat from a chair, and his hat from the head of Pallas Athené; "here it is. I don't suppose any thing from poor Lionel can be very brilliant just now; but still I know nothing. Good-by, Caterham, old fellow; can't help me to a servant-man, eh? See you next week; meantime—and this earnest, old boy—if there's any thing I can do to help Lionel in any shape, you'll let me know, won't you, old fellow?"

And Algy Barford handed Lord Caterham the letter, kissed his hand, and departed in his usual airy, cheery fashion.

That night Lord Caterham did not appear at the dinner-table; and his servant, on being asked, said that his master "had been more than usual queer-like," and had gone to bed very early.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST VISIT.

Geoffrey Ludlow was in his way a recognizant and a grateful man, grateful for such mercies as he knew he enjoyed; but from never having experienced its loss, he was not sufficiently appreciative of one of the greatest of life's blessings, the faculty of sleep at will. He could have slept, had he so willed it, under the tremendous cannonading, the *feu-d'enfer*, before Sebastopol, or while Mr. Gladstone was speaking his best speech, or Mr. Tennyson was reading aloud his own poetry; whenever and wherever he chose he could sleep the calm, peaceful sleep of an infant. Some people tell you they are too tired to sleep—that was never the case with Geoffrey; others that their minds are too full, that they are too excited, that the weather is too hot or too cold, that there is too much noise, or that the very silence is too oppressive. But, excited or comatose, hot or cold, in the rumble of London streets or the dead silence of—well, he had never tried the desert, but let us say Walton-on-the-Naze, Geoffrey Ludlow no sooner laid his head on the pillow than he went off into a sound, glorious, healthy sleep—steady, calm, and peaceful; not one of your stertorous, heavy, growling slumbers, nor your starting, fly-catching, open-mouthed, moaning states, but a placid, regular sleep, so quiet and undisturbed that he scarcely seemed to breathe; and often as a child had caused his mother to examine with anxiety whether the motionless figure stretched upon the little bed was only sleeping naturally or whether the last long sleep had not fallen on it.

Dreams he had, no doubt; but they by no means disturbed the refreshing, invigorating character of his repose. On the night of his adventure in the streets he dreamed the Lamia dream without its in the least affecting his slumber; and when he opened his eyes the next morning, with the recollection of where he was, and what day it was, and what he had to do—those post-waking thoughts which come to all of us—there came upon him an indefinable sensation of something pleasurable and happy, of something bright and sunshiny, of something which made his heart feel light within him, and caused him to open his eyes and grapple with the day at once.

Some one surely must long ere this have remarked how our manner of waking from slumber is affected by our state of mind. The instant that consciousness comes upon us the dominant object of our thoughts, be it pleasant or horrible, is before us: the absurd quarrel with the man in the black beard last night, about—what *was* it about? the acceptance which Smith holds, which must be met, and can't be renewed; the proposal in the conservatory to Emily Fairbairn, while she was flushed with the first *valse* after supper, and we with Mrs. Tresillian's Champagne; or, *per contra*, as they say in the City, the thrilling pressure of Flora Maitland's hand, and the low whisper in which she gave us rendezvous at the Botanical Fête this afternoon; the lawyer's letter informing us of our godfather's handsome legacy; all these, whether for good or ill, come before us with the first unclosing of our eyelids. If agreeable, we rouse ourselves at once, and lie simultaneously chewing the cud of pleasant thoughts and enjoying the calm haven of our

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bed; if objectionable, we try and shut them out yet for a little while, and turning round court sleep once more.

What was the first thought that flashed across Geoffrey Ludlow's brain immediately on his waking, and filled him with hope and joy? Not the remembrance of the purchase of his picture by Mr. Stompff, though that certainly occurred to him, with Stompff's promises of future employment, and the kind words of his old friends at the Titians, all floating simultaneously across his mind. But with these thoughts came the recollection of a fragile form, and a thin hand with long, lithe fingers wound round his own, and a low, feeble voice whispering the words, "Bless you!—saved me!" in his listening ear.

Beneath the flickering gas-lamps or in the dim half-light of Mrs. Flexor's room he had been unable to make out the color of the eyes, or of the thick hair which hung in heavy masses over her cheeks; it was a spiritual recollection of her at the best; but he would soon change that into a material inspection. So, after settling in his own mind—that mind which coincides so readily with our wishes—that it was benevolence which prompted his every action, and which roused in him the desire to know how the patient of the previous night was getting on, he sprang from his bed, and pulled the string of his shower-bath with an energy which not even the knowledge of the water's probable temperature could mitigate. But he had not proceeded half-way through his toilet when the old spirit of irresolution began to exercise its dominion over him. Was it not somewhat of a Quixotic adventure in which he was engaging? To succor a starving, frozen girl on a wet night was merely charitable and humane; there was no man of any thing like decent feeling but would have acted as he had done, and—by George!—here the hair-brushes were suspended in mid air, just threatening a descent one on either side of his bushy head—wouldn't it have been better to have accepted Charley Potts's suggestion, and let the policeman take her to the work-house? There she would have had every attention and—bah! every attention! the truckle-bed in a gaunt, bare room, surrounded by disease in every shape; the perfunctory visits of the parish doctor; the—oh no! and, moreover, had he not heard, or at all events imagined he heard, the pallid lips mutter "Not there!" No! there was something in her which—which—at all events—well, *ruat cœlum*, it was done, and he must take the consequences; and down came the two hair-brushes like two avalanches, and worried his unresisting scalp like two steam-harrows. The recollection of the fragile frame, and the thin hands, and the broken voice, supported by the benevolent theory, had it all their own way from that time out until he had finished dressing, and sent him down stairs in a happy mood, pleased with what he had done, more pleased still with the notion of what he was about to do. He entered the room briskly, and striding up to an old lady sitting at the head of the breakfast-table, gave her a sounding kiss.

"Good-morning, dearest mother. How do, Til, dear?" turning to a young woman who was engaged in pouring out the tea. "I'm late again, I see."

"Always on sausage mornings, I notice, Geoffrey," said Mrs. Ludlow, with a little asperity. "It does not so much matter with haddock, though it becomes leathery; or eggs, for you like them hard; but sausages should be eaten hot, or not at all; and to-day, when I'd sent specially for these, knowing that nasty herb-stuffing is indigestible—let them deny it if they can—it does seem hard that—well, never mind—"

Mrs. Ludlow was a very good old lady, with one great failing: she was under the notion that she had to bear what she called "a cross," a most uncomfortable typical object, which caused all her friends the greatest annoyance, but in which, though outwardly mournful, she secretly rejoiced, as giving her a peculiar status in her circle. This cross intruded itself into all the social and domestic details of her life, and was lugged out metaphorically on all possible occasions.

"Don't mind me, mother," said Geoff; "the sausages will do splendidly. I overslept myself; I was a little late last night."

"Oh, at those everlasting Titians. I declare I forgot," said the young woman who had been addressed as "Til," and who was Geoffrey's only sister. "Ah, poor fellow! studying his art till two this morning, wasn't he?" And Miss Til made a comic sympathetic *moue*, which made Geoff laugh.

"Two!" said Mrs. Ludlow; "nearer three, Matilda. I ought to know, for I had water running down my back all night, and my feet as cold as stone; and I had a perfect recollection of having left the key of the linen-closet in the door, owing to my having been hurried down to luncheon yesterday when I was giving Martha out the clean pillow-cases. However, if burglars do break into that linen-closet, it won't be for my not having mentioned it, as I call you to witness, Matilda."

"All right, mother," said Geoffrey, "we'll run the risk of that. I'm very sorry I disturbed the house, but I *was* late, I confess; but I did some good, though."

"Oh yes, Geoffrey, we know," said Matilda. "Got some new notions for a subject, or heard some æsthetic criticism; or met some wonderful lion, who's going to astonish the world, and of whom no one ever hears again! You always have done something extraordinary when you're out very late, I find."

"Well, I did something really extraordinary last night. I sold my picture, the 'Ball-room,' you know; and for what do you think?—two hundred pounds."

"Oh, Geoff, you dear, darling old Geoff! I am so glad! Two hundred pounds! Oh, Geoff, Geoff! You dear, lucky old fellow!" and Miss Til flung her arms round her brother's neck and hugged him with delight. Mrs. Ludlow said never a word; but her cross melted away momentarily, her eyes filled with tears, and her lips quivered. Geoffrey noticed this, and so soon as he had returned his sister's hearty embrace, he went up to his mother, and kneeling by her side put up his face for her kiss.

"God bless you, my son!" said the old lady, reverently, as she gave it; "God bless you! This is brave news indeed. I knew it would come in time; but—"

"Yes; but tell us all about it, Geoff. How did it come about? and how ever did you pluck

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up courage, you dear, bashful, nervous old thing, to ask such a price?"

"I—why, Til, you know that I—and you, dear mother, you know too that—not that I am bashful, as Til says; but still there's something. Oh, I should never have sold the picture, I believe, if I'd been let alone. It was Charley Potts sold it for me."

"Charles Potts! That ridiculous young man! Well, I should never have thought it," said Mrs. Ludlow.

Miss Matilda said nothing, but a faint flush rose on her neck and cheeks, and died away again as quickly as it came.

"Oh, he's a capital man of business—for any body else, that's to say. He don't do much good for himself. He sold the picture for me, and prevented my saying a word in the whole affair. And who do you think has bought it? Mr. Stompff, the great dealer, who tells me he'll take as many more of the same style as I like to paint."

"This is great news indeed, my boy," said the old lady. "You've only to persevere, and your fortune's made. Only one thing, Geoffrey—never paint on Sunday, or you'll never become a great man."

"Well, but, mother," said Geoff, smiling, "Sir Joshua Reynolds painted always on Sundays until Johnson's death; and he was a great man."

"Ah, well, my dear," replied his mother, forcibly, if not logically, "that's nothing to do with it."

Then Geoffrey, who had been hurrying through his sausage, and toward the last began to grow nervous and fidgety—accounted for by his mother and sister from his anxiety to go and see Mr. Stompff, and at once fling himself on to fresh canvases—finished his breakfast, and went out to get his hat. Mrs. Ludlow, with her "cross" rapidly coming upon her, sat down to "do the books"—an inspection of the household brigade of tradesmen's accounts which she carried on weekly with the sternest rigor; and Matilda, who was by no means either a romantic or a strong-minded woman, commenced to darn a basketful of Geoffrey's socks. Then the sock-destroyer put his head in at the door, his mouth ornamented with a large cigar, and calling out "Good-by," departed on his way.

The fragile form, the thin hands, and the soft, low voice had it all their own way with Geoffrey Ludlow now. He was going to see their owner; in less than an hour he should know the color of the eyes and the hair; and figuratively Geoffrey walked upon air; literally, he strode along with bright eyes and flushed cheeks, swinging his stick, and, but for the necessity of clenching his cigar between his teeth, inclined to hum a tune aloud. He scarcely noticed any of the people he met; but such as he did casually glance at he pitied from the bottom of his soul: there were no thin hands or soft voices waiting for them. And it must be owned that the passers-by who noticed him returned his pity. The clerks on the omnibuses, sucking solemnly at their brier-root pipes, or immersed in their newspapers, solemn, staid men going in "to business," on their regular daily routine, looked up with wonder on this buoyant figure, with its black wideawake hat and long floating beard, its jerky walk, its swinging stick, and its general air of light-hearted happiness. The cynical clerks, men with large families, whom nothing but an increase of salary could rouse, interchanged shoulder-shrugs of contempt, and the omnibus-conductor, likewise a cynic, after taking a long stare at Geoffrey, called out to his driver, "'Appy cove that! looks as if he'd found a fourpenny-piece, don't he?"

Entirely ignorant of the attention he was attracting, Geoff blithely pursued his way. He lived at Brompton, and he was bound for the neighborhood of Portland Place; so he turned in at the Albert Gate, and crossing the inclosure and the Row, made for Grosvenor Gate. In the Park he was equally the object of remark: the nurse-girls called their charges to come "to heel" out of the way of that "nasty, ugly, big man;" the valetudinarians taking their constitutional in the Row loathed him for swinging his stick and making their horses shy as he passed; the park-keepers watched him narrowly, as one probably with felonious intent to the plants or the ducks.

Still, utterly unconscious, Geoffrey went swinging along across Grosvenor Square, down Brook Street; and not until he turned into Bond Street did he begin to realize entirely the step he was about to take. Then he wavered in mind and in gait; he thought he would turn back; he did turn back, irresolute, doubtful. Better have nothing more to do with it; nip it in the bud; send Charley Potts with a couple of sovereigns to Mrs. Flexor's, and tell her to set the girl on her way again, and wish her God-speed. But what if she were still ill, unable to move? people didn't gain sufficient strength in twelve hours; and Charley, though kind-hearted, was rather *brusque;* and then the low voice, with the "Bless you!—saved me!" came murmuring in his ear; and Geoffrey, like Whittington, turned again, and strode on toward Little Flotsam Street.

When he got near Flexor's door he faltered again, and very nearly gave in: but looking up, saw Mrs. Flexor standing on the pavement; and perceiving by her manner that his advent had been noticed, proceeded, and was soon alongside that matron.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Flexor."

"Good-mornin', Sir; thought you'd be over early, though not lookin' for you now, but for Reg'las, my youngest plague, so called after Mr. Scumble's Wictory of the Carthageniums, who has gone for milk for some posset for our dear; who is much better this mornin', the Lord a mussy! Dr. Rollix have been, and says we may sit up a little, if taking nourishment prescribed; and pleased to see you we shall be. A pretty creetur, Mr. Ludlow, though thin as thin and low as low; but what can we expect?"

"She is better then?"

"A deal better, more herself like; though not knowing what she was before, I can't exactly say. Flexor was fine and buffy when he came home last night, after you was gone, Sir. Them nasty Titiums, he always gets upset there. And now he's gone to sit to Mr. Potts for—ah, well, some Roman party whose name I never can remember."

"Is your patient up, Mrs. Flexor?"

"Gettin'. We shall be ready to see you in five minutes, Sir. I'll go and see to her at once."

Mrs. Flexor retired, and Geoffrey was left to himself for a quarter of an hour standing in the street, during which time he amused himself as most people would under similar circumstances.

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That is to say, he stared at the houses opposite and at the people who passed; and then he beat his stick against his leg, and then he whistled a tune, and then, having looked at his watch five times, he looked at it for the sixth. Then he walked up the street, taking care to place his foot on the round iron of every coal-shoot; and then he walked down the street, carrying out a determination to step in the exact centre of every flag-stone; and then, after he had pulled his beard a dozen times, and lifted his wideawake hat as many, that the air might blow upon his hot forehead, he saw Mrs. Flexor's head protruded from the doorway, and he felt very much inclined to run away. But he checked himself in time, and entered the house, and, after a ghostly admonition from Mrs. Flexor "not to hagitate her," he opened the parlor-door, which Mrs. Flexor duly shut behind him, and entered the room.

Little light ever groped its way between the closely-packed rows of houses in Little Flotsam Street even on the brightest summer day; and on a dark and dreary winter's morning Mrs. Flexor's little front parlor was horribly dark. The worthy landlady had some wild notion, whence derived no one knew, that an immense amount of gentility was derived from keeping the light out; and consequently the bottom part of her windows were fitted with dwarf wire-blinds, and the top part with long linen-blinds, and across both were drawn curtains made of a kind of white fishing-net; so that even so little daylight as Little Flotsam Street enjoyed was greatly diluted in the Flexorian establishment.

But Geoffrey Ludlow saw stretched out on a miserable black horse-hair sofa before him there this fragile form which had been haunting his brain for the last twelve hours. Ah, how thin and fragile it was; how small it looked, even in its worn, draggled black-merino dress! As he advanced noiselessly he saw that the patient slept; her head was thrown back, her delicate white hands (and almost involuntarily Geoffrey remarked that she wore no wedding-ring) were clasped across her breast, and her hair, put off her dead-white face, fell in thick clusters over her shoulders.

With a professional eye Geoffrey saw at once that whatever trouble she might have taken, she could not have been more artistically posed than in this natural attitude. The expression of her eyes was wanting; and as he sunk into a chair at her feet her eyes opened upon him. Then he saw her face in its entirety; saw large, deep-violet eyes, with dark lashes and eyebrows; a thin, slightly aquiline nose; small, thin, close lips, and a little chin; a complexion of the deadest white, without the smallest color; and hair, long, thick, rich, luxuriant hair, of a deep red-gold color—not the poetic "auburn," not the vulgar "carrots;" a rich metallic red, unmistakable, admitting of no compromise, no darkening by grease or confining by fixature—a great mass of deep-red hair, strange, weird, and oddly beautiful. The deep-violet eyes, opening slowly, fixed their regard on his face without a tremor, and with a somewhat languid gaze; then brightening slowly, while the hands were unclasped, and the voice—how well Geoff remembered its tones, and how they thrilled him again!—murmured faintly, "It is you!"

What is that wonderful something in the human voice which at once proclaims the social status of the speaker? The proletary and the *roturier*, Nature willing, can have as good features, grow as flowing beards, be as good in stature, grace, and agility, as the noblest patrician, or the man in whose veins flows the purest *sangre azul;* but they fail generally in hands, always in voice. Geoffrey Ludlow, all his weakness and irresolution notwithstanding, was necessarily by his art a student of life and character; and no sooner did he hear those three little words spoken in that tone than all his floating ideas of shamming tramp or hypocritical street-walker, as connected with the recipient of his last night's charity, died away, and he recognized at once the soft modulations of education, if not of birth.

But those three words, spoken in deep, low, quivering tones, while they set the blood dancing in Geoffrey Ludlow's veins, made him at the same time very uncomfortable. He had a dread of any thing romantic; and there flashed through his mind an idea that he could only answer this remark by exclaiming, "Tis I!" or "Ay, indeed!" or something else equally absurd and ridiculous. So he contented himself with bowing his head and putting out his hand, into which the long, lithe fingers came fluttering instantly. Then, with burning cheeks, Geoffrey bent forward, and said, "You are better to-day?"

"Oh, so much—so much better! thanks to you, thanks to you!"

"Your doctor has been?" She bowed her head in reply.

"And you have every thing you wish for?" She bowed again, this time glancing up—with, oh, such a light in the deep-violet eyes!—into Geoffrey's face.

"Then—then I will leave you now," said he, awkwardly enough. The glance fell as he said this, but flashed again full and earnest in an instant; the lithe fingers wound round his wrist, and the voice, even lower and more tremulously than before, whispered, "You'll come to-morrow?"

Geoff flushed again, stammered, "Yes, oh, by all means!" made a clumsy bow, and went out.

Now this was a short, and not a particularly satisfactory interview; but the smallest detail of it remained in Geoffrey Ludlow's mind, and was reproduced throughout the remainder of that day and the first portion of the succeeding night, for him to ponder over. He felt the clasp of her fingers yet on his wrist, and he heard the soft voice, "You'll come to-morrow?" It must be a long distance, he thought, that he would not go to gaze into those eyes, to touch that hand, to hear that voice again!

CHAPTER VII.

CHEZ POTTS.

Mr. Potts lived in Berners Street, on the second-floor of a rambling, big, old-fashioned house, which in its palmy days had been inhabited by people of distinction, and in which it was rumored in the art-world that the great Mr. Fuseli had once lived, and painted those horrors which sprung from the nightmare consequent on heavy suppers of pork-chops. But these were the days

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of its decadence, and each of its floors had now a separate and distinct tenant. The ground-floor was a kind of half show-room, half shop, held by Mr. Lectern, the great church-upholsterer. Specimens of stained-glass windows, crosiers, and brass instruments like exaggerated beadles'-staves, gilt sets of communion-service, and splendidly-worked altar-cloths occupied the walls; the visitor walked up to the desk at which Mr. Lectern presided between groves of elaborately-carved pulpits and reading-desks, and brazen eagles were extending their wings in every available corner. On the first-floor Mdlle. Stetti gave lessons to the nobility, gentry, and the public in general in the fashionable dances of the day, and in the Magyar sceptre-exercises for opening the chest and improving the figure. Mdlle. Stetti had a very large connection; and as many of her pupils were adults who had never learned to dance while they were supple and tender, and as, under the persevering tuition of their little instructress, they gamboled in a cumbrous and rather elephantine manner, they earned for themselves many hearty anathemas from Mr. Potts, who found it impossible to work with any thing like a steady hand while the whole house was rocking under the influence of a stout stock-broker doing the "changes," or while the walls trembled at every bound of the fourteen-stone lady from Islington, who was being initiated into the mysteries of the gavotte. But Charley Potts's pipe was the only confidant of his growled anathemas, and on the whole he got on remarkably well with his neighbors; for Mr. Lectern had lent him bits of oak furniture to paint from; and once, when he was ill, Mdlle. Stetti, who was the dearest, cheeriest, hardest-working, best-tempered little creature in existence, had made him broths and "goodies" with her own hand, and when he was well had always a kind word and a smile for him—and, indeed, reveled in the practical humor and buffonery of "*ce farceur* Pott." For Mr. Potts was nothing if not funny; the staircase leading to his rooms began to be decorated immediately after you had passed Mdlle. Stetti's apartments; an enormous hand, sketched in crayon, with an outstretched finger, directed attention to an inscription—"To the halls of Potts!" Just above the little landing you were confronted by a big beef-eater's head, out of the mouth of which floated a balloon-like legend—"Walk up, walk up, and see the great Potts!" The aperture of the letter-box in the door formed the mouth in a capital caricatured head of Charley himself; and instead of a bell-handle there hung a hare's-foot, beneath which was gummed a paper label with a written inscription—"Tug the trotter."

Three days after the gathering at the Titian Sketching-Club Mr. Potts sat in his studio, smoking a pipe and glaring vacantly at a picture on an easel in front of him. It was not a comfortable room; its owner's warmest friend could not have asserted that. There was no carpet, and the floor was begrimed with the dirt of ages, and with spilled tobacco and trodden-in cigar-ash. The big window was half stopped-up, and had no curtain. An old oak-cabinet against the wall, surmounted by the inevitable plaster torso and studies of hands and arms, had lost one of its supporting feet, and looked as though momentarily about to topple forward. A table in the middle of the room was crowded with litter, among which a pewter pot reared itself conspicuously. Over an old sofa were thrown a big, rough Inverness-cape, a wideawake hat, and a thick stick; while on a broken, ragged, but theatrically-tawdry arm-chair by the easel were a big pallet already "set," a color-box, and a sheaf of brushes. Mr. Potts was dressed in a shepherd's-plaid shooting coat, adorned here and there with dabs of paint, and with semi-burned brown patches, the result of the incautious dropping of incandescent tobacco and vesuvians. He had on a pair of loose rough trowsers, red-morocco slippers without heels, and he wore no neckcloth; but his big turned-down shirt-collar was open at the throat. He wore no beard, but had a large sweeping Austrian mustache, which curled fiercely at the ends; had thin brown hair, light-blue eyes, and the freshest and healthiest of complexions. No amount of late hours, of drinking and smoking, could apparently have any effect on this baby-skin; and under the influence of cold water and yellow soap, both of which he used in large quantities, he seemed destined to remain—so far as his complexion was concerned—"beautiful forever"—or at least until long after Madame Rachel's clients had seen the worthlessness of pigments. Looking at him as he sat there—his back bent nearly double, his eyes fixed on his picture, his pipe fixed stiffly between his teeth, and his big bony hands clasped in front of him—there was no mistaking him for any thing but a gentleman; ill-dressed, slatternly, if you like; but a true gentleman, every inch of him.

The "trotter" outside being tugged with tremendous violence roused him from his reverie, and he got up and opened the door, saying, as he did so, "Why didn't you ring? I would, if I'd been you. You're in the bell-hanging line, I should think, by the way you jerked my wire. Halloo, Bowker, my boy! is it you? What's the matter? Are you chivied by a dun on the staircase, or fainting for a pull at the pewter, that you come with such a ring as that? Bring your body in, old man; there's a wind here enough to shave you."

Mr. Bowker preceded his friend into the room, looked into the pewter pot, drained it, wiped his beard with a handkerchief which he took out of his hat, and said, in a solemn, deep voice: "Potts, my pipkin, how goes it?"

"Pretty well, old man, pretty well—considering the weather. And you?"

"Your William *se porte bien*. Halloo!" glancing at the easel, while he took a pipe from his pocket and filled it from a jar on the table; "halloo! something new! What's the subject? Who is the Spanish party in tights? and what's the venerable buffer in the clerical get-up of the period putting out his hand about?"

"Oh, it's a scene from *Gil Blas*, where the Archbishop of Grenada discharges him, you know."

"No, I don't, and I don't want to hear. Your William, dear boy, has discovered that life is too short to have any thing explained to him: if he don't see it at first he let's it pass. The young party's right leg is out of drawing, my chick; just give your William a bit of chalk. There—not being a patient at the Orthopædic Hospital—that's where his foot would come to. The crimson of the reverend gent's gown is about

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as bad as any thing I've seen for a long time, dear boy. Hand over the pallet and brushes for two minutes. Your William is a rum old skittle; but if there's one thing he knows about it is color." And Charley, who knew that, with all his eccentricity, Mr. Bowker, or "your William," as he always spoke of himself, was a thorough master of his art, handed him what he required, and sat by watching him.

A fat, bald-headed man with a grizzled beard, a large paunch, and flat splay feet, badly dressed and not too clean, Mr. Bowker did not give one the idea of ever having been an "object of interest" to any one save the waiter at the tavern where he dined, or the tobacconist where he bought his Cavendish. But yet there had been a day when bright eyes grew brighter at his approach, tiny ears latticed with chestnut-hair had eagerly drunk in the music of his voice, gentle hands had thrilled beneath his touch. He had bright-blue eyes himself then, and long hair, and a slim figure. He was young Mr. Bowker, whose first pictures exhibited at Somerset House had made such a sensation, and who was so much noticed by Sir David Wilkie, and for whom Mr. Northcote prophesied such a future, and whom Mr. Fuseli called a "coot prave poy!" He was the young Mr. Bowker who was recommended by Sir Thomas Lawrence as drawing-master to the lovely young wife of old Mr. Van Den Bosch, the Dutch banker and financier long resident in London. He was "that scoundrel Bowker, Sir," who, being wildly romantic, fell head-over-ears in love with his pupil; and finding that she was cruelly ill-treated by the old ruffian her husband, ran away with her to Spain, and by that rash act smashed up his career and finally settled himself forever. Old Van Den Bosch got a divorce, and died, leaving all his money to his nephews; and then William Bowker and the woman he had eloped with returned to England, to find himself universally shunned and condemned. His art was as good, nay, a thousand times better than ever; but they would not hear of him at the Royal Academy now; would not receive his pictures; would not allow the mention of his name. Patrons turned their backs on him, debts accumulated, the woman for whom he had sacrificed every thing died—penitent so far as she herself was concerned, but adoring her lover to the last, and calling down blessings on him with her latest breath. And then William Bowker strove no more, but accepted his position, and sunk into what he was, a kindly, jolly, graceless vagabond, doing no harm, but very little good. He had a little private money on which he lived; and as time progressed some of his patrons, who found he painted splendidly and cheaply, came back to him and gave him commissions; but he never again attempted to regain his status; and so long as he had enough to supply his simple daily wants seemed content. He was a great favorite with some half-dozen young men of Charley Potts's set, who had a real love and regard for him, and was never so happy as when helping them with advice and manual assistance.

Charley watched him at his work, and saw with delight the archbishop's robe gradually growing all aglow beneath the master's touch; and then, to keep him in good-humor and amused, began to talk, telling him a score of anecdotes, and finally asking him if he'd heard any thing of Tommy Smalt.

"Tommy Smalt, Sir?" cried Bowker, in his cheery voice; "Tommy Smalt, Sir, is in clover! Your William has been able to put Tommy on to a revenue of at least thirty shillings a week. Tommy is now the right-hand man of Jacobs of Newman Street, and the best judges say that there are no Ostades, Jan Steens, or Gerard Dows like Tommy's."

"What do you mean?—copies?"

"Copies! no, Sir; originals!"

"Originals!"

"Certainly! original Tenierses, of boors drinking; Wouvermans, not forgetting the white horse; or Jan Steens, with the never-failing episode—all carefully painted by Tommy Smalt and his fellow-laborers! Ah, Jacobs is a wonderful man! There never was such a fellow—he sticks at nothing; and when he finds a man who can do his particular work he keeps him in constant employment."

"Well, but is the imposition never detected? Don't the pictures look new?"

"Oh, most verdant of youths, of course not! The painting is clobbered with licorice-water; and the varnish is so prepared that it cracks at once; and the signature in the corner is always authentic; and there's a genuine look of cloudy vacancy and hopeless bankruptcy about the whole that stamps it at once to the connoisseur as the real thing. Tommy's doing a 'Youth's Head' by Rembrandt now, which ought to get him higher pay—it ought, indeed. It's for a Manchester man. They're very hot about Rembrandts at Manchester."

"Well, you've put me up to a new wrinkle. And Jacobs lives by this?"

"Lives by it! ay, and lives like a prince, too. Mrs. J. to fetch him every day in an open barouche, and coachman and footman in sky-blue livery, and all the little J.'s hanging over the carriage-doors, rendering Newman Street dark with the shadow of their noses. Lives by it! ay, and why not? There will always be fools in the world, thank Heaven! or how should you and I get on, Charley, my boy? and so long as people will spend money on what they know nothing about, for the sake of cutting-out their friends, gaining a spurious reputation for taste, or cutting a swell as 'patrons of the fine-arts'—patrons indeed! that word nearly chokes me!—it's quite right that they should be pillaged and done. No man can love art in the same manner that he can love pancakes. He must know something about it, and have some appreciation of it. Now no man with the smallest knowledge of art would go to Jacobs; and so I say that the lords and railway-men and cotton-men who go there simply as a piece of duff—to buy pictures as they would carpets—are deuced well served out. There! your William has not talked so much as that in one breath for many a long day. The pewter's empty. Send for some more beer and let's have a damp; my throat's as dry as a lime-burner's wig."

Charley Potts took up the pewter measure, and going on to the landing outside the door, threw open the staircase-window, and gave a shrill whistle. This twice repeated had some effect, for a very much-be-ribboned young lady in the bar of the opposite public-house looked

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up and nodded with great complaisance; and then Charley, having made a solemn bow, waved the empty quart pot three times round his head. Two minutes afterward a bare-headed youth, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up to his shoulders, crossed the road, carefully bearing a pasteboard hat-box, with which he entered the house, and which he delivered into Mr. Potts's hands.

"Good boy, Richard! never forget the hat-box; come for it this evening, and take back both the empty pewters in it. It would never do, Bowker, my boy, to have beer—vulgar beer, Sir—in its native pewter come into a respectable house like this. The pious parties who buy their rattletraps and properties of old Lectern down below would be scandalized; and poor little Mossoo woman Stetti would lose her swell connection. So Caroline and I—that's Caroline in the bar, with the puce-colored ribbons—arranged this little dodge; and it answers first-rate."

"Ha—a!" said Mr. Bowker, putting down the tankard half-empty, and drawing a long breath; "beer is to your William what what's-his-name is to thingummy; which, being interpreted, means that he can't get on without it. I never take a big pull at a pewter without thinking of our Geoff. How is our Geoff?"

"Our Geoff is—hush! some one coming up stairs. What's to-day? Friday. The day I told the tailor to call. Hush!"

The footsteps came creaking up the stairs until they stopped outside Charley Potts's door, on which three peculiar blows were struck—one very loud, then two in rapid succession.

"A friend!" said Charley, going to the door and opening it. "Pass, friend, and give the countersign! Halloo, Flexor! is it you? I forgot our appointment for this morning. Come in."

It was indeed the great model, who, fresh-shaved, and with his hair neatly poodled under his curly-brimmed hat, entered the room with a swagger, which, when he perceived a stranger, he allowed to subside into an elaborate bow.

"Now then, Flexor, get to work! we won't mind my friend here; he knows all this sort of game of old," said Charley; while Flexor began to arrange himself into the position of the expelled secretary of the archbishop.

"Ay, and I know Mr. Flexor of old, that's another thing!" said Bowker, with a deep chuckle, expelling a huge puff of smoke.

"Do you, Sir?" said Flexor, still rigid in the Gil-Blas position, and never turning his head; "maybe, Sir; many gents knows Flexor."

"Yes; but many gents didn't know Flexor five-and-twenty years ago, when he stood for 'Mercutio discoursing of Queen Mab.'"

"Lor' a mussy!" cried Flexor, forgetting all about his duty, parting the smoke with his hand, and bending down to look into William's face. "It's Mr. Bowker, and I ought to have knowed him by the voice. And how are you, Sir? hearty you look, though you've got a paucity of nob-thatch, and what 'air you 'ave is that gray you might be your own grandfather. Why, I haven't seen you since you was gold-medalist at the 'Cademy, 'cept once when you come with Mrs. ——"

"There, that'll do, Flexor! I'm alive still, you see; and so I see are you. And your wife, is she alive?"

"Oh yes, Sir; but, Lord, how different from what you know'd her! None of your Wenuses, nor Dalilys, nor Nell Gwyns now! she's growed stout and cumbersome, and never sits 'cept some gent wants a Mrs. Primrose in that everlastin' Wicar, or a old woman a-scoldin' a gal because she wants to marry a pore cove, or somethin' in that line; and then I says, 'Well, Jane, you may as well earn a shillin' an hour as any one else,' I says."

"And you've been a model all these years, Flexor?"

"Well, no, Sir—off and on; but I've always come back to it. I was a actor for three years; did Grecian stators—Ajax defyin' the lightnin'; Slave a-listenin' to conspirators; Boy a-sharpenin' his knife, and that game, you know, in a cirkiss. But I didn't like it; they're a low lot, them actors, with no feelin' for art. And then I was a gentleman's servant; but that wouldn't do; they do dam' and cuss their servants so, the gentlemen do, as I couldn't stand it; and I was a mute."

"A mute!—what, a funeral mute?"

"Yes, Sir; black-job business; and wery good that is—plenty of pleasant comp'ny and agreeable talk, and nice rides in the summer-time on the 'earses to all the pleasant simmetries in the suburbs! But in the winter it's frightful! and my last job I was nearly killed. We had a job at 'Ampstead, in the debth of snow; and it was frightful cold on the top of the 'Eath. It was the party's good lady as was going to be interred, and the party himself were frightful near; in fact, a reg'lar screw. Well, me and my mate had been standin' outside the 'ouse-door with the banners in our 'ands for an hour, until we was so froze we could scarcely hold the banners. So I says, I won't stand no longer, I says; and I gev a soft rap, and told the servant we must have a drop of somethin' short, or we should be killed with cold. The servant goes and tells her master, and what do you think he says? 'Drink!' he says. 'Nonsense!' he says; '*if they're cold, let 'em jump about and warm 'emselves*,' he says. Fancy a couple of mutes with their banners in their 'ands a-jumpin' about outside the door just before the party was brought out! So that disgusted me, and I gev it up, and come back to the old game agen."

"Now, Flexor," said Charley, "if you've finished your biography, get back again."

"All right, Sir!" and again Flexor became rigid as the student of Santillane.

"What were we talking of when Flexor arrived? Oh, I remember; I was asking you about Geoff Ludlow. What of him?"

"Well, Sir, Geoff Ludlow has made a thundering *coup* at last. The other night at the Titians he sold a picture to Stompff for two hundred pounds; more than that, Stompff promised him no end of commissions."

"That's first-rate! Your William pledges him!" and Mr. Bowker finished the stout.

"He'll want all he can make, gentlemen," said Flexor, who, seeing the pewter emptied, became cynical; "he'll want all he can make, if he goes on as he's doin' now."

"What do you mean?" asked Bowker.

"He's in love, Mr. Ludlow is; that's wot I mean. That party—you know, Mr. Potts—as you brought to our place that night—he's been to see her every day, he has; and my missis says,

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from what she 'ave seen and 'eard—well, that's neither 'ere nor there," said Flexor, checking himself abruptly as he remembered that the key-hole was the place whence Mrs. Flexor's information had been derived.

Charley Potts gave a loud whistle, and said, "The devil!" then turning to Bowker, he was about to tell the story of the wet night's adventure, but William, putting up his finger warningly, grunted out "*Nachher!*" and Charley, who understood German, ceased his chatter and went on with his painting.

When the sitting was over, and Flexor had departed, William Bowker returned to the subject, saying, "Now, Charley, tell your William all about this story of Geoff and his adventure."

Charley Potts narrated it circumstantially, Bowker sitting grimly by and puffing his pipe the while. When he had finished, Bowker never spoke for full five minutes; but his brow was knit, and his teeth clenched round his pipe. At length he said, "This is a bad business, so far as I see; a devilish bad business! If the girl were in Geoff's own station, or if he were younger, it wouldn't so much matter; but Geoff must be forty now, and at that age a man's deuced hard to turn from any thing he gets into his head. Well, we must wait and see. I'd rather it were you, Charley, by a mile; one might have some chance then. But you never think of any thing of that sort, eh?"

What made Charley Potts color as he said, "Well—not in Geoff's line, at all events?"

William Bowker noticed the flush, and said, ruefully, "Ah, I see! Always the way! Now let's go and get some beef, or something to eat: I'm hungry."

CHAPTER VIII.

THROWING THE FLY.

Mr. Flexor was by nature mendacious; indeed, his employers used pleasantly to remark that when he did not lie it was simply by accident; but in what he had mentioned to Charley Potts about Geoffrey Ludlow's visits to the nameless female then resident in his, Flexor's, house, he had merely spoken the truth. To be sure there had been an *arrière pensée* in his remark; the fact being that Flexor objected to matrimony as an institute among his patrons. He found that by an artist in a celibate state beer was oftener sent for, donations of cigars were more frequent, cupboards were more constantly unlocked, and irregularities of attendance on his part, consequent on the frivolities of the preceding night, were more easily overlooked than when there was a lady to share confidences and keys, and to regard all models, both male and female, as "horrid creatures." But although Mr. Flexor had spoken somewhat disparagingly of Geoffrey's frequent visits, and had by his hints roused up a certain amount of suspicion in the breasts of Charley Potts and that grim old cynic William Bowker, he was himself far from knowing what real ground for apprehension existed, or how far matters had progressed, at least with one of the parties concerned.

For Geoffrey Ludlow was hard hit! In vain he attempted to argue with himself that all he had done, was doing, and might do, was but prompted by benevolence. A secret voice within him told him that his attempts at self-deceit were of the feeblest, and that, did he but dare to confess it, he knew that there was in this woman whom he had rescued from starvation an attraction more potent than he had ever yet submitted to. It was, it may be said, his duty to call and see how she was getting on, to learn that she wanted for nothing, to hear from her own lips that his orders for her comfort had been obeyed; but it was not his duty to sit watching jealously every glance of her eye, every turn of her head, every motion of her lithe fingers. It was *not* his duty to bear away with him recollections of how she sat when she said this or answered that; of the manner in which, following a habit of hers, she would push back the thick masses of her gleaming hair, and tuck them away behind her pretty ears; or, following another habit, she would drum petulantly on the floor with her little foot when talking of any thing that annoyed her—as, for instance, Mrs. Flexor's prying curiosity.

What was it that caused him to lie awake at night, tossing from side to side on his hot pillow, ever before him the deep-violet eyes, the pallid face set in masses of deep-red hair, the slight, frail figure? What was it that made his heart beat loudly, his breath come thickly, his whole being tingle with a strange sensation—now ecstatic delight, now dull blank misery? Not philanthropy, I trow. The superintendents of boys' reformatories and refuges for the houseless poor may, in thinking over what good they have achieved, enjoy a comfortable amount of self-satisfaction and proper pride; but I doubt if the feeling ever rises to this level of excitement. Not much wonder if Geoffrey himself, suffering acutely under the disease, knew not, or refused to avow to himself any knowledge of the symptoms. Your darling child, peacefully sleeping in his little bed, shall show here and there an angry skin-spot, which you think heat or cold, or any thing else, until the experienced doctor arrives, and with a glance pronounces it scarlet-fever. Let us be thankful in such a case that the prostrate patient is young. Geoffrey's was as dire a malady, and one which, coming on at forty years of age, usually places the sufferer in a perilous state. It was called Love—not the ordinary sober inclination of a middle-aged man, not that thin line of fire quivering among a heap of ashes which betokens the faded passion of the worn and sated voluptuary; this was boy-love, calf-love, mad-spooniness—any thing by which you can express the silliest, wildest, pleasantest, most miserable phase of human existence. It never comes but once to any one. The *caprices* of the voluptuary are as like to each other as peas or grains of sand; the platonic attachments or the sentimental *liaisons* indulged in by foolish persons of both sexes, with nothing to do, may have some slight shade of distinction, but are equally wanting in back-bone and *vis*. Not to man or woman is it given to be ever twice "in love"—a simple phrase, which means every thing, but needs very little explanation. My readers will comprehend what I want to convey, and will not require my feeble efforts in depicting the state. Suffice it to say, that Geoffrey Ludlow, who had hitherto gone through life scot-free, not because he was case-hardened, not

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because he was infection-proof, or that he had run no risks, but simply from the merest chance, now fell a victim to the disease, and dropped powerless before its attack.

He did not even strive to make head against it much. A little of his constitutional wavering and doubtfulness came into play for a short time, suggesting that this passion, for such he must allow it, was decidedly an unworthy one; that at present he knew nothing of the girl's antecedents, and that her actual state did not promise much for all she had to tell of what had gone before. At certain times, too, when things present themselves in their least roseate garb, notably on waking in the morning, for instance, he allowed to himself that he was making a fool of himself; but the confidence extended no farther. And then, as the day grew, and the sun came out, and he touched up his picture and thought of the commissions Mr. Stompff had promised him, he became brighter and more hopeful, and he allowed his thoughts to feast on the figure then awaiting him in Little Flotsam Street, and he put by his sheaf of brushes and his pallet, and went up and examined himself in the glass over the mantle-piece. He had caught himself doing this very frequently within the last few days, and half-chuckling inwardly, had acknowledged that it was a bad sign. But though he laughed, he tweaked out the most prominent gray hairs in his beard, and gave his necktie a more knowing twist, and removed the dabs of stray paint from his shooting-coat. Straws thrown up show which way the wind blows, and even such little sacrifices to vanity as these were in Geoffrey Ludlow very strong signs indeed.

He had paid three visits to Little Flotsam Street; and on the fourth morning, after a very poor pretense of work, he was at the looking-glass settling himself preparatory to again setting out. Ever since that midnight adventure after the Titians meeting Geoffrey had felt it impossible to take his usual daily spell at the easel, had not done five pounds worth of real work in the whole time, had sketched-in and taken out, and pottered, and smoked over his canvas, perfectly conscious that he was doing no good, utterly unable to do any better. On this fourth morning he had been even more unsuccessful than usual; he was highly nervous; he could not even set his pallet properly, and by no manner of means could he apply his thoughts to his work. He had had a bad night; that is, he had woke with a feeling that this kind of penny-journal romance, wherein a man finds a starving girl in the streets and falls desperately in love with her, could go on no longer in London and in the nineteenth century. She was better now, probably strong enough to get about; he would learn her history, so much of it at least as she liked to tell; and putting her in some way of earning an honest livelihood, take his leave of her, and dismiss her from his thoughts.

He arrived at this determination in his studio; he kept it as he walked through the streets; he wavered horribly when he came within sight of the door; and by the time he knocked he had resolved to let matters take their chance, and to act as occasion might suggest. It was not Mrs. Flexor who opened the door to him, but that worthy woman's youngest plague, Reg'las, who, with a brown eruption produced by licorice round his lips, nodded his head, and calmly invited the visitor, as he would have done any one else, to "go up 'tairs." Geoffrey entered, patted the boy's head, and stopped at the parlor-door, at which he gave a low rap, and immediately turning the handle walked in.

She was lying as usual on the sofa immediately opposite the door; but what he had never seen before, her hair was freed from the confining comb, and was hanging in full luxuriance over her shoulders. Great heavens, how beautiful she looked! There had been a certain piquancy and *chic* in her appearance when her hair had been taken saucily off her face and behind her ears; but they were nothing as compared to the profound expression of calm, holy resignation in that dead-white face, set in that deep dead-gold frame of hair. Geoff started when he saw it; was it a Madonna of Raphael's, or a St. Teresa of Guido's, which flashed across his mind? And as he looked she raised her eyes, and a soft rosy flush spread over her face and melted as quickly as it came. He seated himself on a chair by her side as usual, and took her hand as usual, the blood tingling in his fingers as he touched hers—as usual. She was the first to speak.

"You are very early this morning. I scarcely expected you so soon—as you may see;" and with a renewed flush she took up the ends of her hair, and was about to twist them up, when Geoffrey stopped her.

"Leave it as it is," said he, in a low tone; "it could not be better; leave it as it is."

She looked at him as he spoke; not a full straight glance, but through half-closed lids; a prolonged gaze—half-dreamy, half-intense; then released her hair, and let it again fall over her shoulders in a rich red cloud.

"You are much better?"

"Thanks to you, very much; thanks to you!" and her little hand came out frankly, and was speedily swallowed up in his big palm.

"No thanks at all; that is—well, you know. Let us change the subject. I came to say—that—that—"

"You hesitate because you are afraid of hurting my feelings. I think I can understand. I have learned the world—God knows in no easy school; you came to say that I had been long enough a pensioner on your charity, and now must make my own way. Isn't that it?"

"No, indeed; no, that is not entirely what I meant. You see—our meeting—so strange—"

"Strange enough for London and this present day. You found me starving, dying, and you took care of me; and you knew nothing of me—not even my name—not even my appearance."

There was a something harsh and bitter in her tone which Geoffrey had never remarked before. It jarred on his ear; but he did not further notice it. His eyes dropped a little as he said, "No, I didn't; I do not know your name."

She looked up at him from under her eyelids; and the harshness had all faded out of her voice as she said, "My name is Margaret Dacre." She stopped, and looked at him; but his face only wore its grave, honest smile. Then she suddenly raised herself on the sofa, and looking straight into his face, said, hurriedly, "You are a kind man, Mr. Ludlow; a kind, generous, honorable man; there are many men would have given me

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food and shelter—there are very few who would have done it unquestioning, as you have."

"You were my guest, Miss Dacre, and that was enough, though the temptation was strong. How one evidently born and bred a lady could have—"

"Ah, now," said she, smiling faintly, "you are throwing off your bonds, and all man's curiosity is at work."

"No, on my honor; but—I don't know whether you know, but any one acquainted with the world would see that—gad! I scarcely know how to put it—but—fact is, that—people would scarcely understand—you must excuse me, but —but the position, Miss Dacre!" and Geoff pushed his hands through his hair, and knew that his cheeks were flaming.

"I see what you mean," said she, "and you are only explaining what I have for the last day or two felt myself; that the—the position must be altered. But you have so far been my friend, Mr. Ludlow—for I suppose the preserver of one's life is to be looked upon as a friend, at all events as one actuated by friendly motives—that I must ask you to advise me how to support it."

"It would be impossible to advise unless—I mean, unless one knew, or had some idea—what, in fact, one had been accustomed to."

The girl sat up on the sofa, and this time looked him steadily in the face for a minute or so. Then she said, in a calm, unbroken voice, "You are coming to what I knew must arise, to what is always asked, but what I hitherto have always refused to tell. You, however, have a claim to know—what I suppose people would call my history." Her thin lips were tightly pressed and her nostrils curved in scorn as she said these words. Geoffrey marked the change, and spoke out at once, all his usual hesitation succumbing before his earnestness of purpose.

"I have asked nothing," said he; "please to remember that; and further, I wish to hear nothing. You are my guest for so long as it pleases you to remain in that position. When you wish to go you will do so, regretted but certainly unquestioned." If Geoffrey Ludlow ever looked handsome it was at this moment. He was a little nettled at being suspected of patronage, and the annoyance flushed his cheek and fired his eyes.

"Then I am to be a kind of heroine of a German fairy-tale; to appear, to sojourn for a while—then to fade away and never to be heard of ever after, save by the good fortune which I leave behind me to him who had entertained an angel unawares. Not the last part of the story, I fear, Mr. Ludlow; nor indeed any part of it. I have accepted your kindness; I am grateful—God knows how grateful for it; and now, being strong again—you need not raise your eyebrows; I am strong, am I not, compared with the feeble creature you found in the streets?—I will fade away, leaving gratitude and blessings behind me."

"But what do you intend to do?"

"Ah! there you probe me beyond any possibility of reply. I shall—"

"I—I have a notion, Miss Dacre, just come upon me. It was seeing you with your hair down —at least, I think it was—suggested it; but I'm sure it's a good one. To sit, you know, as a model—of course I mean your face, you know, and hair, and all that sort of thing, so much in vogue just now; and so many fellows would be delighted to get studies of you—the pre-Raphaelite fellows, you know; and it isn't much—the pay, you know; but when one gets a connection —and I'm sure that I could recommend—oh, no end of fellows." It was not that this was rather a longer speech than usual that made Geoffrey terminate it abruptly; it was the expression in Margaret Dacre's gray eyes.

"Do you think I could become a model, Mr. Ludlow—at the beck and call of every man who chose to offer me so much per hour? Would you wish to see me thus?" and as she said the last words she knit her brows, leaning forward and looking straight at him under her drooping lids.

Geoffrey's eyes fell before that peculiar glance, and he pushed his hands through his hair in sheer doubtful desperation.

"No!" he said, after a minute's pause; "it wouldn't do. I hadn't thought of that. You see, I—oh, by Jove! another idea! You play? Yes, I knew you did by the look of your hands! and talk French and German, I dare say? Ah, I thought so! Well, you know, I give lessons in some capital families—drawing and water-color sketching—and I'm constantly asked if I know of governesses. Now what's to prevent my recommending you?"

"What, indeed? You have known me so long! You are so thoroughly acquainted with my capabilities—so persuaded of my respectability!"

The curved lips, the petulant nostril, the harsh, bitter voice again! Geoff winced under them. "I think you are a little prejudiced," he began. "A little—"

"A little nothing! Listen, Mr. Ludlow. You have saved me from death, and you are kind enough to wish me, under your auspices, to begin life again. Hear, first, what was my former life. Hear it, and then see the soundness of your well-intentioned plans. My father was an infantry captain, who was killed in the Crimea. After the news came of his death, my mother's friends, wealthy tradespeople, raised a subscription to pay her an annuity of £150, on condition of her never troubling them again. She accepted this, and she and I went to live for cheapness at Tenby in Wales. There was no break in my life until two years since, when I was eighteen years old. Up to that time, school, constant practice at home (for I determined to be well educated), and attendance on my mother, an invalid, formed my life. Then came the usual character—without which the drama of woman's life is incomplete—a man!"

She hesitated for a moment, and looked up as Geoffrey Ludlow leaned forward, breathing thickly through his nostrils; then she continued:

"This one was a soldier, and claimed acquaintance with a dead comrade's widow; had his claim allowed, and came to us morning, noon, and night. A man of the world, they called him; could sit and talk with my mother of her husband's virtues and still-remembered name, and press my hand, and gaze into my eyes, and whisper in my ear whenever her head was turned."

"And you?"

"And I! What would a girl do, brought up at a sleepy watering-place, and seeing nobody

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but the curate or the doctor? I listened to his every word, I believed his every look; and when he said to me, 'On such a night fly with me,' I fled with him without remorse."

Geoffrey Ludlow must have anticipated something of this kind; and yet when he heard it he dropped his head and shook it, as though under the effect of a staggering blow. The action was not unnoticed by Margaret.

"Ah," said she, in low tones and with a sad smile, "I saw how your schemes would melt away before my story."

This time it was his hand that came out and caught hers in its grip.

"Ah, wait until you have heard the end, now very close at hand. The old, old story: a coming marriage, which never came, protracted and deferred now for one excuse, now for another—the fear of friends, the waiting for promotion, the—ah, every note in the whole gamut of lies! And then—"

"Spare yourself and me—I know enough!"

"No; hear it out! It is due to you, it is due to me. A sojourn in Italy, a sojourn in England—gradual coolness, final flight. But such flight! One line to say that he was ruined, and would not drag me down in his degradation—no hope of a future meeting—no provision for present want. I lived for a time by the sale of what he had given me—first jewels, then luxuries, then clothes. And then, just as I dropped into death's jaws, you found me."

"Thank God!" said Geoffrey, earnestly, still retaining the little hand within his own; "thank God! I can hear no more to-day—yes; one thing, his name?"

"His name," said she, with fixed eyes, "I have never mentioned to mortal; but to you I will tell it. His name was Leonard Brookfield."

"Leonard Brookfield," repeated Geoffrey. "I shall not forget it. Now adieu! We shall meet to-morrow."

He bowed over her hand and pressed it to his lips, then was gone; but as his figure passed the window she raised herself upright, and ere he vanished from her sight from between her compressed lips came the words, "At last! at last!"

CHAPTER IX.

SUNSHINE IN THE SHADE.

What is a dull life? In what does the enjoyment of existence consist? It is a comparative matter, after all, I fancy. A Londoner, cantering homeward down the Row, will lift his hat as he passes three horsemen abreast, the middle one of whom, comely, stout, and pleasant-looking, bows in return; or, looking after an olive-colored brougham with a white horse, out of the window of which looms a lined, leery-looking face, will say, "How well Pam holds out!" and will go home to dinner without bestowing another thought on the subject; whereas the mere fact of having seen the Prince of Wales or Lord Palmerston would give a countryman matter for reflection and conversation for a couple of days. There are even Londoners who look upon a performance of chamber-music or a visit to the Polytechnic Institute as an excitement; while in a provincial town to attend a lecture on "Mnemonics" or the dinner of the farmers' club is the acme of dissipation. Some lives are passed in such a whirl that even the occasional advent among their kindred of the great date-maker, Death, is scarcely noticed; others dwindle away with such unvarying pulsations that the purchase of a new bonnet, the lameness of an old horse, the doctor's visit, the curate's cough, are all duly set down as notabilia worthy to be recorded. Who does not recollect the awe and reverence with which one regarded the Bishop of Bosphorus, when, a benevolent seraph in a wig (they wore wigs in those days) and lawn sleeves, he arrived at the parish-church for the confirmation-service? It was exciting to see him; it was almost too much to hear his voice; but now, if you are a member of the Athenæum Club, you may see him and two or three other prelates reading the evening papers, or drinking their pint of sherry with the joint, and speaking to the waiters in voices akin to those of ordinary mortals; may even see him sitting next to Belmont the poet, whose *Twilight Musings* so delighted your youth, but whom you now find to be a fat man with a red face and a tendency to growl if there be not enough schalot sent up with his steak.

If there were ever a man who should have felt the influence of a dull life it was Lord Caterham, who never repined. And yet it would be difficult to imagine any thing more terribly lonely than was that man's existence. Dressed by his servant, his breakfast over, and he wheeled up to his library-table, there was the long day before him; how was he to get through it? Who would come to see him? His father, perhaps, for five minutes, with a talk about the leading topic treated of in the *Times*, a remark about the change in the weather, a hope that his son would "get out into the sunshine," and as speedy a departure as could be decently managed. His mother very rarely, and then only for a frosty peck at his cheek, and a tittered hope that he was better. His brother Lionel, when in town, when not else engaged, when not too seedy after "a night of it"—his brother Lionel, who would throw himself into an easy-chair, and, kicking out his slippered feet, tell Caterham what a "rum fellow" he, Lionel, thought him; what a "close file;" what a "reserved, oyster-like kind of a cove!" Other visitors occasionally. Algy Barford, genial, jolly, and quaint; always welcome for his bright, sunshiny face, his equable temper, his odd, salted remarks on men and things. A bustling apothecary, with telescopic shoulders and twinkling eyelids, who peered down Lord Caterham's throat like a magpie looking into a bone, and who listened to the wheezings of Lord Caterham's chest with as much intentness as a foreigner in the Opera-pit to the prayer in *Der Freischütz*. Two or three lounging youths, fresh from school or college, who were pleased to go away afterward and talk of their having been with him, partly because he was a lord, partly because he was a man whose name was known in town, and one with whom it was rather *kudos* to be thought intimate. There are people who, under such circumstances, would have taken their servants into their confidence; but Lord Caterham was not one of these. Kindly and courteous to all, he yet kept his servant at the greatest distance; and the man knew that to take the slightest lib-

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erty was more than his place was worth. There were no women to talk with this exile from his species; there were none on sufficiently intimate footing to call on him and sit with him, to talk frankly and unreservedly that pleasant chatter which gives us the key-note to their characters; and for this at least Lord and Lady Beauport were unfeignedly thankful. Lord Beauport's knowledge of the world told him that there were women against whom his son's deformity and isolated state would be no defense, to whom his rank and position would be indefinable attractions, by whom he would probably be assailed, and with whom he had no chance of coping. Not bad women, not *intrigantes*—such would have set forth their charms and wasted their dalliances in vain—but clever, heartless girls, brought up by match-making mothers, graduates in the great school of life, skilled in the deft and dexterous use of all aggressive weapons, unscrupulous as to the mode of warfare so long as victory was to be the result. In preventing Lord Caterham from making the acquaintance of any such persons, Lord Beauport took greater pains than he had ever bestowed on any thing in connection with his eldest son; and, aided by the astute generalship of his wife, he had succeeded wonderfully.

Only once did there seem a chance of an enemy's scaling the walls and entering the citadel, and then the case was really serious. It was at an Eton and Harrow match at Lord's that Lord Caterham first saw Carry Chesterton. She came up hanging on the arm of her brother, Con Chesterton, the gentleman farmer, who had the ground outside Homershams, Lady Beauport's family place, and who begged to present his sister to Lord Caterham, of whom she had heard so much. A sallow-faced girl, with deep-black eyes, arched brows, and raven hair in broad bands, with a high forehead, and a chiseled nose, and tight, thin lips, was Carry Chesterton; and as she bent over Lord Caterham's chair and expressed her delight at the introduction, she shot a glance that went through Caterham's eyes, and into his very soul.

"She was a poetess, was Carry, and all that sort of thing," said honest Con; "and had come up to town to try and get some of her writings printed, you know, and that sort of thing; and your lordship's reputation as a man of taste, you know, and that sort of thing; if you'd only look at the stuff and give your opinion, and that sort of thing."

"That sort of thing," *i. e.* the compulsory conversion into a Mecænas, Lord Caterham had had tried on before; but only in the case of moonstruck men, never from such a pair of eyes. Never had he had the request indorsed in such a deep-toned, thrilling voice; and so he acquiesced, and a meeting was arranged for the morrow, when Con was to bring Carry to St. Barnabas Square; and that night Lord Caterham lay in a pleasant state of fevered excitement, thinking of his expected visitor. Carry came next day, but not Con. Con had some arrangements to make about that dreadful yeomanry which took up so much of his time, to see Major Latchford or Lord Spurrier, the colonel, and arrange about their horrid evolutions; but Carry came, and brought her manuscript book of poems. Would she read them? She could, and did, in a deep, low, *trainante* voice, with wonderful art and pathos, illustrating them with elevations of her thick brows and with fervid glances from her black eyes. They were above the average of women's verse; had nothing namby-pamby in them, and were not merely flowing and musical, but strong and fervid; they were full of passion, which was not merely a Byronic *refrain*, but had a warmth and novelty of its own. Lord Caterham was charmed with the verses, was charmed with the writer; he might suggest certain improvements in them, none in her. He pointed out certain lines which might be altered; and as he pointed them out their hands met, touched but for an instant, and on looking up his eyes lost themselves in hers.

Ah, those hand-touches and eye-glances! The oldest worldling has some pleasure in them yet, and can recall the wild ecstatic thrill which ran through him when he first experienced them in his salad-days. But we can conceive nothing of their effect on a man who, under peculiar circumstances, had lived a reserved, self-contained life until five-and-twenty years of age—a man with keen imagination and warm passions, who had "never felt the kiss of love, nor maiden's hand in his," until his whole being glowed and tingled under the fluttering touch of Carry Chesterton's lithe fingers, and in the fiery gaze of her black eyes. She came again and again; and after every visit Lord Caterham's passion increased. She was a clever woman with a purpose, to the fulfillment of which her every word, her every action tended. Softly, delicately, and with the greatest *finesse*, she held up to him the blank dreariness of his life, and showed him how it might be cheered and consoled. In a pitying rather than an accusing spirit, she pointed out the shortcomings of his own relatives, and indicated how, to a person in his position, there could be but one who should be all in all. This was all done with the utmost tact and refinement; a sharp word, an appearance of eagerness, the slightest showing of the cards, and the game would have been spoiled; but Carry Chesterton knew her work, and did it well. She had been duly presented by Lord Caterham to his father and mother, and had duly evoked first their suspicion, then their rage. At first it was thought that by short, resolute measures the evil might be got rid of. So Lord Beauport spoke seriously to his son, and Lady Beauport spoke warningly; but all in vain. For the first time in his life Lord Caterham rebelled, and in his rebellion spoke his mind; and in speaking his mind he poured forth all that bitterness of spirit which had been collecting and fermenting so long. To the crippled man's heart-wrung wail of contempt and neglect, to his passionate appeal for some one to love and to be loved by, the parents had no reply. They knew that he had bitter cause for complaint; but they also knew that he was now in pursuit of a shadow; that he was about to assuage his thirst for love with Dead-Sea apples; that the "set gray life and apathetic end" were better than the wild, fierce conflict and the warming of a viper in the fires of one's heart. Lady Beauport read Carry Chesterton like a book—saw her ends and aims, and told Lord Caterham plainly what they were. "This girl is attracted by your title and position, Caterham—nothing else," she said, in her hard,

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dry voice; "and the natural result has ensued." But that voice had never been softened by any infusion of maternal love. Her opinions had no weight with her son. He made no answer, and the subject dropped.

Lionel Brakespere, duly apprised by his mother of what was going on, and urged to put a stop to it, took his turn at his brother, and spoke with his usual mess-room frankness, and in his usual engaging language. "Every body knew Carry Chesterton," he said; "all the fellows at the Rag knew her—at least all who'd been quartered in the neighborhood of Flockborough, where she was a regular garrison hack, and had been engaged to Spoonbill, of the 18th Hussars, and jilted by Slummer, of the 160 Rifles, and was as well known as the town-clock, by Jove! and Caterham was a flat and a spoon, and he'd be dashed if he'd see the fam'ly degraded; and I say, why the doose didn't Caterham listen to reason!" So far Captain the Honorable Lionel Brakespere; who, utterly failing in his purpose and intent, and having any further access to Lord Caterham's rooms strictly denied him by Lord Caterham's orders, sought out Agly Barford, and confided to him the whole story, and "put him on" to save the fam'ly credit, and stop Caterham's rediklous 'fatuation.

Now if the infatuation in question had been legitimate, and likely to lead to good results, Algy Barford would have been the very last man on earth to attempt to put a stop to it, or to interfere in any way save for its advancement. But this airy, laughing philosopher, with all his apparent carelessness, was a man of the world and a shrewd reader of human character; and he had made certain inquiries, the result of which proved that Carry Chesterton was, if not all that Lionel Brakespere had made her out, at all events a heartless coquette and fortune-huntress, always rising at the largest fly. Quite recently jilted by that charming creature, Captain Slummer, of the Rifles, she had been heard to declare she would not merely retrieve the position hereby lost, but achieve a much greater one; and she had been weak enough to boast of her influence over Lord Caterham, and her determination to marry him in spite of all his family's opposition. Then Algy Barford joined the ranks of the conspirators, and brought his thoroughly practical worldly knowledge to their camp. It was at a council held in Lady Beauport's boudoir that he first spoke on the subject, his face radiant with good humor, his teeth gleaming in the light, and his attention impartially divided between the matter under discussion and the vagaries of a big rough terrier which accompanied him every where.

"You must pardon me, dear Lady Beauport," said he; "but you've all been harking forward on the wrong scent. Down, Tinker! Don't let him jump on your mother, Lionel; his fleas, give you my honor, big as lobsters!—on the wrong scent! Dear old Caterham! best fellow in the world; but frets at the curb, don't you know? Put him a couple of links higher up than usual, and he rides rusty and jibs—jibs, by Jove! And that's what you've been doing now. Dear old Caterham! not much to amuse him in life, don't you know? goes on like a blessed old martyr; but at last finds something which he likes, and you don't. Quite right, dear Lady Beauport; *I* see it fast enough, because I'm an old lad, and have seen men and cities; but dear Caterham, who is all milk, and rusks, and green pease, and every thing that is innocent, don't you know? don't see it at all. And then you try to shake him by the shoulder and rouse him out of his dream, and tell him that he's not in fairy-land, not in Aladdin's palace, not in a two-pair back in Craven Street, Strand. Great mistake that, Lionel, dear boy. Dear Lady Beauport, surely your experience teaches you that it is a great mistake to cross a person when they're in that state?"

"But, Mr. Barford, what is to be done?"

"Put the helm about, Lady Beauport, and—Tinker! you atrocious desperado, you shameless caitiff! will you get down?—put the helm about, and try the other tack. We've failed with dear old Caterham: now let's try the lady. Caterham is the biggest fish she's seen yet; but my notion is that if a perch came in her way, and seemed likely to bite, she'd forget she'd ever seen a gudgeon. Now my brother Windermere came to town last week, and he's an earl, you know, and just the sort of fellow who likes nothing so much as a flirtation, and is all the time thunderingly well able to take care of himself. I think if Miss Chesterton were introduced to Windermere she'd soon drop poor dear Caterham."

Both Lionel and his mother agreed in this notion, and an early opportunity was taken for the presentation of Lord Windermere to Miss Chesterton. An acknowledged *parti;* a man of thews and sinews; frank, generous, and affable: apparently candid and unsuspecting in the highest degree, he seemed the very prize for which that accomplished fortune-huntress had long been waiting; and forgetting the old fable of the shadow and the substance, she at once turned a decided cold shoulder upon poor Lord Caterham, ceased visiting him, showed him no more poetry, and within a week of her making Lord Windermere's acquaintance cut her old friend dead in Kensington Gardens, whither he had been wheeled in the hope of seeing her. Ah, in how few weeks, having discovered the sandy foundation on which she had been building, did she come back, crouching and fawning and trying all the old devices, to find the fire faded out of Caterham's eyes and the hope out of his breast, and the prospect of any love or companionship as distant from him as ever!

Yes, that was Lord Caterham's one experience of love; and after its lame and impotent conclusion he determined he would never have another. We have all of us determined that in our time; but few of us have kept to our resolution so rigidly as did Lord Caterham, possibly because opportunities have not been so wanting to us as to him. It is all that horrible opportunity which saps our strongest resolutions; it is the close proximity of the magnum of "something special" in claret which leads to the big drink; it is the shaded walk, and the setting sun behind the deep bank of purple clouds, and the solemn stillness, and the upturned eyes, and the provoking mouth, which lead to all sorts of horrible mistakes. Opportunity after the Chesterton *escapade* was denied to Lord Caterham both by himself and his parents. He shut himself up in solitude: he would see no one save the apothecary and Algy Barford, who indeed came constantly, feeling all

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the while horribly treacherous and shamefaced. And then by degrees—by that blessed process of Time against which we rail so much, but which is so beneficial, of Time the anodyne and comforter, he fell back into his old ways of life; and all that little storm and commotion was as though it had never been. It left no marks of its fury on Caterham; he kept no relics of its bright burning days: all letters had been destroyed. There was not a glove nor a flower in his drawers—nothing for him to muse and shake his head over. So soon as his passion had spent itself—so soon as he could look calmly upon the doings of the few previous months, he saw how unworthy they had been, and blotted them from his memory forever.

So until Annie Maurice had come to take up her position as his mother's companion Lord Caterham had been entirely without female society, and since her advent he had first learned the advantages of associating with a pure, genuine, healthy woman. Like Carry Chesterton, she seemed to take to the crippled man from her first introduction to him, but ah, how unlike that siren did sweet Annie Maurice show her regard! There was no more romance in her composition, so she would have told you herself, than in the statue at Charing Cross; no eyebrow elevations, no glances, no palpable demonstrations of interest. In quite a household and domestic manner did this good fairy discharge her duties. She was not the Elf, the Wili, the Giselle, in book-muslin and star-sprent hair; she was the ordinary "Brownie," the honest Troll, which shows its presence in help rather than ornament. Ever since Miss Maurice had been an inmate of the house in Barnabas Square Caterham's books had been dusted, his books and papers arranged, his diurnal calendar set, his desk freshened with a glass of newly-gathered flowers. Never before had his personal wants been so readily understood, so deftly attended to. No one smoothed his pillows so softly, wheeled his chair so easily, his every look so quickly comprehended. To all that dreary household Annie Maurice was a sunbeam; but on no one did she shine so brightly as on that darkened spirit. The Earl felt the beaming influence of her bright nature; the Countess could not deny her meed of respect to one who was always "in her place;" the servants, horribly tenacious of interference, could find no fault with Miss Maurice; but to none appeared she in so bright a light as to Lord Caterham.

It was the morning after the receipt of the letter which Algy Barford had left with him, and which had seemingly so much upset him, that Caterham was sitting in his room, his hands clasped idly before him, his looks bent, not on the book lying open on the desk, but on the vacant space beyond it. So delicately constituted was his frame that any mental jar was immediately succeeded by acute bodily suffering; he was hurt not merely in spirit but in body; the machinery of his being was shaken and put out of gear, and it took comparatively some length of time for all to get into working order again. The strain on this occasion had evidently been great; his head throbbed, his eyes were surrounded with bistre rings, and the nervous tension of his clasped fingers showed the unrest of his mind. Then came a gentle tap on the door, a sound apparently instantly recognizable, for Lord Caterham raised his head, and bade the visitor "Come in." It was Annie Maurice. No one else opened the door so quickly and closed it so quietly behind her; no one came with so light and yet so firm a step; no one else would have seen that the sun was pouring in through the window on to the desk, and would have crossed the room and arranged the blind before coming up to the chair. Caterham knew her without raising his eyes, and had said, "Ah, Annie, dear!" before she reached him.

"I feared you were ill, my lord," she began; but a deep growl from Caterham stopped her. "I feared you were ill, Arthur," she then said; "you did not show at dinner last night, nor in the evening; but I thought you might be disinclined for society—the Gervises were here, you know, and the Scrimgeours, and I know you don't care for our classical music, which is invariable on such occasions; but I met Stevens on the staircase, and he gave me such a desponding account that I really feared you were ill."

"Only a passing dull fit, Annie; only a passing dull fit of extra heaviness, and consequently extra duration! Stevens is a croaker, you know; and having, I believe, an odd sort of Newfoundland-dog attachment to me, is frightened if I have a fingerache. But I'm very glad you've come in, Annie, for I'm not really very bright even now, and you always help to set me straight. Well, and how goes it with you, young lady?"

"Oh, very well, Arthur, very well."

"You feel happier than you did on your first coming among us? You feel as though you were settling down into your home?"

"I should be worse than foolish if I did not, for every one tries to be kind to me."

"I did not ask you for moral sentiments, Annie, I asked you for facts. Do you feel settling down into your home?" And as Caterham said this he shot a keen, scrutinizing glance at the girl.

She paused for a moment ere she answered, and when she spoke she looked at him straight out of her big brown eyes.

"Do I feel as if I were settling down into my home, Arthur? No; in all honesty, no. I have no home, as you know well enough; but I feel that—"

"Why no home?" he interrupted; "isn't—No, I understand."

"No, you do not understand; and it is for that reason I speak. You do not understand me, Lord—Arthur. You have notions which I want to combat, and set right at once, please. I know you have, for I've heard hints of them in something you've said before. It all rises out of your gentlemanly and chivalrous feeling, I know; but, believe me, you're wrong. I fill the position of your mother's companion here, and you have fallen into the conventional notion that I'm not well treated, put upon, and all that kind of thing. On my honor, that is utterly wrong. No two people could be kinder, after their lights, than Lord and Lady Beauport are to me. Of your own conduct I need say no word. From the servants I have perfect respect; and yet—"

"And yet?"

"Well, simply you chose the wrong word; there's no homey feeling about it, and I should be false were I to pretend there were."

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"But pardon me for thus pursuing the subject into detail—my interest in you must be my excuse—what 'homey feeling,' as you call it, had you at Ricksborough Vicarage, whence you came to us? The people there are no closer blood-relations than we are; nor did they, as far as I know—"

"Nor did they try more to make me happy. No, indeed! they could not have tried more in that way than you do. But I was much younger when I first went there, Arthur—quite a little child—and had all sorts of childish reminiscences of cow-milking, and hay-making, and harvest-homes, and all kinds of ruralities, with that great balloon-shaped shadow of St. Paul's ever present on the horizon, keeping watch over the City, where dear old Uncle Frank told me I should have to get my living after he was gone. Its home-influence gained on me even from the sorrow which I saw and partook of in it; from the sight of my aunt's death-bed and my uncle's meek resignation overcoming his desperate grief; from the holy comfort inspired in him by the discharge of his holy calling; by the respect and esteem in which he was held by all around, and which was never so much shown as when he wanted it most acutely. These things, among many others, made that place home to me."

"Yes," said Lord Caterham, in a harsh, dry voice; "I understand easily enough. After such innocence and goodness I can fully comprehend what it must be to you to read blue-books to my father, to listen to my mother's *fade* nonsense about balls, operas, and dresses, or to attend to the hypochondriacal fancies of a valetudinarian like myself—"

"Lord Caterham! I don't think that even you have a right to insult me in this way!"

"*Even* I! thank you for the compliment; which implies—Bah! what a brute I am! You'll forgive me, Annie, won't you? I'm horribly hipped and low. I've not been out for two days, and the mere fact of being a prisoner to the house always fills my veins with bile instead of blood. Ah, you won't keep that knit brow and those tightened lips any longer, will you? No one sees more plainly than I do that your life here wants certain—"

"Pray say no more, I—"

"Ah, Annie, for Heaven's sake don't pursue this miserable growl of mine. Have some pity for my ill-health. But I want to see you with as many surroundings natural to your age and taste as we can find in this—hospital. There's music: you play and sing very sweetly; but you can't—I know you can't—sit down with any ease or comfort to that great furniture-van of a grand-piano in that gaunt drawing-room; that's only fit for those long-haired foreigners who let off their fire-works on Lady Beauport's reception-nights. You must have a good piano of your own, in your own room or here, or somewhere where you can practice quietly. I'll see about that. And drawing—for you have a great natural talent for that; but you should have some lessons: you must keep it up; you must have a master. There's a man goes to Lady Lilford's, a capital fellow, whom I know; you must have him. What's his name? Ludlow—"

"What, Geoffrey Ludlow! dear old Geoff! He used to be papa's greatest friend when we were at Willesden, you know—and before that dreadful bankruptcy, you know, Mr. Ludlow was always there. I've sat on his knee a thousand times; and he used to sketch me, and call me his little elf. Oh yes, dear Arthur, I should like that—I should like to have lessons from Mr. Ludlow! I should so like to see him again!"

"Well, Annie, you shall. I'll get his address from the Lilfords, and write to him, and settle about his coming. And now, Annie, leave me, dear; I'm a little tired, and want rest."

He was tired, and wanted rest; but he did not get it just then. Long after Annie left the room he sat pondering, pondering, with a strange feeling for which he himself could not account, but which had its key-note in this: How strongly she spoke of the man Ludlow; how he disliked her earnestness on the subject; and what would he not have given could he have thought she would have spoken so strongly of him.

CHAPTER X.

YOUR WILLIAM.

When you feel yourself gradually becoming enthralled, falling a victim to a fascination all-potent, but scarcely all-satisfactory, be it melancholy, or gambling, or drink, or love, there is nothing so counteracting to the horrible influence as to brace your nerves together, and go in for a grand spell of work. That remedy is always efficacious, of course. It never fails, as Geoffrey Ludlow knew very well; and that was the reason why, on the morning after his last described interview with Margaret Dacre, he dragged out from behind a screen, where it had been turned with its face to the wall, his half-finished picture intended for the Academy, and commenced working on it with wonderful earnestness. It was a large canvas with three principal figures: a young man, a "swell" of modern days, turning away from the bold and eager glances of a somewhat brazen coquette, and suddenly struck by the modest, bashful beauty of a girl of the governess order seated at a piano. "Scylla and Charybdis" Geoff had intended calling it, with the usual *Incidit in*, etc., motto; and when the idea first struck him he had taken pains with his composition, had sketched his figures carefully, and had painted in the flirt and the man very successfully. The governess had as yet been a failure; he had had no ideal to work from; the model who had sat to him was a little coarse and clumsy; and irritated at not being able to carry out his notion, he had put the picture by. But he now felt that work was required of him, not merely as a distraction from thought, but as an absolute duty which he owed to himself; and as this was a subject likely to be appreciated by Mr. Stompff he determined to work at it again, and to have it ready for submission to the Hanging-Committee of the Academy. He boggled over it a little at first; he smoked two pipes, staring at the canvas, occasionally shading his eyes with one hand, and waving the other in a dreamy possessed manner in front of him. Then he took up a brush and began to lay on a bit of color, stepping back from time to time to note the effect; and then the spirit came upon him, and he went to work with all his soul.

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What a gift is that of the painter, whose whole story can be read at one glance, who puts what we require three thick volumes to narrate into a few feet of canvas, who with one touch of his brush gives an expression which we pen-and-ink workers should take pages to convey, and even then could never hope to do it half so happily!—who sees his work grow beneath his hand, and can himself judge of its effect on others; who can sit with his pipe in his mouth and chirp away merrily to his friend, the while his right hand is gaining him wealth and honor and fame!

The spirit was on Geoffrey Ludlow, and the result came out splendidly. He hoped to gain a good place on the Academy walls; he hoped to do justice to the commissions which Mr. Stompff had given him; but there was something beyond these two incentives which spurred his industry and nerved his touch. After all his previous failures, it seemed as though Scylla the governess would have the best of it at last. Charybdis was a splendid creature, a bold, black-eyed, raven-haired charmer, with her hair falling in thick masses over her shoulders, and with a gorgeous passion-flower hanging voluptuously among her tresses; a goddess among big Guardsmen, who would sit and suck their yellow mustaches and express their admiration in fragmentary ejaculations, or among youths from the Universities, with fluff instead of hair, and blushes in place of *aplomb*. But in his later work the artist's heart seemed to have gone with Scylla, who was to her rival as is a proof after Sir Joshua to a French print, as a glass of Amontillado to a *petit verre* of Chartreuse—a slight, delicate creature, with violet eyes and pallid complexion, and deep-red hair brought down in thick braids, and tucked away behind such dainty little ears; her modest gray dress contrasting, in its quaker-like simplicity, with the brilliant-hued robe and rich laces of her rival. His morning's work must have been successful, for—rare thing with him—Geoff himself was pleased with it. No doubt of the inspiration now; he tried to deny it to himself, but could not—the likeness came out so wonderfully. So he gave way to the charm; and as he sat before the canvas, thoughtfully gazing at it, he let his imagination run riot, and gave his pleasant memories full play.

He had worked well and manfully, and had tolerably satisfied himself, and was sitting resting, looking at what he had done, and thinking over what had prompted his work, when there came a tap at the door, and his sister Til crept noiselessly in. She entered softly, as was her wont when her brother was engaged, and took up her position behind him. But Miss Til was demonstrative by nature, and after a minute's glance could not contain herself.

"Oh, you dear old Geoff, that is charming! Oh, Geoff, how you have got on! But I say, Geoff, the governess—what do you call her? I never can recollect those Latin names, or Greek is it?—you know, and it does not matter; but she is—you know, Geoff, I know you don't like me to say so, but I can't find any other word—she is stunning! Not that I think—I don't know, you know, of course, because we don't mix in that sort of society—not that—that I think that people who—well, I declare, I don't know any other word for them!—I mean swells—would allow their governess to have her hair done in that style; but she is de-licious! You've got a new model, Geoff—at least you've never attempted any thing in that style before; and I declare you've made a regular hit. You don't speak, Geoff; don't you like what I'm saying?"

"My dear child, you don't give me the chance of saying any thing. You rattle on with 'I know' and 'you know' and 'don't you know,' till I can scarcely tell where I am. One thing I do manage to glean, however, and that is that you are pleased with the picture, which is the very best news that I could have. For though you're a most horrible little rattletrap, and talk nineteen to the dozen, there is some sense in what you say, and always a great deal of truth."

"Specially when what I say is complimentary, eh, Geoff? Not that I think I have ever said much in any other strain to you. But you haven't told me about your new model, Geoff. Where did she come from?"

"My new model?"

"Yes, yes, for the governess, you know. That's new—I mean that hair and eyes, and all that. You've never painted any thing like that before. Where did she come from?"

There were few things that Geoffrey Ludlow would have kept from his sister, but this was one of them; so he merely said:

"Oh, a model, Til, dear—one of the usual shilling-an-hour victims."

"Sent you by Mr. Charles Potts, I suppose," said Miss Till, with unusual asperity; "sent you for—" But here a knock at the door cut short the young lady's remarks. "Oh, but if that is Mr. Potts," she resumed, "don't say a word about what I said just now; don't, Geoff, there's a dear."

It was not Mr. Potts who responded to Geoffrey Ludlow's "Come in." It was Mr. Bowker's head which was thrust through the small space made by the opening of the door; and it was Mr. Bowker's deep voice which exclaimed:

"Engaged, eh? Your William will look in again."

But Til, with whom Mr. Bowker was a special favorite, from his strange unconventional manners and rough *bonhomie*, called out at once: "Mr. Bowker, it's only I—Geoff's sister Til;" and Geoff himself roaring out that "Bowker was growing modest in his old age," that gentleman was persuaded to come in; and closing the door lightly behind him he went up to the young lady, and bending over her hand made her a bow such as any *preux chevalier* might have envied. A meeting with a lady was a rare oasis in the desert of William Bowker's wasted life; but whenever he had the chance he showed that he had been something more than the mere pot-walloping boon-companion which most men thought him.

"Geoff's sister Til!" he repeated, looking at the tall, handsome girl before him—"Geoff's sister Til! Ah, then it's perfectly right that I should have lost all my hair, and that my beard should be grizzled, and that I have a general notion of the omnipresence of old age. I was inclined to grumble; but if 'Geoff's sister Til,' who I thought was still a little child, is to come up and greet me in this guise, I recant: Time is right; and your William is the only old fool in the matter."

"It is your own fault, Mr. Bowker, that you

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don't know the changes that take place in us. You know we are always glad to see you, and that mamma is always sending you messages by Geoff."

"You are all very good, and—well, I suppose it is my fault; let's say it is, at all events. What! going? There, you see the effect my presence has when I come upon a chance visit."

"Not at all," said Til; "I should have gone five minutes ago if you had not come in. I'll make a confidant of you, Mr. Bowker, and let you into a secret. Those perpetual irritable pulls at the bell are the tradespeople waiting for orders, and I must go and settle about dinner and all sorts of things. Now good-by." She shook hands with him, nodded brightly at her brother, and was gone.

"That's a nice girl," said William Bowker, as the door closed after her; "a regular nice girl—modest, lady-like, and true; none of your infernal fal-lal affectations—honest as the day; you can see that in her eyes and in every word she says. Where do you keep your tobacco? All right. Your pipes want looking after, Geoff. I've tried three, and each is as foul as a chimney. Ah, this will do at last; now I'm all right, and can look at your work. H—m! that seems good stuff. You must tone-down that back-ground a little, and put a touch of light here and there on the dress, which is infernally heavy and Hamlet-like. Halloo, Geoff, are you going in for the P.-R.-B. business?"

"Not I. What do you mean?"

"What do *you* mean by this red-haired party, my boy? This is a new style for you, Geoff, and one which no one would have thought of your taking up. You weren't brought up to consider this the right style of thing in old Sassoon's academy, Geoff. If the old boy could rise from his grave, and see his favorite pupil painting a frizzy, red-haired, sallow-faced woman as the realization of beauty, I think he'd be glad he'd been called away before such awful times."

There was a hesitation in Geoff's voice and a hollowness in his smile as he answered:

"P.-R.-B. nonsense! Old Sassoon couldn't teach every thing; and as for his ideas of beauty, look how often he made us paint Mrs. S. and the Miss S.'s, who, Heaven knows, were any thing but reproductions of the Venus Calipyge. The simple question, as I take it, is this—is the thing a good thing or a bad one? Tell me that."

"As a work of art?"

"Of course; as you see it. What else could I mean?"

"As a work of art, it's good—undeniably good, in tone, and treatment, and conception; as a work of prudence, it's infernally bad."

Geoff looked at him sharply for a minute, and William Bowker, calmly puffing at his pipe, did not shrink from his friend's glance. Then, with a flush, Geoff said:

"It strikes me that it is as a work of art you have to regard it. As to what you say about a work of prudence, you have the advantage of me. I don't understand you."

"Don't you?" said William. "I'm sorry for you. What model did you paint that head from?"

"From no model."

"From life?"

"N-no; from memory—from— Upon my soul, Bowker, I don't see what right you have to cross-question me in this way."

"Don't you?" said Bowker. "Give your William something to drink, please; he can't talk when he's dry. What is that? B. and soda. Yes, that'll do. Look here, Geoffrey Ludlow, when you were little more than a boy, grinding away in the Life-School, and only too pleased if the visitor gave you an encouraging word, your William, who is ten years your senior, had done work which made him be looked upon as the coming man. He had the ball at his foot, and he had merely to kick it to send it where he chose. He does not say this out of brag—you know it?"

Geoffrey Ludlow inclined his head in acquiescence.

"Your William didn't kick the ball; something interfered just as his foot was lifted to send it flying to the goal—a woman."

Again Geoffrey Ludlow nodded in acquiescence.

"You've heard the story. Every body in town knew it, and each had his peculiar version; but I will tell you the whole truth myself. You don't know how I struggled on against that infatuation; no, you may think you do, but I am a much stronger man than you—am, or was—and I saw what I was losing by giving way. I gave way. I knocked down the whole fabric which, from the time I had had a man's thoughts, a man's mind, a man's energy and power, I had striven to raise. I kicked it all down, as Alnaschar did his basket of eggs, and almost as soon found how vain had been my castle-building. I need scarcely go into detail with you about that story: it was published in the Sunday newspapers of the time; it echoed in every club-room; it has remained lingering about art-circles, and in them is doubtless told with great gusto at the present day should ever my name be mentioned. I fell in love with a woman who was married to a man of more than double her age; a woman of education, taste, and refinement; of singular beauty, too—and that to a young artist was not her least charm—tied for life to an old, heartless scoundrel. My passion for her sprung from the day of my first seeing her; but I choked it down. I saw as plainly as I see this glass before me now what would be the consequence of any absurd escapade on my part; how it would crush me, how, infinitely more, it would drag *her* down. I knew what was working in each of us; and, so help me Heaven! I tried to spare us both. I tried—and failed, dismally enough. It was for no want of arguing with myself—from no want of forethought of all the consequences that might ensue. I looked at all point-blank; for though I was young and mad with passion, I loved that woman so that I could even have crushed my own selfishness lest it should be harm to her. I could have done this: I did it until—until one night I saw a blue, livid mark on her shoulder. God knows how many years that is ago, but I have the whole scene before me at this moment. It was at some fine ball (I went into what is called 'society' then), and we were standing in a conservatory when I noticed this mark. I asked her about it, and she hesitated; I taxed her with the truth, which she first feebly denied, then admitted. He had struck her, the hound! in a fit of jealous rage—had struck her with his clench-

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ed fist! Even as she told me this I could see him within a few yards of us, pretending to be rapt in conversation, but obviously noting our conduct. I suppose he guessed that she had told me of what had occurred. I suppose he guessed it from my manner and the expression of my face, for a deadly pallor came over his grinning cheeks; and as we passed out of the conservatory he whispered to her—not so low but that I caught the words—'You shall pay for this, madam—you shall pay for this!' That determined me, and that night we fled. Give me some more brandy and soda, Geoff. Merely to tell this story drags the heart out of my breast."

Geoff pushed the bottle over to his friend, and after a gulp Bowker proceeded:

"We went to Spain, and remained there many months; and there it was all very well. That slumbering country is even now but little haunted by your infernal British tourist; but then scarcely any Englishman came there. Such as we came across were all bachelors, your fine lady can't stand the mule-traveling and the roughing it in the posadas; and they either had not heard the story or didn't see the propriety of standing on any squeamishness, more especially when the acquaintance was all to their advantage, and we got on capitally. Nelly had seen nothing, poor child, having left school to be married; and all the travel, and the picturesque old towns, and the peasantry, and the Alhambra, and all the rest of it, made a sort of romantic dream for her. But then old Van den Bosch got his divorce; and so soon as I had heard of that, like a madman as I was, I determined to come back to England. The money was running short, to be sure; but I had made no end of sketches, and I might have sent them over and sold them; but I wanted to get back. A man can't live on love alone; and I wanted to be among my old set again, for the old gossip and the old *camaraderie;* and so back we came. I took a little place out at Ealing, and then I went into the old haunts and saw the old fellows, and—for the first time—so help me Heaven! for the first time I saw what I had done. They cut me, Sir, right and left! There were some of them—blackguards who would have hobnobbed with Greenacre if he'd stood the drink—who accepted my invitations, and came Sunday after Sunday, and would have eaten and drunk me out of house and home if I'd have stood it; but the best—the fellows I really cared about—pretty generally gave me the cold shoulder. Some of them had married during my absence, and of course they couldn't come; others were making their way in their art, working under the patronage of big swells in the Academy, and hoping for election there, and they daren't be mixed up with such a notoriously black sheep as your William. I felt this, Geoff, old boy. By George! it cut me to the heart; it took all the change out of me; it made me low and hipped, and, I fear, sometimes savage. And I suppose I showed it at home; for poor Nell seemed to change and wither from the day of our return. She had her own troubles, poor darling, though she thought she kept them to herself. In a case like that, Geoff, the women get it much hotter than we do. There were no friends for her, no one to whom she could tell her troubles. And then the story got known, and people used to stare and nudge each other, and whisper as she passed. The parson called when we first came, and was a good pleasant fellow; but a fortnight afterward he'd heard all about it, and grew purple in the face as he looked straight over our heads when we met him. And once a butcher, who had to be spoken to for cheating, cheeked her and alluded to her story; but I think what I did to him prevented any repetition of that kind of conduct. But I couldn't silence the whole world by thrashing it, old fellow; and Nell drooped and withered under all the misery—drooped and—died! And I—well, I became the graceless, purposeless, spiritless brute you see me now!"

Mr. Bowker stopped and rubbed the back of his hand across his eyes, and gave a great cough before finishing his drink; and then Geoffrey patted him on the shoulder and said, "But you know how we all love you, old friend; how that Charley Potts, and I, and Markham, and Wallis, and all the fellows, would do any thing for you."

Mr. Bowker gave his friend's hand a tight grip as he said, "I know, Geoff; I know you boys are fond of your William; but it wasn't to parade my grief or to cadge for sympathy from them that I told you that story. I had another motive."

"And that was—"

"To set myself up as an example and a warning to—any one who might be going to take a similar step. You named yourself just now, Geoff, among those who cared for me. Your William is a bit of a fogy, he knows; but some of you do care for him, and you among them."

"Of course. You know that well enough."

"Then why not show your regard for your William, dear boy?"

"Show my regard—how shall I show it?"

"By confiding in him, Geoff; by talking to him about yourself; telling him your hopes and plans; asking him for some of that advice which seeing a great many men and cities, and being a remarkably downy old skittle, qualifies him to give. Why not confide in him, Geoff?"

"Confide in you? About what? Why on earth not speak out plainly at once?"

"Well, well, I won't beat about the bush any longer. I dare say there's nothing in it; but people talk and cackle so confoundedly, and, by George! men—some men, at least—are quite as bad as women in that line; and they say you're in love, Geoff; regularly hard hit—no chance of recovery!"

"Do they?" said Geoff, flushing very red—"do they? Who are 'they,' by the way?—not that it matters, a pack of gabbling fools! But suppose I am—what then?"

"What then! Why, nothing then—only it's rather odd that you've never told your William, whom you've known so long and so intimately, any thing about it. Is that" (pointing to the picture) "a portrait of the lady?"

"There—there is a reminiscence of her—her head and general style."

"Then your William would think that her head and general style must be doosid good. Any sisters?"

"I—I think not."

"Are her people pleasant—do you get on with them?"

"I don't know them."

"Ah, Geoff, Geoff, why make me go on in

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this way? Don't you know me well enough to be certain that I'm not asking all these questions for impertinence and idle curiosity? Don't you see that I am dragging bit by bit out of you because I'm coming to the only point any of your friends can care about? Is this girl a good girl? is she respectable? is she in your own sphere of life? can you bring her home and tell the old lady to throw her arms round her neck and welcome her as a daughter? Can you introduce her to that sweet sister of yours who was here when I came in?"

There came over Geoffrey Ludlow's face a dark shadow, such as William Bowker had never seen there before. He did not speak nor turn his eyes, but sat fixed and rigid as a statue.

"For God's sake think of all this, Geoff! I've told you a thousand times that you ought to be married; that there was no man more calculated to make a woman happy, or to have his own happiness increased by a woman's love. But then she must be of your own degree in life, and one of whom you could be every where proud. I would not have you married to an ugly woman, or a drabby woman, or any thing that wasn't very nice; how much less, then, to any one whom you would feel ashamed of, or who could not be received by your dear ones at home! Geoff, dear old Geoff, for heaven's sake think of all this before it is too late! Take warning by my fatal error, and see what misery you would prepare for both of you."

Geoffrey Ludlow still sat in the same attitude. He made no reply for some minutes; then he said, dreamily, "Yes—yes, you're quite right, of course—quite right. But I don't think we'll continue the conversation now. Another time, Bowker, please—another time." Then he ceased, and Mr. Bowker rose and pressed his hand, and took his departure. As he closed the door behind him that worthy said to himself: "Well, I've done my duty, and I know I've done right; but it's very little of Geoff's mutton that your William will cut, and very little of Geoff's wine that your William will drink, if that marriage comes off. For of course he'll tell her all I've said, and *won't* she love your William!"

And for hours Geoffrey Ludlow sat before his easel, gazing at the Scylla head, and revolving all the detail of Mr. Bowker's story in his mind.

CHAPTER XI.

PLAYING THE FISH.

When did the giver of good, sound, unpalatable, wholesome advice ever receive his due? Who does not possess, among the multitude of acquaintances, a friend who says, "Such and such are my difficulties: I come to you because I want advice;" and who, after having heard all that, after a long struggle with yourself, you bring yourself to say, wrings your hand, goes away thinking what an impertinent idiot you are, and does exactly the opposite of all you have suggested? All men, even the most self-opinionated and practical, are eager for advice. None, even the most hesitating and diffident, take it unless it agrees with their own preconceived ideas. There are, of course, exceptions by which this rule is proved; but there are two subjects on which no man was ever yet known to take advice, and they are horses and women. Depreciate your friend's purchase as delicately as Agag came unto Saul; give every possible encomium to make and shape and breeding; but hint, *per contra*, that the animal is scarcely up to his weight, or that that cramped action looks like a possible blunder; suggest that a little more slope in the shoulder, a little less cowiness in the general build, might be desirable for riding purposes, and your friend will smile, and shake his head, and canter away, convinced of the utter shallowness of your equine knowledge. In the other matter it is much worse. You must be very much indeed a man's friend if you can venture to hint to him, even after his iterated requests for your honest, candid opinion, that the lady of his love is any thing but what he thinks her. And though you iterate and reiterate, moralize as shrewdly as Ecclesiasticus, bring chapter and verse to support your text, he must be more or less than a man, and cast in very different clay from that of which we poor ordinary mortals are composed, if he accepts one of your arguments or gives way one atom before your elucidations.

Did William Bowker's forlorn story, commingled with his earnest passionate appeal, weigh one scruple with Geoffrey Ludlow? Not one. Geoff was taken aback by the story. There was a grand human interest in that laying bare before him of a man's heart and of two persons' wasted lives, which aroused his interest and his sympathy, made him ponder over what might have been had the principal actors in the drama been kept asunder, and sent him into a fine, drowsy state of metaphysical dubiety. But while Bowker was pointing his moral, Geoff was merely turning over the various salient points which had adorned his tale.

He certainly heard Bowker drawing a parallel between his own unhappy passion and Geoff's regard for the original owner of that "Scylla head;" but as the eminent speaker was arguing on hypothetical facts, and drawing deductions from things of which he knew absolutely nothing, too much reliance was not to be placed on his arguments. In Bowker's case there had been a public scandal, a certain betrayal of trust, which was the worst feature in the whole affair, a trial and an *exposé*, and a denunciation of the—well, the world used hard words—the seducer; which—though Bowker was the best fellow in the world, and had obviously a dreadful time of it—which was only according to English custom. Now in his own case, Margaret (he had already accustomed himself to think of her as Margaret) had been victimized by a scoundrel, and the blame—for he supposed blame would, at least in the minds of very strait-laced people, attach to her—was mitigated by the facts. Besides—and here was his great thought—nothing would be known of her former history. Her life, so far as any one in his set could possibly know any thing about it, began on the night when he and Charley Potts found her in the street. She was destitute and starving, granted; but there was nothing criminal in destitution and starvation, which indeed would, in the eyes of a great many weak and good-natured (the terms are synonymous) persons, bind a kind of romance to the story. And as to all that had gone before, what of that? How was any thing of that love ever to become

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known? This Leonard Brookfield, an army swell, a man who, under any circumstances, was never likely to come across them, or to be mixed up in Geoff's artist-circle, had vanished, and with him vanished the whole dark part of the story. Vanished for ever and aye! Margaret's life would begin to date from the time when she became his wife, when he brought her home to—Ah, by-the-way, what was that Bowker said about her worthiness to associate with his mother and sister? Why not? He would tell them all about it. They were good women, who fully appreciated the grand doctrine of forgiveness; and yet—He hesitated; he knew his mother to be a most excellent church-going woman, bearing her "cross" womanfully, not to say rather flaunting it than otherwise; but he doubted whether she would appreciate an introduction to a Magdalen, however penitent. To subscribe to a charity for "those poor creatures;" to talk pleasantly and condescendingly to them, and to leave them a tract on visiting a "Home" or a "Refuge," is one thing; to take them to your heart as daughters-in-law is another. And his sister! Well, young girls didn't understand this kind of thing, and would put a false construction on it, and were always chattering, and a great deal of harm might be done by Til's want of reticence; and so, perhaps, the best thing to be done was to hold his tongue, decline to answer any questions about former life, and leave matters to take their course. He had already arrived at that state of mind that he felt, if any disagreements arose, he was perfectly ready to leave mother and sister, and cleave to his wife—that was to be.

So Geoffrey Ludlow, tossing like a reed upon the waters, but ever, like the same reed, drifting with the resistless current of his will, made up his mind; and all the sage experience of William Bowker, illustrated by the story of his life, failed in altering his determination. It is questionable whether a younger man might not have been swayed by or frightened at the counsel given to him. Youth is impressible in all ways; and however people may talk of the headstrong passion of youth, it is clear that—nowadays at least—there is a certain amount of selfish forethought mingled with the heat and fervor; that love, like the measles, though innocuous in youth, is very dangerous when taken in middle life; and Geoffrey Ludlow was as weak and withal as stubborn an im-patient as ever caught the disease.

And yet?—and yet?—was the chain so strong, were the links already so well riveted, as to defy every effort to break them? Or, in truth, was it that the effort was wanting? An infatuation for a woman had been painted in very black shadows by William Bowker; but it was a great question to Geoff whether there was not infinite pleasure in the mere fact of being infatuated. Since he had seen Margaret Dacre—at all events, since he had been fascinated by her—not merely was he a different man so far as she was concerned, but all life was to him a different and infinitely more pleasurable thing. That strange doubting and hesitation which had been his bane through life seemed, if not to have entirely vanished, at all events to be greatly modified; and he had recently, in one or two matters, shown a decision which had astonished the members of his little household. He felt that he had at last—what he had wanted all through his life—a purpose; he felt that there was something for him to live for; that by his love he had learned something that he had never known before; that his soul was opened, and the whole aspect of nature intensified and beautified; that he might have said with Maud's lover in that exquisite poem of the Laureate's, which so few really appreciate—

> "It seems that I am happy, that to me
> A livelier emerald twinkles in the grass,
> A purer sapphire melts into the sea."

Then he sat down at his easel again, and worked away at the Scylla head, which came out grandly, and soon grew all aglow with Margaret Dacre's peculiar expression; and then, after contemplating it long and lovingly, the desire to see the original came madly upon him, and he threw down his pallet and brushes and went out.

He walked straight to Mrs. Flexor's, and, on his knocking, the door was opened to him by that worthy dame, who announced to him, with awful solemnity, that he'd "find a change up stairs."

"A change!" cried Geoff, his heart thumping audibly, and his cheek blanched—"a change!"

"Oh, nothin' serious, Mr. Ludlows; but she have been a worritin' herself, poor lamb, and a cryin' her very eyes out. But what it is I can't make out, though statin' put your trust in one where trust is doo, continual."

"I don't follow you yet, Mrs. Flexor. Your lodger has been in low spirits—is that it?"

"Sperrits isn't the name for it, Mr. Ludlows, when downer than dumps is what one would express. As queer as Dick's hat-band have she been ever since you went away yesterday; and I says to her at tea last evening—"

"I can see her, I suppose?"

"Of course you can, Sir; which all I was doing was to prepare you for the—" But here Mrs. Flexor, who had apparently taken something stronger than usual with her dinner, broke down and became inarticulate.

Geoffrey pushed past her, and, knocking at the parlor-door, entered at once. He found Margaret standing, with her arms on the mantle-shelf, surveying herself in the wretched little scrap of looking-glass which adorned the wall. Her hair was arranged in two large full bands, her eyes were swollen, and her face was blurred and marked by tears. She did not turn round at the opening of the door, nor, indeed, until she had raised her head and seen in the glass Geoff's reflection; even then she moved languidly, as though in pain, and her hand, when she placed it in his, was dry with burning heat.

"That chattering idiot down stairs was right after all," said Geoff, looking alarmedly at her. "You are ill?"

"No," she said, with a faint smile; "not ill—at all events not now. I have been rather weak and silly; but I did not expect you yet. I intended to remove all traces of such folly by the time you came. It was fit I should, as I want to talk to you most seriously and soberly."

"Do we not always talk so? did we not the last time I was here—yesterday?"

"Well, generally, perhaps; but not the last time—not yesterday. If I could have thought so, I should have spared myself a night of agony and a morning of remorse."

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Geoff's face grew clouded.

"I am sorry for your agony, but much more sorry for your remorse, Miss Dacre," said he.

"Ah, Mr. Ludlow!" cried Margaret, passionately, "don't *you* be angry with me; don't *you* speak to me harshly, or I shall give way altogether! Oh! I watched every change of your face, and I saw what you thought at once; but indeed, indeed, it is not so. My remorse is not for having told you all that I did yesterday; for what else could I do to you who had been to me what you had? My remorse was for what I had done, not for what I had said—for the wretched folly which prompted me to yield to a wheedling tongue, and so ruin myself forever."

Her tears burst forth again as she said this, and she stamped her foot upon the ground.

"Ruin you forever, Margaret!" said Geoffrey, stealing his arm round her waist as she still stood by the mantle-shelf; "Oh no, not ruin you, dearest Margaret—"

"Ah, Mr. Ludlow!" she interrupted, neither withdrawing from nor yielding to his arm, "have I not reason to say ruin? Can I fail to see that you have taken an interest in me which—which—"

"Which nothing you have told me can alter—which I shall preserve, please God," said Geoff, in all simplicity and sincerity, "to the end of my life."

She looked at him as he said these words with a fixed regard, half of wonder, half of real, unfeigned, earnest admiration.

"I—I'm a very bad hand at talking, Margaret, and know I ought to say a great deal for which I can't find words. You see," he continued, with a grave smile, "I'm not a young man now, and I suppose one finds it more difficult to express one's self about—about such matters. But I'm going to ask you—to—to share my lot—to be my wife!"

Her heart gave one great bound within her breast, and her face was paler than ever, as she said:

"Your wife! your wife! Do you know what you are saying, Mr. Ludlow? or is it I who, as the worldling, must point out to you—"

"I know all," said Geoffrey, raising his hand deprecatingly; but she would not be silenced.

"I must point out to you what you would bring upon yourself—what you would have to endure. The story of my life is known to you, and to you alone: not another living soul has ever heard it. My mother died while I was in Italy; and of—the other person—nothing has ever been heard since his flight. So far, then, I do not fear that my—my shame—we will use the accepted term—would be flung in your teeth, or that you would be made to wince under any thing that might be said about me. But you would know the facts yourself; you could not hide them from your own heart; they would be ever present to you; and in introducing me to your friends, your relatives, if you have any, you would feel that—"

"I don't think we need go into that, Margaret. I see how right and how honorable are your motives for saying all this; but I have thought it over, and do not attach one grain of importance to it. If you say 'yes' to me, we shall live for ourselves, and with a very few friends who will appreciate us for ourselves. Ah! I was going to say that to you. I'm not rich, Margaret, and your life would, I'm afraid, be dull. A small income and a small house, and—"

"It would be my home, and I should have you;" and for the first time during the interview she gave him one of her long dreamy looks out of her half-shut eyes.

"Then you will say 'yes,' dearest?" asked Geoff, passionately.

"Ah! how can I refuse! How can I deny myself such happiness as you hold out to me after the misery I have gone through!"

"Ah! darling, you shall forget that—"

"But you must not act rashly—must not do in a moment what you would repent your life long. Take a week for consideration. Go over every thing in your mind, and then come back to me and tell me the result."

"I know it now. Oh! don't hesitate, Margaret; don't let me wait the horrid week!"

"It is right, and so we will do it. It will be more tedious to me than to you, my—my Geoffrey."

Ah! how caressingly she spoke, and what a look of love and passion glowed in her deep-violet eyes!

"And I am not to see you during this week?"

"No: you shall be free from whatever little influence my presence may possess. You shall go now. Good-by."

"God bless you, my darling!" He bent down and kissed her upturned mouth, then was gone. She looked after him wistfully; then after some time said softly to herself, "I did not believe there lived so good a man."

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER THE HARROW.

Mr. Bowker was not the only one of Geoffrey Ludlow's friends to whom that gentleman's intentions toward the lodger at Flexor's occasioned much troubled thought. Charley Potts regarded his friend's intimacy in that quarter with any thing but satisfaction; and an enormous amount of bird's-eye tobacco was consumed by that rising young artist in solemn cogitation over what was best to be done in the matter. For though Geoffrey had reposed no confidence in his friend, and, indeed, had never called upon him, and abstained as much as possible from meeting him since the night of the adventure outside the Titian Sketching-Club, yet Mr. Potts was pretty accurately informed of the state of affairs through the medium of Mr. Flexor, then perpetually sitting for the final touches to Gil Blas; and having a tolerable acquaintance with human nature—or being, as he metaphorically expressed it, "able to reckon how many blue beans made five"—Mr. Potts was enabled to arrive at a pretty accurate idea of how affairs stood in Little Flotsam Street. And affairs, as they existed in Little Flotsam Street, were by no means satisfactory to Mr. Charles Potts. Had it been a year ago, he would have cared but little about it. A man of the world, accustomed to take things as they were, without the remotest idea of ever setting himself up to correct abuses or protest against a habitude of being not strictly

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in accordance with the views of the most strait-laced, Charley Potts had floated down the stream of life, objecting to nothing, objected to by none. There were fifty ladies of his acquaintance, passing as the wives of fifty men of his acquaintance, pleasant, genial creatures, capital punch-mixers —women in whose presence you might wear your hat, smoke, talk slang, chaff and sing; women who knew all the art-gossip, and entered into it; whom one could take to the Derby, or who would be delighted with a cheap-veal-and-ham-pie, beer-in-a-stone-jar, and bottle-of-hot-sherry picnic in Bushey Park—the copy of whose marriage-licenses Charley never expected to see. It was nothing to him, he used to say. It might or it might not be; but he didn't think that Joe's punch would be any the stronger, or Tom's weeds any the better, or Bill's barytone voice one atom more tuneful and chirpy, if the Archbishop of Canterbury had given out the bans and performed the ceremony for the lot. There was in it, he thought, a glorious phase of the *vie de Bohême*, a scorn of the respectable conventionalities of society, a freedom of thought and action possessing a peculiar charm of their own; and he looked upon the persons who married and settled, and paid taxes and tradesmen's bills, and had children, and went to bed before morning, and didn't smoke clay pipes and sit in their shirt-sleeves, with that softened pity with which the man bound for Epsom Downs regards the City-clerk going to business on the Clapham omnibus.

But within the last few months Mr. Potts's ideas had very considerably changed. It was not because he had attained the venerable age of thirty, though he was at first inclined to ascribe the alteration to that; it was not that his appetite for fun and pleasure had lost any of its keenness, nor that he had become "awakened," or "enlightened," or subjected to any of the preposterous revival influences of the day. It was simply that he had, in the course of his intimacy with Geoffrey Ludlow, seen a great deal of Geoffrey Ludlow's sister Til; and that the result of his acquaintance with that young lady was the entire change of his ideas on various most important points. It was astonishing, its effect on him: how, after an evening at Mrs. Ludlow's tea-table—presided over, of course, by Miss Til—Charley Potts, going somewhere out to supper among his old set, suddenly had his eyes opened to Louie's blackened eyelids and Bella's painted cheeks; how Georgie's *h*-slips smote with tenfold horror on his ear, and Carry's cigarette-smoking made him wince with disgust. He had seen all these things before, and rather liked them; it was the contrast that induced the new feeling. Ah, those preachers and pedants—well-meaning, right-thinking men—how utterly futile are the means which they use for compassing their ends! In these skeptical times their pulpit denunciations, their frightful stories of wrath to come, are received with polite shoulder-shrugs and grins of incredulity; their two-pence colored pictures of the Scarlet Woman, their time-worn renderings of the street-wanderer, are sneered at as utterly fictitious and untrue; and meanwhile detached villas in St. John's Wood, and first-floors in quiet Pimlico streets, command the most preposterous rents. Young men will, of course, be young men; but the period of young-man-ism in that sense narrows and contracts every year. The ranks of her Scarlet Ladyship's army are now filled with very young boys who do not know any better, or elderly men who can not get into the new groove, and who still think that to be gentlemanly it is necessary to be immoral. Those writers who complain of the "leveling" tone of society, and the "fast" manners of our young ladies, scarcely reflect upon the improved morality of the age. Our girls—all the outcry about fastness and selling themselves for money notwithstanding—are as good and as domestic as when formed under the literary auspices of Mrs. Chapone; and—granting the existence of Casinos and Anonymas—our young men are infinitely more wholesome than the class for whose instruction Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, penned his delicious letters.

So Mr. Charles Potts, glowing with newly-awakened ideas of respectability, began to think that, after all, the *vie de Bohême* was perhaps a mistake, and not equal, in the average amount of happiness derived from it, to the *vie de* Camden Town. He began to think that to pay rent and taxes and tradesmen's bills was very likely no dearer, and certainly more satisfactory, than to invest in pensions for cast-off mistresses and provisions for illegitimate children. He began to think, in fact, that a snug little house in the suburbs, with his own Lares and Penates about him, and Miss Matilda Ludlow, now looking over his shoulder and encouraging him at his work, now confronting him at the domestic dinner-table, was about the pleasantest thing which his fancy could conjure up in his then frame of mind.

Thinking all this, devoutly hoping it might so fall out, and being, like most converts, infinitely more rabid in the cause of Virtue than those who had served her with tolerable fidelity for a series of years, Mr. Charley Potts heard with a dreadful amount of alarm and amazement of Geoffrey Ludlow's close connection with a person whose antecedents were not comeatable and siftable by a local committee of Grundys. A year ago, and Charley would have laughed the whole business to scorn; insisted that every man had a right to do as he liked; slashed at the doubters; mocked their shaking heads and raised shoulders; and taken no heed of any thing that might have been said. But matters were different now. Not merely was Charley a recruit in the Grundy ranks, having pinned the Grundy colors in his coat and subscribed to the Grundy oath, but the person about to be brought before the Grundy *Fehmgericht*, or court-martial, was one in whom, should his hopes be realized, he would have the greatest interest. Though he had never dared to express his hopes, though he had not the smallest actual foundation for his little air-castle, Charles Potts naturally and honestly regarded Matilda Ludlow as the purest and most honorable of her sex—as does every young fellow regard the girl he loves; and the idea that she should be associated or intimately connected with any one under a moral taint was to him terrible and loathsome.

The moral taint, mind, was all hypothetical. Charles Potts had not heard one syllable of Margaret Dacre's history, had been told nothing about it, knew nothing of her except that he and Geoffrey had saved her from starvation in the streets. But when people go in for the public

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profession of virtue, it is astonishing to find how quickly they listen to reports of the shortcomings and backslidings of those who are not professedly in the same category. It seemed a bit of fatalism too, that this acquaintance should have occurred immediately on Geoffrey's selling his picture for a large sum to Mr. Stompff. Had he not done this, there is no doubt that the other thing would have been heard of by few, noticed by none; but in art, as in literature, and indeed in most other professions, no crime is so heavily visited as that of being successful. It is the sale of your picture, or the success of your novel, that first makes people find out how you steal from other people, how your characters are mere reproductions of your own personal friends—for which you ought to be shunned—how labored is your pathos, and how poor your jokes. It is the repetition of your success that induces the criticism; not merely that you are a singular instance of the badness of the public taste, but that you have a red nose, a decided cast in one eye, and that undoubtedly your grandmother had hard labor for stealing a clock. Geoff Ludlow the struggling might haye done as he liked without comment; on Geoff Ludlow the possessor of unlimited commissions from the great Stompff it was meet that every vial of virtuous wrath should be poured.

Although Charles Potts knew the loquacity of Mr. Flexor—the story of Geoff's adventure and fascination had gone the round of the studios—he did not think how much of what had occurred, or what was likely to occur, was actually known, inasmuch as that most men, knowing the close intimacy existing between him and Ludlow, had the decency to hold their tongues in his presence. But one day he heard a good deal more than every thing. He was painting on a fancy head which he called "Diana Vernon," but which, in truth, was merely a portrait of Miss Matilda Ludlow very slightly idealized (the "Gil Blas" had been sent for acceptance or rejection by the Academy Committee), and Bowker was sitting by smoking a sympathetic pipe, when there came a sharp tug at the bell, and Bowker, getting up to open the door, returned with a very rueful countenance, closely followed by little Tidd. Now little Tidd, though small in stature, was a great ruffian. A soured, disappointed little wretch himself, he made it the business of his life to go about maligning every one who was successful, and endeavoring, when he came across them personally, to put them out of conceit by hints and innuendoes. He was a nasty-looking little man, with an always grimy face and hands, a bald head, and a frizzled beard. He had a great savage mouth with yellow tusks at either end of it; and he gave you, generally, the sort of notion of a man that you would rather not drink after. He had been contemporary with Geoffrey Ludlow at the Academy, and had been used to say very frankly to him and others, "When I become a great man, as I'm sure to do, I shall cut all you chaps;" and he meant it. But years had passed, and Tidd had not become a great man yet; on the contrary, he had subsided from yards of high-art canvas into portrait-painting, and at that he seemed likely to remain.

"Well, how do *you* do, Potts?" said Mr. Tidd. "I said 'How do you do?' to our friend Mr. Bowker at the door. Looks well, don't he? His troubles seem to sit lightly on him." Here Mr. Bowker growled a bad word, and seemed as if about to spring upon the speaker.

"And what's this you're doing, Potts? A charming head! a charming—n-no! not quite so charming when you get close to it! nose a little out of drawing, and—rather spotty, eh? What do you say, Mr. Bowker?"

"I say, Mr. Tidd, that if you could paint like that, you'd give one of your ears."

"Ah, yes—well, that's not complimentary, but—soured, poor man; sad affair! Yes, well! You've sent your Gil Blas to the Academy, I suppose, Potts?"

"Oh yes; he's there, Sir; very likely at this moment being held up by a carpenter before the Fatal Three."

"Ah! don't be surprised at its being kicked out."

"I don't intend to be."

"That's right; they're sending them back in shoals this year, I'm told—in shoals. Have you heard any thing about the pictures?"

"Nothing, except that Landseer's got something stunning."

"Landseer, ah!" said Mr. Tidd. "When I think of that man, and the prices he gets, my blood boils, Sir—boils! That the British public should care about and pay for a lot of stupid horses and cattle-pieces, and be indifferent to real art, is—well, never mind!" and Mr. Tidd gave himself a great blow in the chest, and asked, "What else?"

"Nothing else—oh yes! I heard from Rushworth, who's on the Council, you know, that they had been tremendously struck by Geoff Ludlow's pictures, and that one or two more of the same sort are safe to make him an Associate."

"What!" said Mr. Tidd, eagerly biting his nails. "What!—an Associate! Geoffrey Ludlow an Associate!"

"Ah, that seems strange to you, don't it, Tidd?" said Bowker, speaking for the first time. "I recollect you and Geoff together drawing from the life. You were going to do every thing in those days, Tidd; and old Geoff was as quiet and as modest as—as he is now. It's the old case of the hare and the tortoise; and you're the hare, Tidd; though, to look at you," added Mr. Bowker, under his breath, "you're a d—d sight more like the tortoise, by Jove!"

"Geoffrey Ludlow an Associate!" repeated Mr. Tidd, ignoring Mr. Bowker's remark, and still greedily biting his nails. "Well, I should hardly have thought that, though you can't tell what they won't do down in that infernal place in Trafalgar Square. They've treated me badly enough; and it's quite like them to make a pet of him."

"How have they treated you badly, Tidd?" asked Potts, in the hope of turning the conversation away from Ludlow and his doings.

"How?" screamed Tidd; "in a thousand ways! They've a personal hatred of me, Sir—that's what they have! I've tried every dodge and painted in every school, and they won't have me. The year after Smith made a hit with that miserable picture 'Measuring Heights,' from the *Vicar of Wakefield*, I sent in 'Mr. Burchell cries Fudge!'—kicked out! The year after Mr. Ford got great praise for his wretched daub of 'Dr. Johnson reading Goldsmith's Manuscript,' I sent

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in 'Goldsmith, Johnson, and Bozzy at the Mitre Tavern'—kicked out!—a glorious bit of humor, in which I'd represented all three in different stages of drunkenness—kicked out!"

"I suppose you've not been used worse than most of us, Tidd," growled Mr. Bowker. "She's an unjust step-mother, is the R.A. of A. But she snubs pretty nearly every body alike."

"Not at all," said Tidd. "Here's this Ludlow—"

"What of him?" interposed Potts, quickly.

"Can any one say that his painting is—ah, well, poor devil! it's no good saying any thing more about him; he'll have quite enough to bear on his own shoulders soon."

"What, when he's an Associate?" said Bowker, who inwardly was highly delighted at Tidd's evident rage.

"Associate!—stuff! I mean when he's married."

"Married? Is Ludlow going to be married?"

"Of course he is. Haven't you heard it? It's all over town." And indeed it would have been strange if the story had not permeated all those parts of the town which Mr. Tidd visited, as he himself had labored energetically for its circulation. "It's all over town—oh, a horrible thing! horrible thing!"

Bowker looked across at Charley Potts, who said: "What do you mean by a horrible thing, Tidd? Speak out and tell us; don't be hinting in that way."

"Well, then, Ludlow's going to marry some dreadful bad woman. Oh, it's a fact; I know all about it. Ludlow was coming home from a dinner-party one night, and he saw this woman, who was drunk, nearly run over by an omnibus at the Regent Circus. He rushed into the road and pulled her out; and finding she was so drunk she couldn't speak he got a room for her at Flexor's, and took her there, and has been to see her every day since; and at last he's so madly in love with her that he's going to marry her."

"Ah!" said Mr. Bowker; "who is she? Where did she come from?"

"Nobody knows where she came from; but she's a reg'lar bad 'un—as common as dirt. Pity, too, ain't it? for I've heard Ludlow's mother is a nice old lady, and I've seen his sister, who's stunnin'!" and Mr. Tidd winked his eye.

This last proceeding finished Charley Potts, and caused his wrath, which had been long simmering, to boil over. "Look here, Mr. Tidd!" he burst forth; "that story about Geoff Ludlow is all lies—all lies, do you hear! And if I find that you're going about spreading it, or if you ever mention Miss Ludlow as you did just now, I'll break your infernal neck for you!"

"Mr. Potts!" said Tidd—"Mr. Potts, such language! Mr. Bowker, did you hear what he said?"

"I did," growled old Bowker, over his pipe; "and from what I know of him, I should think he was deuced likely to do it."

Mr. Tidd seemed to be of the same opinion, for he moved toward the door, and slunk out, muttering ominously.

"There's a scoundrel for you!" said Charley, when the door shut behind the retreating Tidd; "there's a ruffian for you! I've not the least doubt that vagabond got a sort of foundation smattering from that babbling Flexor, and invented all that about the omnibus and the drunken state and the rest of it himself. If that story gets noised about it will do Geoff harm."

"Of course it will," said Bowker; "and that's just what Tidd wants. However, I think your threat of breaking his neck has stopped that little brute's tongue. There are some fellows, by Jove! who'll go on lying and libeling you, and who are only checked by the idea of getting a licking, when they shut up like telescopes. I don't know what's to be done about Geoff. He seems thoroughly determined and infatuated."

"I can't understand it."

"*I* can," said old Bowker, sadly; "if she's any thing like the head he's painted in his second picture—and I think from his manner it must be deuced like her—I can understand a man's doing any thing for such a woman. Did she strike you as being very lovely?"

"I couldn't see much of her that night, and she was deadly white and ill; but I didn't think her as good-looking as—some that I know."

"Geoff ought to know about this story that's afloat."

"I think he ought," said Charley. "I'll walk up to his place in a day or two and see him about it."

"See *him*?" said Bowker. "Ah, all right! Yesterday was not your William's natal day."

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE PRIVATE VIEW.

The grand epoch of the artistic year had arrived; the tremendous Fehmgericht—appointed to decide on the merits of some hundreds of struggling men, to stamp their efforts with approval or to blight them with rejection—had issued their sentence. The Hanging-Committee had gone through their labors and eaten their dinners; every inch of space on the walls in Trafalgar Square was duly covered; the successful men had received intimation of the "varnishing day," and to the rejected had been dispatched a comforting missive, stating that the amount of space at the command of the Academy was so small that, sooner than place their works in an objectionable position, the Council had determined to ask for their withdrawal. Out of this ordeal Geoffrey Ludlow had come splendidly. There had always been a notion that he would "do something;" but he had delayed so long—near the mark, but never reaching it—that the original belief in his talents had nearly faded out. Now, when realization came, it came with tenfold force. The old boys—men of accepted name and fame—rejoiced with extra delight in his success because it was one in their own line, and without any giving in to the doctrines of the new school, which they hated with all their hearts. They liked the "Sic vos non vobis" best (for Geoffrey had sternly held to his title, and refused all Mr. Stompff's entreaties to give it a more popular character); they looked upon it as a more thoroughly legitimate piece of work. They allowed the excellences of the "Scylla and Charybdis," and, indeed, some of them were honest enough to prefer it, as a bit of real excellence in painting; but others objected to the pre-Raphaelite tendency to exalt the white face and the dead-

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gold hair into a realization of beauty. But all were agreed that Geoffrey Ludlow had taken the grand step which was always anticipated from him, and that he was, out and away, the most promising man of the day. So Geoff was hung on the line, and received letters from half a dozen great names congratulating him on his success, and was in the seventh heaven of happiness, principally from the fact that in all this he saw a prospect of excellent revenue, of the acquisition of money and honor to be shared with a person then resident in Mr. Flexor's lodgings, soon to be mistress of his own home.

The kind Fates had also been propitious to Mr. Charles Potts, whose picture of "Gil Blas and the Archbishop" had been well placed in the North Room. Mr. Tidd's "Boadicea in her Chariot," ten feet by six, had been rejected; but his portrait of W. Bagglehole, Esq., vestry-clerk of St. Wabash, Little Britain, looked down from the ceiling of the large room and terrified the beholders.

So at length arrived that grand day of the year to the Academicians, when they bid certain privileged persons to the private view of the pictures previous to their public exhibition. The *profanum vulgus*, who are odi'd and arceo'd, pine in vain hope of obtaining a ticket for this great occasion. The public press, the members of the Legislature carefully sifted, a set of old dowagers who never bought a sketch, and who scarcely know a picture from a pipkin, and a few distinguished artists—these are the happy persons who are invited to enter the sacred precincts on this eventful day. Geoffrey Ludlow never had been inside the walls on such an occasion—never expected to be: but on the evening before, as he was sitting in his studio smoking a pipe, and thinking that within twenty-four hours he would have Margaret's final decision, looking back over his short acquaintance with her in wonder, looking forward to his future life with her in hope, a mail-phaeton dashed up to the door, and in the strident tones, "Catch hold, young 'un!" shouted to the groom, Geoff recognized the voice of Mr. Stompff, and looking out saw that great capitalist descending from the vehicle.

"Halloo, Ludlow!" said Mr. Stompff, entering the studio; "how are you? Quiet pipe after the day's grind? That's your sort! What will I take, you were going to say? Well, I think a little drop of sherry, if you've got it pale and dry—as, being a man of taste, of course you have. Well, those duffers at the Academy have hung you well, you see! Of course they have. You know how that's done, of course?"

"I had hoped that the—" Geoff began to stutter directly it became a personal question with him—"that the—I was going to say that the pictures were good enough to—"

"'Pictures good enough!'—all stuff! pickles! The pictures are good—no use in denying that, and it would be deuced stupid in me, who've bought 'em! But that's not why there're so well hung. My men all on the Hanging-Committee—*twiggez-vous?* Last year there were two of Caniche's men, and a horrible fellow who paints religious dodges which no one buys: not one of my men on the line, and half of them turned out! I determined to set that right this year, and I've done it. Just you look where Caniche's men are to-morrow, that's all!"

"To-morrow?"

"Oh, ah! that's what brought me here; I forgot to tell you. Here's a ticket for the private view. I think you ought to be there—show yourself, you know, and that kind of thing. And look here: if you see me pointing you out to people don't you be offended. I've lived longer in the world than you, and I know what's what. Besides, you're part of my establishment just now, and I know the way to work the oracle. So don't mind it, that's all. Very decent glass of sherry, Ludlow! I say—excuse me, but if you *could* wear a white waistcoat to-morrow, I think I should like it. English gentleman, you know, and all that! Some of Caniche's fellows are very seedy-looking duffers."

Geoff smiled, took the ticket, and promised to come, terribly uncomfortable at the prospect of notoriety which Mr. Stompff had opened for him. But that worthy had not done with him yet.

"After it's all over," said he, "you must come and dine with me at Blackwall. Regular business of mine, Sir. I take down my men and two or three of the newspaper chaps, after the private view, and give 'em as good a dinner as money can buy. No stint! I say to Lovegrove, 'You know me! The best, and damn the expense!' and Lovegrove does it, and it's all right! It would be difficult for a fellow to pitch into any of my men with a recollection of my Moselle about him, and a hope that it'll come again next year, eh? Well—won't detain you now; see you to-morrow; and don't forget the dinner."

Do you not know this kind of man, and does he not permeate English society?—this coarse ruffian, whose apparent good-nature disarms your nascent wrath, and yet whose good-nature you know to be merely vulgar ostentatious self-assertion under the guise of *bonhomie*. I take the character I have drawn, but I declare he belongs to all classes. I have seen him as publisher to author, as attorney to young barrister, as patron to struggler generally. Geoffrey Ludlow shrank before him, but shrank in his old, feeble, hesitating way; he had not the pluck to shake off the yoke, and bid his employer go to the devil. It was a new phase of life for him—a phase which promised competence at a time when competence was required; which, moreover, rid him of any doubt or anxiety about the destination of his labor, which to a man of Ludlow's temperament was all in all. How many of us are there who will sell such wares as Providence has given us the power of producing at a much less rate than we could otherwise obtain for them, and to most objectionable people, so long as we are enabled to look for and to get a certain price, and are absolved from the ignominy of haggling, even though by that haggling we should be tenfold enriched! So Geoffrey Ludlow took Mr. Stompff's ticket, and gave him his pale sherry, and promised to dine with him, and bowed him out; and then went back into his studio and lit a fresh pipe, and sat down to think calmly over all that was about to befall him.

What came into his mind first? His love, of course. There is no man, as yet unanchored in the calm haven of marriage, who amidst contending perplexities does not first think of what storms and shoals beset his progress in that course; and who, so long as there he can see a bit of blue sky, a tolerably clear passage, does

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not, to a great extent, ignore the black clouds which he sees banking up to windward, the heavy swell crested with a thin, dangerous, white line of wave, which threatens his fortunes in another direction. Here Geoffrey Ludlow thought himself tolerably secure. Margaret had told him all her story; had made the worst of it, and had left him to act on her confession. Did she love him? That was a difficult question for a man of Geoff's diffidence to judge. But he thought he might unhesitatingly answer it in the affirmative. It was her own proposition that nothing should be done hurriedly; that he should take the week to calmly reflect over the position, and see whether he held by his first avowal. And to-morrow the week would be at an end, and he would have the right to ask for her decision.

That decision, if favorable, would at once settle his plans, and necessitate an immediate communication to his mother. This was a phase of the subject which Geoffrey characteristically had ignored, put by, and refrained from thinking of as long as possible. But now there was no help for it. Under any circumstances he would have endeavored, on marrying, to set up a separate establishment for himself; but situated as he was, with Margaret Dacre as his intended wife, he saw that such a step was inevitable. For though he loved his mother with all his heart, he was not blind to her weaknesses, and he knew that the "cross" would never be more triumphantly brought forward, or more loudly complained of, than when it took the form of a daughter-in-law —a daughter-in-law, moreover, whose antecedents were not held up for the old lady's scrutinizing inspection. And here, perhaps, was the greatest tribute to the weird influence of the dead-gold hair, the pallid face, and the deep-violet eyes. A year ago, and Geoff Ludlow would have told you that nothing could ever have made him alter his then style of life. It had continued too long, he would have told you; he had settled down into a certain state of routine, living with the old lady and Til: they understood his ways and wishes, and he thought he should never change. And Mrs. Ludlow used to say that Geoffrey would never marry now; he did not care for young chits of girls, who were all giggle and nonsense, my dear; a man at his time of life looked for something more than that, and where it was to come from she, for one, did not know. Miss Matilda had indeed different views on the subject; she thought that dear old Geoff would marry, but that it would probably come about in this way: Some lovely female member of the aristocracy, to whom Geoff had given drawing-lessons, or who had seen his pictures, and become imbued with the spirit of poetry in them, would say to her father, the haughty earl, "I pine for him—I can not live without him;" and to save his darling child's health the earl would give his consent, and bestow upon the happy couple estates of the annual value of twenty thousand pounds. But then, you see, Miss Matilda Ludlow was given to novel-reading, and though perfectly practical and unromantic as regards herself and her career, was apt to look upon all appertaining to her brother, whom she adored, through a surrounding halo of circulating-library.

How this great intelligence would, then, be received by his home-tenants, set Geoff thinking after Stompff's departure, and between the puffs of his pipe he turned the subject hither and thither in his mind, and proposed to himself all kinds of ways for meeting the difficulty; none of which, on reconsideration, appearing practicable or judicious, he reverted to an old and favorite plan of his, that of postponing any further deliberation until the next day, when, as he argued with himself, he would have "slept upon it"—a most valuable result when the subject is systematically ignored up to the time of going to sleep, and after the hour of waking—he would have been to the private view at the Academy—which had, of course, an immense deal to do with it—and he would have received the final decision from Margaret Dacre. Oh yes, it was useless to think any more of it that night. And fully persuaded of this, Geoff turned in and fell fast asleep.

"And there won't be a more gentlemanly-looking man in the rooms than our dear old Geoff."

"Stuff, Til! don't be absurd!"

"No, I mean it; and you know it too, you vain old thing; else why are you perpetually looking in the glass?"

"No, but—Til, nonsense!—I suppose I'm all right, eh?"

"All right!—you're charming, Geoff! I never saw you such a—I can't help it, you know—swell before! Don't frown, Geoff; there's no other word that expresses it. One would think you were going to meet a lady there. Does the Queen go, or any of the young princesses?"

"How can you be so ridiculous, Til? Now, good-by;" and Geoff gave his sister a hearty kiss, and started off. Miss Matilda was right; he did look perfectly gentlemanly in his dark-blue coat, white waistcoat, and small-check trowsers. Nature, which certainly had denied him personal beauty or regularity of feature, had given him two or three marks of distinction: his height, his bright, earnest eyes, and a certain indefinable odd expression, different from the ordinary ruck of people—an expression which attracted attention, and invariably made people ask who he was.

It was three o'clock before Geoff arrived at the Academy, and the rooms were crowded. The scene was new to him, and he stared round in astonishment at the brilliancy of the *toilettes*, and what Charley Potts would have called the "air of swelldom" which pervaded the place. It is scarcely necessary to say that his first act was to glance at the catalogue to see where his pictures were placed; his second, to proceed to them to see how they looked on the walls. Round each was a little host of eager inspectors, and from what Geoff caught of their conversation the verdict was entirely favorable. But he was not long left in doubt. As he was looking on his arm was seized by Mr. Stompff, who, scarcely waiting to carry him out of ear-shot, began, "Well! you've done it up brown this time, my man, and no flies! Your pictures have woke 'em up. They're talking of nothing else. I've sold 'em both. Lord Everton—that's him over there: little man with a double eye-glass, brown coat and high velvet collar—he's bought the 'Sic Wos;' and Mr. Shirtings of Manchester's got the other. The price has been good, Sir; I'm not above denyin' it. There's six dozen of Sham

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ready to go into your cellar whenever you say the word: I ain't mean with my men like some people. Power of nobs here to-day. There's the Prime-Minister, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer—that's him in the dirty white hat and rumpled coat—and no end of bishops and old ladies of title. That's Shirtings, that fat man in the black satin waistcoat. Wonderful man, Sir—factory-boy in Manchester! Saved his shillin' a week, and is now worth two hundred thousand. Fine modern collection he's got! That little man in the turn-down collar, with the gold pencil-case in his hand, is Scrunch, the art-critic of the *Scourge*. A bitter little beast; but I've squared him. I gave him five-and-twenty pounds to write a short account of the Punic War, which was given away with Bliff's picture of 'Regulus,' and he's never pitched into any of my people since. He's comin' to dinner to-day. Oh, by-the-by, don't be late! I'll drive you down."

"Thank you," said Geoff; "I—I've got somewhere to go to. I'll find my own way to Blackwall."

"Ha!" said Stompff, "then it is true, is it? Never mind; mum's the word! I'm tiled. Look here: don't you mind me if you see me doing any thing particular. It's all good for business."

It may have been so, but it was undoubtedly trying. During the next two hours Geoff was conscious of Mr. Stompff's perpetually hovering round him, always acting as cicerone to some different man, to whom he would point out Geoff with his forefinger, then whisper in his companion's ear, indicate one of Geoff's pictures with his elbow, and finish by promenading his friend just under Geoff's nose; the stranger making a feeble pretense of looking at some highly-hung portrait, but obviously swallowing Geoff with his eyes, from his hair to his boots.

But he had also far more pleasurable experiences of his success. Three or four of the leading members of the Academy, men of world-wide fame, whom he had known by sight, and envied—so far as envy lay in his gentle disposition—for years, came up to him, and introducing themselves, spoke warmly of his pictures, and complimented him in most flattering terms. By one of these, the greatest of them all, Lord Everton was subsequently brought up; and the kind old man, with that courtesy which belongs only to the highest breeding, shook hands with him, and expressed his delight at being the fortunate possessor of Mr. Ludlow's admirable picture, and hoped to have the pleasure of receiving him at Everton House, and showing him the gallery of old masters, in whose footsteps he, Mr. Ludlow, was so swiftly following.

And then, as Geoffrey was bowing his acknowledgments, he heard his name pronounced, and turning round, found himself close by Lord Caterham's wheel-chair, and had a hearty greeting from its occupant.

"How do you do, Mr. Ludlow? You will recollect meeting me at Lady Lilford's, I dare say. I have just been looking at your pictures, and I congratulate you most earnestly upon them. No, I never flatter. They appear to me very remarkable things, especially the evening-party scene, where you seem to have given an actual spirit of motion to the dancers in the background, so different from the ordinary stiff and angular representation.—You can leave the chair here for a minute, Stevens.—In such a crowd as this, Mr. Ludlow, it's refreshing—is it not?—to get a long look at that sheltered pool, surrounded by waving trees, which Creswick has painted so charmingly. The young lady who came with me has gone roving away to search for some favorite, whose name she saw in the catalogue; but if you don't mind waiting with me a minute she will be back, and I know she will be glad to see you, as—ah! here she is!"

As Geoffrey looked round a tall young lady, with brown eyes, a pert, inquisitive nose, an undulating figure, and a bright, laughing mouth, came hurriedly up, and without noticing Geoffrey, bent over Lord Caterham's chair, and said, "I was quite right, Arthur; it is—" then, in obedience to a glance from her companion, she looked up and exclaimed, "What, Geoffrey!—Mr. Ludlow, I mean—oh, how *do* you do? Why, you don't mean to say you don't recollect me?"

Geoff was a bad courtier at any time, and now the expression of his face at the warmth of this salutation showed how utterly he was puzzled.

"You *have* forgotten, then? And you don't recollect those days when—"

"Stop!" he exclaimed, a sudden light breaking upon him; "little Annie Maurice that used to live at Willesden Priory! My little fairy, that I have sketched a thousand times. Well, I ought not to have forgotten you, Miss Maurice, for I have studied your features often enough to have impressed them on my memory. But how could I recognize my little elf in such a dashing young lady?"

Lord Caterham looked up at them out of the corners of his eyes as they stood warmly shaking hands, and for a moment his face wore a pained expression; but it passed away directly, and his voice was as cheery as usual as he said, "*Et nos mutamur in illis*, eh, Mr. Ludlow? Little fays grow into dashing young ladies, and indolent young sketchers become the favorites of the Academy."

"Ay," said Annie; "and the dear old Priory let to other people, and many of those who made those times so pleasant are dead and gone. Oh, Geoffrey—Mr. Ludlow, I mean—"

"Yes," said Geoff, interrupting her; "and Geoffrey turned into Mr. Ludlow, and Annie into Miss Maurice: there's another result of the flight of time, and one which I, for my part, heartily object to."

"Ah, but, Mr. Ludlow, I must bespeak a proper amount of veneration for you on the part of this young lady," said Lord Caterham; "for I am about to ask you to do me a personal favor in which she is involved."

Geoff bowed absently; he was already thinking it was time for him to go to Margaret.

"Miss Maurice is good enough to stay with my family for the present, Mr. Ludlow; and I am very anxious that she should avail herself of the opportunity of cultivating a talent for drawing which she undoubtedly possesses."

"She used to sketch very nicely years ago," said Geoff, turning to her with a smile; and her face was radiant with good-humor as she said:

"Oh, Geoffrey, do you recollect my attempts at cows?"

"So, in order to give her this chance, and in the hope of making her attempt at cows more

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creditable than it seems they used to be, I am going to ask you, Mr. Ludlow, to undertake Miss Maurice's artistic education, to give her as much of your time as you can spare, and, in fact, to give what I think I may call her genius the right inclination."

Geoffrey hesitated, of course; it was his normal state; and he said, doubtingly: "You're very good; but I—I'm almost afraid—"

"You are not bashful, I trust, Mr. Ludlow," said Lord Caterham; "I have seen plenty of your work at Lady Lilford's, and I know you to be perfectly competent."

"It was scarcely that, my lord; I rather think that—" But when he got thus far he looked up and saw Annie Maurice's brown eyes lifted to his in such an appealing glance that he finished his sentence by saying: "Well, I shall be very happy indeed to do all that I can—for old acquaintance' sake, Annie;" and he held out his hand frankly to her.

"You are both very good," she said; "and it will be a real pleasure to me to recommence my lessons, and to try to prove to you, Geoffrey, that I'm not so impatient or so stupid as I was. When shall we begin?"

"The sooner the better, don't you think, Mr. Ludlow?" said Lord Caterham.

Geoff felt his face flush as he said: "I—I expect to be going out of town for a week or two; but when I return I shall be delighted to commence."

"When you return we shall be delighted to see you. I can fully understand how you long for a little rest and change after your hard work, Mr. Ludlow. Now, good-by to you; I hope this is but the beginning of an intimate acquaintance." And Lord Caterham, nodding to Geoffrey, called Stevens, and was wheeled away.

"I like that man, Annie," said he, when they were out of ear-shot; "he has a thoroughly good face, and the truth and honesty of his eyes overbalance the weakness of the mouth, which is undecided, but not shifty. His manner is honest, too; don't you think so?"

He waited an instant for an answer, but Annie did not speak.

"Didn't you hear me, Annie? or am I not worth a reply?"

"I—I beg your pardon, Arthur. I heard you perfectly; but I was thinking. Oh yes, I should think Mr. Ludlow was as honest as the day."

"But what made you *distraite?* What were you thinking of?"

"I was thinking what a wonderful difference a few years made. I was thinking of my old ideas of Mr. Ludlow when he used to come out to dine with papa and sleep at our house; how he had long dark hair, which he used to toss off his face, and poor papa used to laugh at him and call him an enthusiast. I saw hundreds of silver threads in his hair just now, and he seemed—well, I don't know—so much more constrained and conventional than I recollect him."

"You seem to forget that you had frocks and trowsers and trundled a hoop in those days, Annie. You were a little fay then; you are a Venus now: in a few years you will be married, and then you must sit to Mr. Ludlow for a Juno. It is only your pretty flowers that change so much; your hollies and yews keep pretty much the same throughout the year."

From the tone of voice in which Lord Caterham made this last remark Annie knew very well that he was in one of those bitter humors which, when his malady was considered, came surprisingly seldom upon him, and she knew that a reply would only have aggravated his temper, so she forbore and walked silently by his side.

No sooner did he find himself free than Geoffrey Ludlow hurried from the Academy, and jumping into a cab, drove off at once to Little Flotsam Street. Never since Margaret Dacre had been denizened at Flexor's had Geoff approached the neighborhood without a fluttering at his heart, a sinking of his spirits, a general notion of fright and something about to happen. But now, whether it was that his success at the Academy and the kind words he had had from all his friends had given him courage, it is impossible to say, but he certainly jumped out of the hansom without the faintest feeling of disquietude, and walked hurriedly, perhaps, but by no means nervously, up to Flexor's door.

Margaret was in, of course. He found her, the very perfection of neatness, watering some flowers in her window which he had sent her. She had on a tight-fitting cotton dress of a very small pattern, and her hair was neatly braided over her ears. He had seen her look more voluptuous, never more *piquante* and irresistible. She came across the room to him with outstretched hand and raised eyebrows.

"You have come!" she said; "that's good of you, for I scarcely expected you."

Geoff stopped suddenly. "Scarcely expected me! Yet you must know that to-day the week is ended."

"I knew that well enough; but I heard from the woman of the house here that to-day is the private view of the Academy, and I knew how much you would be engaged."

"And did you think that I should suffer any thing to keep me from coming to you to-day?"

She paused a minute, then looked him full in the face. "No; frankly and honestly I did not. I was using conventionalisms and talking society to you. I never will do so again. I knew you would come, and—and I longed for your coming, to tell you my delight at what I hear is your glorious success."

"My greatest triumph is in your appreciation of it," said Geoff. "Having said to you what I did a week ago, you must know perfectly that the end and aim of all I think, of all I undertake, is connected with you. And you must not keep me in suspense, Margaret, please. You must tell me your decision."

"My decision! Now did we not part, at my suggestion, for a week's adjournment, during which you should turn over in your mind certain positions which I had placed before you? And now, the week ended, you ask for my decision! Surely rather I ought to put the question."

"A week ago I said to you, 'Margaret, be my wife.' It was not very romantically put, I confess; but I'm not a very romantic person. You told me to wait a week, to think over all the circumstances of our acquaintance, and to see whether my determination held good. The week is over; I've done all you said; and I've come again to say, Margaret, be my wife."

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It was rather a long speech this for Geoff; and as he uttered it his dear old face glowed with honest fervor.

"You have thoroughly made up your mind, considered every thing, and decided?"

"I have."

"Mind, in telling you the story of my past life I spoke out freely, regardless of my own feelings and of yours. You owe me an equal candor. You have thought of all?"

"Of all."

"And you still—"

"I still repeat that one demand."

"Then I say 'Yes,' frankly and freely. Geoffrey Ludlow, I will be your wife; and by Heaven's help I will make your life happy, and atone for my past. I—"

And she did not say any more just then, for Geoff stopped her lips with a kiss.

"What *can* have become of Ludlow?" said Mr. Stompff for about the twentieth time, as he came back into the dining-room, after craning over the balcony and looking all round.

"Giving himself airs on account of his success," said genial Mr. Bowie, the art-critic. "I wouldn't wait any longer for him, Stompff."

"I won't," said Stompff. "Dinner!"

The dinner was excellent, the wine good and plentiful, the guests well assorted, and the conversation as racy and salted as it usually is when a hecatomb of absent friends is duly slaughtered by the company. Each man said the direst things he could about his own personal enemies; and there were but very few cases in which the rest of the *convives* did not join in chorus. It was during a pause in this kind of conversation —much later in the evening, when the windows had been thrown open, and most of the men were smoking in the balcony—that little Tommy Smalt, who had done full justice to the claret, took his cigar from his mouth, leaned lazily back, and looking up at the moonlit sky felt in such a happy state of repletion and tobacco as to be momentarily charitable—the which feeling induced him to say:

"I wish Ludlow had been with us!"

"His own fault that he's not," said Mr. Stompff; "his own fault entirely. However, he's missed a pleasant evening. I rather think we've had the pull of him."

Had Geoff missed a pleasant evening? He thought otherwise. He thought he had never had such an evening in his life; for the same cold steel-blue rays of the early spring moon which fell upon the topers in the Blackwall balcony came gleaming in through Mr. Flexor's first-floor window, lighting up a pallid face set in a frame of dead-gold hair and pillowed on Geoffrey Ludlow's breast.

CHAPTER XIV.

THOSE TWAIN ONE FLESH.

So it was a settled thing between Margaret Dacre and Geoffrey Ludlow. She had acceded to his earnest demand—demand thrice repeated —after due consideration and delay, and she was to become his wife forthwith. Indeed, their colloquy on that delicious moonlight evening would have been brought to a conclusion much sooner than it was, had not Geoff stalwartly declared and manfully held to his determination, spite of every protest, not to go until they had settled upon a day on which to be married. He did not see the use of waiting, he said; it would get buzzed about by the Flexors; and all sorts of impertinent remarks and congratulations would be made, which they could very well do without. Of course, as regarded herself, Margaret would want a—what do you call it?—outfit, *trousseau*, that was the word. But it appeared to him that all he had to do was to give her the money, and all she had to do was to go out and get the things she wanted, and that need not take any time, or hinder them from naming a day—well, let us say in next week. He himself had certain little arrangements to make; but he could very well get through them all in that time. And what did Margaret say?

Margaret did not say very much. She had been lying perfectly tranquil in Geoffrey's arms; a position which, she said, first gave her assurance that her new life had indeed begun. She should be able to realize it more fully, she thought, when she commenced in a home of her own, and in a fresh atmosphere; and as the prying curiosity of the Flexors daily increased, and as Little Flotsam Street, with its normal pavement of refuse and its high grim house-rows scarcely admitting any light, was an objectionable residence, she could urge no reason for delay. So a day at the end of the ensuing week was fixed upon; and no sooner had it been finally determined than Geoff, looking round at preparations which were absolutely necessary, was amazed at their number and magnitude.

He should be away a fortnight, he calculated, perhaps longer; and it was necessary to apprise the families and the one or two "ladies' colleges" in which he taught drawing of his absence. He would also let Stompff know that he would not find him in his studio during the next few days (for it was the habit of this great *entrepreneur* to pay frequent visits to his *protégés*, just to "give 'em a look-up," as he said; but in reality to see that they were not doing work for any opposition dealer); but he should simply tell Stompff that he was going out of town for a little change, leaving that worthy to imagine that he wanted rest after his hard work. And then came a point at which he hitched up at once, and was metaphorically thrown on his beam ends. What was he to say to his mother and sister and to his intimate friends?

To the last, of course, there was no actual necessity to say any thing, save that he knew he must have some one to "give away" the bride, and he would have preferred one of his old friends, even at the risk of an explanation, to Flexor, hired for five shillings, and duly got up in the costume of the old English gentleman. But to his mother and sister it was absolutely necessary that some kind of notice should be given. It was necessary they should know that the little household, which, despite various small interruptions, had been carried on so long in amity and affection, would be broken up, so far as he was concerned; also necessary that they should know that his contribution to the household income would remain exactly the same as though he still partook of its benefits. He had to say all

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this; and he was as frightened as a child. He thought of writing at first, and of leaving a letter to be given to his mother after the ceremony was over; of giving a bare history in a letter, and an amount of affection in the postscript which would melt the stoniest maternal heart. But a little reflection caused him to think better of this notion, and determined him to seek an interview with his mother. It was due to her, and he would go through with it.

So one morning, when he had watched his sister Til safe off into a prolonged diplomatic controversy with the cook, involving the reception of divers embassadors from the butcher and other tradespeople, Geoff made his way into his mother's room, and found her knitting something which might have been either an antimacassar for a giant or a counterpane for a child, and at once intimated his pleasure at finding her alone, as he had "something to say to her."

This was an ominous beginning in Mrs. Ludlow's ears, and her "cross" at once stood out visibly before her; Constantine himself had never seen it plainer. The mere pronunciation of the phrase made her nervous; she ought to have "dropped one and taken up two;" but her hands got complicated, and she stopped with a knitting-needle in mid-air.

"If you're alluding to the butcher's book, Geoffrey," she said, "I hold myself blameless. It was understood, thoroughly understood, that it should be eightpence a pound all round; and if Smithers chooses to charge ninepence-halfpenny for lamb, and you allow it, I don't hold myself responsible. I said to your sister at the time—I said, 'Matilda, I'm sure Geoffrey—' "

"It's not that, mother, I want to talk to you about," said Geoff, with a half-smile; "it's a bigger subject than the price of butcher's meat. I want to talk to you about myself—about my future life."

"Very well, Geoffrey; that does not come upon me unawares. I am a woman of the world. I ought to be, considering the time I had with your poor father; and I suppose that now you're making a name, you'll find it necessary to entertain. He did, poor fellow, though it's little enough name or money he ever made! But if you want to see your friends round you, there must be help in the kitchen. There are certain things—jellies, and that like—that must come from the pastry-cook's; but all the rest we can do very well at home with a little help in the kitchen."

"You don't comprehend me yet, mother. I—I'm going to leave you."

"To leave us!—Oh, to live away! Very well, Geoffrey," said the old lady, bridling up; "if you've grown too grand to live with your mother, I can only say I'm sorry for you. Though I never saw my name in print in the *Times* newspaper except among the marriages; and if that's to be the effect it has upon me I hope I never shall."

"My dear mother, how *can* you imagine any thing so absurd! The truth is—"

"Oh yes, Geoffrey, I understand. I've not lived for sixty years in the world for nothing. Not that there's been ever the least word said about your friends coming pipe-smoking at all times of the night, or hot water required for spirits when Emma was that dead with sleep she could scarcely move; nor about young persons—female models you call them—trolloping misses I say."

It is worthy of remark that in all business matters Mrs. Ludlow was accustomed to treat her son as a cipher, forgetting that two-thirds of the income by which the house was supported were contributed by him. There was no thought of this, however, in honest old Geoff's mind as he said,

"Mother, you won't hear me out! The fact is, I'm going to be married."

"To be married, Geoffrey!" said the old lady, in a voice that was much softer and rather tremulous; "to be married, my dear boy! Well, that is news!" Her hands trembled as she laid them on his big shoulders and put up her face to kiss him. "Well, well, to be sure! I never thought you'd marry now, Geoffrey. I looked upon you as a confirmed old bachelor. And who is it that has caught you at last? Not Miss Sanders, is it?"

Geoffrey shook his head.

"I thought not. No, that would never do. Nice kind of girl too; but if we're to hold our heads so high when all our money comes out of sugar-hogsheads in Thames Street, why where will be the end of it, I should like to know? It isn't Miss Hall?"

Geoffrey repeated his shake.

"Well, I'm glad of it; not but what I'm very fond of Emily Hall; but that half-pay father of hers! I shouldn't like some of the people about here to know that we were related to a half-pay captain with a wooden leg; and he'd be always clumping about the house, and be horrible for the carpets! Well, if it isn't Minnie Beverley, I'll give it up; for you'd never go marrying that tall Dickenson, who's more like a dromedary than a woman!"

"It is not Minnie Beverley, nor the young lady who's like a dromedary," said Geoff, laughing. "The young lady I am going to marry is a stranger to you; you have never even seen her."

"Never seen her! Oh, Geoff!" cried the old lady, with horror in her face, "you're never going to marry one of those trolloping models, and bring her home to live with us?"

"No, no, mother; you need be under no alarm. This young lady, who is from the country, is thoroughly lady-like and well educated. But I shall not bring her home to you; we shall have a house of our own."

"And what shall we do, Til and I? Oh, Geoffrey! I shall never have to go into lodgings at my time of life, shall I, and after having kept house and had my own plate and linen for so many years?"

"Mother, do you imagine I should increase my own happiness at the expense of yours? Of course you'll keep this house, and all arrangements will go on just the same as usual, except that I sha'n't be here to worry you."

"You never worried me, my dear," said the old lady, as all his generosity and noble unselfishness rose before her mind; "you never worried me, but have been always the best of sons; and pray God that you may be happy, for you deserve it." She put her arms round his neck and kissed him fondly, while the tears trickled down her cheeks. "Ah, here's Til," she continued, drying her eyes; "it would never do to let her see me being so silly."

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"Oh, here you are at last!" said Miss Til, who, as they both noticed, had a very high color and was generally suffused about the face and neck; "what have you been conspiring about? The Mater looks as guilty as possible, doesn't she, Geoff? and you're not much better, Sir. What is the matter?"

"I suspect you're simply attempting the authoritative to cover your own confusion, Til. There's something—"

"No, no! I won't be put off in that manner. What *is* the matter?"

"There's nothing the matter, my dear," said Mrs. Ludlow, who by this time had recovered her composure; "though there is some great news. Geoffrey's going to be married!"

"What!" exclaimed Miss Til, and then made one spring into his arms. "Oh, you darling old Geoff! you don't say so? Oh, how quiet you have kept it, you horrible hypocrite, seeing us day after day and never breathing a word about it! Now, who is it, at once? Stop, shall I guess? Is it any one I know?"

"No one that you know."

"Oh, I am so glad! Do you know, I think I hate most people I know—girls, I mean; and I'm sure none of them are nice enough for my Geoff. Now, what's she like, Geoff?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"That's what men always say—so tiresome! Is she dark or fair?"

"Well, fair, I suppose."

"And what colored hair and eyes?"

"Eh? well, her hair is red, I think."

"Red! Lor, Geoff! what they call carrots?"

"No; deep-red, like red gold—"

"Oh, Geoff, I know, I know! Like the Scylla in the picture. Oh, you worse than fox, to deceive me in that way, telling me it was a model, and all the rest of it. Well, if she's like that, she must be wonderful to look at, and I'm dying to see her. What's her name?"

"Margaret."

"Margaret! That's very nice; I like Margaret very much. Of course you'll never let yourself be sufficiently childishly spoony to let it drop into Peggy, which is atrocious. I'm very glad she's got a nice name; for, do all I could, I'm certain I never could like a sister-in-law who was called Belinda or Keziah, or any thing dreadful."

"Have you fixed your wedding-day, Geoffrey?"

"Yes, mother; for Thursday next."

"Thursday!" exclaimed Miss Til. "Thursday next? why, there'll be no time for me to get any thing ready; for I suppose, as your sister, Geoff, I'm to be one of the bridemaids?"

"There will be no bridemaids, dear Til," said Geoffrey; "no company, no breakfast. I have always thought that, if ever I married, I should like to walk into the church with my bride, have the service gone through, and walk out again, without the least attempt at show; and I'm glad to find that Margaret thoroughly coincides with me."

"But surely, Geoffrey," said Mrs. Ludlow, "your friends will—"

"Oh my! Talking of friends," interrupted Miss Til, "I quite forgot in all this flurry to tell you that Mr. Charles Potts is in the drawing-room, waiting to see you, Geoffrey."

"Dear me! is he, indeed? ah, that accounts for a flushed face—"

"Don't be absurd, Geoff! Shall I tell him to come here?"

"You may if you like; but don't come back with him, as I want five minutes' quiet talk with him."

So Mrs. Ludlow and her daughter left the studio, and in a few minutes Charley Potts arrived. As he walked up to Geoffrey and wrung his hand both men seemed under some little constraint. Geoff spoke first.

"I'm glad you're here, Charley. I should have gone up to your place if you hadn't looked in to-day. I have something to tell you, and something to ask of you."

"Tell away, old boy; and as for the asking, look upon it as done—unless it's tin, by-the-way; and there I'm no good just now."

"Charley, I'm going to be married next Thursday to Margaret Dacre—the girl we found fainting in the streets that night of the Titians."

Geoff expected some exclamation, but his friend only nodded his head.

"She has told me her whole life: insisted upon my hearing it before I said a word to her; made me wait a week after I had asked her to be my wife, on the chance that I should repent; behaved in the noblest way."

Geoffrey again paused, and Mr. Potts again nodded.

"We shall be married very quietly at the parish church here; and there will be nobody present but you. I want you to come; will you?"

"Will I? Why, old man, we've been like brothers for years; and to think that I'd desert you at a time like this! I—I didn't quite mean that, you know; but if not, why not? You know what I do mean."

"Thanks, Charley. One thing more: don't talk about it until after it's over. I'm an awkward subject for chaff, particularly such chaff as this would give rise to. You may tell old Bowker, if you like; but no one else."

And Mr. Potts went away without delivering that tremendous philippic with which he had come charged. Perhaps it was his conversation with Miss Til in the drawing-room which had softened his manners and prevented him from being brutal.

They were married on the following Thursday; Margaret looking perfectly lovely in her brown silk dress and white bonnet. Charley Potts could not believe her to be the haggard creature in whose rescue he had assisted; and simple old William Bowker, peering out from between the curtains of a high pew, was amazed at her strange weird beauty. The ceremony was over; and Geoff, happy and proud, was leading his wife down the steps of the church to the fly waiting for them, when a procession of carriages, coachmen and footmen with white favors, and gayly-clad company, all betokening another wedding, drove up to the door. The bride and her bridemaids had alighted, and the bridegroom's best-man, who with his friend had just jumped out of his cabriolet, was bowing to the bridemaids as Geoff and Margaret passed. He was a pleasant airy fellow, and seeing a pretty woman coming down the steps, he looked hard at her. Their eyes met, and there was something in Marga-

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ret's glance which stopped him in the act of raising his hand to his hat. Geoffrey saw nothing of this; he was waving his hand to Bowker, who was standing by; and they passed on to the fly.

"Come on, Algy!" called out the impatient intended bridegroom; "they'll be waiting for us in the church. What on earth are you staring at?"

"Nothing, dear old boy!" said Algy Barford, who was the best-man just named—"nothing but a resurrection!—only a resurrection; by Jove, that's all!"

BOOK II.—BREAKERS AHEAD.

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 disfavor 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, etc., 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?—Oh, 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 that 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. Oh, 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."

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"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 cozy 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 suits! 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."

"Oh, 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 vigor. 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 up stairs 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 cozy 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 dare say. Come along, my dear."

But Brown's horse had scarcely been persuaded by his driver to comprehend that he was required to start off homeward 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."

"Oh, 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."

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"Well, my dear, different people are differently constituted. I shouldn't feel frightened to walk into Buckingham Palace as mistress to-morrow. However, I dare say 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 toward wild stripes and checks and large green leaves, with veins like caterpillars, spread over brown grounds; toward portentous bonnets, bearing cockades and bows of ribbon where such things were never seen before; to puce-colored gloves, and parasols rescued at an alarming sacrifice 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 neighbors on either side, with their noses firmly pressed against their parlor-windows, were envious of her personal appearance, though both of them declared afterward 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 endeavoring to catch the reflection of herself in the front glasses of the fly. These performances were scarcely over before 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 realization 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 honey-moon.

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 handsome creature moving gracefully toward 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 up stairs. You'll find things much more settled than when you were here last." And up stairs 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

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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 horse-hair 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 honors 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 balusters 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. Oh, 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

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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 honey-moon Geoffrey had talked so much of his mother and sister, and of his anxiety that they should be favorably 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 toward 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 favorably 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 utilized 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 anathematizing; 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

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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 overdose 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 realization of a thousand waking dreams; and that for the time was enough. But when he found her entering into and giving shape and color 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 mustache, 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 analyze her own feelings; but she recognized 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 honor-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

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upon her. As she lay back in the arm-chair in Flexor's parlor, dimly sounding in her ears, at first like the monotonous surging of the waves, afterward 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 toward effecting her cure, even in the outset, 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 forever.

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 honor; 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 heart-felt 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.

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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 to 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 fulfill. 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 laborer in all matters appertaining to the hair; a person whose anatomical knowledge exceeded that of many medical students, and who produced effects undreamed 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 toward 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 recipes 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 offense, were won by the silence of her bell and her independence of toilet 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 by-gone 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, put-

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ting 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 mantle-piece 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 favorite 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 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 among 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 Stevens 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 Ricksborough, 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 color? Where's the brightness of her eyes?"

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

"Oh, 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 gayeties 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 book-shelves. 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

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

"Oh, 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 subject. 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? Oh, 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 honey-moon in the Isle of Wight."

"His what?"

"His honey-moon; 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 honor 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 can not understand."

"No, Arthur," said Annie, very quietly, utterly 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 mustache, or with the vicar's daughter, a sandy-haired girl in spectacles; and then poor papa would laugh—oh, 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, recognizing it at once, he called out, "Come in!"

CHAPTER IV.

ALGY BARFORD'S NEWS.

It was the Honorable 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 recognized 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, "Oh, 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-by; good-by, 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, floun-

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dered, 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 dare say, 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 cozy—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?"

"Oh, 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 Countercheck 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 afterward, 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. Oh, I know! Dick French 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 toward 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."

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"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 dullness 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 recognized Mrs. Geoffrey Ludlow, who happened to look in, with a deferential 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 overstocking the market with Ludlow's; 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

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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—oh, 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 recognize 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.

"Oh, 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 dare say, 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-by, 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 afterward 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 neighborhood, 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, "Oh, Geoff, don't you remember?" and "Oh, Geoff, will you ever forget?" 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 wonder 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

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what perfect good-humor 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—oh, 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-colored 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. Oh, 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 willfully neglected informing Annie of his intended marriage was the true reason, that the marriage itself was, up to within the shortest time of its fulfillment, 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, "Oh yes; I dare say 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. "Oh, 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

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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!

"Oh 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 Stevens. 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 honor 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 Geoff'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 unrecognized 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 school-boys 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 among 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 scandalized 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 afterward 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 colors 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

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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 worshipers 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 cork-screw ringlets and black lace mittens, who kept house for their brother, old Coverdale, the red-faced, white-headed proctor, Geoffrey's next-door neighbor—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 school-girl's, and leaving her cheeks as bare as bare," as they afterward 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, oh, 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 among the nursemaids of Islington. Mrs. Abbott, a mild, meek little woman, who practiced potichomanie, delcomanie, the art of making wax-flowers, any thing whereby to make money to pay the tradespeople 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

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an association of gentlemen; and who could say what would be done next if artists were 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 tea-pot and two hundred sovereigns, with which (the tea-pot 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 pallet, 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 school-boys 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-Raphaelitic, and worshiping 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 discussed 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—oh, 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 fulfill her earliest expectations of him—generous to a degree, kind-hearted, weak, and easily led. Weak! weak as water. Yes, and oh 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 among us—a man who was rapidly lifting his name for the wonder and the envy of the best portion of the civilized 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 honor 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 worshiped 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 color 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

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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, toilet, 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? Oh 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? Oh 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 belongings. 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 honor 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 by-gone 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 Honorable 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. Oh 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—oh 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. Oh 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 familiarized 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 fire-flies, the sensuous strains of the orchestra soaring up to the great yellow-faced moon looking down upon it; and then the cozy 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 familiarized 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 conversations 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.

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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 favorite 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 corn-field, 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 realize 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 mustache with great vigor—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 athirst. 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 endeavoring to practice 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's *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 toward 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! corn-field—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.

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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."

"Oh, 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 recognized you?"

"She couldn't have recognized 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 marvelously 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 trowsers 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-colored 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 mustaches were twisted with a ferocity which, however fascinating to the maid-servants at the kitchen-windows, failed to please the ruralizing cits and citizenesses, who were accustomed to regard a white hat as the distinctive badge of card-sharpers, and a mustache 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 trowsers 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 wide-awake 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 cômrades 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

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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 burned 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 recall 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 honored 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? His 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 hundredth time, as she sat down upon the sofa and took up the first book which came to hand, not even making a pretense 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 sympathized 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 neighborhood; 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 humor, 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.

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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 favoritism 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 generalizing 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 discomfort, 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 apologize, 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 humanizing 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-flavored ecstasy of Charley Potts, struck upon Margaret's ear. Shortly afterward, while Geoffrey and Potts were deep in a discussion on color, 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 way 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, toward 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?"

"Oh 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, some-

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thing 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 color 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 road-side, 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 neighborhood ran out in admiration of the whole turnout, 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 afterward 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 ear-rings. 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."

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"Oh, Miss Maurice?" said Margaret, as though half doubtful to whom she was talking. "Oh 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 gayety."

"Yes; at least, if not to gayety to excitement; to having every hour of the day filled up with something to do; to finding the time flown before I scarcely knew 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 candor 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 gayety; and I thought at one time it would be impossible for me to continue there. But I held on, and I manage 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 dullness. 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—oh, 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 dare say 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."

"Oh 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. References kindly permitted to the Earl of B., Lord C., etc.' 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

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will please me better. It's dull for her here, Annie, all alone; and I'm tied to my easel all day."

"Oh, 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 hostlers 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 Misses Coverdale 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. Oh, 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 endeavored to make reparation for it. How openly she spoke! how bitterly she bemoaned the dullness 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 endeavored 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 gayety 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-color 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 among the nick-nacks, and trotting out his little scraps of news in his own odd, quaint fashion, Annie, who had heard from Stevens of his arrival, came in, bringing the portrait with her.

"Enter, Miss Maurice!" said Algy; "always

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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?—Shakspeare. 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?"

"Oh! 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 color, 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 soliloquizing: "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 honor 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 toward 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 favorite 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*,

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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 fire-works 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. Oh, angel of light and almost of hope to this wretched frame! oh, sole realization 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 piano-forte exercises by the children in the next house; dreaming of his past, his present, and his future. Dreaming of the old farm-house 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 that 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

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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 recognized 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. Oh, 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 content to receive him back again, and to install 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 book-shelves, "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 recognized 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 Stevens, 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 Stevens said, "Her ladyship asked me if Mr. Barford wasn't here, my lord, and seemed particular anxious to see him." Lord Caterham felt the color flush in his cheeks as the cause of his mother's visit was thus innocently explained by Stevens; but the moment

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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 Stevens 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 grand-daughter, 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."

"Oh, 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 condition 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.

"Oh, 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 favorite 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 can not 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 can not 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. Oh no; it's not the smallest use trying to learn any thing from Mr. Trivett."

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"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 correct? 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 Honorable Algernon Barford, who used to dine with the old gentleman half a dozen times every season, and who had the honor of being called a very good fellow by him."

"Oh, 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 can not 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. Oh, 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 among them, would hardly recognize 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 rumors went the round of the gossip-columns of

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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 rumor traceable to the old gentleman's housekeeper, 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 intrigued for his favor.

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 number, 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 herself 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 unfavorable 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 afterward 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 realization 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

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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 can not 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 appreciate 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 behavior, Lord Caterham saw plainly what she was endeavoring 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 among 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 Stevens, who announced that Mr. and Mrs.

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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 apologize.

"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 utilize 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."

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

"Oh, 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."

"Oh, 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; "oh, 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 afterward 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 house-maids 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 afterward, 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 homeward—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-heart-

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ed, 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 Stevens, 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 color 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 Stevens 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. Stevens 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.

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"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 recognize. 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. Oh, 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 can not 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 Stevens 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 toward 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.

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

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

"Oh!—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 toward 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-by, 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 untrammeled, 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;

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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 endeavor 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 laboring 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, 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 gayety.

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 pretense 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 chirruping to the little putty face, or swing the shapeless mass to and fro, singing meanwhile the dismalest 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 marvelously 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

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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 fulfillment of their maternal duties; if there was one bond of union between them it was a sort of tacitly recognized 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 behavior 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 eyebrow-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 gandering about with a parcel of fellows, and come home at all hours of the night—I used to hear him, though he did creep up stairs 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?"

"Oh, 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

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would be likely to be well when she 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 have noticed; and I'll tell you what it is, Matilda, I'm certain she has got something on her mind."

"Oh, I hope not, poor girl; poor, dear Margaret!"

"Poor, dear fiddle-stick! 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!"

"Oh, 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—"

"Oh 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."

"Oh, 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! Oh, 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 intimacy! 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 sharp-sighted 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-by 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

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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 explain 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 rumored 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-flavored joke, and were only too delighted to get them, in conjunction with his check. 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 different motives from those of Mr. Stompff, was identically the same. Old William had heard some of those irrepressible rumors 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 color, 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?"

"Oh, 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, eying the young man kindly as he puffed at his pipe; "it's not very difficult to discover what's up now, then."

"Oh, 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.

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"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 ahead 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 mustache, 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 afterward 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. Halloo! 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 cornfield and mowers? what you call 'em—reapers? That's it! reapers, and a little child. Some story, eh? Oh, 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's 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."

"Oh, I shall say nothing. People will talk,

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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 analyze it.

"What can it be?" Geoffrey would ask himself. "I can not 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 practical 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 cheer-

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ful. 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 preöccupying 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 afterward, 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 realized, 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 beautifulest 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 favorite 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 unfavorably.

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 agonizing, 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

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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 colorless, 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?"

"Oh yes, quite well," she replied; and then added, with the faintest flicker of color 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 demeanor 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 Margaret 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.

"Oh 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 toward 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 school-boy—a letter over which his mother bent sad and boding looks and Til had a "good cry." Though Geoffrey had not visited

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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 realized 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 lingered 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 toward home, his head bent downward, 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 can not 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 among 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 dispatches 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 diplomacy in the highest degree; and diplomacy was required in the present juncture.

In his solitary hours he had been accustomed to recall 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 heartfulest 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 analyze, 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

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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 honors. 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 toward a better understanding between them, had long since begun to tell upon him. There was a time when, smarting under her life-long 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 wheel-chair, apparently forgotten in an obscure corner of his father's study at Homershams, while Lord Beauport administered a terrific "wigging," ending in threats of jails 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 offense, 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.

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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?"

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

"Ah, so Stevens 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—"

"Oh 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 gayety, 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 can not 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—"

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"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 endeavored 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 fulfill 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

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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 yourself to such a scheme."

"I havé not the least idea of what you are talking about, Arthur," said Lady Beauport after a minute's pause. "You appear to have conceived 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 painful 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:

"Oh, it's all very well to talk about his promises, Arthur; but, really, how you could expect Lionel to remain in Australia I can not 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 can not 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 favor 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,

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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." Oh, how the feeble voice softened, and the light in the eyes deepened! "And my requests are neither frequent nor hard to fulfill, 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 defeated 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 Stevens 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!"

BOOK III.—LAND AT LAST.

CHAPTER I.

THE WHOLE TRUTH.

No one who knew Geoffrey Ludlow would have recognized him in the round-shouldered man with the prone head, the earth-seeking eyes, the hands plunged deeply in his pockets, plodding home on that day on which he had determined that Margaret should give him an explanation of her conduct toward him. Although Geoff had never been a roisterer, had never enlisted in that army of artists whose members hear "the chimes o' midnight," had always been considered more or less slow and steady, and was looked upon as one of the most respectable representatives of the community, yet his happy disposition had rendered him a general favorite even among those ribalds, and his equable temper and kindly geniality were proverbial among all the brethren of the brush. Ah, that equable temper, that kindly geniality—where were they now? Those expanded nostrils, those closed lips spoke of very different feelings; that long steady stride was very different from the joyous step which had provoked the cynicism of the City-bound clerks; that puckered brow, those haggard cheeks, could not be recognized as the facial presentments of the Geoffrey Ludlow of a few short months since.

In good sooth he was very much altered. The mental worrying so long striven against in silence had begun to tell upon his appearance; the big broad shoulders had become rounded; the gait had lost its springy elasticity, the face was lined, and the dark-brown hair round the temples and the long full beard were dashed with streaks of silver. These changes troubled him but little. Never, save perhaps during the brief period of his courtship of Margaret, had he given the smallest thought to his personal appearance; yellow soap and cold water had been his cosmetics, and his greatest sacrifice to vanity had been to place himself at rare intervals under the hairdresser's scissors. But there were other changes to which, try as he might, he could not blind himself. He knew that the very source and fount of his delight was troubled, if not sullied; he knew that all his happiness, so long wished for, so lately attained, was trembling in the balance; he felt that indefinable, indescribable sensation of something impending, something which would shatter his roof-tree and break up that home so recently established. As he plunged onward through the seething streets, looking neither to the right nor to the left, he thought vaguely of the events of the last few months of his life—thought of them, regarding them as a dream. How long was it since he was so happy at home with his old mother and with Til? when the monthly meeting of the Titians caused his greatest excitement, and when his hopes of fame were yet visionary and indistinct? How long was it since he had met *her* that fearful night, and had drunk of the beauty and the witchery which had had such results? He was a man now before the world with a name which people knew and respected, with a wife whose beauty people admired; but ah! where was the quietude, the calm, unpretending happiness of those old days?

What could it mean? Had she a wish ungratified? He taxed his mind to run through

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all the expressions of her idle fancy, but could think of none with which he had not complied. Was she ill? He had made that excuse for her before her baby was born; but now, not merely the medical testimony, but his own anxious scrutiny told him that she was in the finest possible health. There was an odd something about her sometimes which he could not make out—an odd way of listening vacantly, and not replying to direct questions, which he had noticed lately, and only lately; but that might be a part of her idiosyncrasy. Her appetite, too, was scarcely as good as it used to be; but in all other respects she seemed perfectly well. There might have been some difficulty with his mother and sister, he had at first imagined; but the old lady had been wonderfully complaisant; and Til and Margaret, when they met, seemed to get on excellently together. To be sure his mother had assumed the reins of government during Margaret's confinement, and held them until the last moment compatible with decency; but her *régime* had been over long since; and Margaret was the last person to struggle for power so long as all trouble was taken off her hands. Had the neighbors slighted her she might have had some cause for complaint; but the neighbors were every thing that was polite, and indeed at the time of her illness had shown her attention meriting a warmer term. What could it mean? Was there— No; he crushed out the idea as soon as it arose in his mind. There could not be any question about—any one else—preying on her spirits? The man, her destroyer—who had abandoned and deserted her—was far away; and she was much too practical a woman not to estimate all his conduct at its proper worth. No amount of girlish romance could survive the cruel schooling which his villainy had subjected her to; and there was no one else whom she had seen who could have had any influence over her. Besides, at the first, when he had made his humble proffer of love, she had only to have told him that it could not be, and he would have taken care that her future was provided for—if not as it had been, at all events far beyond the reach of want. Oh no, that could not be.

So argued Geoff with himself—brave, honest, simple old Geoff, with the heart of a man and the guilelessness of a child. So he argued, determining at the same time that he would pluck out the heart of the mystery at once, whatever might be at its root; any thing would be better than this suspense preying on him daily, preventing him from doing his work, and rendering him moody and miserable.

But before he reached his home his resolution failed, and his heart sunk within him. What if Margaret were silent and preoccupied? what if the occasional gloom upon her face became more and more permanent? Had not her life been full of sorrow? and was it wonderful that the remembrance of it from time to time came over her? She had fearlessly confided her whole story to him; she had given him time to reflect on it before committing himself to her; and would it be generous, would it be even just, to call her to account now for freaks of behavior engendered doubtless in the memory of that bygone time? After all, what was the accusation against her? None. Had there been the smallest trace of levity in her conduct, how many eyebrows were there ready to be lifted—how many shoulders waiting to be shrugged! But there was nothing of the kind; all that could be said about her was that—all that could be said about her—now he thought it over, nothing was said about her; all that was hinted was that her manner was cold and impassible; that she took no interest in what was going on around her, and that therefore there must be something wrong. There is always something to be complained of. If her manner had been light and easy, they would have called her a flirt, and pitied him for having married a woman so utterly ill-suited to his staid habits. He knew so little of her when he married her that he ran every kind of risk as to what she might really prove to be; and on reflection he thought he had been exceedingly lucky. She might have been giddy, vulgar, loud, presuming, extravagant; whereas she was simply reserved and undemonstrative—nothing more. He had been a fool in thinking of her as he had done during the last few weeks; he had—without her intending it doubtless, for she was an excellent woman—he had taken his tone in this matter from his mother, with whom Margaret was evidently no favorite, and—there, never mind—it was at an end now. She was his own darling wife, his lovely companion, merely to sit and look at whom was rapturous delight to a man of his keen appreciation of the beauty of form and color; and as to her coldness and reserve, it was but a temporary mannerism, which would soon pass away.

So argued Geoffrey Ludlow with himself—brave, honest, simple old Geoff, with the heart of a man and the guilelessness of a child.

So happy was he under the influence of his last thought that he longed to take Margaret to his heart at once, and without delay to make trial of his scheme for dissipating her gloom; but when he reached home the servant told him that her mistress had gone out very soon after he himself had left that morning, and had not yet returned. So he went through into the studio, intending to work at his picture; but when he got there he sunk down into a chair, staring vacantly at the lay-figure, arranged as usual in a preposterous attitude, and thinking about Margaret. Rousing himself, he found his pallet, and commenced to set it; but while in the midst of this task he suddenly fell a-thinking again, and stood there mooning until the hope of doing any work was past, and the evening shadows were falling on the landscape. Then he put up his pallet and his brushes, and went into the dining-room. He walked to the window, but had scarcely reached it when he saw a cab drive up. The man opened the door, and Margaret descended, said a few hasty words to the driver, who touched his hat and fastened on his horse's nose-bag, and approached the house with rapid steps.

From his position in the window he had noticed a strange light in her eyes which he had never before seen there, a bright hectic flush on her cheek, a tight compression of her lips. When she entered the room he saw that in his first hasty glance he had not been deceived; that the whole expression of her face had changed from its usual state of statuesque repose, and was now stern, hard, and defiant.

He was standing in the shadow of the window-curtain, and she did not see him at first, but

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throwing her parasol on the table, commenced pacing the room. The lamp was as yet unlit, and the flickering fire-light—now glowing a deep, dull red, now leaping into yellow flame—gave an additional weirdness to the set intensity of her beautiful face. Gazing at her mechanically walking to and fro, her head supported by one hand, her eyes gleaming, her hair pushed back off her face, Geoffrey again felt that indescribable sinking at his heart; and there was something of terror in the tone in which, stepping forward, he uttered her name—"Margaret!"

In an instant she stopped in her walk, and turning toward the place whence the voice came, said, "You there, Geoffrey?"

"Yes, darling—who else? I was standing at the window when the cab drove up, and saw you get out. By-the-way, you've not sent away the cab, love; is he paid?"

"No, not yet—he will—let him stay a little."

"Well, but why keep him up here, my child, where there is no chance of his getting a return-fare? Better pay him and let him go. I'll go and pay him!" and he was leaving the room.

"Let him stay, please," said Margaret, in her coldest tones; and Geoffrey turned back at once. But as he turned he saw a thrill run through her, and marked the manner in which she steadied her hand on the mantle-piece on which she was leaning. In an instant he was by her side.

"You are ill, my darling!" he exclaimed. "You have done too much again, and are over-fatigued—"

"I am perfectly well," she said; "it was nothing; or whatever it was, it has passed. I did not know you had returned. I was going to write to you."

"To write to me!" said Geoff, in a hollow voice—"to write to me!"

"To write to you. I had something to tell you—and—and I did not know whether I should ever see you again!"

For an instant the table against which Geoffrey Ludlow stood seemed to spin away under his touch, and the whole room reeled. A deadly faintness crept over him, but he shook it off with one great effort, and said, in a very low tone, "I scarcely understand you; please explain."

She must have had the nature of a fiend to look upon that large-souled, loving fellow, stricken down by her words as by a sudden blow, and with his heart all bleeding, waiting to hear the rest of her sentence. She had the nature of a fiend, for through her set teeth she said, calmly and deliberately:

"I say I did not know whether I should ever see you again. That cab is detained by me to take me away from this house, to which I ought never to have come; which I shall never enter again."

Geoff had sunk into a chair, and clutching the corner of the table with both hands, was looking up at her with a helpless gaze.

"You don't speak!" she continued; "and I can understand why you are silent. This decision has come upon you unexpectedly, and you can scarcely realize its meaning or its origin. I am prepared to explain both to you. I had intended doing so in a letter, which I should have left behind me; but since you are here, it is better that I should speak."

The table was laid for dinner, and there was a small decanter of sherry close by Geoff's hand. He filled a glass from it and drank it eagerly. Apparently involuntarily Margaret extended her hand toward the decanter; but she instantly withdrew it, and resumed:

"You know well, Geoffrey Ludlow, that when you asked me to become your wife I declined to give you any answer until you had heard the story of my former life. When I noticed your growing interest in me—and I noticed it from its very first germ—I determined that before you pledged yourself to me—for my wits had been sharpened in the school of adversity, and I read plainly enough that love from such a man as you had but one meaning and one result—I determined that before you pledged yourself to me you should learn as much as it was necessary for you to know of my previous history. Although my early life had been spent in places far away from London, and among persons whom it was almost certain I should never see again, it was, I thought, due to you to explain all to you, lest the gossiping fools of the world might some day vex your generous heart with stories of your wife's previous career, which she had kept from you. Do you follow me?"

Geoffrey bowed his head, but did not speak.

"In that story I told you plainly that I had been deceived by a man under promise of marriage; that I had lived with him as his wife for many months; that he had basely deserted me and left me to starve—left me to die—as I should have died had you not rescued me. You follow me still?"

She could not see his face now—it was buried in his hands; but there was a motion of his head, and she proceeded:

"That man betrayed me when I trusted him, used me while I amused him, deserted me when I palled upon him. He ruined, you restored me; he left me to die, you brought me back to life; he strove to drag me to perdition, you to raise me to repute. I respected, I honored you; but I loved him! yes, from first to last I loved him; infatuated, mad as I knew it to be, I loved him throughout! Had I died in those streets from which you rescued me I should have found strength to bless him with my last breath. When I recovered consciousness my first unspoken thought was of him. It was that I would live, that I would make every exertion to hold on to life, that I might have the chance of seeing him again. Then dimly, and as in a dream, I saw you and heard your voice, and knew that you were to be a portion of my fate. Ever since the image of that man has been always present before me; his soft words of love have been always ringing in my ears; his gracious presence has been always at my side. I have striven and striven against the infatuation. Before Heaven I swear to you that I have prayed night after night that I might not be led into that awful temptation of retrospect which beset me; that I might be strengthened to love you as you should be loved, to do my duty toward you as it should be done. All in vain, all in vain! That one fatal passion has sapped my being, and rendered me utterly incapable of any other love in any other shape. I know what you have done for me—more than that, I know what you have suffered for me. You have said nothing; but do you think I have not seen how my weariness, my

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coldness, the impossibility of my taking interest in all the little schemes you have laid for my diversion, have irked and pained you? Do you think I do not know what it is for a full heart to beat itself into quiet against a stone? I know it all; and if I could have spared you one pang, I swear I would have done so. But I loved this man; ah, how I loved him! He was but a memory to me then; but that memory was far, far dearer than all reality! He is more than a memory to me now; for he lives, and he is in London, and I have seen him!"

Out of Geoffrey Ludlow's hands came, raised up suddenly, a dead white face, with puckered lips, knit brows, and odd red streaks and indentations round the eyes.

"Yes, Geoffrey Ludlow," she continued, not heeding the apparition, "I have seen him—now, within this hour—seen him, bright, well, and handsome—oh, so handsome!—as when I saw him first; and that has determined me. While I thought of him as perhaps dead, while I knew him to be thousands of miles away, I could bear to sit here, to drone out the dull, monotonous life, striving to condone the vagrancy of my thoughts by the propriety of my conduct—heart-sick, weary, and remorseful. Yes, remorseful, so far as you are concerned; for you are a true and noble man, Geoffrey. But now that he is here, close to me, I could not rest another hour—I must go to him at once. Do you hear, Geoffrey—at once?"

He tried to speak, but his lips were parched and dry, and he only made an inarticulate sound. There was no mistaking the flash of his eyes, however. In them Margaret had never seen such baleful light; so that she was scarcely astonished when, his voice returning, he hissed out, "I know him!"

"You know him?"

"Yes; just come back from Australia—Lord Caterham's brother! I had a letter from Lord Caterham to-day—his brother—Lionel Brakespere!"

"Well!" she exclaimed, "what then? Suppose it be Lionel Brakespere, what then, I ask—what then?"

"Then!" said Geoffrey, poising his big, sinewy arm—"then, let him look to himself; for, by the Lord, I'll kill him!"

"What!" and in an instant she had left her position against the mantle-piece, and was leaning over the table at the corner where he sat, her face close to his, her eyes on his eyes, her hot breath on his cheeks—"You dare to talk of killing him, of doing him the slightest injury! You dare to lift your hand against my Lionel! Look here, Geoffrey Ludlow: you have been good and kind and generous to me—have loved me, in your fashion—deeply, I know; and I would let us part friends; but I swear that if you attempt to wreak your vengeance on Lionel Brakespere, who has done you no harm—how has he injured you?—I will be revenged on you in a manner of which you little dream, but which shall break your heart and spirit, and humble your pride to the dust. Think of all this, Geoffrey Ludlow—think of it. Do nothing rashly, take no step that will madden me, and drive me to do something that will prevent your ever thinking of me with regret when I am far away."

There was a softness in her voice which touched a chord in Geoffrey Ludlow's breast. The fire faded out of his eyes; his hands, which had been tight-clenched, relaxed, and spread out before him in entreaty; he looked up at Margaret through blinding tears, and, in a broken voice, said:

"When you are far away! Oh, my darling, my darling, you are not going to leave me? It can not be—it is some horrible dream. To leave me, who live but for you, whose existence is bound up in yours! It can not be. What have I done?—what can you charge me with? Want of affection, of devotion to you? O God! it is hard that I should have to suffer in this way! But you won't go, Margaret darling? Tell me that—only tell me that!"

She shrank farther away from him, and seemed for a moment to cower before the vehemence and anguish of his appeal; but the next her face darkened and hardened, and as she answered him the passion in her voice was dashed with a tone of contempt.

"Yes, I will leave you," she said—"of course I will leave you. Do you not hear me? Do you not understand me? I have seen him, I tell you, and every thing which is not him has faded out of my life. What should I do here, or any where, where he is not? The mere idea is absurd. I have only half lived since I lost him, and I could not live at all now that I have seen him again. Stay here! not leave *you!* stay *here!*" She looked round the room with a glance of aversion and avoidance, and went on with increasing rapidity: "You have never understood me. How should you? But the time has come now when you must try to understand me, for your own sake; for mine it does not matter—nothing matters now."

She was standing within arm's-length of him, and her face was turned full upon him: but she did not seem to see him. She went on, as though reckoning with herself, and Geoffrey gazed upon her in stupefied amazement; his momentary rage quenched in the bewilderment of his anguish.

"I don't deny your goodness; I don't dispute it; I don't think about it at all; it is all done with, all past and gone; and I have no thought for it or you beyond these moments in which I am speaking to you for the last time. I have suffered in this house torments which your slow nature could neither suffer nor comprehend—torments wholly impossible to endure longer. I have raged and rebelled against the dainty life of dullness and dawdling, the narrow hopes and the tame pleasures which have sufficed for you. I must have so raged and rebelled under any circumstances; but I might have gone on conquering the revolts if I had not seen him. Now, I tell you, it is no longer possible, and I break with it at once and forever. Let me go quietly, and in such peace as may be possible: for go I must and I will. You could as soon hold a hurricane by force or a wave of the sea by entreaty."

Geoffrey Ludlow covered his face with his hands, and groaned. Once again she looked at him—this time as if she saw him—and went on:

"Let me speak to you, while I can, of yourself; while I can, I say, for his face is rising between me and all the world beside, and I can hardly force myself to remember any thing, to calculate any thing, to realize any thing which is

not him. You ask me not to leave you; you would have me stay! Are you mad, Geoffrey Ludlow? Have you lived among your canvases and your colors until you have ceased to understand what men and women are, and to see facts? Do you know that I love him, though he left me to what you saved me from, so that all that you have done for me and given me has been burdensome and hateful to me, because these things had no connection with him, but marked the interval in which he was lost to me? Do you know that I love him so that I have sickened and pined in this house, even as I sickened and pined for hunger in the streets you took me from, for the most careless word he ever spoke and the coldest look he ever gave me? Do you know the agonized longing which has been mine, the frantic weariness, the unspeakable loathing of every thing that set my life apart from the time when my life was his? No, you don't know these things! Again I say, how should you? Well, I tell them to you now, and I ask you, are you mad that you say, 'Don't leave me?' Would you have me stay with *you* to think of *him* all the weary hours of the day, all the wakeful hours of the night? Would you have me stay with you to feel, and make you know that I feel, the tie between us an intolerable and hideous bondage, and that with every pang of love for him came a throb of loathing for you? No, no! you are nothing to me now—nothing, nothing! My thoughts hurry away from you while I speak; but if any thing so preposterous as my staying with you could be possible, you would be the most hateful object on this earth to me."

"My God!" gasped Geoffrey. That was all. The utter, unspeakable horror with which her words, poured out in a hard, ringing voice, which never faltered, filled him, overpowered all remonstrance. A strange feeling, which was akin to fear of this beautiful unmasked demon, came over him. It was Margaret, his wife, who spoke thus! The knowledge and its fullest agony were in his heart; and yet a sense of utter strangeness and impossibility were there too. The whirl within him was not to be correctly termed thought; but there was in it something of the past, a puzzled remembrance of her strange quietude, her listlessness, her acquiescent, graceful, wearied, compliant ways; and this was she—this woman whose eyes burned with flames of passion and desperate purpose—on those ordinarily pale cheeks two spots of crimson glowed—whose lithe frame trembled with the intense fervor of the love which she was declaring for another man! Yes, this was she! It seemed impossible; but it was true.

"I waste words," she said; "I am talking of things beside the question, and I don't want to lie to you. Why should I? There has been nothing in my life worth having but him, nothing bearable since I lost him, and there is nothing else since I have found him again. I say, I must leave you for your sake, and it is true; but I would leave you just the same if it was not true. There is nothing henceforth in my life but him."

She moved toward the door as she spoke, and the action seemed to rouse Geoffrey from the stupefaction which had fallen upon him. She had her hand upon the door-handle though before he spoke.

"You are surely mad!" he said; "I think so. —I hope so; but even mad women remember that they are mothers. Have you forgotten your child, that you rave thus of leaving your home?"

She took her hand from the door and leaned back against it, her head held up, and her eyes turned upon him, the dark eyebrows shadowing them with a stern frown.

"I am not mad," she said; "but I don't wonder you think me so. Continue to think so, if you needs must remember me at all. Love is madness to such as you; but it is life, and sense, and wisdom, and wealth to such as I and the man I love. At all events it is all the sanity I ask for or want. As for the child—" She paused for one moment, and waved her hand impatiently.

"Yes," repeated Geoffrey, hoarsely — "the child!"

"I will tell you then, Geoffrey Ludlow," she said, in a more deliberate tone than she had yet commanded, "I care nothing for the child! Ay, look at me with abhorrence now; so much the better for *you*, and not a jot the worse for me. What is your abhorrence to me? what was your love? There are women to whom their children are all in all. I am not of their number; I never could have been. They are not women who love as I love. Where a child has power to sway and fill a woman's heart, to shake her resolution, and determine her life, love is not supreme. There is a proper and virtuous resemblance to it, no doubt, but not love; no, no, not love. I tell you I care nothing for the child. Geoffrey Ludlow, if I had loved you, I should have cared for him almost as little; if the man I love had been his father, I should have cared for him no more, if I know any thing of myself. The child does not need me. I suppose I am not without the brute instinct which would lead me to shelter and feed and clothe him if he did; but what has he ever needed from me? If I could say without a lie that any thought of him weighs with me—but I can not—I would say to you, for the child's sake, if for no other reason, I must go. The child is the last and feeblest argument you can use with me, with whom indeed there are none strong or availing."

She turned abruptly, and once more laid her hand upon the door-handle. Her last words had roused Geoffrey from the inaction caused by his amazement. As she coldly and deliberately avowed her indifference to the child furious anger once more awoke within him. He strode hastily toward her and sternly grasped her by the left arm. She made a momentary effort to shake off his hold; but he held her firmly at arm's-length from him, and said through his closed teeth:

"You are a base and unnatural woman—more base and unnatural than I believed any woman could be. As for me, I can keep silence on your conduct to myself; perhaps I deserved it, seeing where and how I found you." She started and winced. "As for the child, he is better motherless than with such a mother; but I took you from shame and sin, when I found you in the street, and married you; and you shall not return to them if any effort of mine can prevent it. You have no feeling, you have no conscience, you have no pride; you glory in a passion for a man who flung you away to starve! Woman, have you no sense of decency left, that you can talk of resuming your life of infamy and shame?"

The husband and wife formed a group which

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would have been awful to look upon, had there been any one to witness that terrible interview, as they stood confronting one another, while Geoffrey spoke. As his words came slowly forth a storm of passion shook Margaret's frame. Every gleam of color forsook her face; she was transformed into a fixed image of unspeakable wrath. A moment she stood silent, breathing quickly, her white lips dry and parted. Then, as a faint movement, something like a ghastly smile, crept over her face, she said:

"You are mistaken, Geoffrey Ludlow; I leave my life of infamy and shame in leaving *you!*"

"In leaving me! Again you are mad!"

"Again I speak the words of sanity and truth. If what I am going to tell you fills you with horror, I would have spared you; you have yourself to thank. I intended to have spared you this final blow—I intended to have left you in happy ignorance of the fact which you blindly urge me to declare by your taunts. What did I say at the commencement of this interview? That I wanted us to part friends. But you will not have that. You reproach me with ingratitude; you taunt me with being an unnatural mother; finally you fling at me my life of infamy and shame; I repeat that no infamy, no shame could attach to me until I became your mistress!"

The bolt had shot home at last. Geoffrey leaped to his feet, and stood erect before her; but his strength must have failed him in that instant; for he could only gasp, "My mistress!"

"Your mistress. That is all I have been to you, so help me Heaven!"

"My wife! my own—married—lawful wife!"

"No, Geoffrey Ludlow, no! In that wretched lodging to which you had me conveyed, and where you pleaded your love, I told you—the truth indeed, but not the whole truth. Had you known me better then—had you known me as you—as you know me now, you might have guessed that I was not one of those trusting creatures who are betrayed and ruined by fair words and beaming glances, come they from ever so handsome a man. One fact I concealed from you, thinking, as my Lionel had deserted me, and would probably never be seen again, that its revelation would prevent me from accepting the position which you were about to offer me; but the day that I fled from my home at Tenby I was married to Lionel Brakespere; and at this moment I am his wife, not merely in the sight of God, but by the laws of man!"

For some instants he did not speak, he did not move from the chair into which he had again fallen heavily during her speech; he sat gazing at her, his breathing thickened, impeded, gasping. At length he said:

"You're—you're speaking truth?"

"I am speaking gospel-truth, Geoffrey Ludlow. You brought it upon yourself; I would have saved you from the knowledge of it if I could, but you brought it upon yourself."

"Yes—as you say—on myself;" still sitting gazing vacantly before him, muttering to himself rather than addressing her. Suddenly, with a wild shriek, "The child! O God, the child!"

"For the child's sake, no less than for your own, you will hold your tongue on this matter," said Margaret, in her calm, cold, never-varying tone. "In this instance at least you will have sense enough to perceive the course you ought to take. What I have told you is known to none but you and me, and one other—who can be left to me to deal with. Let it be your care that the secret remains with us."

"But the child is a—"

"Silence, man!" she exclaimed, seizing his arm—"silence now—for a few moments at all events. When I am gone, proclaim your child's illegitimacy and your own position if you will, but wait till then. Now I can remain here no longer. Such things as I absolutely require I will send for. Good-by, Geoffrey Ludlow!"

She gathered her shawl around her and moved toward the door. In an instant his lethargy left him; he sprang up, rushed before her, and stood erect and defiant.

"You don't leave me in this way, Margaret. You shall not leave me thus. I swear you shall not pass!"

She looked at him for a moment with a half-compassionate, half-interested face. This assumption of spirit and authority she had never seen in him before, and it pleased her momentarily. Then she said, quietly:

"Oh yes, I shall. I am sure, Mr. Ludlow, you will not prevent my going to my husband!"

When the servant, after waiting more than an hour for dinner to be rung for, came into the room to see what was the cause of the protracted delay, she found her master prostrate on the hearth-rug, tossing and raving incoherently. The frightened girl summoned assistance; and when Dr. Brandram arrived he announced Mr. Ludlow to be in the incipient stage of a very sharp attack of brain-fever.

CHAPTER II.

THE REVERSE OF THE MEDAL.

It was one of those cheerless days not unfrequent at the end of September, which first tell us that such fine weather as we have had has taken its departure, and that the long, dreary winter is close at hand. The air was moist and "muggy;" there was no freshening wind to blow away the heavy dun clouds which lay banked up thick, and had seemed almost motionless for days; there was a dead, faint depression over all things, which weighed heavily on the spirits, impeded the respiration, and relaxed the muscles. It was weather which dashed and cowed even the lightest-hearted, and caused the care-worn and the broken to think self-destruction less extraordinary than they had hitherto considered it.

About noon a man was looking out of one of the upper windows of Long's Hotel on the dreary desert of Bond Street. He was a tall man; who, with straight-cut features, shapely beard, curling light hair, and clear complexion, would have been generally considered more than good-looking, notwithstanding that his eyes were comparatively small and his mouth was decidedly sensual. That he was a man of breeding and society one could have told in an instant—could have told it by the color and shape of his hands, by his bearing, by the very manner in which he, leaving the window from time to time, lounged

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round the room, his hands plunged in his pockets or pulling at his tawny beard. You could have told it despite of his dress, the like of which had surely never been seen before on any visitor to that select hostelry; for he wore a thick jacket and trowsers of blue pilot-cloth, a blue flannel shirt, with a red silk handkerchief knotted round the collar, and ankle jack-boots. When he jumped out of the cab at the door on the previous day he had on a round tarpaulin hat, and carried over his arm an enormous pea-jacket with horn buttons; and as he brought no luggage with him save a small valise, and had altogether the appearance of the bold smugglers who surreptitiously vend cigars and silk handkerchiefs, the hall porter at first refused him admittance; and it was not until the proprietor had been summoned, and after a close scrutiny and a whispered name had recognized his old customer, that the strange-looking visitor was ushered up stairs. He would have a private room, he said; and he did not want it known that he was back just yet—did Jubber understand? If any body called, that was another matter: he expected his mother and one or two others; but he did not want it put in the papers, or any thing of that kind. Jubber did understand, and left Captain Lionel Brakespere to himself.

Captain Lionel Brakespere, just at that time, could have had no worse company. He had been bored to death by the terrible monotony of a long sea-voyage, and had found on landing in England that his boredom was by no means at an end. He had heard from his mother that "that awkward business had all been squared," as he phrased it; and that it was desirable he should return home at once, where there was a chance of a marriage by which "a big something was to be pulled off," as he phrased it again. So he had come back, and there he was at Long's; but as yet he was by no means happy. He was doubtful as to his position in society, as to how much of his escapade was known, as to whether he would be all right with his former set, or whether he would get the cold-shoulder, and perhaps be cut. He could only learn this by seeing Algy Barford or some other fellow of the *clique;* and every fellow was of course out of town at that infernal time of year. He must wait, at all events, until he had seen his mother, to whom he had sent word of his arrival. He might be able to learn something of all this from her. Meantime he had taken a private room; not that there was much chance of his meeting any one in the coffee-room, but some fellow might perhaps stop there for the night on his way through town; and he had sent for the tailor, and the hair-cutter fellow, and that sort of thing, and was going to be made like a Christian again—not like the cad he'd looked like in that infernal place out there.

He lounged round the room, and pulled his beard and yawned as he looked out of the window; pulling himself together afterward by stretching out his hands and arms, and shrugging his shoulders and shaking himself, as if endeavoring to shake off depression. He *was* depressed; there was no doubt about it. Out there it was well enough. He had been out there just long enough to have begun to settle down into his new life, to have forgotten old ties and old feelings; but here every thing jarred upon him. He was back in England certainly, but back in England in a condition which he had never known before. In the old days, at this time of year, he would have been staying down at some country-house, or away in some fellow's yacht, enjoying himself to the utmost; thoroughly appreciated and highly thought of—a king among men and a favorite among women. Now he was cooped up in this deserted, beastly place, which every one decent had fled from, not daring even to go out and see whether some old comrade, haply retained in town by duty, were not to be picked up, from whom he could learn the news, with whom he might have a game of billiards, or something to get through the infernally dragging, wearisome time. He expected his mother. She was his truest and stanchest friend, after all, and had behaved splendidly to him all through this terrible business. It was better that she should come down there, and let him know exactly how the land lay. He would have gone home, but he did not know what sort of a reception he might have met with from the governor; and from all he could make out from his mother's letters, it was very likely that Caterham might cut up rough, and say or do something confoundedly unpleasant. It was an infernal shame of Caterham, and just like his strait-laced nonsense—that it was. Was not he the eldest son, and what did he want more? It was all deuced well for him to preach and moralize, and all that sort of thing; but his position had kept him out of temptation, else he might not be any better than other poor beggars who had fallen through and come to grief.

So he reasoned with himself as he lounged round and round the room; and at last began to consider that he was a remarkably ill-used person. He began to hate the room and its furniture, altered the position of the light and elegant little couch, flung himself into the arm-chair, drumming his heels upon the floor, and rose from it leaving the chintz covering all tumbled and the anti-macassar all awry, drummed upon the window, stared at the prints already inspected—the "Hero and his Horse," which led him into reminiscences of seeing the old Duke with his white duck trowsers and his white cravat, with the silver buckle gleaming at the back of his bowed head, at Eton on Montem days—glanced with stupid wonderment at Ward's "Dr. Johnson reading the Manuscript of the *Vicar of Wakefield,*" which conveyed to him no idea whatsoever—looked at a proof of "Hogarth painting the Muse of Comedy," and wondered "who was the old cock with the fat legs, drawing." He watched the few people passing through the streets, the very few hansom cabs with drivers listlessly creeping up and down, as though conscious that the chances of their being hired were dismally remote, the occasional four-wheelers with perambulators and sand-spades on the top, and bronzed children leaning out of the windows, talking of the brief holiday over and the work-a-day life about to recommence—he watched all this, and, watching, worked himself up to such a pitch of desperation that he had almost determined to brave all chances of recognition, and sally forth into the streets, when the door opened, and a waiter entering told him that a lady was waiting to speak with him.

His mother had come at last, then? Let her be shown up directly.

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Of all things Lionel Brakespere abhorred a "scene;" and this was likely to be an uncommonly unpleasant meeting. The Mater was full of feeling and that sort of thing, and would probably fling herself into his arms as soon as the waiter was gone, and cry, and sob, and all that sort of thing, and moan over him—make a fellow look so confoundedly foolish and absurd, by Jove! Must get that over as soon as possible—all the hugging and that—and then find out how matters really stood. So he took up his position close to the door; and as the footsteps approached was a little astonished to hear his heart thumping so loudly.

The door opened, and passing the bowing waiter, who closed it behind her, a lady entered. Though her veil was down, Lionel saw instantly that it was not his mother. A taller, younger woman, with step graceful though hurried, an eager air, a strange nervous manner. As the door closed she threw up her veil and stood revealed—Margaret!

He fell back a pace or two, and the blood rushed to his heart, leaving his face as pale as hers. Then, recovering himself, he caught hold of the table, and glaring at her, said, hoarsely, "You here!"

There was something in his tone which jarred upon her instantly. She made a step forward, and held out her hand appealingly—"Lionel," she said, quite softly, "Lionel, you know me?"

"Know you?" he repeated. "Oh yes—I—I have that honor. I know you fast enough—though what you do here I *don't* know. What do you do here?"

"I came to see you."

"Devilish polite, I'm sure. But—now you have seen me—" He hesitated and smiled. Not a pleasant smile by any means: one of those smiles in which the teeth are never shown. A very grim smile, which slightly wrinkled the lips, but left the eyes hard and defiant; a smile which Margaret knew of old, the sight of which recalled the commencement of scenes of violent passion and bitter upbraiding in the old times; a smile at sight of which Margaret's heart sank within her, only leaving her strength enough to say: "Well!"

"Well!" he repeated—"having seen me—having fulfilled the intention of your visit—had you not better—go?"

"Go!" she exclaimed—"leave you at once, without a look, without a word! Go! after all the long, weary waiting, this hungering to see and speak with you, to pillow my head on your breast, and twine my arms round you as I used to do in the dear old days! Go! in the moment when I am repaid for oh such misery as you, Lionel, I am sure, can not imagine I have endured—the misery of absence from you; the misery of not knowing how or where you were—whether even you were dead or alive; misery made all the keener by recollection of joy which I had known and shared with you. Go! Lionel, dearest Lionel, you can not mean it! Don't try me now, Lionel; the delight at seeing you again has made me weak and faint. I am not so strong as I used to be. Lionel, dearest, don't try me too much."

Never had she looked more beautiful than now. Her arms were stretched out in entreaty, the rich tones of her voice were broken, tears stood in her deep-violet eyes, and the dead-gold hair was pushed off the dead-white brow. Her whole frame quivered with emotion—emotion which she made no attempt to conceal.

Lionel Brakespere had seated himself on the corner of the table, and was looking at her with curiosity. He comprehended the beauty of the picture before him, but he regarded it as a picture. On most other men in his position such an appeal from such a woman would have caused at least a temporary rekindling of the old passion; on him it had not the slightest effect beyond giving him a kind of idea that the situation was somewhat ridiculous and slightly annoying. After a minute's interval he said, with his hands in his pockets and his legs swinging to and fro:

"It's deuced kind of you to say such civil things about me, and I appreciate them—appreciate them, I assure you. But, you see the fact of the matter is, that I'm expecting my mother every minute, and if she were to find you here I should be rather awkwardly situated."

"Oh!" cried Margaret, "you don't think I would compromise you, Lionel? You know me too well for that. You know too well how I always submitted to be kept in the back-ground—only too happy to live on your smiles, to know that you were fêted and made much of."

"Oh yes," said Lionel, simply; "you were always a deuced sensible little woman."

"And I sha'n't be in the way, and I sha'n't bore you. They need know nothing of my existence, if you don't wish it, any more than they used. And we shall lead again the dear old life—eh, Lionel?"

"Eh!" repeated he, in rather a high key—"the dear old life!"

"Ah, how happy I was!" said Margaret. "You, whose intervening time has been passed in action, can scarcely imagine how I have looked back on those days—how eagerly I have longed for the time to come when I might have them again."

"Gad!" said he, "I don't exactly know about my time being passed in action. It's been horribly ghastly and melancholy, and deuced unpleasant, if you mean that."

"Then we will both console ourselves for it now, Lionel. We will forget all the misery we have suffered, and—"

"Y-es!" said he, interrupting her, swinging his leg a little more slowly, and looking quietly up into her face; "I don't exactly follow you in all this."

"You don't follow me?"

"N-no! I scarcely think we can be on the same tack, somehow."

"In what way?"

"In all this about leading again the old life, and living the days over again, and consoling ourselves, and that kind of thing."

"You don't understand it?"

"Well, I don't know about understanding it. All I mean to say is, I'm not going to have it."

But for something in his tone Margaret might not have entirely comprehended what he sought to convey in his words, so enraptured was she at seeing him again. But in his voice, in his look, there was a bravado that was unmistakable. She clasped her hands together in front of her, and her voice was very low and tremulous as she said:

"Lionel, what do you mean?"

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"What do I mean? Well, it's a devilish awkward thing to say—I can't conceive how it came about—all through your coming here, and that sort of thing; but it appears to me that, as I said before, you're on the wrong tack. You don't seem to see the position."

"I don't indeed. For God's sake speak out!"

"There, you see!—that's just it; like all women, taking the thing so much in earnest, and—"

"So much in earnest? Is what would influence one's whole life a thing to be lightly discussed or laughed over? Is—"

"There you are again! That's exactly what I complain of. What have I to do with influencing your life?"

"All—every thing!"

"I did not know it, then, by Jove!—that's all I've got to say. You're best out of it, let me tell you. My influence is a deuced bad one, at least for myself."

Once again the tone, reckless and defiant, struck harshly on her ear. He continued, "I was saying you did not seem to see the position. You and I were very good friends once upon a time, and got on very well together; but that would never do now."

She turned faint, sick, and closed her eyes; but remained silent.

"Wouldn't do a bit," he continued. "You know I've been a tremendous cropper—must have thought deuced badly of me for cutting off in that way; but it was my only chance, by Jove! and now I've come back to try and make all square. But I must keep deuced quiet and mind my p's and q's, or I shall go to grief again, like a bird."

She waited for a moment, and then she said, faintly and slowly, "I understand you thoroughly now. You mean that it would be better for us to remain apart for some time yet?"

"For some time!—yes. Confound it all, Margaret!—you won't take a hint, and you make a fellow speak out and seem cruel and unkind, and all that sort of thing, that he does not want to. Look here! You ought never to have come here at all. It's impossible we can ever meet again."

She started convulsively; but even then she seemed unable to grasp the truth. Her earnestness brought the color flying to her cheeks as she said, hurriedly, "Why impossible, Lionel—why impossible? If you are in trouble, who has such a right to be near you as I? If you want assistance and solace, who should give it to you before me? That is the mistake you made, Lionel. When you were in your last trouble you should have confided in me: my woman's wit might have helped you through it; or at the worst, my woman's love would have consoled you in it."

She was creeping closer to him, but stopped as she saw his face darken and his arms clasp themselves across his breast.

"D—n it all!" said he, petulantly; "you *won't* understand, I think. This sort of thing is impossible. Any sort of love, or friendship, or trust is impossible. I've come back to set myself straight, and to pull out of all the infernal scrapes I got myself into before I left; and there's only one way to do it."

"And that is—"

"Well, if you will have it, you must. And that is—by making a good marriage."

She uttered a short, sharp cry, followed by a prolonged wail, such as a stricken hare gives. Lionel Brakespere looked up at her; but his face never relaxed, and his arms still remained tightly folded across his breast. Then she spoke, very quietly and very sadly:

"By making a good marriage! Ah! then I see it all. That is why you are annoyed at my having come to you. That is why you dread the sight of me, because it reminds you that I am in the way; reminds you of the existence of the clog round your neck that prevents your taking up this position for which you long; because it reminds you that you once sacrificed self to sentiment, and permitted yourself to be guided by love instead of ambition. That is what you mean?"

His face was darker than ever as he said, "No such d—d nonsense. I don't know what you're talking about; no more do you, I should think, by the way in which you are going on. What *are* you talking about?"

He spoke very fiercely; but she was not cowed or dashed one whit. In the same quiet voice she said: "I am talking about myself—your wife!"

Lionel Brakespere sprung from the corner of the table on which he had been sitting, and stood upright, confronting her.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" in a hard, low voice. "That's your game, eh? I thought it was coming to that. Now, look here," shaking his fist at her, "drop that for good and all; drop it, I tell you, or it will be the worse for you. Let me hear of your saying a word about your being my wife, and, so help me God, I'll be the death of you! That's plain, isn't it? You understand that?"

She never winced; she never moved. She sat quietly under the storm of his rage; and when he had finished speaking she said:

"You can kill me if you like—you very nearly did just before you left me—but so long as I am alive I shall be your wife!"

"Will you, by George? not if there's law in the land, I can tell you. What have you been doing all this time? How have you been living since I've been away? How do you come here, dressed like a swell as you are, when I left you without money? I shall want to know all that; and I'll find out, you may take your oath. There are heaps of ways of discovering those things now, and places where a fellow has only to pay for it and he may know any thing that goes on about any body. I don't think you would particularly care to have those inquiries made about *you*, eh?"

She was silent. He waited a minute; then, thinking from her silence that he had made a point, went on:

"You understand me at last, don't you? You see pretty plainly, I should think, that being quiet and holding your tongue is your best plan, don't you? If you're wise you'll do it; and then, when I'm settled, I may make you some allowance—if you want it, that's to say—if your friends who've been so kind to you while I've been away don't do it. But if you open your mouth on this matter, if you once hint that you've any claim on me, or send to me, or write to me, or annoy me at all, I'll go right in at once, find out all you've been doing, and then see what they'll say to you in the Divorce Court. You hear?"

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Still she sat perfectly silent. He was apparently pleased with his eloquence and its effect, for he proceeded:

"This is all your pretended love for me, is it? This is what you call gratitude to a fellow, and all that kind of thing? Turning up exactly when you're not wanted, and coolly declaring that you're going in to spoil the only game that can put me right and bring me home! And this is the woman that used to declare in the old days that she'd die for me, and all that! I declare I didn't think it of you, Madge!"

"Don't call me by that name!" she screamed, roused at last; "don't allude to the old days, in God's name, or I shall go mad! The recollection of them, the hope of their renewal, has been my consolation in all sorts of misery and pain. I thought that to hear them spoken of by you would have been sufficient recompense for all my troubles: now to hear them mentioned by your lips agonizes and maddens me; I—"

"This is the old story," he interrupted; "you haven't forgotten that business, I see. This is what you used to do before when you got into one of these states. It frightened me at first, but I got used to it; and I've seen a great deal too much of such things to care for it now, I can tell you. If you make this row I'll ring the bell—upon my soul I will!"

"Oh, Lionel, Lionel!" said Margaret, stretching out her hands in entreaty toward him, "don't speak so cruelly! You don't know all I have gone through for you; you don't know how weak and ill I am. But it is nothing to what I will do. You don't know how I love you, Lionel, my darling! how I have yearned for you; how I will worship and slave for you, so that I may only be with you. I don't want to be seen, or heard of, or known, so long as I am near you. Only try me and trust me, only let me be your own once more."

"I tell you it's impossible," said he, petulantly. "Woman, can't you understand? I'm ruined, done, shut up, cornered, and the only chance of my getting through is by my marriage with some rich woman, who will give me her money in exchange for— There, d—n it all—it's no use talking any more about it. If you can't see the position, I can't show it you any stronger; and there's an end of it. Only, look here! keep your mouth shut, or it will be the worse for you. You understand that?—the worse for you."

"Lionel!" She sprang toward him and clasped her hands round his arm. He shook her off roughly, and moved toward the door.

"No more foolery," he said, in a low, deep voice. "Take my warning now and go. In a fortnight's time you can write to me at the Club, and say whether you are prepared to accept the conditions I have named. Now, go."

He held the door open, and she passed by him and went out. She did not shrink, or faint, or fall. Somehow, she knew not how, she went down the stairs and into the street. Not until she had hailed a cab, and seated herself in it, and was being driven off, did she give way. Then she covered her face with her hands, and burst into a passionate fit of weeping, rocking herself to and fro, and exclaiming, "And it is for this that I have exiled myself from my home, and trampled upon a loving heart! O my God! my God! if I could only have loved Geoffrey Ludlow! Oh, to love as I do such a man as this!"

CHAPTER III.

GONE TO HIS REST.

The last-mentioned interview between Lord Caterham and his mother, though productive of good in a certain way—for Lady Beauport, however bravely she succeeded in bearing herself at the time, was in reality not a little frightened at her son's determination—had a visibly bad effect on Caterham's health. The excitement had been too much for him. The physician had enjoined perfect rest and an absence of all mental effort, in the same way in which they prescribe wine and nourishing food to the pauper, or Turkish baths to the cripple on the outskirts of Salisbury Plain. Perfect rest and absence of all mental effort were utterly impossible to Caterham, whose mind was on the rack, who knew that he had pitted himself against time for the accomplishment of his heart's desire, and who felt that he must either fulfill his earnest intention or give up it and life simultaneously. Life was so thin and faint and feeble within him that he needed all of it he could command to bear him up merely through "the fever called living"—to keep him together sufficiently to get through the ordinary quiet routine of his ever-dull day. When there was an exceptional occasion—such as the interview with his mother, for instance, where he had gone through a vast amount of excitement—it left him exhausted, powerless, incapable of action or even of thought, to an extent that those accustomed only to ordinary people could never have imagined.

The next day he was too ill to leave his bed; but that made little difference to the rest of the household. Lord Beauport was away in Wales looking after some mines on one of his estates, which had suddenly promised to be specially productive. Lady Beauport, detained in town for the due carrying out of her plans with respect to Lionel, sent down her usual message of inquiry by Timpson her maid, who communicated with Stevens, and gave the reply to her mistress. Lady Beauport repeated the message, "Very unwell, indeed, eh?" and adding, "this weather is so horribly depressing," proceeded with her toilet. Miss Maurice sent grapes and flowers and some new perfume to the invalid; and—it revived him more than any thing else—a little hurried note, bidding him not give way to depression, but rouse sufficiently to get into his easy-chair by the morrow, and she would spend all the day with him, and read to him, and play to him whatever he wanted.

He had strength enough to raise that little note to his lips so soon as he heard the door shut behind the outgoing Stevens; to kiss it over and over again, and to place it beneath his pillow ere he sunk into such imitation of rest as was vouchsafed to him. A want of sleep was one of the worst symptoms of his malady, and the doctors had all agreed that if they could only superinduce something like natural sleep it might aid greatly in repairing the little strength which had been given to him originally, and which was so gradually and imperceptibly, and yet so surely,

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wearing away. But that seemed to be impossible. When he was first assisted to bed he was in a sufficiently drowsy state, partly from the fatigue of the day, partly from the effect of the wine, of which the doctors insisted on his taking a quantity which would have been nothing to an ordinary man, but was much to one feeble in frame, and unable to take any exercise to carry off its strength. Then, after a short slumber—heavy, stertorous, and disturbed—he would wake, bright and staring, without the smallest sign of sleep in his head or in his eye. In vain would he toss from side to side, and try all the known recipes for somnolence—none were of the slightest avail. He could not sleep, he could not compose himself in the least degree, he could not empty his mind, as it were; and the mind must be, or at all events must seem, empty before sleep will take possession of it. Lord Caterham's mind in the dead silence of the night was even more active than it was in the daytime. Before him rose up all the difficulties which he had to surmount, the dangers which he had to avoid, the hopes, and fears, and triumphs, and vexations which made up the sum of his bitter life. They were not many now—they never had been diffuse at any time; so little had Caterham been a citizen of the world that all his aspirations had lain within a very small compass, and now they centred in one person—Annie Maurice. To provide for her safety when he was not there to look after it in person; to leave such records as would show what action he had taken in her behalf, and on what grounds that action had been undertaken; to arm some competent and willing person so thoroughly to bestir himself at the necessary juncture as to prevent the chance of the conspiracy against Annie's future being carried into effect: these were the night-thoughts which haunted Caterham's couch, and rendered him sleepless.

Sleeplessness had its usual effect. The following day he was quite worn out in mind and body—felt it, knew it, could not deny the fact when it was suggested to him mildly by Stevens, more firmly by his doctors—but yet persevered in his intention of getting up. He was sure he should be so much better out of bed; he was certain that a change—were it only to his easy-chair—would do him so much good. He could be very positive—"obstinate" was the phrase by which the doctors distinguished it, "arbitrary" was Stevens's phrase—when he chose; and so they let him have his way, wondering why he preferred to leave the calm seclusion of his bed. They little knew that the contents of that little note which the valet had seen protruding from the corner of his master's pillow when he went in to call him in the morning had worked that charm; they did not know that she had promised to spend the day with him, and read and play to him. But he did; and had he died for it he could not have denied himself that afternoon of delight.

So he was dressed, and wheeled into his sitting-room, and placed by his desk and among his books. He had twice nearly fainted during the process; and Stevens, who knew his every look, and was as regardful of his master's health as the just appreciation of a highly-paid place could make him, had urged Lord Caterham to desist and return to his bed. But Caterham was obstinate; and the toilet was performed and the sitting-room gained, and then he desired that Miss Maurice might be told he was anxious to see her.

She came in an instant. Ah, how radiant and fresh she looked as she entered the room! Since the end of the season, she had so far assumed her heiress position as to have a carriage of her own and a saddle-horse; and instead of accompanying Lady Beauport in her set round of "airing," Annie had taken long drives into country regions, where she had alighted and walked in the fresh air, duly followed by the carriage; or on horseback, and attended by her groom, had galloped off to Hampstead and Highgate and Willesden and Ealing in the early morning, long before Lady Beauport had thought of unclosing her eyes. It was this glorious exercise, this enjoyment of heaven's light and air and sun, that had given the rose to Annie's cheeks and the brilliance to her eyes. She was freckled here and there; and there was a bit of a brown mark on her forehead, showing exactly how much was left unshaded by her hat. These were things which would have distressed most well-regulated Belgravian damsels; but they troubled Annie not one whit; and as she stood close by his chair, with her bright eyes and her pushed-off brown hair, and the big teeth gleaming in her fresh, wholesome mouth, Caterham thought he had never seen her look more charming, and felt that the distance between her, brimming over with health, and him, gradually succumbing to disease, was greater than ever.

Annie Maurice was a little shocked when she first glanced at Caterham. The few days which had intervened since she had been to his room had made a great difference in his appearance. His color had not left him—on the contrary, it had rather increased—but there was a tight look about the skin, a dull glassiness in his eyes, and a pinched appearance in the other features which were unmistakable. Of course she took no notice of this: but coming in, greeted him in her usual affectionate manner. Nor was there any perceptible difference in his voice as he said:

"You see I have kept you to your word, Annie. You promised if I were in my easy-chair that you would play and read to me; and here I am."

"And here I am to do your bidding, Arthur; and too delighted to do it, and to see you sufficiently well to be here. You're not trying too much, are you, Arthur?"

"In what, Annie?"

"In sitting up and coming into this room. Are you strong enough to leave your bed?"

"Ah, I am so weary and wretched alone, Annie. I long so for companionship, for—" he checked himself and said, "for some one to talk, to read, to keep me company in all the long hours of the day. I'm not very bright just now, and even I have been stronger—which seems almost ridiculous—but I could keep away no longer, knowing you would come to lighten my dreariness."

Though his voice was lower and more faint than usual, there was an impassioned tone in it which she had never heard before, and which jarred ever so slightly on her ear. So she rose from her seat, and laughingly saying that she would go at once and perform part of her engagement, sat down at the piano, and played

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and sang such favorite pieces of his as he had often been in the habit of asking for. They were simple ballads—some of Moore's melodies, Handel's "Harmonious Blacksmith," and some of Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Wörte*—all calm, soft, soothing music, such as Caterham loved; and when Annie had been playing for some time he said:

"You don't know how I love to hear you, Annie! You're getting tired now, child."

"Not in the least degree, Arthur. I could go on singing all day, if it amused you."

"It does more than amuse me, Annie. I can not describe to you the feeling that comes over me in listening to your singing; nothing else has such a calm, holy, sanctifying influence on me. Listening to you, all the petty annoyances, the carking cares of this world fade away, and—"

He ceased speaking suddenly; and Annie, looking round, saw the tears on his cheek. She was about to run to him, but he motioned her to keep her seat, and said: "Annie dear, you recollect a hymn that I heard you sing one night when you first came here?—one Sunday night when they were out, and you and I sat alone in the twilight in the drawing-room? Ah, I scarcely knew you then, but that hymn made a great impression on me."

"You mean—

'Abide with me! fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens: Lord, with me abide!'"

"Yes, that is it. How lovely it is!—both words and music, I think."

"Yes, it is lovely. It was written by a Mr. Lyte, when he was—"

She checked herself, but he finished the sentence for her—"When he was dying. Yes; I recollect your telling me so that night. Sing it for me, dear."

She turned to the piano at once, and in an instant the rich deep tones of her voice were ringing through the room. Annie Maurice sang ballads sweetly, but she sang hymns magnificently. There was not the slightest attempt at ornamentation or *bravura* in her performance, but she threw her whole soul into her singing; and the result was rich and solemn melody. As she sang she seemed to embody the spirit of the composer, and her voice vibrated and shook with the fervor which animated her.

Half leaning on his stick, half reclining in his chair, Caterham watched her in rapt delight; then when she had finished, and ere the thrilling music of her voice had died away, he said: "Thanks, dear—again a thousand thanks! Now, once more a request, Annie. I shall not worry you much more, my child."

"Arthur"—and in an instant she was by his side—"if you speak like that, I declare I will not sing to you."

"Oh yes, you will, Annie dear!—oh yes, you will. You know as well as I do that— Well, then"—obedient to a forefinger uplifted in warning—"I'll say no more on that point. But I want you now to sing me the old-fashioned Evening Hymn. I've a very ancient love for dear old Bishop Ken, and I don't like to think of his being set aside for any modern hymnologist—even for such a specimen as that you have just sung. Sing me 'Glory to Thee,' Annie—that is, if you are old-fashioned enough to know it."

She smiled and sang. When she ceased, finding that he remained speechless and motionless, she went up to him, fearing that he had fainted. He was lying back in his chair, perfectly quiet, with his eyes closed. When she touched him he opened them dreamily, saying, "'That I may dread the grave as little as my bed.' Yes, yes! Ah, Annie dear, you've finished!—and to think that you, a modern young lady, should be able to sing old Bishop Ken without book! Where did you learn him?"

"When I was a very little child—at the Priory, Arthur. Geoffrey Ludlow—as I've told you, I think—used to come out to us every Sunday; and in the evening after dinner, before I went to bed, he used to ask for his little wife to sing to him. And then poor papa used to tell me to sit on Geoff's knee, and I used to sing the Evening Hymn."

"Ay," said Caterham, in an absent manner, "Geoffrey Ludlow's little wife! Geoffrey Ludlow's little wife!—ay, ay! 'That so I may rise glorious at Thine awful day!' In Thy mercy, in Thy mercy!" and saying this, he fainted away.

That evening Algy Barford, at Lord Dropmore's in Lincolnshire, on his return from shooting, found a telegram on his dressing-room table. It was from Annie Maurice, and begged his immediate return to town.

Lord Caterham was better the next day. Though still very weak, he insisted on being dressed and wheeled into his sitting-room. Once there, he had his dispatch-box placed before him, and the writing-materials put ready to his hand. Of late he had occasionally been in the habit of employing an amanuensis. Annie Maurice had frequently written from his dictation; and when she had been engaged, a son of the old housekeeper, who was employed at a law-stationer's, and who wrote a hand which was almost illegible from its very clearness, had sometimes been pressed into the service. But now Lord Caterham preferred writing for himself. Annie had sent to beg him to rest; and in reply he had scrawled two lines, saying that he was ever so much better, and that he had something to do which must be done, and which, when done, would leave him much happier and easier in mind. So they left him to himself; and Stevens, looking in from time to time, as was his wont, reported to the servants'-hall that his master was "at it as hard as ever—still a-writin'!" They wondered what could thus occupy him, those curious domestics. They knew exactly the state in which he was, the feeble hold that he had on life—what do they not know, those London servants?—and they thought that he was making his will, and speculated freely among themselves as to what would be the amount of Stevens's inheritance; and whether it would be a sum of money "down," or an annuity; and whether Stevens would invest it, after the usual fashion of their kind, in a public house, or whether, from excessive gentility, he was not a "cut above that." Lord Caterham would not hold out much longer, they opined; and then Mr. Lionel would come in for his title; and who Mr. Lionel was—inquired about by the new servants, and the description of Mr. Lionel by the old servants—and mysterious hints as to how, in the matter of Mr. Lionel, there had been a "screw loose" and a "peg out," how he was a regular "out-and-out fast lot," and had had to "cut it;" all this oc-

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casioned plenty of talk in the servants'-hall, and made the dreary autumn-day pass quite pleasantly. And still the sick man sat at his desk plying his pen, with but rare intervals of rest—intervals during which he would clasp his poor aching head, and lift his shriveled, attenuated hands in earnest, silent prayer.

The Beauport household was sunk in repose the next morning, when a sharp ring at the bell, again and again repeated, aroused the young lady who as kitchen-maid was on her preferment, and whose dreams of being strangled by the cook for the heaviness of her hand in an omelette were scared by the shrill clanging of the bell which hung immediately over her head. The first notion of "fire" had calmed down into an idea of "sweeps" by the time that she had covered her night-attire with a dingy calico robe known to her as her "gownd;" and she was tottering blindly down stairs before she recollected that no sweeps had been ordered, and thought that it was probably a "runaway." But lured perhaps by a faint idea that it might be the policeman, she descended; and after an enormous amount of unbolting and unchaining, found herself face to face with a fresh-colored, light-bearded, cheery gentleman, who wore a Glengarry cap, had a traveling-rug in his hand, was smoking a cigar, and had evidently just alighted from a hansom-cab which was standing at the door, and the driver of which was just visible behind a big portmanteau and a gun-case. The fresh-colored gentleman was apparently rather startled at the apparition of the kitchen-maid, and exclaimed, apparently involuntarily, "Gad!" in a very high key. Recovering himself instantly, he asked how Lord Caterham was. Utterly taken aback at discovering that the visitor was not the policeman, the kitchen-maid was floundering about heavily for an answer, when she was more than ever disconcerted at seeing the fresh-colored gentleman tear off his Glengarry cap and advance up the steps with outstretched hand. These demonstrations were not made in honor of the kitchen-maid, but of Annie Maurice, who had been aroused from her usual light sleep by the ring, and who, guessing at the visitor, had come down in her dressing-gown to see him.

They passed into the dining-room, and then he took her hand and said: "I only got your telegram at dinner-time last night, my dear Miss Maurice, and came off just as I was. Dropmore—deuced civil of him—drove me over to the station himself hard as he could go, by Jove! just caught mail-train, and came on from King's Cross in a cab. It's about Caterham, of course. Bad news—ay, ay, ay! He—poor—I can't say it—he's in danger, he—" And brave old Algy stopped, his handsome jolly features all tightened and pinched in his anxiety.

"He is very, very ill, dear Mr. Barford—very ill; and I wanted you to see him. I don't know—I can't tell why—but I think he may possibly have something on his mind—something which he would not like to tell me, but which he might feel a relief in confiding to some one else; and as you, I know, are a very dear and valued friend of his, I think we should all like you to be that some one. That was what made me send for you."

"I'm—I'm not a very good hand at eloquence, Miss Maurice—might put pebbles in my mouth and shout at the sea-shore and all that kind of thing, like the—the celebrated Greek person, you know—and wouldn't help me in getting out a word; but though I can't explain, I feel very grateful to you for sending for me to see—dear old boy!" The knot which had been rising in Algy Barford's throat during this speech had grown nearly insurmountable by this time, and there were two big tears running down his waistcoat. He tried to pull himself together as he said: "If he has any thing to say, which he would like to say to me—of course—I shall—any thing that would—God bless him, my dear old boy!—good, patient, dear, darling old boy, God bless him!" The thought of losing his old friend flashed across him in all its dread heart-wringing dreariness, and Algy Barford fairly broke down and wept like a child. Recovering himself after a moment, he seized Annie's hand, and muttering something to the effect that he would be back as soon as he had made himself a little less like an Esquimaux, he dashed into the cab and was whirled away.

You would scarcely have thought that Algy Barford had had what is called sleep, but what really is a mixture of nightmare and cramp, in a railway-carriage, had you seen him at eleven o'clock, when he next made his appearance at St. Barnabas Square, so bright and fresh and radiant was he. He found Annie Maurice awaiting his arrival, and had with her a short, earnest conversation as to Caterham's state. From that he learned all. The doctors had a very bad opinion of their patient's state: it was —hum—ha!—Yes—you know!—general depression—a want of vitality, which—just now—looking at his normal lack of force, of what we call professionally *vis vitæ*, might—eh? Yes, no doubt, serious result. Could not be positively stated whether he would not so far recover—pull through, as it is called—rally, as we say, as to—remain with us yet some time; but in these cases there was always—well, yes, it must be called a risk. This was the decision which the doctors had given to Annie, and which she, in other words, imparted to Algy Barford, who, coupling it with his experience of the guarded manner in which fashionable physicians usually announced their opinions, felt utterly hopeless, and shook his head mournfully. He tried to be himself, to resume his old smile and old confident buoyant way; he told his dear Miss Maurice that she must hope for the best; that these doctor-fellows, by Jove! generally knew nothing; half of them died suddenly themselves, without even having anticipated their own ailments; "Physician, heal thyself," and all that sort of thing; that probably Caterham wanted a little rousing, dear old boy; which rousing he would go in and give him. But Annie marked the drooping head and the sad, despondent manner in which he shrugged his shoulders and plunged his hands into his pockets when he thought she had retired—marked also how he strove to throw elasticity into his step and light into his face as he approached the door of Caterham's room.

It had been arranged between Algy and Annie Maurice that his was to have the appearance of a chance visit, so that when Stevens had announced him, and Lord Caterham had raised his head in wonder, Algy, who had by this time

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pulled himself together sufficiently, said: "Ah, ha! Caterham!—dear old boy!—thought you had got rid of us all out of town, eh?—and were going to have it all to yourself? Not a bit of it, dear boy! These doctor-fellows tell you one can't get on without ozone. Don't know what that is—dare say they're right. All I know is, I can't get on without a certain amount of chimney-pot. Country, delicious fresh air, turf, heather, peat-bog, stubble, partridge, snipe, grouse—all deuced good; cows and pigs, and that kind of thing; get up early, and go to bed and snore; get red face and double-chin and awful weight—then chimney-pot required. I always know, bless you! Too much London season, get my liver as big as Strasburg goose's, you know—*foie gras* and feet nailed to a board, and that kind of thing; too much country, tight waistcoat, red face—awfully British, in point of fact. Then chimney-pot. I'm in that state now; and I've come back to have a week's chimney-pot and blacks and generally cabbage-stalky street—and then I shall go away much better."

"You keep your spirits, Algy, wherever you are." The thin, faint voice struck on Algy Barford's ear like a knell. He paused a minute and took a short quick gulp, and then said: "Oh yes, still the same stock on hand, Caterham. I could execute country orders, or supply colonial agencies even, with promptitude and dispatch, I think. And you, Arthur—how goes it with you?"

"Very quietly, Algy—very, very quietly, thank God! I've had no return of my old pain for some time, and the headache seems to have left me."

"Well, that's brave! We shall see you in your chair out on the lawn at the hunt-breakfast at Homershams again this winter, Arthur. We shall—"

"Well, I scarcely think that. I mean, not perhaps as you interpret me; but—I scarcely think— However, there's time enough to think of that. Let's talk of nearer subjects. I'm so glad you chanced to come to town, Algy—so very glad. Your coming seems predestined; for it was only yesterday I was wishing I had you here."

"Tremendously glad I came, dear old boy! Chimney-pot attack fell in handy this time, at all events. What did you want, Arthur, old fellow? Not got a new leaning toward dogginess, and want me to go up to Bill George's? Do you recollect that Irish deerhound I got for you?"

"I recollect him well—poor old Connor! No, not a dog now. I want you to—just raise me a bit, Algy, will you?—a little bit: I am scarcely strong enough to—that's it. Ah, Algy, old fellow! how often in the long years that we have been chums have you lifted this poor wretched frame in your strong arms!"

It was a trial for a man of Algy Barford's big heart; but he made head against it even then, and said, in a voice harder and drier than usual from the struggle, "How often have I brought my bemuddled old brains for you to take them out and pick them to pieces and clean them, and put them back into my head in a state to be of some use to me!—that's the question, dear old boy. How often have you supplied the match to light the tow inside my head—I've got deuced little outside now—and sent me away with some idea of what I ought to do when I was in a deuce of a knot! Why, I recollect once when Lionel and I—what is it, dear old boy?"

"You remind me—the mention of that name—I wanted to say something to you, Algy, which oddly enough had—just reached me that bottle, Algy: thanks!—which—"

"Rest a minute, dear old boy; rest. You've been exerting yourself too much."

"No; I'm better now; only faint for a minute. What was I saying?—oh, about Lionel. You recollect a letter which—" His voice was growing again so faint that Algy took up the sentence.

"Which I brought to you; a letter from Lionel, after he had—you know, dear old boy—board ship, and that kind of thing?"

"Yes, that is the letter I mean. You—you knew its contents, Algy?"

"Well, Arthur, I think I did—I—you know Lionel was very fond of me, and—used to be about with him, you know, and that kind of thing—"

"You knew his—his wife?"

"Wife, Gad, did he say?—Jove! Knew you were—dear me!—charming person—lady. Very beautiful—great friend of Lionel's; but not his wife, dear old boy—somebody else's wife."

"Somebody else's wife?"

"Yes; wonderful story. I've wanted to tell you, and, most extraordinary thing, something always interrupted. Friend of yours, too: tall woman, red hair, violet eyes—wife of painter-man—Good God, Arthur!"

Well might he start; for Lord Caterham threw his hands wildly above his head, then let them fall helplessly by his side. By the time Algy Barford had sprung to his chair and passed his arms around him, the dying man's head had drooped on to his right shoulder, and his eyes were glazing fast.

"Arthur! dear Arthur! one instant! Let me call for help."

"No, Algy; leave us so; no one else. Only one who could—and she—better not—bless her!—better not. Take my hand, Algy, old friend—tried, trusted, dear old friend—always thoughtful, always affectionate—God bless you—Algy! Yes, kiss my forehead again. Ah, so happy! where the wicked cease from troubling and the—Yes, Lord, with me abide, with me abide!—the darkness deepens: Lord, with me abide!"

And as the last words fell faintly on Algy Barford's ears, the slight form which was lying in Algy Barford's arms, and on which the strong man's tears were falling like rain, slipped gradually out of his grasp—dead.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PROTRACTED SEARCH.

Annie Maurice was aroused from the brooding loneliness in which she had sought refuge, in the first bewilderment and stupefaction of her grief, by a communication from Lord Beauport. All was over now; the last sad ceremonial had taken place; and the place which had known Arthur, in his patient suffering, in his little-appreciated gentleness and goodness, should know him no more forever. The crippled form was gone, and the invalid-chair which had for so long supported it had been removed by order of the housekeeper to a receptacle for discarded articles of use or ornament. Lord and Lady Beauport were

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not likely to notice the circumstance, or to object to it if they did. The blinds were decorously drawn; the rooms were scrupulously arranged; every thing in them in its place, as though never to be used or handled any more. The books, the objects of art, the curious things which the dead man alone of all the house had understood and valued, had a staring lifeless look about them in the unaccustomed precision of their distribution; the last flowers which Annie had placed in the Venetian glasses had withered and been thrown away by the notable house-maids. A ray of sunlight crept in at one side of the blind, and streamed upon the spot where Arthur's head had fallen back upon his friend's arm; ah, how short a time ago! and yet all looked strange and changed, not only as if he had gone away forever, but as if he had never been there at all. Annie had not gone into the rooms since he had left them for the last time; she had an instinctive feeling of how it would be, and she could not bear it yet; she knew that in nothing would there be so sharp a pang as in seeing the familiar things which had been so like him grown so unlike. So, when her maid told her that Lord Beauport wished to see her immediately, she asked nervously where he was.

"In the library, Miss Annie," said her maid, and looked very pityingly at the purple eyelids and white face.

"Alone?"

No, his lordship was not alone; one of the lawyer gentlemen and her ladyship were with him.

Annie went slowly and reluctantly to the library. She did not think for a moment that Lord and Lady Beauport were indifferent to the death of their eldest son; on the contrary, she knew that the event had come upon them with a mighty shock, and that they had felt it, if not deeply, at least violently and keenly. But she had the faculty of vivid perception, and she used it intuitively; and in this case it told her that shame, self-detection, and remorse—the vague uneasiness which besets all who can not reckon with themselves to the full in the daylight of conscience, but, like the debtor called to an account, keep something back—mingled largely with their grief. It was not whole-hearted, lavish, sacred, like hers; it was not the grief which takes the spontaneous form of prayer, and chastens itself into submission, elevating and sanctifying the mind and character of the mourner. Annie knew, by that keen, unreasoning instinct of hers, that while her sole and earnest desire was to keep the memory of her dead cousin green, recalling his words, his counsels, his wishes—dwelling on his views of life and its duties, and preserving him in her faithful heart, forever near her, as a living friend—while her chosen thoughts would be of him, and her best consolation in memory—his father and mother would forget him if they could. They mourned for him, but it was with captious, impatient grief; there was a sting in every remembrance, every association, which they could not yet escape from, but would have put away if they had had the power. To them sorrow for the dead was as a haunting enemy, to be outwitted and left behind as speedily as might be; to her it was a friend, cherished and dear, solemnly greeted and piously entertained.

When Annie entered the library she found that the "lawyer gentleman," whom her maid had mentioned, was the family solicitor, Mr. Knevitt, who was well known to her, and for whom Caterham had had much liking and respect. Lord Beauport and he were standing together beside a long table, strewn with papers, and on which stood a large dispatch-box open, and, as she saw while she walked up the room, also full of papers. At some distance from the table, and in the shade, Lady Beauport was seated, her hands clasped together in her lap, and her figure leaning completely back in the deep arm-chair she occupied. She looked very pale and worn, and her deep mourning was not becoming to her. Sharp contention of thought and feeling was going on under that calm exterior—bitter pangs, in which vexation had a large share, as well as regret, and a sense that she was to be baffled in the future as she had been defeated in the past. Ay, the future—she had begun to think of it already, or rather she had begun (when had she ever ceased?) to think of *him*. Lionel was the future to her. What if there were more trouble and opposition in store for her? What if Arthur (ah, poor fellow! he had never understood young men different from himself, and he was always hard on Lionel) had left any communication for his father, had written any thing touching the particulars of Lionel's career which he knew, and had warned her not to ask? Hitherto nothing of the sort had been found in the examination of Lord Caterham's papers instituted by Lord Beauport and Mr. Knevitt. There was a packet for Annie Maurice, indeed; they had found it an hour ago, and Lord Beauport had just sent for Annie in order to hand it over to her. Lady Beauport had, however, no apprehensions connected with this matter; the virtues of the dead and the vices of the living son (though she would not have given them their true name) secured her from feeling any. Whatever Lionel had done she felt convinced was not of a nature to be communicated to Annie, and Caterham would have guarded her with the utmost caution from hearing any thing unfit for her ears. No, no; there was no danger in that quarter. Had she not felt sure, before this "dreadful thing"—as she called Lord Caterham's death to herself—happened, that the scrupulous delicacy of her son, where Annie was concerned, would be her best aid and defense against his defeat of her projects? The letter, the packet—whatever it might be called—was probably an effusion of feeling, a moral lecture on life, or a posthumous guide to studies in which Arthur had desired to see his gentle and interesting cousin proficient.

So Lady Beauport looked at the packet as it lay on the table, close to the dispatch-box, without the least anxiety, and fixed her impatient attention on the further investigation of the papers, continued by Lord Beauport and Mr. Knevitt. It was not until they had concluded as much of their melancholy task as they proposed to undertake that day that the Earl sent the summons which brought Annie to the library.

He took up the packet as she drew near, and said, very sadly:

"This is for you, my dear."

"From—from Arthur?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

"Yes, Annie—we found it among his papers."

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She took it from him, looked at it, and sat down in a chair beside the table, but made no attempt to break the seal. Lady Beauport did not speak. The Earl resumed his conversation with Mr. Knevitt, and Annie sat still and silent for a few minutes. Then she interrupted Lord Beauport by asking him if he required her for any thing further.

"No, my dear," he said, kindly; "you may go away if you like. How weary you look!" he added, with a deep sigh. Still Lady Beauport spoke no word; but her keen, unsympathetic eyes followed the girl's graceful figure and drooping head as she left the library.

Arrived at her own room Annie opened the packet, which she felt was a sacred thing. Her departed friend had written to her, then, words which he intended her to read only when he should be no more; solemn counsel, very precious affection, a priceless legacy from the dead would no doubt be in the letter, whose folds felt so thick and heavy in her hand. She removed the outer cover, placing it carefully by her side, and found an inclosure directed to Geoffrey Ludlow, and merely a few lines to herself, in which the writer simply directed her to place the accompanying letter in Geoffrey's hands *herself*, and privately, as soon after it came into hers as possible.

Surprise and disappointment were Annie's first feelings. She looked forlornly enough at the meagre scrap of writing that was her share, and with some wonder at the letter—no doubt voluminous—which was Geoffrey's. What could it be about? Arthur and Ludlow had been good friends, it is true, and had entertained strong mutual respect; but she could not account for this solemn communication, implying so strange and absolute a confidence. She turned the letter over in her hands, she scrutinized the address, the paper, the seal; then she rose and locked it carefully away, together with the note to herself in which it had been inclosed. "Give this letter *privately* to Ludlow," were Arthur's words; then, if he did not wish its delivery to be known, it was plain he wished to conceal its existence. If Lady Beauport should question her as to the contents of the packet? Well, she must either give an evasive answer, or refuse to answer at all; the alternative should be decided by the terms of the question. She could venture to refuse an answer to a question of Lady Beauport's now; her heiress-ship had secured her many immunities, that one among the rest.

Lord Beauport was right; Annie was weary, and looking so. The sickness and draeriness of a great grief were upon her, and she was worn out. The stillness of the great house was oppressive to her; and yet she shrank from the knowledge that that stillness was soon to pass away, that life would resume its accustomed course, and the dead be forgotten—by all but her. To her his memory should be ever precious, and his least wish sacred. Then she debated within herself how she should fulfill his last request. There were difficulties in the way. She could not tell Geoffrey to call on her yet, nor could she go to his house. Then she remembered that he had not written to her. She had forgotten, until then, that there had been no answer to the letter in which she told Geoffrey Ludlow of Caterham's death. Could a letter have come and been overlooked? She rang for her maid and questioned her; but she was positive no letter had been mislaid or forgotten. Several papers lay on her writing-table; she turned them over to satisfy herself, though nothing could be more improbable than that she should have overlooked a letter from her dear old friend. There was no such thing. Puzzled and vaguely distressed, Annie stood looking at the heap of notes, with her hands pressed on her throbbing temples; and her maid entreated her to lie down and rest, commenting, as Lord Beauport had done, upon her appearance. Annie complied; and the girl carefully darkened the room and left her. For a while she lay still, thinking how she was to convey the letter to Geoffrey without delay—"as soon as possible," Arthur had said; but she soon dropped into the dull, heavy sleep of grief and exhaustion.

It was late in the evening when she awoke, and she again eagerly inquired for letters. There were none, and Annie's surprise grew into uneasiness. She resolved to write to Ludlow again, to tell him that she had something of importance to communicate, without indicating its character. "He may tell Margaret, or not, as he pleases," she thought; "that is for him to decide. I dare say if she sees my note she will not feel any curiosity or interest about it. Poor Geoffrey!" And then the girl recalled all that Arthur had said of his suspicion and distrust of Ludlow's beautiful wife, and thought sorrowfully how large was his share in the loss they had sustained of such a friend. Something must be wrong, she thought, or Geoffrey would surely have written. In her sore grief she yearned for the true and ready sympathy which she should have from him, and him alone. Stay; she would not only write, she would send her maid to inquire for Geoffrey and Margaret and the child. She could go early next morning in a cab, and be back before breakfast-hour. So Annie made this arrangement, wrote her note, got through a short hour or two in the great dreary drawing-room as best she could, and once more cried herself to the merciful sleep which in some degree strengthened her for the intelligence which awaited her in the morning.

She was aroused by her maid, who came hurriedly to her bedside, holding in her hand Annie's note to Ludlow. She started up, confused, yet sufficiently awake to be startled at the look in the girl's face.

"What is it?" she said, faintly.

"Oh, Miss Annie! dreadful, dreadful news! Mrs. Ludlow has gone away, nobody knows where, and Mr. Ludlow is raving mad, in brain-fever!"

Lord Caterham's letter lay for many days undisturbed in the receptacle in which Annie Maurice had placed it. Not yet was the confidence of the dead to be imparted to the living. He was to read that letter in time, and to learn from it much that the writer had never dreamed it could convey. Little had the two, who had lived in so near and pleasant an intimacy, dreamed of the fatal link which really, though unseen, connected them. This was the letter which, in due time, Annie Maurice deposited in Geoffrey's hands:

"My dear Ludlow,—I have felt for some

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time that for me 'the long disease called life' is wearing toward its cure. Under this conviction I am 'setting my house in order;' and to do so thoroughly, and enjoy peace of mind for the brief space which will remain to me when that is done, I must have recourse to your honest and trusty friendship. I have to bequeath to you two services to be done for me, and one confidence to be kept until your discretion shall judge it expedient that it should be divulged. These two services are distinct, but cognate; and they concern one who is the dearest of all living creatures to me, and for whom I know you entertain a sincere and warm affection—I allude to Annie Maurice. The confidence concerns my unworthy brother, Lionel Brakespere.

"In the fortune left her by Mr. Ampthill Annie has security against material ills, and is safe from the position of dependence, in which I never could bear to feel she must remain. This is an immense relief to my mind; but it has substituted a source of uneasiness, though of considerably less dimensions, for that which it has removed. When I wrote to you lately, asking you to come to me, it was with the intention of speaking to you on this subject; but as our interview has been accidentally prevented, I made up my mind to act in the matter myself as long as I live, and to bequeath action after my death to you, as I am now doing. My brother is as worthless a man as there is on the face of the earth—heartless, depraved, unprincipled to an almost incredible degree, considering his early association with men and women of character. You have, I dare say, heard vaguely of certain disgraceful circumstances which forced him to leave the country, and which brought immeasurable distress upon us all.

"I need not enter into these matters: they have little to do with the thing that is pressing on my mind. If Lionel's vices had been hidden from society ever so discreetly, I was sufficiently aware of their existence to have shrunk with as much horror as I feel now from the idea of his becoming Annie's husband. Let me preface what I am about to say by assuring you that I do not entertain any such fear. I know Annie; and I am perfectly assured that for her pure, upright, intelligent, and remarkably clear-sighted nature such a man as Lionel—whose profound and cynical selfishness is not to be hidden by external polish, and whose many vices have left upon him the *cachet* which every pure woman feels instinctively, even though she does not understand theoretically—will never have any attraction. She knows the nature of the transaction which drove him from England; and such a knowledge would be sufficient protection for her without the repulsion which I am satisfied will be the result of association with him. I would protect her from such association if I could, and while I live I do not doubt my power to do so. It will be painful to me to use it; but I do not mind pain for Annie's benefit. A sad estrangement always existed between Lionel and me; an estrangement increased on his side by contempt and dislike—which he expressed in no measured terms—but on my part merely passive. The power which I possess to hinder his return to this house was put into my hands by himself—more, I believe, to wound me, and in the wanton malice and daring of his evil nature, than for the reason he assigned; but it is effectual, and I shall use it, as I can, without explanation. When I am gone, if needs be, some one must be enabled to use this power in my stead; and that person, my dear Ludlow, is you. I choose you for Annie's sake, for yours, and for my own. My mother designs to marry Lionel to Annie, and thus secure to him by marriage the fortune which his misconduct lost him by inheritance. With this purpose in view she has summoned Lionel to England, and she proposes that he should return to this house. She and I have had a painful explanation, and I have positively declared that it can not and shall not be. In order to convince her of the necessity of yielding the point, I have told her that I am in possession of particulars of Lionel's conduct, unknown to her and my father, which perfectly justify me in my declaration; and I have entreated her, for the sake of her own peace of mind, not to force me, by an attempt which can have no issue but failure, to communicate the disgraceful particulars. Lady Beauport has been forced to appear satisfied for the present; and matters are in a state of suspense.

"But this can not last, and with my life it will come to an end. Lionel will return here, in my place, and bearing my name—the heir to an earldom; and the follies and crimes of the younger son will be forgotten. Still Annie Maurice will be no less a brilliant match, and my mother will be no less anxious to bring about a marriage. I foresee misery to Annie—genteel persecution and utter friendlessness—unless you, Ludlow, come to her aid. With all its drawbacks, this is her fitting home; and you must not propose that she should leave it without very grave cause. But you must be in a position to preserve her from Lionel; you must hold the secret in your hand, as I hold it, which makes all schemes for such an accursed marriage vain—the secret which will keep the house she will adorn free from the pollution of his presence. When you hear that Lionel Brakespere is paying attention to Annie under his father's roof, go to Lord Beauport and tell him that Lionel Brakespere is a married man.

"And now, my dear Ludlow, you know one of the services you are to do me when I am gone; and you are in possession of the confidence I desire to repose in you. To explain the other I must give you particulars. When my brother left England he sent me, by the hands of a common friend, a letter which he had written at Liverpool, and which, when I have made you acquainted with its contents, I shall destroy. I do not desire to leave its low ribaldry, its coarse contempt, its cynical wickedness, to shock my poor father's eyes, or to testify against my brother when I am gone.

"I enable you to expose him in order to prevent unhappiness to one dear to us both; but I have no vindictive feeling toward him, and no eyes but mine must see the words in which he taunts me with the physical afflictions to which he chooses to assign my 'notions of morality' and 'superiority to temptation.' Enough—the facts which the letter contains are these: As nearly as I can make out, four years ago he met and tried to seduce a young lady, only eighteen years old, at Tenby. Her virtue, I hope—he says her ambition—foiled him, and he ran away with the girl and married her. He called himself Leonard Brookfield; and she never knew his name or

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real position. He took her abroad for a time; then brought her to London, where she passed for his mistress among the men to whom he introduced her, and who were aware that she had no knowledge of his identity. He had left the army then, or of course she would have discovered it. When the crash came he had left her, and he coolly told me, as he had next to nothing for himself, he had nothing for her. His purpose in writing to me was to inform me, as especially interested in the preservation of the family, that not only was there a wife in the case, but, to the best of his belief, a child also, to be born very soon; and as no one could say what would become of him, it might be as well to ascertain where the heir of the Beauports might be found, if necessary. He supposed I would keep the matter a secret until it should become advisable, if ever, to reveal it. Mrs. Brakespere had no knowledge of her rights, and could not, therefore, make herself obnoxious by claiming them. If I chose to give her some help, I should probably be rewarded by the consciousness of charity; but he advised me to keep the secret of our relationship for my own sake: she was perfectly well known as his mistress; and as they were both under a cloud at present, the whole thing had better be kept as dark as possible. I read this letter with the deepest disgust; the personal impertinence to myself I could afford to disregard, and was accustomed to; but the utter baseness and villainy of it sickened me. This was the man who was to bear my father's name and fill my father's place. I determined at once to afford assistance to the wretched, forsaken wife, and to wait and consider when and how it would be advisable to bring about the acknowledgment of the truth and her recognition. I thought of course only of simple justice. The circumstances of the marriage were too much against the girl to enable me to form any favorable opinion of her. I turned to the letter to find her name and address; they were not given: of course this was only an oversight; he must have intended to subjoin them. My perplexity was extreme. How was I to discover this unhappy woman? I knew too well the code of honor, as it is called, among men, to hope for help from any of his dissolute friends; they would keep his evil secret—as they believed it—faithfully.

"Algy Barford had brought me the letter, and on that occasion had referred to his being 'no end chums' with Lionel. But he had also declared that he knew nothing whatever of the contents of the letter. Still he might know something of her. I put a question or two to him, and found he did not. He had known a woman who lived with Lionel for a short time, he believed, but she was dead. Clearly this was another person. Then I determined to have recourse to the professional finders-out of secrets, and I sent for Blackett. You have often seen him leaving me as you came in, or waiting for me as you went out. The day Mrs. Ludlow fainted, you remember, he was in the hall as you took her to the carriage, and he asked me so many questions about her that I was quite amused at the idea of a detective being so enthusiastic. The materials he had to work on were sparing indeed, and the absence of all clew by name was very embarrassing. He went to work skillfully, I am sure, though he failed. He went to Tenby, and there he ascertained the name of the girl who had deserted her widowed mother for Leonard Brookfield. The mother had been many months dead. This was little help, for she had doubtless discarded the Christian name; and the personal description was probably colored by the indignation her conduct had excited. Blackett learned that she was handsome, with red hair and blue eyes—some said black. He could get no certain information on that point.

"But I need not linger over these details. No efforts were spared, yet our search proved vain. When some time had elapsed their direction changed, and a woman and child were sought for—in every part of London where destitution hides, in all the abodes of flaunting sin, in hospitals, in refuges, in charitable institutions—in vain. Sometimes Blackett suggested that she might have taken another protector and gone abroad; he made all possible inquiry. She had never communicated with her home, or with any one who had formerly known her. I began to despair of finding her; and I had almost made up my mind to relinquish the search, when Blackett came to me one day, in great excitement for him, and told me he was confident of finding her in a day or two at the farthest. 'And the child?' I asked. No, he knew nothing of the child; the woman he had traced, and whom he believed to be my brother's deserted wife, had no child, had never had one, within the knowledge of the people from whom he had got his information; nevertheless he felt sure he was right this time, and the child might have died before she came across them. She must have suffered terribly. Then he told me his information came through a pawnbroker, of whom he had frequent occasion to make inquiries. This man had shown him a gold locket, which had evidently held a miniature, on the inside of which was engraved 'From Leonard to Clara,' and which had been pawned by a very poor but respectable person, whose address, in a miserable lane at Islington, he now gave to Blackett. He went to the place at once and questioned the woman, who was only too anxious to give all the information in her power in order to clear herself. She had received the locket in the presence of two persons from a young woman who had lodged with her, and who had no other means of paying her. The young woman had gone away a week before, she did not know where; she had no money, and only a little bundle of clothes—a handkerchief full. She had no child, and had never said any thing about one. The woman did not know her name. She had taken a picture out of the locket. She had red hair and dark eyes. This was all. I shall never forget the wretched feeling which came over me as I thought of the suffering this brief story implied, and of what the wretched woman might since have undergone. I remember so well, it was in January—a dirty, wet, horrible day—when Blackett told me all this; and I was haunted with the idea of the woman dying of cold and want in the dreadful streets. Blackett had do doubt of finding her now; she had evidently fallen to the veriest pauperism, and out of the lowest depths she would be drawn up, no doubt. So he set to work at once, but all in vain. Dead or living, no trace of her has ever been found; and the continuous search has been abandoned. Blackett only 'bears it in mind' now.

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Once he suggested to me, that as she was no doubt handsome, and not over particular, she might have got a living by sitting to the painters, and 'I'll try that lay,' he said; but nothing came of that either. I thought of it the day Annie and I met you first, at the Private View, and if I had had the opportunity, would have asked you if you knew such a face as the one we were only guessing at, after all; but you were hurried, and the occasion passed; and when we met again Blackett had exhausted all sources of information in that direction and there was nothing to be learned.

"This is the story I had to tell you, Ludlow, and to leave to your discretion to use when the time comes. Within the last week Blackett has made further attempts, and has again failed. Lionel is in London; but while I live he does not enter this house. I shall, after a little, when I am able, which I am not now, let him know that search has been unsuccessfully made for his wife, and demand that he shall furnish me with every clew in his possession, under the threat of immediate exposure. This and every other plan may be at any moment rendered impossible by my death; therefore I write this, and entreat you to continue the search until this woman be found, dead or living. So only can Annie's home be made happy and reputable for her when I shall have left it forever. You will receive this from Annie's hands; a packet addressed to her will not be neglected or thrown aside; and if it becomes necessary for you to act for her, she will have the knowledge of the confidence I repose in you to support her in her acceptance of your interference and obedience to your advice. I confide her to you, my dear Ludlow—as I said before—as the dearest living thing in all the world to me. Yours ever,

"CATERHAM."

CHAPTER V.

DISMAY.

MRS. LUDLOW and Til had concluded the meal which is so generally advanced to a position of unnatural importance in a household devoid of the masculine element *en permanence;* and, the tea-things having been removed, the old lady, according to the established order, was provided with a book, over which she was expected to fall comfortably asleep. But she did not adhere to the rule of her harmless and placid life on this particular occasion. The "cross" was there—no doubt about it; and it was no longer indefinite in its nature, but very real, and beginning to be very heavy. Under the pressure of its weight Geoffrey's mother was growing indifferent to, even unobservant of, the small worries which had formerly occupied her mind, and furnished the subject-matter of her pardonable little querulousness and complaints—a grievance in no way connected with the tradespeople, and uninfluenced by the "greatest plagues in life"—which no reduction of duties involving cheap groceries, and no sumptuary laws restraining servant-galism within limits of propriety in respect of curls and crinoline, had any power to assuage—had taken possession of her now, and she fidgeted and fumed no longer, but was haunted by apprehension and sorely troubled.

A somewhat forced liveliness on Til's part, and a marked avoidance of the subject of Geoffrey, of whom, as he had just left them, it would have been natural that the mother and daughter should talk, bore witness to the embarrassment she felt, and increased Mrs. Ludlow's depression. She sat in her accustomed arm-chair, but her head drooped forward and her fingers tapped the arms in an absent manner, which showed her preoccupation of mind. 'Til at length took her needle-work and sat down opposite her mother in a silence which was interrupted after a considerable interval by the arrival of Charley Potts, who had not altogether ceased to offer clumsy and violently-improbable explanations of his visits, though such were rapidly coming to be unnecessary.

On the present occasion Charley floundered through the preliminaries with more than his usual impulsive awkwardness, and there was that in his manner which caused Til (a quick observer, and especially so in his case) to divine that he had something particular to say to her. If she were right in her conjecture it was clear that the opportunity must be waited for until the nap in which Mrs. Ludlow invariably indulged in the evening should have set in. The sooner the conversation settled into sequence, the sooner this desirable event might be expected to take place; so Til talked vigorously, and Charley seconded her efforts. Mrs. Ludlow said little, until, just as Charley began to think the nap was certainly coming, she asked him abruptly if he had seen Geoffrey lately. Miss Til happened to be looking at Charley as the question was put to him, and saw in a moment that the matter he had come to speak to her about concerned her brother.

"No, ma'am," said Charley; "none of us have seen Geoff lately. Bowker and I have planned a state visit to him; he's as hard to get at as a swell in the Government—with things to give away—what do you call it?—patronage; but we're not going to stand it. We can't do without Geoff. By-the-by, how's the youngster, ma'am?"

"The child is very well, I believe," said Mrs. Ludlow, with a shake of the head, which Charley Potts had learned to recognize in connection with the "cross," but which he saw with regret on the present occasion. "I'm afraid they've heard something," he thought. "But," continued the old lady, querulously, "I see little of him, or of Geoffrey either. Things are changed; I suppose it's all right, but it's not easy for a mother to see it; and I don't think any mother would like to be a mere visitor at her own son's house—not that I am even much of that now, Mr. Potts; for I'm sure it's a month or more since ever I have darkened the doors of Elm Lodge—and I shouldn't so much mind it, I hope, if it was for Geoffrey's good; but I can't think it's that—" Here the old lady's voice gave way, and she left off with a kind of sob, which went to Charley's soft heart and filled him with inexpressible confusion. Til was also much taken aback, though she saw at once that her mother had been glad of the opportunity of saying her little say, under the influence of the mortification she had felt at Geoffrey's silence on the subject of her future visits to Elm Lodge. He had, as we have seen, made himself as delightful as

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possible in every other respect; but he had been strictly reticent about Margaret, and he had not invited his mother and sister to his house. She had been longing to say all this to Til; and now she had got it out, in the presence of a third party, who would "see fair" between her justifiable annoyance and Til's unreasonable defense of her brother. Til covered Charley's embarrassment by saying promptly, in a tone of extreme satisfaction:

"Geoffrey was here to-day; he paid us quite a long visit."

"Did he?" said Charley; "and is he all right?"

"Oh yes," said Til, "he is very well; and he told us all about his pictures; and, do you know, he's going to put baby and the nurse into a corner group, among the people on the Esplanade—only he must wait till baby's back is stronger and his neck leaves off waggling, so as to paint him properly, sitting up nice and straight in nurse's arms." And then Miss Til ran on with a great deal of desultory talk, concerning Geoffrey, and his description of the presents, and what he had said about Lord Caterham and Annie Maurice. Charley listened to her with more seriousness than he usually displayed; and Mrs. Ludlow sighed and shook her head at intervals, until, as the conversation settled into a dialogue, she gradually dropped asleep. Then Til's manner changed, and she lowered her voice, and asked Charley anxiously if he had come to tell her any bad news.

"If you have," she said, "and that it can be kept from mamma, tell it at once, and let me keep it from her."

With much true delicacy and deep sympathy Charley then related to Til the scene which had taken place between himself, Bowker, and Stompff—and told her that Bowker had talked the matter over with him, and they had agreed that it was not acting fairly by Geoffrey to allow him to remain in ignorance of the floating rumors, injurious to his wife's character, which were rife among their friends. How Stompff had heard of Margaret's having fainted in Lord Caterham's room Charley could not tell; that he had heard it, and had heard a mysterious cause assigned to it, he knew. That he could have known any thing about an incident apparently so trivial proved that the talk had become tolerably general, and was tending to the injury of Geoffrey, not only in his self-respect and in his feelings, but in his prospects. Charley was much more alarmed and uneasy, and much more grieved for Geoffrey, than even Bowker; for he had reason to fear that no supposition derogatory to Margaret's antecedents could surpass the reality. He alone knew where and how the acquaintance between Geoffrey and Margaret had begun, and he was therefore prepared to estimate the calamity of such a marriage correctly. He did not exactly know what he had intended to say to Matilda Ludlow; he had come to the house with a vague idea that something ought to be done—that Til ought to speak to her sister-in-law—a notion which in itself proved Charley Potts to be any thing but a wise man—ought to point out to her that her indifference to her husband was at once ungrateful to him and short-sighted to her own interest; and that people, notably his employer, were talking about it. Charley Potts was not exactly an adept in reading character, and the real Margaret was a being such as he could neither have understood nor believed in; therefore the crudity, wildness, and inapplicability of this scheme were to be excused.

A very few words on his part served to open the susceptible heart of Miss Til, especially as they had spoken on the subject, though generally, before; and they were soon deep in the exchange of mutual confidences. Til cried quietly, so as not to wake her mother; and it distressed Charley very keenly to see her tears and to hear her declare that her sister-in-law had not the slightest regard for her opinion; that, though perfectly civil to her, Margaret had met all her attempts at sisterly intimacy with most forbidding coldness; and that she felt sure any attempt to put their relation on a more familiar footing would be useless.

"She must have been very badly brought up, I am sure," said Til. "We don't know any thing about her family; but I am sure she never learned what the duties of a wife and mother are."

Charley looked admiringly at Til as she sadly uttered this remark, and his mind was divided between a vision of Til realizing in the most perfect manner the highest ideal of conjugal and maternal duty, and speculating upon what might have been the polite fiction presented by Geoffrey to his mother and sister as an authentic history of Margaret's parentage and antecedents.

"Did Geoffrey seem cheerful and happy today?" he asked, escaping off the dangerous ground of questions which he could have answered only too completely.

"Well," replied Til, "I can't say he did. He talked and laughed, and all that; but I could see that he was uneasy and unhappy. How much happier he was when we were all together, in the days which seem so far off now!"

At this point the conversation became decidedly sentimental; for Charley, while carefully maintaining that true happiness was only to be found in the married state, was equally careful to state his opinion that separation from Til must involve a perfectly incomparable condition of misery; and altogether matters were evidently reaching a climax. Matilda Ludlow was an unaffected, honest girl: she knew perfectly well that Charley loved her, and she had no particular objection to his selecting this particular occasion on which to tell her so. But Til and Charley were not to part that evening in the character of affianced lovers; for in one of those significant pauses which precede important words cab-wheels rolled rapidly up to the little gate, hurried footsteps ran along the flagged path, and a loud knock and ring at the door impatiently demanded attention.

Mrs. Ludlow awoke with a violent start; Charley and Til looked at each other. The door was opened, and a moment later the cook from Elm Lodge was in the room, and had replied to Charley's hurried question by the statement that her master was very ill, and she had been sent to fetch Miss Ludlow.

"Very ill! has any accident happened?" they all questioned the woman, who showed much feeling—all his dependents loved Geoffrey—and the confusion was so great that it was some minutes before they succeeded in learning what act-

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ually had happened. That Geoffrey had returned home as usual; had gone to the nursery, and played with the child and talked to the nurse as usual; had gone to his painting-room; and had not again been seen by the servants until the house-maid had found him lying on the hearth-rug an hour before, when they had sent for Dr. Brandram, and that gentleman had dispatched the cook to bring Miss Ludlow.

"Did Mrs. Ludlow tell you to come?" asked Til.

To this question the woman replied that her mistress was not at home. She had been out the greater part of the day, had returned home some time later than Mr. Ludlow, and had kept the cab waiting for an hour; then she had gone away again, and had not returned when the cook had been sent on her errand. Charley Potts exchanged looks of undisguised alarm with Til at this portion of the woman's narrative, and, seeing that reserve would now be wholly misplaced, he questioned her closely concerning Mrs. Ludlow. She had nothing to tell, however, beyond that the house-maid had said her master and mistress had been together in the dining-room, and, surprised that dinner had not been ordered up, she had gone thither; but hearing her mistress speaking "rather strangely," she had not knocked at the door. The servants had wondered at the delay, she said, not understanding why their master should go without his dinner because Mrs. Ludlow was not at home, and had at length found him as she described.

"Did Mrs. Ludlow often go out in this way?" asked Mr. Potts.

"No, Sir, never," said the woman. "I never knew my mistress leave my master alone before, Sir; and I am afraid something has took place between them."

The distress and bewilderment of the little party were extreme. Manifestly there was but one thing to be done; Til must obey the doctor's summons, and repair immediately to her brother's house. He was very ill indeed, the cook said, and quite "off his head;" he did not talk much, but what he did say was all nonsense; and Dr. Brandram had said it was the beginning of brain-fever. Charley and Til were both surprised at the firmness and collectedness manifested by Mrs. Ludlow under this unexpected trial. She was very pale and she trembled very much, but she was quite calm and quiet when she told Til that she must put up such articles of clothing as she would require for a few days, as it was her intention to go to her son and to remain with him.

"I am the fittest person, my dear," said the old lady. "If it be only illness that ails him I know more about it than you do; if it is sorrow also, and sorrow of the kind I suspect, I am fitter to hear it and act in it than you."

It was finally agreed that they should both go to Geoffrey's house, and that Til should return home in the morning; for even in this crisis Mrs. Ludlow could not quite forget her household gods, and to contemplate them bereft at once of her own care and that of Til would have been too grievous; so they started—the three women in the cab, and Charley Potts on the box, very silent, very gloomy, and not even in his inmost thoughts approaching the subject of a pipe.

It was past ten when Geoffrey Ludlow's mother and sister reached the house which had seen such terrible events since they had visited it last. Already the dreary, neglected air which settles over every room in a dwelling invaded by serious illness, except the one which is the scene of suffering, had come upon it. Four hours earlier all was bright and cheerful, well cared for and orderly; now, though the disarray was not material it was most expressive. Mrs. Geoffrey Ludlow had not returned; the doctor had gone away, but was coming back as soon as possible, having left one of the servants by Geoffrey's bedside, with orders to apply wet linen to his temples without intermission. Geoffrey was quiet now—almost insensible, they thought. Mrs. Ludlow and Til went to the sick room at once, and Charley Potts turned disconsolately into the dining-room, where the cloth was still laid and the chairs stood about in disorder—one, which Geoffrey had knocked down, lay unheeded on the ground. Charley picked it up, sat down upon it, and leaned his elbows disconsolately on the table.

"It's all up, I'm afraid," said he to himself; "and she's off with the other fellow, whoever he is. Well, well, it will either kill Geoff outright or break his heart for the rest of his life. At all events, there couldn't have been much good in her if she didn't like Til!"

After some time Dr. Brandram arrived, and Charley heard him ask the servant whether Mrs. Ludlow had returned, and heard her reply that her mistress was still absent, but Mrs. Ludlow and her daughter had come, and were in her master's room. The doctor went up stairs immediately, and Charley still waited in the parlor, determined to waylay him as he came down.

Geoffrey was dangerously ill, there was no doubt of that, though his mother's terror magnified danger into hopelessness, and refused to be comforted by Dr. Brandram's assurance that no living man could tell for certain how things would be. She met the doctor's inquiry about Margaret with quiet reserve: she did not expect her daughter-in-law's return that evening, she said; but she and Miss Ludlow were prepared to remain. It was very essential that they should do so, Dr. Brandram assured her; and on the following day he would procure a professional nurse. Then he made a final examination of his patient, gave the ladies their instructions, observed with satisfaction the absence of fuss, and the quiet, self-subduing alacrity of Til, and went down stairs, shaking his head and wondering, to be pounced upon in the little hall by the impulsive Charley, who drew him into the dining-room, and poured out a torrent of questions. Dr. Brandram was disposed to be a little reserved at first, but unbent when Charley assured him that he and Geoffrey were the most intimate friends—"Brothers almost," said Mr. Potts in a conscious tone, which did not strike the doctor. Then he told his anxious interlocutor that Geoffrey was suffering from brain-fever, which he supposed to be the result of a violent shock, but of what kind he could form no idea; and then he said something, in a hesitating sort of way, about "domestic affairs."

"It is altogether on the mind, then," said Charley. "In that case, no one can explain any thing but himself."

"Precisely so," said Dr. Brandram; "and it

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may, it most probably will, be a considerable time before he will be able to give us any explanation of any thing, and before it would be safe to ask him for any. In the mean time—but no doubt Mrs. Ludlow will return, and—"

"I don't think she will do any thing of the kind," said Charley Potts, in a decisive tone; "and, in fact, doctor, I think it would be well to say as little as possible about her."

Dr. Brandram looked at Mr. Potts with an expression intended to be knowing, but which was in reality only puzzled, and assuring him of his inviolable discretion, departed. Charley remained at Elm Lodge until after midnight, and then, finding that he could be of no service to the watchers, sorrowfully wended his way back to town on foot.

Wearily dragged on the days in the sick man's room, where he lay racked and tormented by fever, and vaguely oppressed in mind. His mother and sister tended him with unwearied assiduity, and Dr. Brandram called in further medical advice. Geoffrey's life hung in the balance for many days—days during which the terror his mother and Til experienced are not to be told. The desolate air of the house deepened; the sitting-rooms were quite deserted now. All the bright, pretty furniture which Geoff had bought for the delectation of his bride, all the little articles of use and ornament peculiarly associated with Margaret, were dust-covered, and had a ghostly seeming. Charley Potts—who passed a great deal of his time moping about Elm Lodge, too thankful to be permitted on the premises, and occasionally to catch a glimpse of Til's figure, as she glided noiselessly from the sick room to the lower regions in search of some of the innumerable things which are always being wanted in illness and are never near at hand—occasionally strolled into the painting-room, and lifting the cover which had been thrown over it, looked sadly at "The Esplanade at Brighton," and wondered whether dear old Geoff would ever paint baby's portrait among that group in the left-hand corner.

The only member of the household who pursued his usual course of existence was this same baby. Unconscious alike of the flight of his mother and the illness, nigh unto death, of his father, the child throve apace, and sometimes the sound of his cooing, crowing voice, coming through the open doors into the room where his grandmother sat and looked into the wan, haunted face of her son, caused her unspeakable pangs of sorrow and compassion. The child "took to" Til wonderfully, and it is impossible to tell the admiration with which the soul of Charley Potts was filled as he saw the motherly ways of the young lady toward the little fellow, happily unconscious that he did not possess a mother's love.

Of Margaret nothing was heard. Mrs. Ludlow and Til were utterly confounded by the mystery which surrounded them. She made no sign from the time she left the house. Their ignorance of the circumstances of her departure was so complete that they could not tell whether to expect her to do so or not. Her dresses and ornaments were all undisturbed in the drawers in the room where poor Geoffrey lay, and they did not know whether to remove them or not. She had said to Geoffrey, "Whatever I actually require I will send for;" but they did not know this, and she never had sent. The centre of the little system—the chief person in the household—the idolized wife—she had disappeared as utterly as if her existence had been only a dream. The only person who could throw any light on the mystery was, perhaps, dying—at all events, incapable of recollection, thought, or speech. It "got about" in the neighborhood that Mr. Ludlow was dangerously ill, and that his mother and sister were with him, but his beautiful wife was not; whereat the neighborhood, feeling profoundly puzzled, merely looked unutterably wise, and had always thought there was something odd in that quarter. Then the neighborhood called to inquire and to condole, and was very pointed in its hopes that Mrs. Geoffrey Ludlow was "bearing up well," and very much astonished to receive for answer, "Thank you, ma'am; but missis is not at home." Mrs. Ludlow knew nothing of all this, and Til, who did know, cared nothing; but it annoyed Charley Potts, who heard and saw a good deal from his post of vantage in the dining-room window, and who relieved his feelings by swearing under his breath, and making depreciatory comments upon the personal appearance of the ladies as they approached the house with their faces duly arranged to the sympathetic pattern.

It chanced that, on one occasion, when Geoffrey had been about ten days ill, Til came down to the dining-room to speak to the faithful Charley, carrying the baby on one arm and in her other hand a bundle of letters. Charley took the child from her as a matter of course; and the youthful autocrat graciously sanctioning the arrangement, the two began to talk eagerly of Geoffrey. Til was looking very pale and weary, and Charley was much moved by her appearance.

"I tell you what it is," he said, "you'll kill yourself, whether Geoffrey lives or dies." He spoke in a tone suggestive of feeling himself personally injured, and Til was not too far gone to blush and smile faintly as she perceived it.

"Oh no, I sha'n't," she said. "I'm going to lie down all this afternoon in the night-nursery Mamma is asleep now, and Geoffrey is quite quiet, though the nurse says she sees no change for the better, no real change of any kind indeed. And so I came down to ask you what you think I had better do about these letters." She laid them on the table as she spoke. "I don't think they are business letters, because you have taken care to let all Geoffrey's professional friends know, haven't you, Charley?"

Charley thrilled; she had dropped unconsciously, in the intimacy of a common sorrow, into calling him by his Christian name, but the pleasure it gave him had by no means worn off yet.

"Yes," he said; "and you have no notion what a state they are all in about dear old Geoff. I assure you they all envy me immensely because I can be of some little use to you. They don't come here, you know, because that would be no use—only making a row with the door-bell, and taking up the servants' time; but every day they come down to my place, or write me notes, or scribble their names on the door, with fat notes of interrogation after them, if I'm not at home. That means, 'How's dear old Geoff? send word at once.' Why, there's Stompff—I told you he was a beast, didn't I? Well, he's

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not half a beast, I assure you; he is in such a way about Geoff; and, upon my word, I don't think it's all because he is worth no end of money to him—I don't indeed. He is mercenary, of course, but not always and not altogether; and he really quite got over me yesterday by the way he talked of Geoffrey, and wanted to know if there was any thing in the world he could do. Any thing in the world, according to Stompff, meant any thing in the way of money, I suppose; an advance upon the 'Esplanade,' or something of that sort."

"Yes, I suppose it did," said Til; "but we don't want money. Mamma has plenty to go on with until"—here her lip quivered—"until Geoffrey can understand and explain things. It's very kind of Mr. Stompff, however, and I'm glad he's not quite a beast," said the young lady, simply. "But, Charley, about these letters; what should I do?"

At this point the baby objected to be any longer unnoticed, and was transferred to Til, who walked up and down the room with the injured innocent, while Charley turned over the letters and looked at their superscriptions.

"You are sure there is no letter from his wife among these?" said Charley.

"Oh no!" replied Til; "I know Margaret's hand well; and I have examined all the letters carefully every day. There has never been one from her."

"Here are two with the same monogram, and the West-end district mark; I think they must be from Miss Maurice. If these letters can be made out to mean any thing, they are A. M. And see, one is plain, and one has a deep black edge."

Til hurried up to the table. "I hope Lord Caterham is not dead," she said; "I have heard Geoffrey speak of him with great regard; and only the day he was taken ill he said he feared the poor fellow was going fast."

"I think we had better break the seal and see," said Charley; "Geoff would not like any neglect in that quarter."

He broke the seal as he spoke, and read the melancholy note which Annie had written to Geoffrey when Arthur died, and which had never received an answer.

Charley Potts and Til were much shocked and affected at the intelligence which the note contained.

"I haven't cared about the papers since Geoff has been ill, or I suppose I should have seen the announcement of Lord Caterham's death, though I don't particularly care for reading about the swells at any time," said Charley. "But how nicely she writes to Geoffrey, poor girl! I am sure she will be shocked to hear of his illness, and you must write to her—h'm—Til. What do you say to writing, and letting me take your letter to-morrow myself? Then she can ask me any questions she likes, and you need not enter into any painful explanations."

Til was eminently grateful for this suggestion, which she knew was dictated by the sincerest and most disinterested wish to spare her; for to Charley the idea of approaching the grandeur of St. Barnabas Square, and the powdered pomposity of the lordly flunkeys, was, as she well knew, wholly detestable. So it was arranged that Charley should fulfill this mission early on the following day, before he presented himself at Elm Lodge. The baby was sent up stairs, Til wrote her note, and Charley departed very reluctantly, stipulating that Til should at once fulfill her promise of lying down in the nursery.

When, on the ensuing morning, Miss Maurice's maid reached Elm Lodge, the servants communicated to her the startling intelligence, which she roused Annie from her sleep to impart to her, without any reference to Mrs. Ludlow and Til, who were not aware for some time that Miss Maurice had sent to make inquiries. On his arrival at St. Barnabas Square, Charley Potts was immediately admitted to Annie's presence, and the result of the interview was that she arrived at Elm Lodge escorted by that gentleman, whose embarrassment under the distinguished circumstances was extreme, before noon. She knew from Charley's report that it would be quite in vain to take Caterham's letter with her; that it must be long ere it should meet the eyes for which it was written, if ever it were to do so, and it remained still undisturbed in her charge. So Annie Maurice shared the sorrow and the fear of Geoffrey's mother and sister, and discussed the mystery that surrounded the calamities which had befallen them, perfectly unconscious that within reach of her own hand lay the key to the enigma.

CHAPTER VI.

A CLEW.

WRITTEN by a dying hand, the letter addressed by Lord Caterham to Geoffrey Ludlow was read when the doctors would scarcely have pronounced its recipient out of the jaws of death. Gaunt, wan, hectic; with great bistre-rings round his big eyes, now more prominent than ever; with his shapely white hands now almost transparent in their thinness; with his bushy beard dashed here and there with gray patches; and with oh! such a sense of weariness and weakness—old Geoff, stretched supine on his bed, demanded news of Margaret. They had none to give him: told him so—at first gently, then reiterated it plainly; but he would not believe it. They must know something of her movements; some one must have been there to tell him where she was; something must have been heard of her. To all these questions negative answers. Then, as his brain cleared and his strength increased—for, except under both of these conditions, such a question would not have occurred to him—he asked whether, during his illness, there had been any communication from Lord Beauport's house. A mystery then—a desire to leave it over until Miss Maurice's next call, which happened the next day, when Caterham's letter, intact, was handed to him.

That letter lay on a chair by Geoffrey's bedside the whole of that afternoon. To clutch it, to look at it, to hold it, with its seal yet unbroken, before his eyes, he had employed such relics of strength as remained to him; but he dared not open it. He felt that he could give no explanation of his feelings; but he felt that if he broke that seal, and read what was contained in that letter, all his recent tortures would return with tenfold virulence: the mocking demons that had sat on his bed and sneered at him; the fiery ser-

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pents that had uncoiled themselves between him and the easel on which stood the picture which urgent necessity compelled him to work at; the pale, fair form, misty and uncertain generally, yet sometimes with Margaret's hair and eyes, that so constantly floated across his vision, and as constantly eluded his outstretched arms—all these phantasms of his fevered brain would return again. And yet in it, in that sheet of paper lying so temptingly near to his pillow, there was news of her! He had but to stretch out his hand and he should learn how far, at least, her story was known to the relatives of him who—The thought in itself was too much; and Geoffrey swooned off. When he recovered his first thought was of the letter; his first look to assure himself that it had not been removed. No, there it lay! He could resist the temptation no longer; and, raising himself on his elbow, he opened and read it.

The effect of the perusal of that letter on Geoffrey Ludlow none knew but himself. The doctors found him "not quite so well" for the succeeding day or two, and thought that his "tone" was scarcely so good as they had been led to anticipate; certain it was that he made no effort to rouse himself, and that, save occasionally when spoken to by Til, he remained silent and preoccupied. On the third day he asked Til to write to Bowker, and beg him to come to him at once. Within twenty-four hours that worthy presented himself at Elm Lodge.

After a few words with Til down stairs Mr. Bowker was shown up to Geoffrey's room, the door of which Til opened, and when Mr. Bowker had entered, shut it behind him. The noise of the closing door roused Geoffrey, and he turned in his bed, and, looking up, revealed such a worn and haggard face, that old Bowker stopped involuntarily, and drew a long breath, as he gazed on the miserable appearance of his friend. There must have been something comical in the rueful expression of Bowker's face, for old Geoff smiled feebly as he said,

"Come in, William; come in, old friend! I've had a hard bout of it, old fellow, since you saw me; but there's no danger now—no infection, I mean, or any thing of that kind."

Geoff spoke hap-hazard; but what he had said was the best thing to restore Mr. Bowker to himself.

"Your William's fever-proof," he growled out in reply, "and don't fear any nonsense of that kind; and if he did, it's not that would keep him away from a friend's bedside. I should have been here—that is, if you'd have let me; and, oddly enough, though I'm such a rough old brute in general, I'm handy and quiet in times of sickness—at least so I've been told;" and here Bowker stifled a great sigh. "But the first I heard of your illness was from your sister's letter, which I only got this morning."

"Give me your hand, William; I know that fast enough. But I didn't need any additional nursing. Til and the old lady—God bless them!—have pulled me through splendidly, and—But I'm beyond nursing now, William; what I want is—" and Geoff's voice failed him, and he stopped.

Old Bowker eyed him with tear-blurred vision for a moment, and then said, "What you want is—"

"Don't mind me just now, William; I'm horribly weak, and girlish, and trembling, but I shall get to it in time. What I want is, some man, some friend, to whom I can talk openly and unreservedly—whose advice and aid I can seek, in such wretchedness as, I trust, but few have experienced."

It was a good thing that Geoffrey's strength had in some degree returned, for Bowker clutched his hand in an iron grip, as in a dull, low voice he said, "Do you remember my telling you the story of my life? Why did I tell you that? Not for sympathy, but for example. I saw the rock on to which you were drifting, and hoped to keep you clear. I exposed the sadness of my life to you when the game was played out, and there was no possibility of redemption. I can't tell what strait you may be in; but if I can help you out of it there is no mortal thing I will not do to aid you."

As well as he could Geoff returned the pressure; then, after a moment's pause, said, "You know, of course, that my wife has left me?"

Bowker bowed in acquiescence.

"You know the circumstances?"

"I know nothing, Geoff, beyond the mere fact. Whatever talk there may be among such of the boys as I drop in upon now and then, if it turned upon you and your affairs, save in the matter of praising your art, it would be certain to be hushed as soon as I stepped in among them. They knew our intimacy, and they are by far too good fellows to say any thing that would pain me. So that beyond the mere fact which you have just stated I know nothing."

Then in a low, weak voice, occasionally growing full and powerful under excitement, and subsiding again into its faint tones, Geoffrey Ludlow told to William Bowker the whole history of his married life, beginning with his finding Margaret on the door-step, and ending by placing in his friend's hands the posthumous letter of Lord Caterham. Throughout old Bowker listened with rapt attention to the story, and when he came back from the window, to which he had stepped for the perusal of the letter, Geoffrey noticed that there were big tears rolling down his cheeks. He was silent for a minute or two after he had laid the letter on Geoffrey's bed; when he spoke he said, "We're a dull lot, the whole race of us; and that's the truth. We pore over our own twopenny sorrows, and think that the whole army of martyrs could not show such a specimen as ourselves. Why, Geoff, dear old man, what was my punishment to yours! What was—but, however, I need not talk of that. You want my services—say how."

"I want your advice first, William. I want to know how to—how to find my wife—for, oh, to me she is my wife! how to find Margaret. You'll blame me probably, and tell me that I am mad—that I ought to cast her off altogether, and to—But I can not do that, William; I can not do that; for I love her—oh, my God, how I love her still!" And Geoffrey Ludlow hid his face in his arms, and wept like a child.

"I sha'n't blame you, Geoff, nor tell you any thing of the kind," said old Bowker, in a deep, low voice. "I should have been very much surprised if—However, that's neither here nor there. What we want is to find her now. You say there's not been the slightest clew to her since she left this house?"

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"Not the slightest."

"She has not sent for any thing—clothes, or any thing?"

"For nothing, as I understand."

"She has not sent—you see, one must understand these things, Geoff; all our actions will be guided by them—she has not sent to ask about the child?"

Geoff shuddered for an instant, then said, "She has not."

"That simplifies our plans," said Bowker. "It is plain now that we have only one chance of discovering her whereabouts."

"And that is—"

"Through Blackett the detective, the man mentioned in Lord Caterham's letter. He must be a sharp fellow; for through the sheer pursuance of his trade, and without the smallest help, he must have been close upon her trail, even up to the night when you met her and withdrew her from the range of his search. If he could learn so much unaided, he will doubtless be able to strike again upon her track with the information we can give him."

"There's no chance of this man—this Captain Brakespere, having—I mean—now he's back, you know—having taken means to hide her somewhere—where one couldn't find her, you know?" said Geoffrey, hesitatingly.

"If your William knows any thing of the world," replied Bowker, "there's no chance of Captain Thingummy having taken the least trouble about her. However, I'll go down to Scotland Yard and see what is to be made of our friend Inspector Blackett. God bless you, old boy! You know if she is to be found, I'll do it."

They are accustomed to odd visitors in Scotland Yard; but the police-constables congregated in the little stone hall stared the next day when Mr. Bowker pushed open the swing-door, and calmly planting himself among them, ejaculated "Blackett." Looking at his beard, his singular garb, and listening to his deep voice, the sergeant to whom he was referred at first thought he was a member of some foreign branch of the force; then glancing at the general wildness of his demeanor, had a notion that he was one of the self-accused criminals who are so constantly forcing themselves into the grasp of justice, and who are so impatient of release; and finally, comprehending what he wanted, sent him, under convoy of a constable, through various long corridors, into a cocoa-nut-matted room, furnished with a long green-baize-covered table, on which were spread a few sheets of blotting-paper and a leaden inkstand, and the walls of which were adorned with a printed tablet detailing the disposition of the various divisions of the police-force, and the situation of the fire-escapes in the metropolis, and a fly-blown Stationers' Almanac. Left to himself, Mr. Bowker had scarcely taken stock of these various articles when the door opened, and Mr. Inspector Blackett, edging his portly person through the very small aperture which he had allowed himself for ingress, entered the room, and closed the door stealthily behind him.

"Servant, Sir," said he, with a respectful bow, and a glance at Bowker, which took in the baldness of his head, the thickness of his beard, the slovenliness of his apparel, and the very shape of his boots—"servant, Sir. You asked for me?"

"I did, Mr. Blackett. I've come to ask your advice and assistance in a rather delicate matter, in which you've already been engaged—Lord Caterham's inquiry."

"Oh, beg pardon, Sir. Quite right. Friend of his lordship's, may I ask, Sir?"

"Lord Caterham is dead, Mr.—"

"Quite right, Sir; all right, Sir. Right to be cautious in these matters; don't know who you are, Sir. If you had not known that fact, must have ordered you out, Sir. Impostor, of course. All on the square, Mr.—beg pardon; didn't mention your name, Sir."

"My name is Bowker. To a friend of mine, too ill now to follow the matter himself, Lord Caterham on his death-bed wrote a letter, detailing the circumstances under which he had employed you in tracing a young woman. That friend has himself been very ill, or he would have pursued this matter sooner. He now sends me to ask whether you have any news?"

"Beg pardon, Sir; can't be too cautious in this matter. What may be the name of that friend?"

"Ludlow—Mr. Geoffrey Ludlow."

"Right you are, Sir! Know the name well; have seen Mr. Ludlow at his lordship's; a pleasant gentleman too, Sir, though not giving me the idea of one to take much interest in such a business as this. However, I see we're all square on that point, Sir; and I'll report to you as exactly as I would to my lord, if he'd been alive—feeling, of course, that a gentleman's a gentleman, and that an officer's trouble will be remunerated—"

"You need not doubt that, Mr. Blackett."

"I don't doubt it, Sir; more especially when you hear what I have got to tell. It's been a wearing business, Mr. Bowker, and that I don't deny; there have been many cases which I have tumbled-to quicker, and have been able to lay my finger upon parties quicker; but this has been a long chase; and though other members of the force has chaffed me, as it were, wanting to know when I shall be free for any thing else, and that sort of thing, there's been that excitement in it that I've never regretted the time bestowed, and felt sure I should hit it at last. My ideas has not been wrong in that partic'ler, Mr. Bowker; I *have* hit it at last!"

"The devil you have!"

"I have indeed, Sir; and hit it, as has cur'ously happened in my best cases, by a fluke. It was by the merest fluke that I was at Radley's Hotel in Southampton and nobbled Mr. Sampson Hepworth, the absconding banker of Lombard Street, after Daniel Forester and all the city-men had been after him for six weeks. It was all a fluke that I was eatin' a Bath-bun at Swindon when the clerk that did them Post-office robberies tried to pass one of the notes to the refreshment gal. It was all a fluke that I was turning out of Grafton Street, after a chat with the porter of the Westminster Club—which is an old officer of the G's and a pal of mine—into Bond Street, when I saw a lady that I'd swear to, if description's any use, though I never see her before, comin' out of Long's Hotel."

"A lady!—Long's Hotel!"

"A lady a-comin' out of Long's Hotel. A

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lady with—not to put too fine a point upon it—red hair and fine eyes and a good figure; the very moral of the description I got at Tenby and them other places. I twigged all this before she got her veil down; and I said to myself, 'Blackett, that's your bird, for a hundred pound.'"

"And were you right? Was it—"

"Wait a minute, Sir: let's take the things in the order in which they naturally present themselves. She hailed a cab and jumped in, all of a tremble like, as I could see. I hailed another—hansom mine was; and I give the driver the office, which he tumbled-to at once—most of the West-enders knows me; and we follows the other until he turned up a little street in Nottin' 'Ill, and I, marking where she got out, stopped at the end of it. When she'd got inside I walked up and took stock of the house, which was a little milliner's and stay-shop. It was cur'ous, wasn't it, Sir," said Mr. Blackett, with a grave professional smile, "that my good lady should want a little job in the millinery line done for her just then, and that she should look round into that very shop that evening, and get friendly with the missis, which was a communicative kind of woman, and should pay her a trifle in advance, and should get altogether so thick as to be asked in to take a cup of tea in the back-parlor, and get a-talking about the lodger? Once in, I'll back my old lady against any ferret that was ever showed at Jemmy Welsh's. She hadn't had one cup of tea before she know'd all about the lodger; how she was the real lady, but dull and lonesome like; how she'd sit cryin' and mopin' all day; how she'd no visitors and no letters; and how her name was Lambert, and her linen all marked M. L. She'd only been there a day or two then, and as she'd scarcely any luggage the milliner was doubtful about her money. My good lady came back that night and told me all this, and I was certain our bird was caged. So I put one of our men regular to sweep a crossin' during the daytime, and I communicated with the sergeant of the division to keep the house looked after at night. But, Lor' bless you, she's no intention of goin' away. Couldn't manage it, I think, if she had; for my missis, who's been up several times since, says the milliner says her lodger's in a queer way, she thinks."

"How do you mean in a queer way?" interrupted Bowker; "ill?"

"Well, not exactly ill, I think, Sir. I can't say exactly how, for the milliner's rather a stupid woman; and it wouldn't do for my missis—though she'd find it out in a minute—to see the lady. As far as I can make out, it's a kind of fits, and she seems to have had 'em pretty bad—off her head for hours at a time, you know. It's rather cornered me, that has, as I don't exactly know how to act in the case; and I went round to the Square to tell his lordship, and then found out what had happened. I was thinking of asking to see the Hearl—"

"The what, Mr. Blackett?"

"The Hearl—Hearl Beauport, his lordship's father. But now you've come, Sir, you'll know what to do, and what orders to give me."

"Yes, quite right," said Bowker, after a moment's consideration. "You must not see Lord Beauport; he's in a sad state of mind still, and any further worry might be dangerous. You've done admirably, Mr. Blackett — admirably indeed; and your reward shall be proportionate, you may take my word for that; but I think it will be best to leave matters as they are until—at all events, until I have spoken to my friend. The name was Lambert, I think you said; and what was the address?"

"No. 102 Thomson Street, just beyond Nottin'-'Ill Gate; milliner's shop, name of Chapman. Beg your pardon, Sir, but this is a pretty case, and one as has been neatly worked up; you won't let it be spoilt by any amatoors?"

"Eh?—by what? I don't think I understand you."

"You won't let any one go makin' inquiries on their own hook? So many of our best cases is spoilt by amatoors shovin' their oars in."

"You may depend on that, Mr. Blackett; the whole credit of the discovery is justly due to you, and you shall have it. Now good-day to you; I shall find you here, I suppose, when next I want you?"

Mr. Blackett bowed, and conducted his visitor through the hollow-sounding corridors, and bade him a respectful farewell at the door. Then, when William Bowker was alone, he stopped, and shook his head sorrowfully, muttering, "A bad job, a bad job! God help you, Geoff, my poor fellow! there's more trouble in store for you—more trouble in store!"

CHAPTER VII.

TRACKED.

The news which Mr. William Bowker had heard from Inspector Blackett troubled its recipient considerably, and it was not until he had thought it over deeply and consumed a large quantity of tobacco in the process, that he arrived at any settled determination as to what was the right course to be pursued by him. His first idea was to make Geoffrey Ludlow acquainted with the whole story and let him act as he thought best; but a little subsequent reflection changed his opinion on this point. Geoff was very weak in health, certainly in no fit state to leave his bed; and yet if he heard that Margaret was found, that her address was known, above all that she was ill, Bowker knew him well enough to be aware that nothing would prevent him at once setting out to see her, and probably to use every effort to induce her to return with him. Such a course would be bad in every way, but in the last respect it would be fatal. For one certain reason Bowker had almost hoped that nothing more might ever be heard of the wretched woman who had fallen like a curse upon his friend's life. He knew Geoffrey Ludlow root and branch, knew how thoroughly weak he was, and felt certain that, no matter how grievous the injury which Margaret had done him, he had but to see her again—to see her more especially in sickness and misfortune—to take her back to his heart and to his hearth, and defy the counsel of his friends and the opinion of the world. That would never do. Geoff had been sufficiently dragged down by this unfortunate infatuation; but he had a future which should be independent of her, undimmed by any tarnish accruing to him from those wondrous misspent days. So old Bowker firmly believed; and to accomplish

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that end he determined that none of Inspector Blackett's news should find its way to Geoffrey's ears, at all events until he, Bowker, had personally made himself acquainted with the state of affairs.

It must have been an impulse of the strongest friendship and love for Geoff that induced William Bowker to undertake this duty; for it was one which inspired him with aversion, not to say horror. At first he had some thoughts of asking Charley Potts to do it; but then he bethought him that Charley, headstrong, earnest, and impulsive as he was, was scarcely the man to be intrusted with such a delicate mission. And he remembered, moreover, that Charley was now to a great extent *lié* with Geoff's family, that he had been present at Geoff's first meeting with Margaret, that he had always spoken against her, and that now, imbued as he was likely to be with some of the strong feelings of old Mrs. Ludlow, he would be certain to make a mess of the mission, and, without the least intention of being offensive, would hurt some one's feelings in an unmistakable and unpardonable manner. No; he must go himself, horribly painful as it would be to him. His had been a set gray life for who should say how many years; he had not been mixed up with any woman's follies or griefs in ever so slight a degree, he had heard no woman's voice in plaintive appeal or earnest confession, he had seen no woman's tears or hung upon no woman's smile, since—since when? Since the days spent with *her*. Ah, how the remembrance shut out the present and opened up the long, long vistas of the past! He was no longer the bald-headed, grizzle-bearded, stout, elderly man; he was young Bowker, from whom so much was expected; and the common tavern-parlor in which he was seated, with its beer-stained tables and its tobacco-reek, faded away, and the long, dusty roads of Andalusia, the tinkling bells of the mules, the cheery shouts of the sun-burnt *arrieros*, the hard-earned pull at the *bota*, and the loved presence, now vanished forever, rose in his memory.

When his musings were put to flight by the entrance of the waiter he paid his score, and summoning up his resolution he went out into the noisy street, and mounting the first omnibus was borne away to his destination. He found the place indicated to him by Blackett—a small but clean and decent street—and soon arrived at Mrs. Chapman's house. There, at the door, he stopped, undecided what to do. He had not thought of any excuse for demanding an interview with Mrs. Chapman's lodger, and, on turning the subject over in his mind, he could not imagine any at all likely to be readily received. See Margaret he must; and to do that he thought he must take her unprepared and on a sudden; if he sent up his name he would certainly be refused admittance. His personal appearance was far too Bohemian in its character to enable him to pass himself off as her lawyer or any friend of her family; his only hope was to put a bold front on it, to mention her name, and to walk straight on to her room, leaving it to chance to favor his efforts.

He entered the shop—a dull, dismal little place, with a pair of stays lying helplessly in the window, and a staring, black-eyed torso of a female doll, for cap-making purposes, insanely smiling on the counter. Such a heavy footfall as Mr. Bowker's was seldom heard in those vestal halls; such a grizzly-bearded face as Mr. Bowker's was seldom seen in such close proximity to the cap-making dummy; and little Mrs. Chapman the milliner came out "all in a tremble," as she afterward expressed it, from her inner sanctum, which was about as big and as tepid as a warm-bath, and in a quavering voice demanded the intruder's business. She was a mild-eyed, flaxen-haired, quiet, frightened little woman, and old Bowker's heart softened toward her as he said, "You have a friend of mine lodging with you, ma'am, I think—Mrs. Lambert?"

"Oh, dear; then, if you're a friend of Mrs. Lambert's, you're welcome here, I can assure you, Sir!" and the little woman looked more frightened than ever, and held up her hands half in fear, half in relief.

"Ah, she's been ill, I hear," said Bowker, wishing to have it understood that he was thoroughly *en rapport* with the lodger.

"Ill!—I'm thankful you've come, Sir!—no one, unless they saw her, would credit how ill she is—I mean to be up and about, and all that. She's better to-day, and clearer; but what she have been these few days past mortal tongue can not tell—all delirium-like, and full of fancies, and talking of things which set Hannah—the girl who does for me—and me nearly out of our wits with fright. So much so, that six-and-sixpence a week is—well, never mind, poor thing! it's worse for her than for us; but I'm glad, at any rate, some friend has come to see her."

"I'll go and do so at once, Mrs. Chapman," said Bowker. "I know my way; the door straight opposite to the front of the stairs, isn't it? Thank you; I'll find it;" and with the last words yet on his tongue Mr. Bowker had passed round the little counter, by the little milliner, and was making the narrow staircase creak again with his weight.

He opened the door opposite to him, after having knocked and received no answer, and peered cautiously in. The daylight was fading, and the blind of the window was half down, and Bowker's eyesight was none of the best now, so that he took some little time before he perceived the outline of a figure stretched in the white dimity-covered easy-chair by the little Pembroke table in the middle of the room. Although some noise had been made by the opening of the door, the figure had not moved; it never stirred when Bowker gave a little premonitory cough to notify his advent; it remained in exactly the same position, without stirring hand or foot, when Bowker said, "A friend has come to see you, Mrs. —Lambert." Then a dim, undefined sense of terror came upon William Bowker, and he closed the door silently behind him, and advanced into the room. Immediately he became aware of a faint sickly smell, a cloying, percolating odor, which seemed to fill the place; but he had little time to think of this, for immediately before him lay the form of Margaret, her eyes closed, her features rigid, her long red hair falling in all its wild luxuriance over her shoulders. At first William thought she was dead; but, stooping close over her, he marked her slow, labored breathing, and noticed that from time to time her hands were unclenched, and then closed again as tightly as ever. He took a little water from a tumbler

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on the table and sprinkled it on her face, and laid his finger on her pulse; after a minute or two she opened her eyes, closing them again immediately, but after a time opening them again, and fixing them on Bowker's face with a long, wistful gaze.

"Are you one of them also?" she asked, in a deep, hushed voice. "How many more to come and gibber and point at me; or, worse than all, to sit mutely staring at me with pitiless unforgiving eyes! How many more? You are the latest. I have never seen you before."

"Oh yes, you have," said Bowker, quietly, with her hand in his, and his eyes steadfastly fixed on hers—"oh yes, you have: you recollect me, my dear Mrs. Ludlow."

He laid special stress on the name, and as he uttered the words Margaret started, a new light flashed into her beautiful eyes, and she regarded him attentively.

"What was that you said?" she asked; "what name did you call me?"

"What name? Why, your own, of course; what else should I call you, my dear Mrs. Ludlow?"

She started again at the repetition, then her eyes fell, and she said, dreamily:

"But that is not my name—that is not my name."

Bowker waited for a moment, and then said:

"You might as well pretend to have forgotten me and our talk at Elm Lodge that day that I came up to see Geoffrey."

"Elm Lodge! Geoffrey!—ah, good God! now I remember all!" said Margaret, in a kind of scream, raising herself in the chair, and wringing Bowker's hand.

"Hush, my dear madam; don't excite yourself; I thought you would remember all; you—"

"You are Mr. Bowker!" said Margaret, pressing her hand to her head; "Mr. Bowker, whose story Geoff told me: Geoff! ah, poor, good Geoff! ah, dear, good Geoff! But why are you here? he hasn't sent you? Geoffrey has not sent you?"

"Geoffrey does not know I am here. He has been very ill; too ill to be told of all that has been going on; too ill to understand it, if he had been told. I heard by accident that you were living here, and that you had been ill; and I came to see if I could be of any service to you."

While he had been speaking Margaret had sat with her head tightly clasped between her hands. When he finished she looked up with a slightly dazed expression, and said, with an evident attempt at controlling her voice, "I see all now; you must pardon me, Mr. Bowker, for any incoherence or strangeness you may have noticed in my manner; but I have been very ill, and I feel sure that at times my mind wanders a little. I am better now. I was quite myself when you mentioned about your having heard of my illness, and offering me service; and I thank you very sincerely for your kindness."

Old William looked at her for a minute, and then said:

"I am a plain-spoken man, Mrs. Ludlow—for you are Mrs. Ludlow to me—as I dare say you may have heard, if you have not noticed it yourself; and I tell you plainly that it is out of no kindness to you that I am here now, but only out of love for my dear old friend."

"I can understand that," said Margaret; "and only respect you the more for it; and now you are here, Mr. Bowker, I shall be very glad to say a few words to you—the last I shall ever say regarding that portion of my life which was passed in—at— You know what I would say; you have heard the story of the commencement of my acquaintance with Geoffrey Ludlow?"

Bowker bowed in acquiescence.

"You know how I left him—why I am here?"

Then William Bowker—the memory of all his friend's trouble, and misery, and crushed hopes, and wasted life rising up strongly within him—set his face hard, and said, between his clenched teeth, "I know your history from two sources. Yesterday Geoffrey Ludlow, scarce able to raise himself in his bed, so weak was he from the illness which your conduct brought upon him, told me, as well as he could, of his first meeting with you, his strange courtship, his marriage—at which I was present—of his hopes and fears, and all the intricacies of his married life; of the manner in which, finally, you revealed the history of your previous life, and parted from him. Supplementing this story, he gave me to read a letter from Lord Caterham, the brother of the man you call your husband. This man, Captain Brakespere, flying from the country, had written to his brother, informing him that he had left behind him a woman who was called his mistress, but who was in reality his wife. To find this woman Lord Caterham made his care. He set the detectives to work, and had her tracked from place to place; continually getting news of, but never finding her. While he lived Lord Caterham never slackened from the pursuit; finding his end approaching—"

"His end approaching!—the end of his life do you mean?"

"He is dead. But before he died he delegated the duty of pursuit, of all men in the world, to Geoffrey Ludlow—to Geoffrey Ludlow, who, in his blind ignorance, had stumbled upon the very woman a year before, had saved her from a miserable death, and, all unknowingly, had fondly imagined he had made her his loving wife."

"Ah, my God! this is too much! And Geoffrey Ludlow knows all this?"

"From Geoffrey Ludlow's lips I heard it not twenty-four hours since."

Margaret uttered a deep groan and buried her face in her hands. When she raised her head her eyes were tear-blurred, and her voice faltered as she said, "I acknowledge my sin, and—so far as Geoffrey Ludlow is concerned—I deeply, earnestly repent my conduct. It was prompted by despair; it ended in desperation. Have those who condemned me—and I know naturally enough I am condemned by all his friends—have those who condemned me ever known the pangs of starvation, the grim tortures of houselessness in the streets? Have they ever known what it is to have the iron of want and penury eating into their souls, and then to be offered a comfortable home and an honest man's love? If they have, I doubt very much whether they would have refused it. I do not say this to excuse myself. I have done Geoffrey Ludlow deadly wrong; but when I listened to his proffered protestations I gave him time for reflection; when I said 'Yes' to his repeated vows I thought

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that the dead past had buried its dead, and that no ghost from it would arise to trouble the future. I vowed to myself that I would be true to that man who had so befriended me; and I was true to him. The life I led was inexpressibly irksome and painful to me; the dead solemn monotony of it goaded me almost to madness at times; but I bore it—bore it all out of gratitude to him—would have borne it till now if *he* had not come back to lure me to destruction. I do not say I did my duty; I am naturally undomestic and unfitted for household management; but I brought no slur on Geoffrey Ludlow's name in thought or deed until that man returned. I have seen him, Mr. Bowker; I have spoken to him, and he spurned me from him; and yet I love him as I loved him years ago. He need only raise his finger, and I would fly to him and fawn upon him, and be grateful if he but smiled upon me in return. They can not understand this—they can not understand my disregard of the respectabilities by flinging away the position and the name and the repute, and all that which they had fitted to me, and which clung to me, ah, so irritatingly! but if all I have heard be true you can understand it, Mr. Bowker—you can. Is Geoffrey out of danger?"

The sudden change in the tone of her voice as she uttered the last sentence struck on Bowker's ear, and looking up he noticed a strange light in her eyes.

"Geoffrey is out of danger," he replied; "but he is still very weak, and requires the greatest care."

"And requires the greatest care!" she repeated. "Well, he'll get it, I suppose; but not from me. And to think that I shall never see him again! Poor Geoffrey! poor, good Geoffrey! How good he was, and how grave!—with those large, earnest eyes of his, and his great head, and rough, curling, brown hair, and—the cruel cold, the pitiless rain, the cruel, cruel cold!" As she said these words she crept back shivering into her chair, and wrapped her dress round her. William Bowker bent down and gazed at her steadily; but after an instant she averted her face, and hid it in the chair. Bowker took her hand, and it fell passively into his own; he noticed that it was burning.

"This will not do, Mrs. Ludlow!" he exclaimed; "you have overexcited yourself lately. You want rest and looking after—you must—" He stopped; for she had turned her head to him again and was rocking herself backward and forward in her chair, weeping meanwhile as though her heart would break. The sight was too much for William to bear unaided, and he opened the door and called Mrs. Chapman.

"Ah, Sir," said the good little woman when she entered the room, "she's off again, I see. I knew she was, for I heard that awful sobbing as I was coming up the stairs. Oh, that awful sobbing that I've laid awake night after night listening to, and that never seemed to stop till daylight, when she was fairly wore out. But that's nothing, Sir, compared to the talk when she's beside herself. Then she'd go on and say—"

"Yes, yes, no doubt, Mrs. Chapman," interrupted Bowker, who did not particularly wish to be further distressed by the narration of Margaret's sadness; "but this faintness, these weeping fits, are quite enough to demand the instant attention of a medical man. If you'll kindly look to her now, I'll go off and fetch a doctor; and if there's a nurse required—as I've little doubt there will be—you won't mind me intruding further upon you? No; I knew you'd say so. Mrs. Lambert's friends will ever be grateful to you; and here's something just to carry you on, you know, Mrs. Chapman—rent and money paid on her account, and that sort of thing." The something was two sovereigns, which had lain in a lucifer-match box used by Mr. Bowker as his bank, and kept by him in his only locked drawer for six weeks past, and which had been put aside for the purchase of a "tweed wrapper" for winter wear.

Deliberating within himself to what physician of eminence he should apply, and grievously hampered by the fact that he was unable to pay any fee in advance, Bowker suddenly bethought him of Dr. Rollit, whose great love of art and its professors led him, "in the fallow leisure of his life," to constitute himself a kind of honorary physician to the brotherhood of the brush. To him Bowker hastened, and, without divulging Margaret's identity, explained the case, and implored the doctor to see her at once. The doctor hesitated for a moment, for he was at his easel and in a knot. He had "got something that would not come right," and he scarcely seemed inclined to move until he had conquered his difficulty; but after explaining the urgency of the case, old Bowker took the pallet and sheaf of brushes from the physician's hand and said, "I think we can help each other at this moment, doctor—go you and see the patient, and leave me to deal with this difficulty. You'll find me here when you come back, and you shall then look at your canvas."

But when Dr. Rollit, after a couple of hours' absence, returned, he did not look at his picture—at least on his first entry. He looked so grave and earnest that William Bowker, moving toward him to ask the result of his visit, was frightened, and stopped.

"What is the matter?" he asked; "you seem—"

"I'm a little taken aback—that's all, old friend!" said the doctor; "you did not prepare me to find in my patient an old acquaintance—you did not know it, perhaps?"

"By Jove! I remember now. Charley Potts said— What an old ass I am!"

"I was called in by Potts and Ludlow, or rather called out of a gathering of the Titians, to attend Mrs. Lambert, as the landlady called her, nearly two years ago. She is not much altered—outwardly—since I left her convalescent."

"You lay a stress on 'outwardly'—what is the inner difference?"

"Simply that her health is gone, my good fellow! her whole constitution utterly shattered; her life not worth a week's purchase."

"Surely you're wrong, doctor. Up to within the last few weeks her health has been excellent."

"My dear William Bowker, I, as an amateur, meddle with your professional work; but what I do is on the surface, and the mistakes I make are so glaring that they are recognizable instantly. You might meddle, as an amateur, with mine, and go pottering on until you'd killed half a parish without any body suspecting you. The disease I attended Mrs.—there! it's absurd

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our beating about the bush any longer—Mrs. Ludlow for was rheumatic fever, caught from exposure to cold and damp. The attack I now find left behind it, as it generally does, a strong predisposition to heart-disease, which, from what I learn from her, seems to have displayed itself in spasms and palpitations very shortly afterward."

"From what you learn from her? She was sensible, then, when you saw her?"

"She was sensible before I left her; ay, and that's the deuce of it. Partly to deaden the pain of these attacks, partly, as she said herself just now, to escape from thought, she has had recourse to a sedative, morphia, which she has taken in large quantities. I smelt it the instant I entered her room, and found the bottle by her side. Under this influence she is deadened and comatose; but when the reaction comes—Poor creature! poor creature!" and the kind-hearted doctor shook his head sadly.

"Do you consider her in absolute danger?" asked Bowker, after a pause.

"My dear fellow, it is impossible to say how long she may last; but—though I suppose that's out of the question now, eh?—people will talk, you know, and I've heard rumors—but if her husband wished to see her, I should say fetch him at once."

"If her husband wished to see her!" said old Bowker to himself, as he walked away toward his lodgings—"if her husband wished to see her! He don't—at least the real one don't, I imagine; and Geoff mustn't; though, if he knew it, nothing would keep him away. But that other—Captain Brakespere—he ought to know the danger she's in; he ought to have the chance of saying a kind word to her before— He must be a damned villain!" said old William, stopping for an instant, and pondering over the heads of the story; "but he deserves that chance, and he shall have it."

Pursuant to his determination Mr. Bowker presented himself the next day at Long's Hotel, where he recollected Mr. Blackett had informed him that Captain Brakespere was stopping. The porter, immediately divining from Mr. Bowker's outward appearance that he meditated a raid upon coats, hats, or any thing that might be lying about the coffee-room, barricaded the entrance with his waistcoat, and parleyed with the visitor in the hall. Inquiring for Captain Brakespere, Mr. Bowker was corrected by the porter, who opined "he meant Lord Catrum." The correction allowed and the inquiry repeated, the porter replied that his "lordship had leff," and referred the inquirer to St. Barnabas Square.

To St. Barnabas Square Mr. Bowker adjourned, but there learned that Lord Caterham had left town with Mr. Barford, and would not be back for some days.

And meanwhile the time was wearing by, and Margaret's hold on life was loosening day by day. Would it fail altogether before she saw the man who had deceived her so cruelly? would it fail altogether before she saw the man whom she had so cruelly deceived?

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE DEEP SHADOW.

In the presence of the double sorrow which had fallen upon her Annie Maurice's girlhood died out. Arthur was gone, and Geoffrey in so suffering a condition of body and mind that it would have been easier to the tender-hearted girl to know that he was at rest, even though she had to face all the loneliness which would then have been her lot. Her position was very trying in all its aspects at this time; for there was little sympathy with her new sorrow at the great house which she still called home, and where she was regarded as decidedly "odd." Lady Beauport considered that Caterham had infected her with some of his strange notions, and that her fancy for associating with "queer" people, removed from her own sphere not more by her heiress-ship than by her residence in an earl's house and her recognition as a member of a noble family, was chargeable to the eccentric notions of her son. Annie came and went as she pleased, free from comment, though not from observation: but she was of a sensitive nature; she could not assert herself, and she suffered from the consciousness that her grief, her anxiety, and her constant visits to Lowbar were regarded with mingled censure and contempt. Her preoccupation of mind prevented her noticing many things which otherwise could not have escaped her attention; but when Geoffrey's illness ceased to be actively dangerous, and the bulletin brought her each morning from Til by the hands of the faithful Charley contained more tranquilizing but still sad accounts of the patient, she began to observe an air of mystery and preparation in the household. The few hours which she forced herself to pass daily in the society of Lady Beauport had been very irksome to her since Arthur died, and she had been glad when they were curtailed by Lady Beauport's frequent plea of "business" in the evenings, and her leaving the drawing-room for her own apartments. Every afternoon she went to Elm Lodge, and her presence was eagerly hailed by Mrs. Ludlow and Til. She had seen Geoffrey frequently during the height of the fever; but since the letter she had kept in such faithful custody had reached his hands she had not seen him. Though far from even the vaguest conjecture of the nature of its contents, she had dreaded the effect of receiving a communication from his dead friend on Geoffrey Ludlow, and had been much relieved when his mother told her on the following day that he was very calm and quiet, but did not wish to see any one for a few days. Bowker and he had fully felt the embarrassment of the position in which Lord Caterham's revelation had placed Geoffrey with regard to Annie Maurice, and the difficulties which the complications produced by Margaret's identity with Lionel Brakespere's wife added to Ludlow's fulfillment of Caterham's trust. They had agreed—or rather Bowker had suggested, and Geoffrey had acquiesced, with the languid assent of a mind too much enfeebled by illness and sorrow to be capable of facing any difficulty but the inevitable, immediate, and pressing—that Annie need know nothing for the present.

"She could hardly come here from the Beauports, Geoff," Bowker had said; "it's all non-

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sense, of course, to men like you and me, who look at the real, and know how its bitterness takes all the meaning out of the rubbish they call rules of society; but the strongest woman is no freer than Gulliver in his fetters of pack-thread in the conventional world she lives in. We need not fret her sooner than it must be done, and you had better not see her for the present."

So Annie came and went for two or three days, and did not see Geoffrey. Mrs. Ludlow, having recovered from the sudden shock of her son's illness and the protracted terror of his danger, had leisure to feel a little affronted at his desire for seclusion, and to wonder audibly why *she* should be supposed to do him more harm than Mr. Bowker.

"A big, blundering fellow like that, Til," she said; "and I do assure you, Miss Maurice, he quite forgot the time for the draught when he was shut up there with him the other day—and talk of *he's* doing Geoffrey no harm! All I can say is, if Geoffrey had not been crying when I went into his room, and wasn't trembling all over in his bed, I never was so mistaken before."

Then Til and Annie looked blankly at each other, in mute wonder at this incomprehensible sorrow—for the women knew nothing but that Margaret had fled with a former lover—so much had been necessarily told them, under Bowker's instructions, by Charley Potts; and Annie, after a little, went sorrowfully away.

That day at dinner Lord Beauport was more than usually kind in his manner to her; and Annie considered it due to him, and a fitting return for some inquiries he had made for "her friend," which had more of warmth and less of condescension than usual in their tone, to rouse herself into greater cheerfulness than she had yet been able to assume. Lady Beauport rose sooner than usual; and the two ladies had hardly seated themselves in the dreary drawing-room when the Earl joined them. There was an air of preparation in Lord Beauport's manner, and Annie felt that something had happened.

The thing which had happened was this: Lady Beauport had not miscalculated her experienced power of managing her husband. She had skillfully availed herself of an admission made by him that Lionel's absence at so great a distance just then was an unfortunate complication; that the necessary communications were rendered difficult and tedious; and that he wished his "rustication" had been nearer home. The Countess caught at the word "rustication:" then not expulsion, not banishment, was in her husband's mind. Here was a commutation of her darling's sentence; a free pardon would follow, if she only set about procuring it in the right way. So she resorted to several little expedients by which the inconvenience of the heir's absence was made more and more apparent. Having once mentioned his name, Lord Beauport continued to do so—perhaps he was in his secret heart as much relieved by the breaking of the ban as the mother herself—and at length, on the same day which witnessed William Bowker's visit to Lionel Brakespere's deserted wife, Lady Beauport acknowledged to her husband that their son was then in London, and that she had seen him. The Earl received her communication in frowning silence; but she affected not to observe his manner, and expatiated, with volubility very unusual to her, upon the fortunate concurrence of circumstances which had brought Lionel to England just as his improved position made it more than ever probable he would be perfectly well received.

"That dear Mr. Barford," she said—and her face never changed at the name of the man in whose arms her son had died so short a time before—"assures me that every one is delighted to see him. And really, George, he mustn't stay at Long's, you know—it looks so bad—for every one knows he's in town; and if we don't receive him properly that will be just the way to rake up old stories. I'm sure they're old enough to be forgotten; and many a young man has done worse than Lionel, and—"

"Stop, Gertrude," said Lord Beauport, sternly; "stick to the truth, if you please. I hope very few young men in our son's position have disgraced it and themselves as he has done. The truth is, that we have to make the best of a misfortune. He has returned; and by so doing has added to the rest a fresh rascality by breaking his pledged word. Circumstances oblige me to acquiesce—luck is on his side—his brother's death—" Lord Beauport paused for a moment, and an expression, hitherto unfamiliar, but which his wife frequently saw in the future, flitted over his face—"his brother's death leaves me no choice. Let us say as little as possible on this subject. He had better come here, for every reason. For appearances' sake it is well; and he will probably be under some restraint in this house." Here the Earl turned to leave the room, and said slowly as he walked toward the door, "Something tells me, Gertrude, that in Arthur's death, which we dreaded too little and mourn too lightly, we have seen only the beginning of evils."

Lady Beauport sat very still and felt very cold after he left her. Conscience smote her dumbly—in days to come it would find a voice in which to speak—and fear fell upon her. "I will never say any thing to him about Annie Maurice," she said to herself, as the first effect of her husband's words began to pass away; "I do believe he would be as hard on Lionel as poor Arthur himself, and warn the girl against him."

How relieved she felt as she dispatched a note to Lionel Brakespere, telling him she had fulfilled her task, and inviting him to return to his father's house when he pleased!

Assuredly the star of the new heir was in the ascendant; his brother was dead, his place restored to him, and society ready to condone all his "follies"—which is the fashionable synonym for the crimes of the rich and the great. If Lionel Brakespere could have seen "that cursed woman"—as in his brutal anger he called his wife a hundred times over, as he fretted and fumed over the remembrance of their interview—as William Bowker saw her that day—he would have esteemed himself a luckier fellow still than he did when he lighted his cigar with his mother's note, and thought how soon he would change that "infernal dull old hole" from what it was in Caterham's time, and how he would have every thing his own way now.

Such, as far as his knowledge of them extended, and without any comment or expression of opinion of his own, were the circumstances which Lord Beauport narrated to Annie. She re-

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ceived his information with an indescribable pang, compounded of a thousand loving remembrances of Arthur and a keen resuscitation by her memory of the scene of Lionel's disgrace, to which she and her lost friend had been witnesses. She could hardly believe, hardly understand it all; and the clearest thought which arose above the surging, troubled sea within her breast was, that the place which knew Arthur no more would be doubly empty and desolate when Lionel should fill it.

The tone in which Lord Beauport had spoken was grave and sad, and he had confined himself to the barest announcement. Annie had listened in respectful silence; but though she had not looked directly at her, she was conscious of Lady Beauport's reproachful glances, addressed to her husband, as he concluded by saying, coldly:

"You were present, Annie, by my desire, when I declared that that which is now about to happen should never be, and I have thought it necessary to explain to you a course of conduct on my part which, without explanation, would have appeared very weak and inconsistent. As a member of *my* family you are entitled to such an explanation; and indeed, as an inmate of this house, you are entitled to an apology."

"Thank you, my lord," said Annie, in a voice which, though lower than usual, was very firm.

This was more than Lady Beauport's pride could bear. She began, fiercely enough,

"Really, Lord Beauport, I can not see—"

But at that moment a servant opened the door, and announced

"Lord Caterham."

The group by the fireside stood motionless for a moment, as Lionel, dressed in deep mourning, advanced toward them with well-bred ease and perfect unconcern. Then Lady Beauport threw herself into his arms; and Annie, hardly noticing that Lord Beauport had by an almost involuntary movement stretched out his hand to the handsome prodigal, glided past the three, hurried to her own room, and, having locked the door, sank down on her knees beside her bed in an agony of grief.

Three days elapsed, during which events marched with a steady pace at Elm Lodge and at the lodging where the woman who had brought such wreck and ruin within that tranquil-looking abode was lying contending with death and disease, dying the death of despair and exhaustion. When Bowker returned from his unsuccessful quest for Lionel Brakespere he found that she had passed into another phase of her malady—was quiet, dreamy, and apparently forgetful of the excitement she had undergone. She was lying quite still on her bed, her eyes half closed, and a faint, unmeaning smile was on her lips.

"I've seen her so for hours and hours, Sir," said the gentle little landlady; "and it's my belief it's what she takes as does it."

So Bowker concluded that Margaret had found means to avail herself of the fatal drug from which she had sought relief so often and so long, in the interval of depression which had succeeded the delirium he had witnessed. He was much embarrassed now to know how to proceed. She required better accommodation and careful nursing, and he was determined she should have both—but how that was to be managed was the question; and Bowker, the most helpless man in the world in such matters, was powerless to answer it. He had never imagined, as he had turned the probabilities over and over in his mind, that such a complication as severe physical illness would arise; and it routed all his plans, besides engaging all his most active sympathies. William Bowker had an extreme dread, indeed a positive terror, of witnessing bodily suffering in women and children; and had his anger and repulsion toward Margaret been far greater than they were, they would have yielded to pain and pity as he gazed upon the rigid lines of the pale, weary face, from which the beauty was beginning to fade and drop away in some mysterious manner of vanishing, terrible to see and feel, but impossible to describe. He made the best provisional arrangements within his power, and went away, promising Mrs. Chapman that he would return on the following day to meet the doctor, and turned his steps in much mental bewilderment toward the abode of Charley Potts, purposing to consult him in the emergency, previous to their proceeding together to Lowbar.

"I can't help it now," he thought; "the women can not possibly be kept out of the business any longer. If she were let to want any thing, and had not every care taken of her, dear old Geoff would never forgive any of us; and it could not be hidden from him. I am sure she's dying; and—I'm glad of it: glad for her sake, poor wretched creature! and oh, so glad for his! He will recover her death—he *must;* but I doubt whether he would recover her life. He would be forever hankering after her, forever remembering the past, and throwing away the remainder of his life, as he has thrown away too much of it already. No, no, dear old Geoff, this shall not be, if your William can save you. I know what a wasted life means; and you shall put yours out at good interest, Geoff, please God!"

Charley was at home; and he received Mr. Bowker's communication with uncommon gravity, and immediately bestowed his best attention upon considering what was to be done. He was not in the least offended by discovering that it had not been his William's intention to tell him any thing about it. "Quite right too," he observed. "I should have been of no use if every thing had not been capsized by her illness; and I don't like to know any thing I'm not to tell to Til. Not that she's in the least inquisitive, you know—don't make any mistake about that—but things are in such an infernally mysterious mess; and then they only know enough to make them want to know more; and I shouldn't like, under these circumstances—it would seem hypocritical, don't you see—and every thing must come out sometime, eh?"

"Oh yes, I see," said Bowker, dryly; "but I have to tell you *now*, Charley; for what the devil's to be done? You can't bring her here and nurse her; and I can't bring her to my place and nurse her—yet she must be taken somewhere and nursed; and we must be prepared with a satisfactory account of every thing we have done when Geoff gets well; and what are we to do?"

Mr. Potts did not answer for a few moments, but handed over the beer in an absent manner to Mr. Bowker; then, starting up from the table on which he had been sitting, he exclaimed:

"I have it, William. Let's tell the women—

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Til, I mean, and Miss Maurice. They'll know all about it, bless you," said Charley, whose confidence in female resources was unbounded. "It's all nonsense trying to keep things dark when they've got to such a pass as this. If Mrs. Ludlow's in the state you say she will not live long; and then Geoff's difficulty, if not his trouble, will be over. Her illness alters every thing. Come on, Bowker; let's get on to Elm Lodge; tell Til, and Miss Maurice, if she's there; and let them make proper arrangements."

"But, Charley," said Bowker, much relieved, in spite of his misgivings, by the suggestion, "you forget one important point. Miss Maurice is Brakespere's cousin, and she lives in his father's house. It won't do to bring her in."

"Never you mind that, William," replied the impetuous Charley. "Til can't act alone; and old Mrs. Ludlow is nervous, and would not know what to do, and must not be told; and I am sure Miss Maurice doesn't care a rap about her cousin—the ruffian—why should she? And I know she would do any thing in the world, no matter how painful to herself, and no matter whether he ever came to know it or not, that would serve or please Geoff."

"Indeed!" said Bowker, in a tone half of inquiry, half of surprise, and looking very hard at Charley; "and how do you know that, eh, Charley?"

"Oh, bother!" answered that gentleman, "I don't know how I know it; but I do know it; and I am sure the sooner we act on my knowledge the better. So come along."

So saying Mr. Potts made his simple outdoor toilet; and the two gentlemen went out, and took their way toward the resort of omnibuses, eagerly discussing the matter in hand as they went, and Mr. Bowker finding himself unexpectedly transformed from the active into the passive party.

It was agreed between them that Geoffrey should not be informed of Bowker's presence in the house, as he would naturally be impatient to learn the result of the mission with which he had intrusted him; and that result it was their present object to conceal.

Fortune favored the wishes of Bowker and Charley. Mrs. Ludlow was with her son; and in the drawing-room, which was resuming somewhat of its former orderly and pleasant appearance, they found Miss Maurice and Til. The two girls were looking sad and weary, and Til was hardly brightened up by Charley's entrance, for he looked so much more grave than usual that she guessed at once he had heard something new and important. The little party were too vitally interested in Geoffrey and his fortunes, and the occasion was too solemn for any thing of ceremony; and when Charley Potts had briefly introduced Bowker to Annie Maurice, he took Til's hand in his, and said:

"Til, Geoffrey's wife has been found—alone, and very ill—dying, as we believe!"

"You are quite sure, William?"

"I am quite sure, Geoffrey. Do you think I would deceive you, or take any thing for granted myself, without seeing and hearing what is so important to you? She is well cared for in every respect. Your own care, when she needed it before, was not more tender or more effective. Be satisfied, dear old Geoff; be content."

"You saw her—you really saw her; and she spoke kindly of me?" asked Geoffrey with a pitiable eagerness which pained Bowker to witness.

"I did. Yes, have I not told you again and again—" Then there was a moment's silence; and Bowker thought, if she were not dying, how terrible this tenderness toward her would be, how inexplicable to all the world but him, how ruinous to Geoffrey; but as it was, it did not matter: it would soon be only the tenderness of memory, the pardon of the grave.

Geoffrey was sitting in an arm-chair by the bedroom window, which overlooked the pretty flower-garden and the lawn. He was very weak still, but health was returning, and with it the power of acute mental suffering, which severe bodily illness mercifully deadens. This had been a dreadful day to him. When he was able to sit up and look around the room, from which all the graceful suggestive traces of a woman's presence had been carefully removed; when he saw the old home look upon every thing before his eyes (for whom the idea of home was forever desecrated and destroyed), the truth presented itself to him as it had never before done, in equal horror and intensity, since the day the woman he loved had struck him a blow by her words which had nearly proved mortal. Would it had been so! he thought, as his large brown eyes gazed wearily out upon the lawn and the flower-beds, and then were turned upon the familiar objects in the chamber, and closed with a shudder. His large frame looked gaunt and worn, and his hands rested listlessly upon the sides of his chair. He had requested them to leave him alone for a little, that he might rest previous to seeing Bowker.

From the window at which Geoffrey sat he could see the nurse walking monotonously up and down the gravel-walk which bounded his little demesne with the child in her arms. Sometimes she stopped to pluck a flower and give it to the baby, who would laugh with delight and then throw it from him. Geoffrey watched the pair for a little, and then turned his head wearily away and put his question to Bowker, who was seated beside him, and who looked at him furtively with glances of the deepest concern.

"You shall hear how she is, Geoff—how circumstanced, how cared for, and by whom, from one who can tell you the story better than I can. Your confidence has not been misplaced." Geoffrey turned upon him the nervous, anxious gaze which is so touching to see in the eyes of one who has lately neared the grave, and still seems to hover about its brink. William Bowker proceeded: "You have not asked for Miss Maurice lately. I dare say you felt too much oppressed by the information in Lord Caterham's letter, too uncertain of the future, too completely unable to make up your mind what was to be done about her, to care or wish to see her. She has been here as usual, making herself as useful as possible, and helping your mother and sister in every conceivable way. But she has done more for you than that, Geoff; and if you are able to see her now I think you had better hear it all from herself."

With these words Bowker hurried out of the room; and in a few minutes Annie Maurice, pale, quiet, and self-possessed, came in, and took her seat beside Geoffrey.

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What had she come to tell him? What had she been doing for the help and service of her early friend—she, this young girl so unskilled in the world's ways, so lonely, so dependent hitherto—who now looked so womanly and sedate—in whose brown eyes he saw such serious thought, such infinite sweetness and pity—whose deep-mourning dress clothed her slender figure with a sombre dignity new to it, and on whom a nameless change had passed, which Geoffrey had eyes to see now, and recognized even in that moment of painful emotion with wonder.

Calmly, carefully subduing every trace of embarrassment for his sake, and in a business-like tone which precluded the necessity for any preliminary explanation, Annie told Geoffrey Ludlow that she had been made aware of the circumstances which had preceded and caused his illness. She touched lightly upon her sorrow and her sympathy, but passed on to the subject of Caterham's letter. Geoffrey listened to her in silence, his head turned away and his eyes covered with his hand. Annie went on:

"I little thought, Geoffrey, when I was so glad to find that you were well enough to read Arthur's letter, and when I only thought of fulfilling so urgent a request as soon as I could, and perhaps diverting your mind into thoughts of our dear dead friend, that I was to be the means of making all this misery plain and intelligible. But it was so, Geoffrey; and I now see that it was well. Why Arthur should have selected you to take up the search after his death I can not tell—I suppose he knew instinctively your fidelity and true-heartedness; but the accident was very fortunate, for it identified your interests and mine, it made the fulfillment of his trust a sacred duty to me, and enabled me to do with propriety what no one else could have done, and what she—what Margaret—would not have accepted from another."

Geoffrey started, let his hand fall from his face, and caught hers. "Is it you, then, Annie?"

"Yes, yes," she said, "it is I, Geoffrey; do not agitate yourself, but listen to me. When Mr. Bowker found Margaret, as you know he did, she was very ill, and—she had no protector and no money. What could he do? He did the best thing; he told me, to whom Arthur's wishes were sacred, who would have done the same had you never existed—you know I am rich and free; and I made all the needful arrangements for her at once. When all was ready for her reception—it is a pretty house at Sydenham, Geoffrey, and she is as well cared for as any one can be—I went to her, and told her I was come to take her home."

"And she—Margaret—did she consent? Did she think it was I who—"

"Who sent me?" interrupted Annie. "No—she would not have consented; for her feeling is that she has so wronged you that she must owe nothing to you any more. In this I know she is quite wrong; for to know that she was in any want or suffering would be still worse grief to you—but that can never be—and I did not need to contradict her. I told her I came to her in a double character; that of her own friend—though she had not had much friendship for me, Geoffrey; but that is beside the question—and—and—" here she hesitated for a moment, but then took courage and went on—"that of her husband's cousin." Geoffrey ground his teeth, but said never a word. She continued, with deepening light in her eyes and growing tenderness in her voice: "I told her how Arthur, whom I loved, had sought for her; how a strange fatality had brought them in contact, neither knowing how near an interest each had in the other. She knew it the day she fainted in his room, but he died without knowing it, and so dying left her, as I told her I felt she was, a legacy to me. She softened then, Geoffrey, and she came with me."

Here Annie paused, as if expecting he would speak, but he did not. She glanced at him, but his face was set and rigid, and his eyes were fixed upon the walk, where the nurse and child still were.

"She is very ill, Geoffrey," Annie went on; "very weak and worn, and weary of life. I am constantly with her, but sometimes she is unable or unwilling to speak to me. She is gloomy and reserved, and suffers as much in mind as in body, I am sure."

Geoffrey said, slowly, "Does she ever speak to you of me?"

Annie replied, "Not often. When she does it is always with the greatest sorrow for your sorrow, and the deepest sense of the injury she has done you. I am going to her to-day, Geoffrey, and I should like to take to her an assurance of your forgiveness. May I tell Margaret that you forgive her?"

He turned hastily, and said, with a great gasp, "Oh, Annie, tell her that I love her!"

"I will tell her that," the girl said, gently and sadly, and an expression of pain crossed her face. She thought of the love that had been wasted, and the life that had been blighted.

"What is she going to do?" asked Geoffrey; "how is it to be in the future?" This was a difficult question for Annie to answer: she knew well what lay in the future; but she dreaded to tell Geoffrey, even while she felt that the wisest, the easiest, the best, and the most merciful solution of the terrible dilemma in which a woman's ungoverned passion had placed so many innocent persons was surely and not slowly approaching.

"I don't know, Geoffrey," she said; "I can not tell you. Nothing can be decided upon until she is better, and you are well enough to advise and direct us. Try and rest satisfied for the present. She is safe, no harm can come to her; and I am able and willing to befriend her now as you did before. Take comfort, Geoffrey; it is all dreadful; but if we had not found her how much worse it would have been!"

At this moment the nurse carried her charge out of their sight, as she came toward the house, and Annie, thinking of the more than motherless child, wondered at the no-meaning of her own words, and how any thing could have been worse than what had occurred.

She and Geoffrey had spoken very calmly to each other, and there had been no demonstration of gratitude to her on his part; but it would be impossible to tell the thankfulness which filled his heart. It was a feeling of respite which possessed him. The dreadful misfortune which had fallen upon him was as real and as great as ever; but he could rest from the thought of it, from its constant torture, now that he knew that she was

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safe from actual physical harm; now that no awful vision of a repetition of the destitution and misery from which he had once rescued her could come to appall him. Like a man who, knowing that the morrow will bring him a laborious task to do, straining his powers to the utmost, inexorable and inevitable in its claims, covets the deep rest of the hours which intervene between the present and the hour which must summon him to his toil, Geoffrey, in the lassitude of recent illness, in the weakness of early convalescence, rested from the contemplation of his misery. He had taken Annie's communication very quietly; he had a sort of feeling that it ought to surprise him very much, that the circumstances were extraordinary, that the chain of events was a strangely-wrought one—but he felt little surprise; it was lurking somewhere in his mind, he would feel it all by-and-by, no doubt; but nothing beyond relief was very evident to him in his present state. He wondered, indeed, how it was with Annie herself, how the brave, devoted, and unselfish girl had been able, trammeled as she was by the rules and restrictions of a great house, to carry out her benevolent designs, and dispose of her own time after her own fashion. There was another part of the subject which Geoffrey did not approach even in his thoughts. Bowker had not told him of Margaret's entreaties that she might see Lionel Brakespere; he had not told him that the young man had returned to his father's house; and he made no reference to him in his consideration of Annie's position. He had no notion that the circumstances in which Lord Caterham had entreated his protection for Annie had already arisen.

"How is it that you can do all this unquestioned, Annie?" he asked; "how can you be so much away from home?"

She answered him with some embarrassment. "It was difficult—a little—but I knew I was right, and I did not suffer interference. When you are quite well, Geoffrey, I want your advice for myself. I have none else, you know, since Arthur died."

"He knew that, Annie; and the purport of the letter which told me such a terrible story was to ask me in all things to protect and guide you. He little knew that he had the most effectual safeguard in his own hands; for, Annie, the danger he most dreaded for you was association with his brother."

"That can never be," she said, vehemently. "No matter what your future course of action may be, Geoffrey, whether you expose him or not—in which, of course, you will consider Margaret only—I will never live under the same roof with him. I must find another home, Geoffrey, let what will come of it, and let them say what they will."

"Caterham would have been much easier in his mind, Annie," said Geoffrey, with a sad smile, "if he had known how baseless were his fears that his brother would one day win your heart."

"There never could have been any danger of that, Geoffrey," said Annie, with a crimson blush, which had not subsided when she took her leave of him.

CHAPTER IX.

CLOSING IN.

The porter at Lord Beauport's mansion in St. Barnabas Square became so familiarized with Mr. Bowker's frequent visits as at length to express no surprise at the sight of the "hold cove," who daily arrived to inquire whether any tidings of Lord Caterham had been received. Although the porter's experience of life had been confined to London, his knowledge of the ways of men was great; and he was perfectly certain that this pertinacious inquirer was no dun, no tradesman with an overdue account, no begging-letter writer or impostor of any kind. What he was the porter could not tell; mentioned, in casual chat with the footman waiting for the carriage to come round, that he could not "put a name" to him, but thought from his "rum get-up" that he was either in the picture-selling or the money-lending line.

Undeterred by, because ignorant of, the curiosity which his presence excited—and indeed it may be assumed that, had he been aware of it, his actions would have been very little influenced thereby—old William Bowker attended regularly every day at the St. Barnabas Square mansion, and having asked his question and received his answer, adjourned to the nearest tavern for his lunch of bread-and-cheese and beer, and then, puffing a big meerschaum pipe, scaled the omnibus which conveyed him to London Bridge, whence he took the train for the little house at Sydenham. They were always glad to see him there, even though he brought no news; and old Mrs. Ludlow especially found the greatest comfort in pouring into his open ears the details of the latest experience of her "cross." William Bowker to such recitals was a splended listener; that is to say, he could nod his head and throw in an "Indeed!" or a "Really!" exactly at the proper moment, while all the time his thoughts were far away, occupied with some important matter. He saw Til occasionally, and sometimes had flying snatches of talk with Annie Maurice in the intervals of her attendance on the invalid. Bowker did not meet Charley Potts very frequently, although that gentleman was a regular visitor at Sydenham whenever Mrs. Ludlow and Til were there; but it was not until the evening that Mr. Potts came, for he was diligently working away at his commissions and growing into great favor with Mr. Caniche; and besides he had no particular interest in Miss Maurice; and so long as he arrived in time to escort Miss Til and her mother back to London Bridge and to put them into the Lowbar omnibus, he was content, and was especially grateful for the refreshing sleep which always came upon old Mrs. Ludlow in the train.

At length, when many weary days had worn themselves away, and Geoffrey was beginning to feel his old strength returning to him, and with it the aching void which he had experienced on regaining consciousness daily increasing in intensity, and when Margaret's hold on life had grown very weak indeed, old William Bowker, making his daily inquiry of Lord Beauport's porter, was informed that Lord Caterham had returned the previous afternoon, and was at that moment at breakfast. Then, with great deliberation, Mr. Bowker unbuttoned his coat and

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from an inner breast-pocket produced an old leather pocket-book, from which, among bits of sketches and old envelopes, he took a card, and penciling his name thereon, requested the porter to give it to Lord Caterham.

The porter looked at the card, and then said, jocosely, "You ain't wrote your business on it, then? 'Spose you couldn't do that, eh? Well, you are a plucked 'un, you are, and I like you for it, never givin' in and comin' so reg'lar; and I'll let him have your card just for that reason." He disappeared as he said these words, but came back speedily, remarking, "He'll see you, he says, though he don't know the name. Do you know the way? Same rooms which his brother used to have — straight afore you. Here, I'll show you."

The friendly porter, preceding Mr. Bowker down the passage, opened the door of what had been poor Arthur's sitting-room, and ushered in the visitor. The book-cases, the desk, the pictures and nick-nacks, were all as they had been in the old days; but there was a table in the middle of the room, at which was seated the new Lord Caterham finishing his late breakfast. Bowker had never seen the Lionel Brakespere of former days; if he had, he would have noticed the change in the man before him—the boldness of bearing, the calm, unflinching regard, the steadiness of voice, the assurance of manner—all of which, though characteristic of Lionel Brakespere in his earliest days, had deserted him, only to reappear with his title.

"You wished to see me, Mr. ——. I don't know your name," said Lionel, stiffly returning the stiff bow which Bowker gave him on entering.

"You have my card, my lord," said old Bowker, quietly.

"Ah, yes, by-the-way, I have your card," said Lionel, taking it up. "Mr. Bowker — Mr. — Bowker! Now that does not convey to me any idea whatever!"

"I dare say not. You never heard it before —you never saw me before; and you would not see me now if I did not come on business of the greatest importance."

"Business of the greatest importance! Dear me, that's what they all come on. Of the greatest importance to yourself, of course?"

"Of the greatest importance to you. Except in a very minor degree I've nothing to do in the matter."

"Of the greatest importance to me! Oh, of course—else it would not have been worth while your coming, would it? Now, as my time is valuable, be good enough to let me know what this business is."

"You shall know in as few words as I can tell you. I come to you from a woman—"

Lionel interrupted him with a cynical laugh.

"The deuce you do!" he said. "From a woman? Well, I thought it was cigars, or a blue diamond, or a portrait of some old swell whom you had made out to be an ancestor of mine, or—"

"I would advise you not to be funny on the subject until you've heard it explained, Lord Caterham," said Mr. Bowker, grimly. "I scarcely imagine you'll find it so humorous before I'm done."

"Sha'n't I? Well, at all events, give me the chance of hearing," said Lionel. He was in a splendid temper. He had come back, after a pleasant run with Algy Barford, to enjoy all the advantages of his new position. On the previous night he and his mother had had a long talk about Miss Maurice—this heiress whom he was to captivate so easily. The world lay straight and bright before him, and he could spare a few minutes to this old fellow—who was either a lunatic or a swindler—for his own amusement.

"I come to you, Lord Caterham, from a woman who claims to be your wife."

In an instant the color died out of Lionel's face; his brows were knit, and his mouth set and rigid. "Oh, ho!" said he, through his clenched teeth, after a moment's pause; "you do, do you? You come to me from *that* woman? That's your line of country, is it? Oh yes—I guessed wrong about you certainly—you don't look a bit like a bully!"

"A bully!" echoed William Bowker, looking very white.

"A bully!" repeated Lionel—"the woman's father, brother, former husband—any thing that will give you a claim to put in an appearance for her. And now look here. This game won't do with me—I'm up to it; so you had better drop it at once and get out."

Old Bowker waited for a minute with set teeth and clenched fists, all the gray hair round his mouth bristling with fury. Only for a minute. Then he resumed the seat which he had quitted, and said:

"I'm not quite so certain of myself nowadays, as I've been a long time out of practice; but it strikes me that during your long career of gentlemanly vice, my Lord Caterham, you never were nearer getting a sound drubbing than you have been within the last five minutes. However, let that pass. You have been good enough to accuse me of being a bully, by which term I imagine you mean a man sent here by the unfortunate lady of whom we have spoken to assert her rights. I may as well start by telling you that she is utterly ignorant of my intention to call on you."

"Of course—oh yes, of course. Didn't give you my address, did she?"

"She did not."

"She didn't? Oh, then you've come on your own hook, being some relation or friend of hers, to see what you could bounce me out of."

"I am no relation of hers. I have not seen her half a dozen times in the course of my life."

"Then what the deuce brings you here?"

"I'll tell you as shortly as I can. When you deserted this woman—not caring what became of her; leaving her to sink or swim as best she might—she slipped from one point of wretchedness to another, until, at the bottom of her descent, she was discovered by a very old friend of mine perishing of cold and hunger—dying in the streets!"

Lionel, whose face when Bowker commenced speaking had been averted, turned here, and gave a short, sharp shudder, fixing his eyes on Bowker as he proceeded.

"Dying in the streets! My friend rescued her from this fate, had her nursed and attended, and finally—ignorant of the chief fact of her life, though she had confided to him a certain portion of her story—fell so desperately in love with her as to ask her to become his wife."

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"To become his wife!" cried Lionel; "and she consented?"

"She did."

"And they were married?"

"They were. I was present."

"*Bravissimo!*" said Lionel, in a low voice. "You've done me a greater service than you think for Mr.—what's-your-name. She'll never trouble me again."

"Only once more, my lord," said old Bowker, solemnly.

"What the devil do you mean, Sir?"

"Simply this, my lord. I understand your exclamation of delight at seeing your way legally to rid yourself of this woman, who is now nothing to you but an encumbrance. But you need not fear; you will not even have the trouble of consulting your lawyer in the matter. There is one who breaks up marriage-ties more effectually even than the Divorce Court, and that one is—Death!"

"Death!"

"Death. The woman of whom we have been speaking lies in the jaws of death. Her recovery, according to all human experience, is impossible. Dying—and knowing herself to be dying—she wishes to see you."

"To see me!" said Lionel, scornfully; "oh no, thank you; I won't interfere in the family party. The gentleman who has married her might object to my coming."

"The gentleman who married her in all noble trust and honor she deserted directly she heard of your return. Overwhelmed by her cruelty, and by the full details of her story, which he heard from your brother, the then Lord Caterham, at the same time, he fell, smitten with an illness from which he is barely recovering. She is in another house far away from his, and on her death-bed she calls for you."

"She may call," said Lionel, after a moment's pause, frowning, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and settling himself back into his chair; "she may call; I shall not go."

"You will not?"

"I will not—why should I?"

"If you can't answer that question for yourself, Lord Caterham, upon my soul I can't for you," said Bowker, gruffly. "If you think you owe no reparation to the woman, your wife, whom you left to be rescued by strangers' charity from starvation, I can not convince you of it: if you decline to accede to her dying request, I can not enforce it."

"Why does not the—the gentleman who was so desperately in love with her, and whom she—she accepted—why does not he go to her?" said Lionel. He did not care for Margaret himself, but the thought that she had been something to any one else grated upon his pride.

"Ah, my God!" said old Bowker, "how willingly would he; but it is not for him she asks—it is for you. You boast of your experience of women, and yet you know so little of them as to expect gratitude of them. Gratitude from a woman!—gratitude—and yet, God knows, I ought not to say that—I ought not to say that."

"You seem to have had a singular experience, Mr. Bowker," said Lionel, "and one on which you can scarcely make up your mind. Where is this lady whom you wish me to see?"

"At Sydenham—within an hour's drive."

Lionel rang the bell. "Tell them to get the brougham round," said he to the servant who answered it. "Now, look here, Mr. Bowker; I am going with you thoroughly depending on your having told me the exact truth."

"You may depend on it," said old Bowker, simply. And they started together.

That was a strange ride. At starting Lionel lit a cigar, and puffed fiercely out of the window; idly looking at the Parliament-houses and other familiar objects which met his gaze, as they drove over Westminster Bridge, the passing populace, the boardings blazing with placards, the ordinary bustle and turmoil of everyday life. He was angry and savage; savage with Margaret for the annoyance she had brought upon him, savage with Bowker for having found him out, savage with himself for having allowed himself, in the impulse of a moment, to be betrayed into this expedition. Then, as the houses became fewer, and the open spaces more frequent; as they left behind them the solid blocks of streets and rows and terraces, dull, wretched habitations for ninth-rate clerks, solemn old two-storied edifices where the shipping-agents and Baltic merchants of a past generation yet lingered in their retirement, frouzy, dirty little shops, with a plentiful sprinkling of dirtier and frouzier taverns, imbued as was the whole neighborhood with a not-to-be-explained maritime flavor—as they slipped by these and came into the broad road fringed by pretty gardens, in which stood trim villas stuccoed and plate-glassed, with the "coach-house of gentility" and every other sign of ease and wealth; then leaving these behind, emerged into country lanes with wide-spreading meadows on either side, green uplands, swelling valleys, brown shorn fields whence the harvest had been carried—as they passed through all these the cruel thoughts in Lionel's mind softened, and he began to think of the scene to which he was being hastened, and of his own share in bringing about that scene. As he flung away the butt-end of his cigar there rose in his mind a vision of Margaret as he had first seen her, walking on the Castle Hill at Tenby with some of her young companions, and looking over the low parapet at the boiling sea raging round Katherine's Rock. How lovely she looked, glowing with youth and health! What a perfectly aristocratic air and *tournure* she had, visible in the careless grace of her hat, the sweeping elegance of her shawl, the fit of her boots and gloves! How completely he had been taken aback by the apparition! how he had raved about her! had never rested until he had obtained an introduction, and—ah, he remembered at that moment distinctly the quivering of her eyelids, the fluttering of her young bosom under its simple gauze, her half-hesitating, timid speech. That was comparatively a short time ago—and now in what condition was he to find her? He was not all bad, this man—who is?—and the best part of him was awakened now. He crossed his arms, leaned back in the carriage, and was nearer repentance than he had been since his childhood.

And old William Bowker, what was he thinking of? Indeed, he had fallen into his usual day-dream. The comparison between Margaret and his own lost love, made when he first saw her, had always haunted him; and he was then turning in his mind how, if such a complication

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as they were experiencing at that moment had been possible, it would have affected her and him. From this his thoughts glided to the impending interview, and he wondered whether he had done right in bringing it about. He doubted whether Margaret would have the physical strength to endure it; and even if she had, whether any good —even so far as the arousing even a transient good in his companion—would result from it. As he was pondering upon these things, Lionel turned quietly upon him and said, in a hoarse voice:

"You said she was very ill?"

"Very ill; could hardly be worse — to be alive."

"It's"—and here he seemed to pull himself together, and nerve himself to hear the worst— "it's consumption, I suppose, caught from— damn it all, how my lip trembles!—brought on by—want, and that."

"It originated in rheumatic fever, produced by cold and exposure, resulting in heart-disease and a complication of disorders."

"Has she had proper advice?—the best, I mean, that can be procured?"

"Yes; she has been seen twice by —— and ——," said Bowker, naming two celebrated physicians, "and her own doctor sees her every day."

"And their opinions agree?"

"They all agree in saying that—"

"Hush," said Lionel, seizing him by the arm; "your face is quite enough. I'd rather not hear it again, please." And he plunged his hands into his pockets, and sunk back shuddering into the corner of the brougham.

Bowker was silent; and they drove on without interchanging a word until William stopped the coachman at a small gate in a high garden-wall. Then Lionel looked up with a strange, frightened glance, and asked, "Is this the place?"

"It is," said Bowker; "she has been here for some little time now. You had better let me go in first, I think, and prepare for your coming."

And all Lionel answered was, "As you please," as he shrunk back into his corner again. He was under a totally new experience. For the first time in his life he found himself suffering under a conscience-pang; felt disposed to allow that he had acted badly toward this woman now lying so stricken and so helpless; had a kind of dim hope that she would recover, in order that he might—vaguely, he knew not how—make her atonement. He felt uncomfortable and fidgety. Bowker had gone, and the sun-blistered, damp-stained garden-door had been closed behind him, and Lionel sat gazing at the door, and wondering what was on the other side of it, and what kind of a house it was, and where she was, and who was with her. He never thought he should have felt like this. He had thought of her—half a dozen times—when he was out there; but he knew she was a clever girl, and he always had a notion that she would fall upon her legs, and outgrow that first girlish smite, and settle down comfortably, and all that kind of thing. And so she would now. They were probably a pack of nervous old women about her—like this fellow who had brought him here—and they exaggerated danger and made mountains of mole-hills. She was ill—he had little doubt of that; but she would get better, and then he'd see what could be done. Gad! it was a wonderful thing to find any woman caring for a fellow so; he might go through life without meeting another; and after all, what the deuce did it matter? He was his own master, wasn't he? and as for money—well, he should be sure to have plenty some day: things were all altered now, since poor old Arthur's death; and— And at that moment the door opened; and behind William Bowker, who was pale and very grave, Lionel saw the house with all its blinds drawn down. And then he knew that his better resolutions had come too late; and that Margaret was dead.

Yes, she was dead; had died early that morning. On the previous day she had been more than usually restless and uncomfortable, and toward evening had alarmed the nurse — who thought she was asleep, and who herself was dozing—by breaking out into a shrill cry, followed by a deep, long-drawn lamentation. Annie Maurice at the sound rushed hastily into the room, and never left it again until all was over. She found Margaret dreadfully excited. She had had a horrible dream, she said—a dream in which she went through all the miseries of her days of penury and starvation, with the added horror of feeling that they were a just punishment on her for her ingratitude to Geoffrey Ludlow. When she was a little quieted she motioned Annie to sit by her; and holding her hand asked her news of Geoffrey. Annie started, for this was the first time that, in her calm senses, Margaret had mentioned him. In her long ravings of delirium his name was constantly on her lips, always coupled with some terms of pity and self-scornful compassion; but hitherto, during her brief intervals of reason, she had talked only of Lionel, and of her earnest desire to see and speak to him once again. So Annie, pleased and astonished, said:

"He is getting better, Margaret; much better, we trust."

"Getting better! Has he been ill, then?"

"He has been very ill—so ill that we at one time feared for his life. But he is out of danger now, thank God!"

"Thank God!" repeated Margaret. "I am grateful indeed that his death is not to be charged to my account; that would have been but a bad return for his preservation of my life; and if he had died I know his death would have been occasioned by my wickedness. Tell me, Miss Maurice—Annie—tell me, has he ever mentioned my name?"

"Ah, Margaret," said Annie, her eyes filling with tears, "his talk is only of you."

"Is it?" said Margaret, with flushing cheeks and brightening eyes; "is it? That's good to hear—oh how good! And tell me, Annie—he knows I shall not trouble him long—has he, has he forgiven me?"

"Not that alone," said Annie, quietly. "Only yesterday he said, with tears in his eyes, how he loved you still."

There was silence for a moment as Margaret covered her eyes with her hands. Then, raising her head, in a voice choked with sobs she said, with a blinding rush of tears: "Oh, Annie, Annie, I can't be *all* bad, or I should never have won the love of that brave, true-hearted man."

She spoke but little after this; and Lionel's name never passed her lips—she seemed to have forgotten all about him and her desire to see him.

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From time to time she mentioned Geoffrey—no longer, as in her delirium, with pity, but with a kind of reverential fondness, as one speaks of the dead. As the night deepened she became restless again, tossing to and fro and muttering to herself; and bending down, Annie heard her, as she had often heard her before, engaged in deep and fervent prayer. Then she slept; and, worn out with watching, Annie slept also.

It was about four o'clock in the morning when Annie felt her arm touched; and at once unclosing her eyes saw Margaret striving to raise herself on her elbow. There was a bright, weird look in her face that was unmistakable.

"It's coming, Annie," she said, in short, thick gasps; "it's coming, dear—the rest, the peace, the home! I don't fear it, Annie. I've—I've had that one line running in my brain, 'What though my lamp was lighted late, there's One will let me in!' I trust in His mercy, Annie, who pardoned Magdalen; and—God bless you, dear! God in His goodness reward you for all your love and care of me! and say to Geoffrey that I blessed him too, and that I thanked him for all his—your hand, Annie—so bless you both! —lighted late, there's One will—"

And the wanderer was at rest.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER THE WRECK.

They looked to Bowker to break the news to Geoffrey; at least so Charley Potts said, after a hurried conference with Til and her mother, at which Annie Maurice, overwhelmed by the reaction from excessive excitement, had not been present. They looked to Bowker to perform this sad duty—to tell Geoffrey Ludlow that the prize which had been so long in coming, and which he had held in his arms for so short a time, was snatched from him forever. "Forever," said old William: "that's it. He bore up wonderfully so long as he thought there was any chance of seeing her again. He hoped against hope, and strove against what he knew to be right and just, and would have made any sacrifice—ay, to the extent of bowing his head to his own shame, and taking her back to his home and his heart. If she had recovered, and even if she would have shown herself willing to come back—which she never would—I could have faced Geoff, and told him what his duty was, and fought it out with him to the last. It would have rather done me good, such a turn as that; but I can't bear this job—I can't bear to see my old friend, to have to tell him that it's all over, that the light of his life has died out, that— Upon my soul," said old William, energetically, "I think they might have got some one else to do this. And yet I don't know," said he, after a moment's pause: "the women couldn't be expected to do it. As for Charley, he'd have bungled it, safe. No, I'll go and do it myself; but I'll wait till to-morrow, I think: there's no good adding another day's anguish to the dear fellow's life."

This was on the second day after Margaret's death, and Bowker yet postponed the execution of his task. On the third day, however, he set out for Elm Lodge, and found Geoffrey in the dining-room. The servant who admitted Mr. Bowker said, in reply to his inquiry, "that master was better certainly, but poor and peaky; did not take much notice of what went on, and were quite off his food." Geoffrey's looks certainly bore out the handmaiden's account. His cheeks were thin and hollow; there were great circles round his eyes; his flesh was tight and yellow; his hands so fallen away that they looked like mere anatomical preparations. He looked up as Bowker entered, and the ghost of his old smile hovered round his lips.

"So you've come at last, William, after failing in your troth these three days, eh?" said he. "What kept you, old friend?"

Bowker was not prepared for any questions. He had gone through all this scene in his mind more than once; but in his rehearsal it was always he who commenced the subject; and this order not being followed he was rather taken aback.

"I have been particularly engaged," he said. "You know, Geoff, that I should not have missed coming to you otherwise; but—it was impossible."

"Was it?" said Geoffrey, raising his head quietly, and steadfastly regarding him with his bright eyes; "was it on my business that you were engaged?"

"It was," said Bowker. He knew at that moment that his friend had guessed the truth.

"Then," said Geoffrey, "Margaret is dead!" He said it without altering the inflection of his voice, without removing his eyes from his friend's face. Scarcely inquiringly he said it, apparently convinced of the fact; and he took Bowker's silence for an affirmative, and rose and walked toward the window, supporting himself by the wall as he went. Bowker left him there by himself for a few minutes, and then, going up to him and laying his hand affectionately on his shoulder, said, "Geoff!"

Geoff's head was averted, but his hand sought Bowker's, and pressed it warmly.

"Geoff, dear old Geoff—my old friend of many happy years—you must bear up in this hour of trial. Think of it, dear old fellow! God knows, I'm one of the worst in the world to preach content and submission, and all that; but think of it: it is the—you know I wouldn't hurt your feelings, Geoff—the best thing that, under all the circumstances, could have occurred."

"I've lost her, William—lost her whom I loved better than my heart's-blood, whom I so prized and cherished and worshiped—lost her forever—ah, my God, forever!" And the strong man writhed in his agony, and burying his head in his arms, burst into tears.

"But, Geoff," said old Bowker, with a great gulp, "you could never have been any thing to her again; you have nothing to reproach yourself with in your conduct to her. It was her misfortune, poor soul, that she did not value you as she should have done; and yet before she died she spoke very, very affectionately of you, and your name was the last on her lips."

"Tell me about that, William," said Geoffrey, raising his head; "tell me what she said about me." He was comparatively calm even then, and sat quite quietly to listen to the details which Bowker had heard from Annie Maurice, and which he now poured into Geoff's eager ears. When he had finished Geoff thanked him, and

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said he felt much easier and more relieved than he had been for some days past, but that he was tired out, and would ask Bowker to excuse him then, and by all means to come the next day. Honest William, glad to have accomplished his mission under such apparently favorable circumstances, and with so little of a "scene," took his leave.

But the next day, when he arrived at Elm Lodge, he found Dr. Brandram's gig at the gate, and on entering the house was met by Dr. Brandram himself in the hall. "And a very fortunate man I esteem myself in meeting you, my dear Mr. Boucher—beg pardon, Bowker! Boucher—name of old friend of mine in Norfolk—very fortunate indeed. Let's step into the dining-room, eh?—no need to stand in the draught, eh? You see I speak without the least professional feeling—ha, ha!" And the little doctor laughed, but very softly. "Now look here, my dear Sir," he continued; "our friend up stairs—I advised his remaining up stairs to-day—this *won't* do, my dear Sir—this *won't* do."

"I know it, doctor, almost as well as you," said old William, gruffly; "but what I don't know, and what I suppose you do, is—what will?"

"Change, my dear Sir—thorough and entire change; not merely of air and scene, but of thought, life, habits, surroundings. He has a splendid constitution, our friend; but if he remains much longer in this cage, from which all the—all the joys have flown—he'll beat himself to death against the bars." This was a favorite simile with Dr. Brandram; and after he had uttered it he leaned back, as was his wont, and balanced himself on his heels, and looked up into the eyes of his interlocutor to see its effect. On this occasion he was not much gratified, for old Bowker had not troubled himself about the poetical setting, but was thinking over the sense of the doctor's remark.

"Change," he repeated, "thorough change; have you told him that yourself, doctor?"

"Fifty times, my dear Sir; repeated it with all the weight of medical authority."

"And what does he say?"

"Always the same thing—that his duty keeps him here. He's an extraordinary man, our friend, a most estimable man; but it would be an excellent thing for him—in fact, make all the difference in the length of his life—if his duty would take him abroad for six months."

"It shall," said old Bowker, putting on his hat, and driving it hard down on his head. "Leave that to me. I'll take care of that." And with these words he nodded at the doctor and departed, leaving the little medico more astonished at the "odd ways" of artists than ever.

When Mr. Bowker had once made up his mind to carry any thing out, he never rested until it was achieved; so that on quitting Elm Lodge he at once made his way to Mr. Stompff's "gallery of modern masters," which he entered, greatly to the surprise of the proprietor, who was hovering about the room like a great spider on the watch for flies. There had never been any thing like cordiality between the great *entrepreneur* and the rough old artist; and the former opened his eyes to their widest extent, and pulled his whisker through his teeth, as he bowed somewhat sarcastically and said, "This is an honor, and no flies!" But before his visitor left, Mr. Stompff had occasion to rub his eyes very hard with a bright silk pocket-handkerchief, and to resort to a cupboard under the desk on which the catalogues stood, whence he produced a tapering flask, from which he and Mr. Bowker refreshed themselves—his last words being, as Mr. Bowker took his departure, "You leave it to me, old feller—you leave it to me!"

Carrying out apparently the arrangement herein entered upon, the next day the great Mr. Stompff's brougham stopped at Elm Lodge, and the great Mr. Stompff himself descended therefrom, exhibiting far less than his usual self-sufficiency, swagger, and noise. To the servant who opened the door in answer to his modest ring he gave a note which he had prepared; and Geoffrey coming down into the dining-room found him waiting there, apparently deep in a photographic album. He rose as the door opened, and caught Geoffrey warmly by the hand.

"How are you, Ludlow? how are you, my dear fellow? It must have been pressing business that brought me here just now, worrying you when you're only just recovered from your illness, my boy; pressing business, you may take your oath of that." And all the time Mr. Stompff held Geoffrey's hand between his own, and looked into his eyes with a wavering, unsettled glance.

"I'm better, thank you, Mr. Stompff, much better; so much better that I hope soon to be at work again," said Geoff, nervously.

"That's right; that's the best hearing possible. Nothing like getting back to work to set a man straight and bring him to his bearings."

"You were getting nervous about the 'Esplanade,'" said Geoff, with a sickly smile—"as well indeed you might, for it's been a long time about. But you need not be frightened about that; I've managed to finish it."

"Have you?" said Stompff, very dry and husky in the throat.

"Yes; if you'll step into the studio, I'll show it you." They went down the little steps which Margaret had traversed so oft; and Geoffrey, as he pulled the big easel round into the light, said, "It's not quite what I wished. I—circumstances, you know, were against me—and but—it can be altered, you know; altered in any manner you wish."

"Altered be—hanged!" cried Stompff, very nearly relapsing into the vernacular; "altered!" he repeated, gazing at it with delight; now approaching closely to the canvas, now stepping away and looking at it under the shade of his hand; "why, that's first chop, that is. You've done it up brown! You've made a reg'ler ten-strike, as the Yankees say. Altered! I wouldn't have a brush laid upon that for a fifty-pun' note. By George, Ludlow, well or ill, you lick the lot in your own line. There's none of 'em can touch you, d'ye hear? Altered!—damme, it's splendid."

"I'm very glad you like it," said Geoff, wearily, "very glad; more especially as it may be a long time before I paint again."

"What's that you say?" said Mr. Stompff, turning upon him sharply. "What's that you say?" he repeated in a gentler tone, laying his hand softly upon Geoffrey Ludlow's shoulder—"a long time before you paint again? Why, nonsense, my good fellow; you don't know what nonsense you're talking."

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"No nonsense, Mr. Stompff, but plain, honest, simple fact. I seem to have lost all zest for my art; my spirit is broken, and—"

"Of course, my good fellow; I understand all that well enough; too much England—that's what it is. Home of the free, and ruling the waves, and all that. Pickles! Capital place to sell pictures; deuced bad place to paint 'em. Now look here! You've been good enough to say more than once that I've been your friend, eh? Not that I've ever done more than give a good price for good work, though that's more than some people do—some people, eh? we know who—never mind. Now, I want you to do *me* a turn, and I am sure you will."

Geoffrey bowed his head and said, "So long as you don't require a picture from me—"

"Picture! Oh no; of course not. A steam-engine, or a hansom cab, or a Stilton cheese—that's what I look for from you naturally, isn't it? Ludlow, my dear fellow, how can you talk such stuff? Now listen. The British public, Sir, has had a sickener of British subjects. Little Dabb and his crew have pretty nearly used up all the sentimental domesticity; and we've had such a lot of fancy fairs, and Hyde Parks, and noble volunteers, and archery fêtes, and gals playing at croky, that the B. P. won't stand it any longer. There'll be a reaction, you'll see; and the 'Cademy will be choke-full of Charles the Seconds, and Nell Gwynns, and coves in wigs, and women in powder and patches, and all that business, just because the modern everyday gaff has been done to death. I shall have to give in to this; and I shall give in of course. There's lots of coves can do that trick for me well enough to sell. But I look for more from you; and this is what I propose. You go straight away out of this; where, I don't care—so long as you remain away a year or so, and keep your eyes about you. You'll work hard enough—I don't fear that; and whatever you do, send it home to me and I'll take it. Lor' bless you, there's rigs that the B. P. knows nothing about, and that would make stunnin' subjects for you—a *table-d'hôte* on the Rhine, a student's *kneipe* at Heidelberg, a *schützenfest* in Switzerland; and then you've never been to Italy yet, and though that game's been worked pretty often, yet any thing Italian from you would sell like mad." He paused for a moment and looked up at Geoffrey, whose eyes were fixed intently on him, and who seemed eager and excited.

"It's all one to me," said he; "I scarcely know what to say; it's very kind of you. I know you mean it well; but do you think I can do it? Do you really think so?"

"Think so! I know so," said Mr. Stompff. "See here! I never take up a thing of this sort without carrying it through. We said five hundred for the 'Esplanade,' didn't we? You've had three on account—that's right! Now here's the other two; and if you're as well pleased with the bargain as me, no knife shall cut our love in two, as the song says. Now you must leave this money behind for the old lady and the little 'un, and that nice sister of yours—oh yes, by-the-way, what makes Charley Potts paint her head in all his pictures, and why don't he sell to me instead of Caniche?—and here's a hundred in circular notes. I went round to my bank and got 'em this morning on purpose for you to go abroad with. When they're done you know where to send for some more."

"You are very kind, Mr. Stompff, but—"

"No, I ain't. I'm a man of business, I am; and there ain't many as is very fond of me. But I know what the B. P. wants, and I know a good fellow when I see one; and when I do see one I don't often let him slide. I ain't a polished sort of cove," said Mr. Stompff, reflectively; "I leave that to Caniche, with his paw-paw bowins and scrapins; but I ain't quite so black as some of the artists paint me. However, this is a matter of business that I'm rather eager about; and I should be glad to know if I may look upon it as settled."

"Look here, Mr. Stompff," said Geoffrey Ludlow, turning to his companion, and speaking in an earnest voice; "you have behaved generously to me, and you deserve that I should speak frankly with you. I should immensely like to get away from this place for a while, to shake off the memory of all that has passed within the last few months—so far as it is possible for me to shake it off—to get into new scenes, and to receive fresh impressions. But I very much doubt whether I shall be able to undertake what you wish. I feel as if all the little power I ever had were gone; as if my brain were as barren to conceive as I know my hand is impotent to execute; I feel—"

"I know," interrupted Mr. Stompff; "regularly sewed up; feel as if you'd like somebody to unscrew your head, take your brains out and clean 'em, and then put 'em back; feel as if you didn't care for the world, and would like to try the hermit dodge and eat roots and drink water, and cut society, eh? Ah, I've felt like that sometimes; and then I've heard of some pictures that was comin' to the hammer, and I've just looked in at Christie's, and, Lord, as soon as I heard the lots a-goin' up, and felt myself reg'ler in the swing of competition, I've given up all them foolish notions, and gone home and enjoyed a roast fowl and a glass of sham and Mrs. S.'s comp'ny, like a Christian! And so will you, Ludlow, my boy; you'll pull through, I'll pound it. You work just when you feel inclined, and draw upon me when you want the ready; I'll stand the racket, never fear."

The conspiracy between Mr. Stompff and old William Bowker had been carried out minutely in detail; one of the points insisted on being that, the position once carried, Geoff should have no time for retreat. Accordingly, while Mr. Stompff was proceeding to Elm Lodge, Mr. Bowker was indoctrinating the ladies (whom he knew he should find at Sydenham) as to the tenor of their advice; and scarcely had Mr. Stompff quitted Geoffrey when Mr. Bowker was announced. To his old friend, Geoffrey, now in a very excited state, told the whole story of Stompff's visit and of the proposition which he had made; and old William—whom no one would have given credit for possessing such control over his face—sat looking on with the greatest apparent interest. When Geoffrey came to an end of his narration, and asked his friend whether he had done right in partially acceding to what had been offered him, or whether—it was not too late—he should retract, Mr. Bowker was extremely vehement—more so than he had ever known himself to be—in insisting that it was the very best thing that could

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possibly have happened. When Mrs. Ludlow and Til returned they unhesitatingly pronounced the same opinion; and so Geoff's departure was decided on.

He had a great deal to attend to before he could leave; and the mere bustle and activity of business seemed to do him good at once. Mrs. Ludlow was thoroughly happy in preparing his clothes for his journey; Mr. Bowker and Charley Potts were constantly at Elm Lodge, the latter gentleman finding his assistance usually required by Miss Til; and on the day before that fixed for Geoffrey's departure Annie Maurice called to take farewell. It was an interview which had been dreaded by both of them, and was as brief as possible. Annie expressed her satisfaction at his having been persuaded to seek change, by which she was sure he would benefit, and extended her hand in "good-by."

Geoff took her hand, and holding it tenderly in his, said:

"Annie, some day I may be able—I am very far from being able now—to tell you how the knowledge of your kindness to—to one whom I have lost—has sustained me under my bitter sorrow. God bless you, my more than sister! God bless you, my good angel!" And Geoffrey touched her forehead with his lips, and hurried from the room.

The authorities at the South-Eastern terminus at London Bridge thought that some distinguished exile must be about returning to France that night, there were so many curiously-hatted and bearded gentlemen gathered round the mail-train. But they were only some of our old friends of the Titians come to say "God-speed" to Geoffrey Ludlow, whose departure had been made known to them by Mr. Stompff. That worthy was there in great force, and old Bowker, and Charley Potts, and little Dabb, and old Tom Wrigley, and many others; and as the train wound out of the station, bearing Geoff along with it, there were rising tears and swelling knots in eyes and throats that were very unused to such manifestations of weakness.

CHAPTER XI.

LAND AT LAST.

The calm had come after the storm; the great, hurrying, thundering waves had stilled into silence, and lay quiet over the shattered wreck of home, and happiness, and hope. The winter rain had beaten upon the pretty house, and the light snow had fallen and lain a while, and had then melted away upon the garden ground and the smooth green turf, within the walls which had made a prison to the restless spirit of Margaret, even as the rain had beaten and the snow had fallen upon her grave in Norwood Cemetery. Now the spring odors were abroad in the air, and the trees were breaking into leaf, and Elm Lodge was looking the very perfection of tranquillity, of well-ordered, tasteful comfort and domesticity; an appearance in which there was all the sadness of a great contrast, a terrible retrospect, and an irremediable loss. Yet this appearance was not altogether deceptive; for within the house which had witnessed so much misery peace and resignation now reigned. Mrs. Ludlow's unacknowledged desire was now realized; she was the mistress of her son's house, of all the modest splendor which had come with poor Geoff's improved fortunes; she ruled now where she had been subordinate before, and in the nursery, where at best she had only enjoyed toleration, she found herself supreme. To be sure, the great element of enjoyment, her son's presence, was wanting; but she knew that Geoffrey was doing the best thing in his power to do, was taking the most effectual means for the establishment of his health and the alleviation of his sorrow; and the old lady—on whom the supineness which comes with years, and which takes the edge off the sword of grief and the bitterness out of its cup, was beginning to steal—was satisfied. Much that had occurred was only imperfectly known to her; and indeed she would have been unfitted, by the safe routine and happy inexperience of evil passions which had marked her own life, to understand the storm and conflict which had raged around her. That her son's beautiful wife had been utterly unworthy of him, and that she had deceived and left him, Mrs. Ludlow knew; but Margaret's death had come so soon to terminate the terrible and mysterious dilemma in which her conduct had placed them all, that it had imposed upon them the silence of compassion, and filled them with the sense of merciful relief; so that by mutual consent her name had not been mentioned in the house where she had been mistress for so long. Her son's illness, and the danger of losing him, had impressed Mrs. Ludlow much more vividly than his domestic calamity; and she had settled down with surprising ease and readiness to the routine of life at Elm Lodge.

That routine included a good deal of the society of Mr. Charley Potts; and as Mrs. Ludlow was almost as much attached to that warm-hearted and hot-headed gentleman as Miss Til herself, she acquiesced with perfect willingness in the state of affairs which brought him to Elm Lodge with regularity equaled only by that of the postman. The household was a quiet one; and the simple and unpretending women who walked along the shady paths at Lowbar in their deep-mourning dresses, or played with the little child upon the lawn, furnished but scanty food for the curiosity of the neighborhood. Popular feeling was indeed somewhat excited on the subject of Charley Potts; but Dr. Brandram—a gallant gentleman in his way—set that matter at rest very quickly by announcing that Charley and Miss Ludlow were engaged, and were shortly to be married—information which was graciously received; as indeed the most distant tidings of a prospective wedding always are received by small communities in which the female element predominates. Dr. Brandram had done Geoffrey good service, too, by his half-made, half-withheld communications respecting the beautiful mistress of Elm Lodge, whose disappearance had been so sudden. She had not recovered her confinement so well as he had hoped: the nervous system had been greatly shaken. He had ordered change; a temporary removal from home was frequently of great benefit. Yes, there had been a terrible scene with Mr. Ludlow—that was quite true: the non-medical mind was hard to convince in these matters sometimes; and Mr.

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Ludlow had been hard to manage. But a quarrel between *them?*—oh dear, no: quite a mistake. Mrs. Ludlow left home by herself?—oh dear, no: by her own consent, certainly. She perfectly comprehended the necessity of the change, and was ready to submit; while Ludlow could not be brought to see it—that was all. "I assure you, my dear madam," the doctor would say to each of his female catechists, "I never had a more interesting patient; and I never pitied a man more than Ludlow when she sank so rapidly and unexpectedly. I really feared for *his* reason then, and of course I sent *him* away immediately. A little change, my dear madam—a little change in these cases produces a wonderful effect—quite wonderful!"

"But, doctor," the anxious inquirer would probably say, "Mr. Ludlow never saw her again after she was removed, did he?"

"Well, indeed, my dear madam—you see I am telling professional secrets; but you are not like other women: you are so far above any vulgar curiosity, and I know I may rely so entirely on your discretion, that I make an exception in your case—they never did meet. You see these cases are so uncertain; and cerebral disease develops itself so rapidly that before any favorable change took place the patient sunk."

"Dear me, how very sad! It was at an asylum, I suppose?"

"Well, my dear madam, it was under private care—under the very best circumstances, I assure you; but—you'll excuse me; this is entirely confidential. And now to return to your dear little boy."

So did kind-hearted Dr. Brandram lend his aid to the laying of the ghost of scandal at Elm Lodge; and gradually it became accepted that Mrs. Ludlow had died under the circumstances hinted at by Dr. Brandram.

"It is rather a disadvantage to the dear child, Charley, I fear," sapiently remarked Miss Til to the docile Mr. Potts as he was attending her on a gardening expedition, holding a basket while she snipped and weeded, and looking as if pipes and beer had never crossed the path of his knowledge or the disk of his imagination; "people will talk about his mother having died in a lunatic asylum."

"Suppose they do?" asked Charley in reply. "That sort of thing does not harm a man; and"—here the honest fellow's face darkened and his voice fell—"it is better they should say that than the truth. I think that can always be hidden, Til. The poor woman's death has saved us all much; but it has been the greatest boon to her child; for now no one need ever know, and least of all the child himself, that he has no right to bear his father's name."

"It is well Geoff is not a rich man, with a great estate to leave to an eldest son," said Til, pulling at an obstinate tuft of groundsel, and very anxious to prevent any suspicion that her lover's words had brought tears to her eyes.

"Well," said Charley, with rather a gloomy smile, "I'm not so certain of that, Til: it's a matter of opinion; but I'm clear that it's a good thing he's not a great man—in the 'nob' sense of the word I mean—and that the world can afford to let him alone. Here comes the young shaver—let's go and talk to him." And Charley, secretly pining to get rid of the basket, laid down that obnoxious burden, and went across the grass-plot toward the nurse, just then making her appearance from the house.

"Charley is always right," said Til to herself as she eradicated the last obstinate weed in the flower-bed under inspection, and rejoined Mr. Potts; from which observation it is to be hoped that the fitness of Miss Till for undertaking that most solemn of human engagements—matrimony—will be fully recognized. There are women who practically apply to their husbands the injunctions of the Church Catechism, in which duty to God is defined; who "believe in, fear, trust, and love" them "with all their hearts, with all their minds, with all their souls, and with all their strength;" and Matilda Ludlow, though a remarkably sensible girl, and likely enough to estimate other people at their precise value, was rapidly being reduced to this state of mind about Charley, who was at all events much less unworthy than most male objects of female devoteeism.

Mrs. Ludlow and her daughter heard pretty regularly from Geoff. Of course his letters were unsatisfactory; men's letters always are, except they be love-letters, when their meaning is tempered by their exclusiveness. He was eager for news of the child; but he never referred to the past in any other respect, and he said little in anticipation of the future. He described his travels, reported the state of his health, and expressed his anxiety for his mother's comfort; and that was about the sum-total of these literary productions, which no doubt were highly penitential performances to poor Geoffrey.

Spring was well advanced when Charley and Til began to discuss the propriety of naming a time for their marriage. The house at Brompton was still "on their hands," as Mrs. Ludlow was fond of saying, while in her secret heart she would have deeply regretted the turning-up of an eligible tenant; for who could answer for the habits and manners of strangers, or tell what damage her sacred furniture might receive? Charley proposed to Til that they should become her mother's tenants, and urged that young lady to consent to a speedy marriage, from the most laudable economic principles, on the ground that under present circumstances he was idling dreadfully, but that he confidently expected that marriage would "settle his mind." The recent date of the family calamity Charley could not be brought to regard as a reasonable obstacle to his wishes.

"Look here, Til," he said; "it isn't as if we were swells, you know, with our names, ages, and weights in the *Morning Post*, and our addresses in the *Red Book*. What need we care, if Geoff don't mind?—and he won't, God bless him!—the happier we are the sooner he'll cease to be miserable; and who's to know or to care whether it's so many months sooner or later after that poor woman's death? Besides, consider this, Til; if we wait until Geoff comes home, a wedding and all that won't be pleasant for him: will it, now? Painful associations, you know, and all that. I really think, for Geoff's sake, we had better get it over."

"Do you, indeed, Master Charley?" said Til, with a smile full of pert drollery, which rendered her exasperatingly pretty. "How wonderfully considerate you are of Geoff; and how marvel-

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ously polite to describe marrying me as 'getting it over!' No, no, Charley," she continued, seriously; "it can not be. I could not leave mamma to the responsibility of the house and the child—at least not yet. Don't ask me; it would not be right toward Geoff or fair to my mother. You must wait, Sir."

And the crest-fallen Charley knew that he must wait, and acquiesced with a very bad grace; not but that Miss Till would have been horribly vexed had it been better.

An unexpected auxiliary was about this time being driven by fate toward Charley Potts in the person of Annie Maurice. She had been constant and regular in her visits to Elm Lodge, affectionate and respectful in her demeanor to Mrs. Ludlow, and sisterly in her confidence toward Til. The hour that had united the two girls in a tie of common responsibility toward Geoff and Margaret had witnessed the formation of a strong and lasting friendship; and though Annie's superior refinement and higher education raised her above the level of Matilda Ludlow, she was not more than her equal in true womanly worth. They passed many happy hours together in converse which had now become cheerful, and their companionship was strengthened by the bond of their common interest in Til's absent brother. Miss Ludlow, perhaps, did an unfair proportion of the talking on these occasions; for she was of the gushing order of girls, though she did not border even remotely on silliness. By common consent they did not speak of Margaret, and Til had never known Arthur; so that Annie rarely talked of him, always sacredly loved and remembered in her faithful heart, preserved as her friend and monitor—dead, yet speaking. Annie had been more silent than usual lately, and had looked sad and troubled; and it chanced that on the day following that which witnessed Charley's luckless proposition Miss Maurice arrived at Elm Lodge at an earlier hour than usual; and having gained a private audience of Til, made to her a somewhat startling revelation.

The conference between the girls lasted long, and its object took Til completely by surprise. Annie Maurice had resolved upon leaving Lord Beauport's house, and she had come to ask Mrs. Ludlow to receive her. She told Til her reasons, simply, honestly, and plainly.

"I can not live in the house with Lionel Brakespere," she said; "and I have no friends but you. Geoffrey and I were always friends, and my dear Arthur trusted him, and knew he would befriend me. I am sure if he were living now he would counsel me to do what I am doing. I have often thought if he had had any idea that the end was so near, he would have told me, if any difficulty came in my way, to apply for aid to Geoffrey, and I am clear that I am doing right now. I have no friends, Til, though I am rich," Annie repeated, with a more bitter smile than had ever flitted over her bright face in former days; "and I have no 'position' to keep up. I can not go and live in a big house by myself, or in a small one either, for that matter, and I want your mother to let me come and live with her while Geoffrey is away."

Til hesitated before she replied. She saw difficulties in the way of such an arrangement which Annie did not; difficulties arising from the difference in the social position of the friends Annie wished to leave, and those she wished to come to.

"I am sure, as far as we are concerned, every thing might be as you wish," she said; "but—Lady Beaufort might not think it quite the thing."

"Lady Beauport knows I will not remain in her house, Til; and she will soon see as plainly as I do that it is well I should not. The choice is between me and her son, and the selection is not difficult. Lionel Brakespere (I can not call him by Arthur's familiar name) and I are not on speaking terms. He knows that I am acquainted with his crimes; not only those known to his family, but those which he thought death had assisted him to hide. I might have concealed my knowledge from him had he not dared to insult me by an odious pretense of admiration, which I resented with all my heart and soul. A few words made him understand that the safest course he could pursue was to abandon such a pretense, and the revelation filled him with such wrath and hatred as only such a nature could feel. Why he has adopted a line of behavior which can only be described as downright savage rudeness—so evidently intended to drive me out of the house that Lord and Lady Beauport themselves see it in that light—I am unable to comprehend. I have sometimes fancied that he and his mother have quarreled on the matter; but if so, he has had the best of it. However, there is no use in discussing it, Til; my home is broken up and gone from me; and if your mother will not take me under her charge, until Geoffrey comes home and advises me for the future, I must only set up somewhere with a companion and a cat."

Annie smiled, but very sadly; then she continued:

"And now, Til, I'll tell you how we will manage. First, we will get the mother's leave, and I will invite myself on a visit here, to act as your bridemaid, you see, and—"

"Charley has been talking to you, Annie!" exclaimed Miss Til, starting up in mingled indignation and amusement; "I see it all now—you have been playing into each other's hands."

"No, indeed, Charley never said a word to me about it," replied Annie, seriously; "though I am sure if he had I should have done any thing he asked; but, Til, do let us be in earnest—I am serious in this. I don't want to make a scandal and a misery of this business of my removal from Lord Beauport's; and if I can come here to be your bridemaid, in a quiet way, and remain with your mother when you have left her, it will seem a natural sort of arrangement, and I shall very soon, heiress though I am, drop out of the memory of the set in which I have lately moved. I am sure Geoffrey will be pleased; and you know that dear little Arthur is quite fond of me already."

It is unnecessary to report the conversation between the two girls in fuller detail. Miss Maurice carried her point; the consent of Mrs. Ludlow to the proposed arrangement was easily gained; and one day the fine carriage with the fine coronets, which had excited the admiration of the neighborhood when Miss Maurice paid her first visit to Geoffrey Ludlow's bride, deposited that young lady and her maid at Elm Lodge.

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A few days later a more modest equipage bore away Mr. and Mrs. Potts on the first stage of their journey of life.

"And so, my dear Annie," wrote Geoffrey to his ex-pupil, "you are established in the quiet house in which I dreamed dreams once on a time. I continue the children's phrase, and say 'a long time ago.' I am glad to think of you there with my mother and my poor little child. If you were any one but Annie Maurice, I might fear that you would weary of the confined sphere to which you have gone; but, then, it is because you *are* Annie Maurice that you are there. Sometimes I wonder whether I shall ever see the place again, which, if ever I do see it, I must look upon with such altered eyes. God knows: it will be long first—for I am woefully weak still. But enough of me. My picture goes on splendidly. When it is finished and sent home to Stompff, I shall start for Egypt. I suppose many a one before me has tried to find the waters of Lethe between the banks of Nile."

Charley Potts and Til were comfortably settled in the house at Brompton, where Til guarded the household gods with pious care, and made Charley uncommonly comfortable and abnormally orderly. Mrs. Ludlow and her young guest led a tranquil life at Elm Lodge. Annie devoted herself to the old lady and the child with a skillful tenderness, partly natural to her and partly acquired by the experiences of her life in her rural home, and within the scene of Caterham's lengthened and patient suffering. The child loved her and throve under her charge; and the old lady seemed to find her "cross" considerably less troublesome within the influence of Annie's tranquil cheerfulness, strong sense, and accommodating disposition. The neighborhood had taken to calling vigorously and pertinaciously on Mrs. Ludlow and Miss Maurice. It approved highly of those ladies; for the younger was very pleasant, not alarmingly beautiful, reputed to be very rich, and acknowledged not to "give herself airs;" while the elder was intensely respectable—after the fashion dear to the heart of Lowbar; and both went to church with scrupulous regularity. Dr. Brandram was even more cordial in his appreciation of Annie than he had been in his admiration of Margaret; and the star of Elm Lodge was quite in the ascendant. A few of the members of the great world whom she had met in the celestial sphere of St. Barnabas Square found Annie out even at Elm Lodge, and the apparition of other coronets than that of the Beauports was not unknown in the salubrious suburb. Lady Beauport visited Miss Maurice but rarely, and her advent seldom gave Annie pleasure. The girl's affectionate and generous heart was pained by the alteration which she marked more and more distinctly each time that she saw the cold and haughty Countess, on whose face care was fast making marks which time had failed to impress.

Sometimes she would be almost silent during her short visits, on which occasions Mrs. Ludlow was wont to disappear as soon as possible; sometimes she would find querulous fault with Annie —with her appearance and her dress, and her "throwing herself away." Sometimes Annie felt that she was endeavoring to turn the conversation in the direction of Lionel; but that she invariably resisted. It chanced one day, however, that she could not succeed in preventing Lady Beauport from talking of him. Time had traveled on since Annie had taken up her abode at Elm Lodge, and the summer was waning; the legislative labors of the Houses had come to an end, and Lord and Lady Beauport were about to leave town. This time the Countess had come to say good-by to Annie, whom she found engaged in preparations for a general flitting of the Elm-Lodge household to the sea-side for the autumn. Annie was in blooming health and her usual agreeable spirits—a strong contrast to the faded, jaded, cross-looking woman who said to her, complainingly:

"Really, Annie, I think you might have come with us, and left your friends here to find their autumnal amusements for themselves; you know how much Lord Beauport and I wished it."

"Yes," said Annie, gently, "I know you are both very kind; but it can not be. You saw that yourself, dear Lady Beauport, and consented to my entering on so different a life. You see I could not combine the two; and I have new duties now—"

"Nonsense, Annie!" said Lady Beauport, angrily. "You will not come because of Lionel —that is the truth. Well, he is not to be at home at all; he is going away to a number of places: he likes any place better than home, I think. I can not understand why you and he should disagree so much; but if it must be so, I suppose it must. However, you will not meet him now." And Lady Beauport actually condescended to reiterate her request; but she had no success. Annie had resolutely broken with the old life, which had never suited her fresh, genial, simple tastes; and she was determined not to renew the tie. She knew that she was not in any true sense necessary to Lady Beauport's happiness; she was not ungrateful for such kindness as she had received; but she was a sensible girl, and she made no mistake about her own value, and the true direction in which her duty, her vocation lay. So she steadily declined; but so gently that no offense was taken; and made inquiry for Lord Beauport. The worried expression which had gradually marred the high-bred repose of Lady Beauport's face increased as she replied, and there was a kind of involuntary confidence in her manner which struck Annie with a new and painful surprise. Lord Beauport was well, she said; but he was not in good spirits. Things seemed to be wrong with them somehow and out of joint. Then the elder lady, seeing in the face of her young listener such true sympathy, thawed suddenly from her habitual proud reserve, and poured out the bitterness of her disappointment and vain regret. There was a tone of reproach against Annie mingled with her complaint, which the girl pityingly passed over. If Annie had but liked Lionel; if she would but have tried to attract him, and keep him at home, all might have been well: but Annie had imbibed poor Arthur's prejudices; and surely never were parents so unfortunate as she and the Earl in the mutual dislike which existed between their children. Lady Beauport did not want to justify Lionel entirely—of course not; but she thought he might have had a better chance given him in the first instance. Now he had greatly deteriorated—she saw that: she could not deny

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it; and her "granted prayer" for his return had not brought her happiness.

Annie listened to all this with a swelling heart. A vision floated before her tearful eyes of the lost son, who had been so little loved, so lightly prized; whose place the brother preferred before him had taken and disgraced; and a terrible sense of retribution came into her mind. Too late the father and mother were learning how true his judgment had been, and how valuable his silent influence. Time could only engrave that lesson more and more deeply on their hearts; experience could only embitter it—its sting was never to be withdrawn. They had chosen between the two, and their choice, like Esau's, was "profane." Lady Beauport spoke more and more bitterly as she proceeded. The softening touch of grief was not upon her—only the rankling of disappointment and mortification; only the sting of a son's ingratitude, of discovering that in return for the sacrifice of principle, self-respect, and dignity to which she had consented for Lionel's sake, she had not received even the poor return of a semblance of affection or consideration.

The hardness of Lionel's nature was shown in every thing his mother said of him—the utter want of feeling, the deadness of soul. Annie felt very sad as she listened to Lady Beauport's melancholy account of the life they had fallen into at the great house. She was oppressed by the sense of the strangeness of the events which had befallen, and in which the Countess had, all unconsciously, so deep an interest. It was very sad and strange to remember that she was detailing the conduct of the man whose baseness had enabled Margaret to lay Geoffrey's life in ruins under Geoffrey's own roof. It was terrible to Annie to feel that in her knowledge there was a secret which might so easily have been divulged at any moment, and which would have afflicted the vexed and mortified woman before her more deeply than any thing that had occurred. Lady Beauport was not tender-hearted; but she was a high-minded gentlewoman, and would have been shamed and stricken to the soul had she discovered the baseness of her son in this particular instance. She had fondly flattered herself into a belief that the crime which had been so inadequately punished was only a folly; but there was no possibility of such a reading of this one, and Annie was glad to think that at least the pang of this knowledge was spared to Lady Beauport. She could say nothing to comfort her. In her inmost heart she had an uneasy, unexplained sense that it was all the just retribution for the conduct of Arthur's parents toward him, and hopelessness for the future of a family of which Lionel formed a member took possession of her.

"He is so disagreeable, so selfish, Annie," continued Lady Beauport, "and oh, so slangy! and you know how his father hates that sort of thing."

"It is better that he should be away, then, for a little," said Annie, trying to be soothing, and failing lamentably.

"Well, perhaps it is," said Lady Beauport; "and yet that seems hard too, when I longed so much for his return, and when now he has every thing he wants. Of course, when he was only a second son, he had excuses for discontent; but now he has none, and yet he is never satisfied. I sometimes think he is ill at ease, and fancies people are thinking about the past who don't even know any thing about it, and would not trouble themselves to resent it if they did. But his father does not agree with me, Annie: he will not give Lionel credit for any thing good. I can not make out Lord Beauport: he is much more cold and stern toward Lionel than he need be, for he is not so careless and inconsiderate toward his father as he is toward me. He seems to have taken up poor Arthur's notions now, and to judge Lionel as severely as he did. He does not say much; but things are uncomfortable between them, and Lord Beauport is altered in every way. He is silent and dispirited; and do you know, Annie, I think he grieves for Arthur more than he did at first?"

Distress and perplexity were in Lady Beauport's face and voice, and they went to Annie's gentle heart.

"Try not to think so much of it," she said; "circumstances may alter considerably when Lionel gets more settled at home, and Lord Beauport has had time to get over the irritation which his return occasioned him."

"He resents your having left us more bitterly than any thing, Annie. He constantly speaks of you in the highest terms of praise, and wishes you back with us. And so do I, my dear, so do I."

Annie was amazed. Tears were in Lady Beauport's eyes, and a tremble in her voice. During all the period of Annie's residence in her house the Countess had never shown so much feeling toward her, had never suffered her to feel herself of so much importance. The sterling merit of the girl, her self-denial, her companionable qualities, had never before met with so much recognition; and a thrill of gratification passed through her as she felt that she was missed and valued in the home whence Lionel's conduct had driven her.

"I am very glad," she said, "that Lord Beauport thinks and speaks so kindly of me—indeed, he was always kind to me, and I am very grateful to him and you."

"Then why will you not come to us, Annie? Why do you prefer these new friends to us?"

"I do not," she answered; "but as things have been, as they are, it is better I should not be in a position possibly to estrange the father and son still more. If I were in the house it would only furnish him with an excuse to remain away, and cause Lord Beauport additional anxiety."

Annie knew that she must appear strangely obstinate to Lady Beauport; but it could not be helped; it was impossible that she could explain. The visit of the Countess was a long one; and Annie gathered from her further confidences that her dissatisfaction with Lionel was not her only trouble. The future was not bright before Lady Beauport. The charms of the world were fading in her estimation; society was losing its allurements, not under the chastening of a wholesome grief, but under the corroding, disenchanting influence of bitterness and disappointment. She looked aged and wearied; and before she and Annie parted that day she had acknowledged to the girl that she dreaded the prospect before her, and had no confidence in her only son, or in

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his line of conduct toward her in the event of Lord Beauport's death. The Earl's words to his wife had been prophetic—in Caterham's death there had been but the beginning of sorrow.

Annie stood sadly at the house-door and watched the carriage as it rolled away and bore Lady Beauport out of her sight, as it bears her out of this history.

"This is the man," she thought, "whom she would have remorselessly made me marry, and been insensible to the cruel wrong she would have done to me. What a wonderful thing is that boundless, blind egotism of mothers! In one breath she confesses that he makes her miserable, and admits his contemptible, wretched nature, though she knows little of its real evil; in the next she complains that I did not tie myself to the miserable destiny of being his wife!"

Then Annie turned into the drawing-room, and went over to the window, through whose panes Margaret's wistful, weary gaze had been so often and so long directed. She leaned one round fair arm against the glass, and laid her sleek brown head upon it, musingly:

"I wonder when *home* will really come for me," she thought. "I wonder where I shall go to, and what I shall do, when I must leave this. I wonder if little Arthur will miss me very much when I go away, after Geoffrey comes back."

Geoffrey Ludlow's letters to his mother and sister were neither numerous nor voluminous, but they were explicit; and the anxious hearts at home gradually began to feel more at rest about the absent one so dear to them all. He had written with much kindness and sympathy on the occasion of Til's marriage, and they had all felt what a testimony to his unselfish nature and his generous heart his letter was. With what pangs of memory—what keen revivals of vain longing love and cruel grief for the beautiful woman who had gone down into her grave with the full ardor of his passionate devotion still clinging around her—what desperate struggles against the weariness of spirit which made every thing a burden to him—Geoffrey had written the warm, frank letter over which Til had cried and Charley had glowed with pleasure, the recipients never knew. There was one who guessed them—one who seemed to herself intuitively to realize them all, to weigh and measure every movement of the strong heart which had so much ado to keep itself from breaking, far away in the distant countries, until time should have had sufficient space in which to work its inevitable cure. Mrs. Potts showed her brother's letter to Annie Maurice with infinite delight, on that memorable day when she made her first visit, as a married woman, to Elm Lodge. The flutter and excitement of so special an occasion makes itself felt amidst all the other flutters and excitements of that period which is the great epoch in a woman's life. The delights of "a home of one's own" are never so truly realized as when the bride returns, as a guest, to the home she has left forever as an inmate. It may be much more luxurious, much more important, much more wealthy; but it is not hers, and, above all, it is not "his;" and the little sense of strangeness is felt to be an exquisite and a new pleasure. Til was just the sort of girl to feel this to the fullest, though her "own" house was actually her "old" home, and she had never been a resident at Elm Lodge: but the house at Brompton had a thousand charms now which Til had never found in it before, and on which she expatiated eagerly to Mrs. Ludlow while Annie Maurice was reading Geoffrey's letter. She was very pale when she handed it back to Til, and there were large tears standing in her full brown eyes.

"Isn't it a delightful letter, Annie?" asked Mrs. Potts; "so kind and genial; so exactly like dear old Geoff."

"Yes," Annie replied, very softly; "it is indeed, Til; it is very like Geoffrey."

Then Annie went to look after little Arthur, and left the mother and daughter to their delightful confidential talk.

When the party from Elm Lodge were at the sea-side, after Til's marriage, Annie began to write pretty regularly to Geoffrey, who was then in Egypt. She was always thinking of him, and of how his mind was to be roused from its grief, and once more interested in life. She felt that he was laboring at his art for money, and because he desired to secure the future of those dear to him, in the sense of duty, but that for him the fame which he was rapidly winning was very little worth, and the glory was quite gone out of life—gone down, with the golden hair and the violet eyes, into the dust which was lying upon them. Annie, who had never known a similar grief, understood his in all its intricacies of suffering, with the intuitive comprehension of the heart, which happily stands many a woman instead of intellectual gifts and the learning of experience; and knowing this, the girl, whose unselfish spirit read the heart of her early friend, but never questioned her own, sought with all her simple and earnest zeal how to "cure him of his cruel wound." His picture had been one of the gems of the Academy, one of the great successes of the year, and Annie had written to him enthusiastically about it, as his mother had also done; but she counted nothing upon this. Geoffrey was wearily pleased that they were pleased and gratified, but that was all. His hand did its work, but the soul was not there; and as he was now working amidst the ruins of a dead world and a nation passed away in the early youth of time, his mood was congenial to it, and he grew to like the select lapse of the sultry desert life, and to rebel less and less against his fate, in the distant land where every thing was strange, and there was no fear of a touch upon the torturing nerves of association. All this Annie Maurice divined, and turned constantly in her mind; and amidst the numerous duties to which she devoted herself with the quiet steadiness which was one of her strongest characteristics, she thought incessantly of Geoffrey, and of how the cloud was to be lifted from him. Her life was a busy one, for all the real cares of the household rested upon her. Mrs. Ludlow had been an admirable manager of her own house, and in her own sphere, but she did not understand the scale on which Elm Lodge had been maintained even in Margaret's time, and that which Miss Maurice established was altogether beyond her reach. The old lady was very happy; that was quite evident. She and Annie agreed admirably. The younger lady studied her peculiarities with the utmost care and forbearance, and the "cross" sat lightly now. She was growing old; and what she did not see

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she had lost the faculty of grieving for; and Geoffrey was well, and winning fame and money. It seemed a long time ago now since she had regarded her daughter-in-law's furniture and dress with envy, and speculated upon the remote possibility of some day driving in her son's carriage.

Mrs. Ludlow had a carriage always at her service now, and the most cheerful of companions in her daily drive; for she, Annie, and the child made country excursions every afternoon, and the only time the girl kept for her exclusive enjoyment was that devoted to her early morning rides. Some of the earliest among the loungers by the sad sea waves grew accustomed to observe, with a sense of admiration and pleasure, the fresh, fair face of Annie Maurice, as, flushed with exercise, and blooming like a rose in the morning air, she would dismount at the door of her "marine villa," where a wee toddling child always awaited her coming, who was immediately lifted to her saddle, and indulged with a few gentle pacings up and down before the windows, whence an old lady would watch the group with grave delight. Mrs. Ludlow wrote all these and many more particulars of her happy life to her absent son; and sometimes Annie wondered whether those cheerful garrulous letters, in which the unconscious mother showed Geoffrey so plainly how little she realized his state of mind, increased his sense of loneliness. Then she bethought her of writing to Geoffrey constantly about the child. She knew how he had loved the baby in happier times, and she never wronged the heart she knew so well by a suspicion that the disgrace and calamity which had befallen him had changed this deep-dwelling sentiment, or included the motherless child in its fatal gloom. She had not spoken of little Arthur in her earlier letters more than cursorily, assuring his father that the child was well and thriving; but now that time was going over, and the little boy's intellect was unfolding, she caught at the legitimate source of interest for Geoffrey, and consulted him eagerly and continuously about her little protégé and pupil.

The autumn passed and the winter came; and Mrs. Ludlow, her grandchild, and Annie Maurice were settled at Elm Lodge. Annie had taken anew to her painting, and Geoffrey's deserted studio had again an inmate. Hither would come Charley Potts—a genial gentleman still, but with much added steadiness and scrupulously-neat attire. The wholesome subjugation of a happy marriage was agreeing wonderfully with Charley, and his faith in Til was perfectly unbounded. He was a model of punctuality now; and when he "did a turn" for Annie in the painting-room, he brushed his coat before encountering the unartistic world outside with a cheerful scrupulousness, at which, in the days of Caroline and the beer-signals, he would have derisively mocked. Another visitor was not infrequent there, though he had needed much coaxing to induce him to come, and had winced from the sight of Geoff's ghostly easel on his first visit with keen and perceptible pain.

A strong mutual liking existed between William Bowker and Annie Maurice. Each had recognized the sterling value of the other on the memorable occasion of their first meeting; and the rough exterior of Bowker being less perceptible then than under ordinary circumstances, it had never jarred with Annie's taste or offended against her sensibilities. So it came to pass that these two incongruous persons became great friends; and William Bowker—always a gentleman in the presence of any woman in whom he recognized the soul of a lady—passed many hours such as he had never thought life could again give him in his dear old friend's deserted home. Miss Maurice had no inadequate idea of the social duties which her wealth imposed upon her, and she discharged them with the conscientiousness which lent her character its combined firmness and sweetness. But all her delight was in her adopted home, and in the child, for whom she thought and planned with almost maternal foresight and quite maternal affection. William Bowker also delighted in the boy, and would have expended an altogether unreasonable portion of his slender substance upon indigestible eatables and curiously-ingenious and destructible toys but for Annie's prohibition, to which he yielded loyal obedience. Many a talk had the strangely-assorted pair of friends as they watched the child's play; and they generally ran on Geoffrey, or if they rambled off from him for a while, returned to him through strange and tortuous ways. Not one of Geoff's friends forgot him, or ceased to miss him and to wish him back among them. Not one of "the boys" but had grieved in his simple, uncultivated way over the only half-understood domestic calamity which had fallen upon "old Geoff;" but time has passed, and they had begun to talk more of his pictures and less of himself. It was otherwise with Bowker, whose actual associates were few, though his spirit of *camaraderie* was unbounded. He had always loved Geoffrey Ludlow with a peculiar affection, in which there had been an unexplained foreboding; and its full and terrible realization had been a great epoch in the life of William Bowker. It had broken up the sealed fountains of feeling; it had driven him away from the grave of the past; it had brought his strong sympathies and strong sense into action, and had effected a moral revolution in the lonely man, who had been soured by trouble only in appearance, but in whom the pure, sweet springs of the life of the heart still existed. Now he began to weary for Geoffrey. He dreaded to see his friend sinking into the listlessness and dreariness which had wasted his own life; and Geoffrey's material prosperity, strongly as it contrasted with the poverty and neglect which had been his own lot, did not enter into Bowker's calculations with any reassuring effect.

"Does Geoffrey never fix any time for his return?" asked William Bowker of Miss Maurice one summer evening when they were slowly pacing about the lawn at Elm Lodge, after the important ceremonial of little Arthur's *coucher* had been performed.

"No," said Annie, with a quick and painful blush.

"I wish he would, then," said Bowker. "He has been away quite long enough now; and he ought to come home and face his duties like a man, and thank God that he has a home and duties which don't all centre in himself. If they did, the less he observed them the better." This with a touch of the old bitterness, rarely apparent now. Annie did not answer, and Bowker went on:

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"His mother wants him, his child wants him, and for that matter Mrs. Potts's child wants him too. Charley talks some nonsense about waiting to baptize the little girl until Geoff comes home 'with water from the Jordan,' said Master Charley, being uncertain in his geography, and having some confused notion about some sacred river. However, if we could only get him home, he might bottle a little of the Nile for us instead. I really wish he'd come. I want to know how far he has really lived down his trouble; I can't bear to think that it may conquer and spoil him."

"It has not done that; it won't do that—no fear of it," said Annie, eagerly; "I can tell from his letters that Geoffrey is a strong man again—stronger than he has ever been before."

"He needs to be, Miss Maurice," said William, with a short, kind, sounding laugh, "for Geoffrey's nature is not strong. I don't think I ever knew a weaker man but one—"

He paused, but Annie made no remark. Presently he fell to talking of the child and his likeness to Geoffrey, which was very strong and very striking.

"There is not a trace of the poor mother in him," said Bowker; "I am glad of it. The less there is before Geoffrey's eyes when he returns to remind him of the past the better."

"And yet," said Annie, in a low voice, and with something troubled in her manner, "I have often thought if he returned, and I saw his meeting with the child, how dreadful it would be to watch him looking for a trace of the dead in little Arthur's face, and not finding it, to know that he felt the world doubly empty."

Her face was half averted from Bowker as she spoke, and he looked at her curiously and long. He marked the sudden flush and pallor of her cheek, and the hurry in her words; and a bright, unusual light came into William Bowker's eyes. He only said:

"Ay—that would indeed be a pang the more." And a few minutes later he took his leave.

"Charley," said Mr. Bowker to Mr. Potts, three or four days afterward, as he stood before that gentleman's easel, criticising the performance upon it with his accustomed science and freedom, "why don't you get your wife to write to Geoffrey, and make him come home? He ought to come, you know, and it's not for you or me to remonstrate with him. Women do these things better than men; they can handle sores without hurting them, and pull at heart-strings without making them crack. There's his mother growing old, you know, and wanting to see him; and the child's a fine young shaver now, and his father ought to know something of him; eh, Charley, what do you think?"

"You're about right, old fellow, that's what I think. Til often talks about it, particularly since the baby was born, and wonders how Geoffrey can stay away; but I suppose if his own child won't bring him home ours can't be expected to do it; eh, William? Til doesn't think of that, you see."

"I see," said Mr. Bowker, with a smile. "But, Charley, do you just get Til to write to Geoffrey, and tell him his mother is not as strong as she used to be, and that the care of her and the child is rather too much of a responsibility to rest upon Miss Maurice's shoulders, and I think Geoffrey will see the matter in the true light, and come home at once."

Charley promised to obey Mr. Bowker's injunction, premising that he must first "talk it over with Til." William made no objection to this perfectly proper arrangement, and felt no uneasiness respecting the result of the conjugal discussion. He walked away smiling, congratulating himself on having done "rather a deep thing," and full of visions in which Geoffrey played a part which would have considerably astonished him had its nature been revealed to him.

Six weeks after the conversation between Mr. Bowker and Mr. Potts a foreign letter in Geoffrey's hand reached Mrs. Ludlow. She hardly gave herself time to read it through before she sought to impart its tidings to Annie. The young lady was not in the painting-room, not in the drawing-room, not in the house. The footman thought he had seen her on the lawn with the child, going toward the swing. Thither Mrs. Ludlow proceeded, and there she found Annie; her hat flung off, her brown hair falling about her shoulders, and her graceful arms extended to their full length as she swung the delighted child, who shouted "higher, higher!" after the fashion of children.

"Geoffrey's coming home, Annie!" said Mrs. Ludlow, as soon as she reached the side of the almost breathless girl. "He's coming home immediately—by the next mail. Is not that good news?"

The rope had dropped from Annie's hand at the first sentence. Now she stooped, picked up her hat, and put it on; and turning to lift the child from his seat, she said:

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Ludlow, it is; but very sudden. Has any thing happened?"

"Nothing whatever, my dear. Geoffrey only says—stay, here's his letter; read for yourself. He merely says he feels it is time to come home; he has got all the good out of his captivity in Egypt in every way that he is likely to get—though why he should call it captivity when he went there of his own accord, and could have come away at any moment he liked, is more than I can understand. Well, well, Geoffrey always had queer sayings; but what matter, now that he is coming home!—Papa is coming home, Arty; we shall see him soon."

"Shall we?" said the child. "Let me go, Annie; you are making my hand cold with yours;" and he slipped his little hand from her grasp, and ran on to the house, where he imparted the news to the household with an air of vast importance.

"Annie," said Geoffrey Ludlow, one day when he had been about three weeks at home, and after he had passed some time in examining Miss Maurice's art-performances, "what has become of the drawing I once made of you, long ago, when you were a little girl? Don't you remember you laughed at it, and said, 'Grandmamma, grandmamma, what big eyes you've got!' to it? and the dear old Rector was so dreadfully frightened lest I should be offended."

"Yes, I remember," answered Annie; "and I have the picture. Why?"

"Because I want it, Annie. If you will let me have it, I will paint a full-length portrait of

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you for the next Academy, in which every one shall recognize a striking likeness of the beautiful and accomplished Miss Maurice."

"Don't, Geoffrey," said Annie, gravely. "I am not in the least more beautiful now than I was when you took my likeness long ago; but you shall have the drawing, and you shall paint the picture, and it shall belong to Arthur, to remind him of me when I am gone abroad."

"Gone abroad!" said Geoffrey, starting up from his chair and approaching her. "You—gone abroad!"

"Yes," she said, with a very faint smile. "Is no one to see men and cities, and sand and sphinxes, and mummies and Nile boatmen except yourself? Don't you remember how Caterham always wished me to travel and improve my mind?"

"I remember," said Geoff, moodily; "but I don't think your mind wants improving, Annie. How selfish I am! I really had a kind of fancy that this was your home; different as it is from such as you might, as you may command, it was your own choice once. You see what creatures we men are. A woman like you sacrifices herself for one of us, to do him good in his adversity, and he takes it as a matter of course that the sacrifice is to continue—" Geoffrey turned to the window and looked wearily out. From the dim corner in which she sat Annie looked timidly at his tall figure—a true image of manliness and vigor. She could see the bronzed cheek, the full, rich brown eye, the bushy beard with its mingled lines of brown and gray. There was far more strength in the face than in former days, and far more refinement, a deeper tenderness, and a loftier meaning. She thought so as she looked at him, and her heart beat hard and fast.

"It was no sacrifice to me, Geoffrey," she said, in a very low tone. "You know I could not bear the life I was leading. I have been very happy here. Every one has been very good to me, and I have been very happy; but—"

Geoffrey turned abruptly, and looked at her—looked at the graceful head, the blushing cheek, the faltering lips—and went straight up to her. She shrunk just a little at his approach; but when he laid his hand upon her shoulder, and bent his head down toward hers, she raised her sweet, candid face and looked at him.

"Annie," he said, eagerly, with the quick earnestness of a man whose soul is in his words, "will you forgive all my mistakes—I have found them out now—and take the truest love that ever a man offered to the most perfect of women? Annie, can you love me?—will you stay with me? My darling, say yes!"

His strong arms were round her now, and her sleek brown head lay upon his breast. She raised it to look at him; then folded her hands and laid them upon his shoulder, and with her crystal-clear eyes uplifted, said, "I will stay with you, Geoffrey. I have always loved you."

The storm had blown itself out now—its last mutterings had died away; and through all its fury and despair, through all its rude buffets and threatening of doom, Geoffrey Ludlow had reached LAND AT LAST!

THE END.

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SIR BROOK FOSSBROOKE.

A Novel.

BY CHARLES LEVER,

AUTHOR OF

"CHARLES O'MALLEY," "TONY BUTLER," "BARRINGTON," "MAURICE TIERNAY,"
"THE DODD FAMILY ABROAD," "ROLAND CASHEL," &c., &c.

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SIR BROOK FOSSBROOKE.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER MESS.

THE mess was over, and the officers of H.M.'s —th were grouped in little knots and parties, sipping their coffee, and discussing the arrangements for the evening. Their quarter was that pleasant city of Dublin, which, bating certain exorbitant demands in the matter of field-day and guard-mounting, stands pre-eminently first in military favour.

"Are you going to that great ball in Merrion Square?" asked one.

"Not so lucky; not invited."

"I got a card," cried a third; "but I've just heard it's not to come off. It seems that the lady's husband is a judge. He's Chief something or other; and he has been called away."

"Nothing of the kind, Tomkins; unless you call a summons to the next world being called away. The man is dangerously ill. He was seized with paralysis on the Bench yesterday, and, they say, can't recover."

There now ensued an animated conversation as to whether, on death vacancies, the men went up by seniority at the bar, or whether a subaltern could at once spring up to the top of the regiment.

"Suppose," said one, "we were to ask the Colonel's guest his opinion. The old cove has talked pretty nigh of everything in this world during dinner; what if we were to ask him about Barons of the Exchequer?"

"Who is he? what is he?" asked another.

"The Colonel called him Sir Brook Fossbrooke; that's all I know."

"Colonel Cave told me," whispered the Major, "that he was the fastest man on town some forty years ago."

"I think he must have kept over the wardrobe of that brilliant period," said another. "I never saw a really swallow-tailed coat before."

"His ring amused *me*. It is a small smoothing-iron, with a coat of arms on it. Hush! here he comes."

The man who now joined the group was a tall, gaunt figure, with a high narrow head, from which the hair was brushed rigidly back to fall behind in something like an old-fashioned queue. His eyes were black, and surmounted with massive and much-arched eyebrows; a strongly-marked mouth, stern, determined, and, except in speaking, almost cruel in expression, and a thin-pointed projecting chin, gave an air of severity and strong will to features which, when he conversed, displayed a look of courteous deference, and that peculiar desire to please that we associate with a bygone school of breeding. He was one of those men, and very distinctive are they, with whom even the least cautious take no liberties, nor venture upon any familiarity. The eccentricities of determined men are very often indications of some deep spirit beneath, and not, as in weaker natures, mere emanations of vanity or offsprings of self-indulgence.

If he was, beyond question, a gentleman, there were also signs about him of narrow fortune: his scrupulously white shirt was not fine, and the seams of his well-brushed coat showed both care and wear.

He had joined the group, who were talking of the coming Derby when the Colonel came up. "I have sent for the man we want, Fossbrooke. I'm not a fisherman myself; but they tell me he knows every lake, river, and rivulet in the island. He has sat down to whist, but we'll have him here presently."

"On no account; don't disturb his game for me."

"Here he comes. Trafford, I want to present you to a very old friend of mine, Sir Brook Fossbrooke—as enthusiastic an angler as yourself. He has the ambition to hook an Irish salmon. I don't suppose any one can more readily help him on the road to it."

The young man thus addressed was a large, strongly, almost heavily built young fellow, but with that looseness of limb and freedom that showed activity had not been sacrificed to mere power. He had a fine frank handsome face, blue-eyed, and bold-looking; and as he stood to receive the Colonel's orders there was in his air that blending of deference and good-humoured carelessness that made up his whole nature.

It was plain to see in him one easy to persuade—impossible to coerce; a fellow with whom the man he liked could do anything, but one perfectly unmanageable if thrown into the wrong hands. He was the second son of a very rich baronet, but made the mistake of believing he had as much right to extravagance as his elder brother, and having persisted in this error during two years in the Life Guards, had been sent to do the double penance of an infantry regiment and an Irish station; two inflictions which, it was believed, would have sufficed to calm down the ardour of the most impassioned spendthrift. He looked at Fossbrooke from head to foot. It was not exactly the stamp of man he would have selected for companionship, but he saw at once that he was distinctively a gentleman, and then the prospect of a few days away from regimental duty was not to be despised, and he quickly re-

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plied that both he and his tackle were at Sir Brook's disposal. "If we could run down to Killaloe, sir," added he, turning to the Colonel, "we might be almost sure of some sport."

"Which means that you want two days' leave, Trafford."

"No, sir; four. It will take a day at least to get over there; another will be lost in exploring; all these late rains have sent such a fresh into the Shannon there's no knowing where to try."

"You see, Fossbrooke, what a casuistical companion I've given you. I'll wager you a five-pound note that if you come back without a rise he'll have an explanation that will perfectly explain it was the best thing could have happened."

"I am charmed to travel in such company," said Sir Brook, bowing. "The gentleman has already established a claim to my respect for him."

Trafford bowed too, and looked not at all displeased at the compliment. "Are you an early riser, sir?" asked he.

"I am anything, sir, the occasion exacts; but when I have an early start before me, I usually sit up all night."

"My own plan, too," cried Trafford. "And there's Aubrey quite ready to join us. Are you a whister, Sir Brook?"

"At your service. I play all games."

"Is he a whister?" repeated the Colonel. "Ask Harry Greville, ask Tom Newenham, what they say of him at Graham's? Trafford, my boy, you may possibly give him a hint about grey hackles, but I'll be shot if you do about the odd trick."

"If you'll come over to my room, Sir Brook, we'll have a rubber, and I'll give orders to have my tax-cart ready for us by daybreak," said Trafford; and Fossbrooke promising to be with him as soon as he had given his servant his orders, they parted.

"And are you as equal to this sitting up all night as you used to be, Fossbrooke?" asked the Colonel.

"I don't smoke as many cigars as formerly, and I am a little more choice about my tobacco. I avoid mulled port, and take weak brandy-and-water; and I believe in all other respects I'm pretty much where I was when we met last,—I think it was at Ceylon?"

"I wish I could say as much for myself. You are talking of thirty-four years ago."

"My secret against growing old is to do a little of everything. It keeps the sympathies wider, makes a man more accessible to other men, and keeps him from dwelling too much on himself. But tell me about my young companion; is he one of Sir Hugh's family?"

"His second son; not unlike to be his eldest, for George has gone to Madeira with very little prospect of recovery. This is a fine lad; a little wild, a little careless of money, but the very soul of honour and right-mindedness. They sent him to me as a sort of incurable, but I have nothing but good to say of him."

"There's great promise in a fellow when he can be a scamp and a man of honour. When dissipations do not degrade and excesses do not corrupt a man, there is a grand nature ever beneath."

"Don't tell him that, Fossbrooke," said the Colonel, laughing.

"I am not likely to do so," said he, with a grim smile. "I am glad, too, to meet his father's son; we were at Christ Church together; and now I see he has the family good-looks. 'Le beau Trafford,' was a proverb in Paris once."

"Do you ever forget a man?" asked the Colonel, in some curiosity.

"I believe not. I forget books, places, dates occasionally, but never people. I met an old schoolfellow t'other day at Dover whom I never saw since we were boys. He had gone down in the world, and was acting as one of the 'commissionaires' they call them, who take your keys to the Custom-house to have your luggage examined; and when he came to ask me to employ him, I said, 'What! an't you Jemmy Harper?' 'And who the devil are you?' said he. 'Fossbrooke,' said I. 'Not "Wart"?' said he. That was my school nickname, from a wart I once had on my chin. 'Ay, to be sure,' said I, 'Wart.' I wish you saw the delight of the old dog. I made him dine with us. Lord Brackington was with me, and enjoyed it all immensely."

"And what had brought him so low?"

"He was cursed, he said, with a strong constitution; all the other fellows of his set had so timed it, that when they had nothing to live on they ceased to live; but Jemmy told us he never had such an appetite as now; that he passed from fourteen to sixteen hours a-day on the pier in all weathers; and as to gout, he firmly believed it all came of the adulterated wines of the great wine-merchants. British gin he maintained to be the wholesomest liquor in existence."

"I wonder how fellows bear up under such reverses as that," said the Colonel.

"My astonishment is rather," cried Fossbrooke, "how men can live on in a monotony of well-being, getting fatter, older, and more unwieldy, and with only such experiences of life as a well-fed fowl might have in a hen-coop."

"I know that's *your* theory," said the other, laughing.

"Well, no man can say that I have not lived up to my convictions; and for myself, I can aver I have thoroughly enjoyed my intercourse with the world, and like it as well to-day as on the first morning I made my bow to it."

"Listen to this, young gentlemen," said the Colonel, turning to his officers, who now gathered around them. "Now and then I hear some of you complaining of being bored or wearied—sick of this, tired of that; here's my friend, who knows the whole thing better than any of us, and he declares that the world is the best of all possible worlds, and that, so far from familiarity with it inspiring disgust with life, his enjoyment of it is as racy as when first he knew it."

"It is rather hard to ask these gentlemen to take me as a guide on trust," said Fossbrooke; "but I have known the fathers of most of those I see around me, and could call many of them as witnesses to character. Major Aylmer, your father and I went up the Nile together, when people talked of it as a journey. Captain Harris, I'm sure I am not wrong in saying you are the

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son of Godfrey Harris of Harrisburg. Your father was my friend on the day I wounded Lord Ecclesmore. I see four or five others too—so like old companions that I find it hard to believe I am not back again in the old days when I was as young as themselves; and yet, I'm not very certain if I would like to exchange my present quiet enjoyment as a looker-on for all that active share I once took in life and its pleasures."

Something in the fact that their fathers had lived in his intimacy, something in his manner—a very courteous manner it was—and something in the bold, almost defiant bearing of the old man, vouching for great energy and dignity together, won greatly upon the young men, and they gathered around him. He was, however, summoned away by a message from Trafford to say that the whist-party waited for him, and he took his leave with a stately courtesy and withdrew.

"There goes one of the strangest fellows in Christendom," said the Colonel, as the other left the room. "He has already gone through three fortunes; he dissipated the first—speculated and lost the second—and the third he, I might say, gave away in acts of benevolence and kindness—leaving himself so ill-off, that I actually heard the other day that some friend had asked for the place of barrack-master at Athlone for him; but on coming over to see the place, he found a poor fellow with a wife and five children a candidate for it; so he retired in his favour, and is content, as you see, to go out on the world, and take his chance with it."

Innumerable questions pressed on the Colonel to tell more of his strange friend; he had, however, little beyond hearsay to give them. Of his own experiences, he could only say that when first he met him it was at Ceylon, where he had come in a yacht like a sloop of war to hunt elephants—the splendour of his retinue and magnificence of his suite giving him the air of a royal personage—and indeed the gorgeous profusion of his presents to the King and the chief personages of the court, went far to impress this notion. "I never met him since," said the Colonel, "till this morning, when he walked into my room, dusty and travel-stained, to say, 'I just heard your name, and thought I'd ask you to give me my dinner to-day.' I owe him a great many—not to say innumerable other attentions; and his last act on leaving Trincomalee was to present me with an Arab charger, the most perfect animal I ever mounted. It is therefore a real pleasure to me to receive him. He is a thoroughly fine-hearted fellow, and, with all his eccentricities, one of the noblest natures I ever met. The only flaw in his frankness is as to his age; nobody has ever been able to get it from him. You heard him talk of your fathers—he might talk of your grandfathers; and he would too, if we had only the opportunity to lead him on to it. I know of my own knowledge that he lived in the Carlton-House coterie, not a man of which except himself survives; and I have heard him give imitations of Burke, Sheridan, Gavin Hamilton, and Pitt, that none but one who had seen them could have accomplished. And now that I have told you all this, will one of you step over to Trafford's rooms, and whisper him a hint to make his whist-points as low as he can; and, what is even of more importance, to take care lest any strange story Sir Brook may tell—and he is full of them—meet a sign of incredulity—still less provoke any quizzing; the slightest shade of such a provocation would render him like a madman."

The Major volunteered to go on this mission, which indeed any of the others would as willingly have accepted, for the old man had interested them deeply, and they longed to hear more about him.

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CHAPTER II.

THE SWAN'S NEST.

As the Shannon draws near Killaloe, the wild character of the mountain scenery, the dreary wastes and desolate islands which marked Lough Derg, disappear, and give way to gently-sloping lawns, dotted over with well-grown timber, well-kept demesnes, spacious country-houses, and a country which, in general, almost recalls the wealth and comfort of England.

About a mile above the town, in a little bend of the river forming a small bay, stands a small but pretty house, with a skirt of rich wood protecting it at the back, while the lawn in front descends by an easy slope to the river.

Originally a mere farmhouse, the taste of an ingenious owner had taken every advantage of its irregular outline, and converted it into something Elizabethan in character, a style admirably adapted to the site, where all the features of rich-coloured landscape abounded, and where varied foliage, heathy mountain, and eddying river, all lent themselves to make up a scene of fresh and joyous beauty.

In the marvellous fertility of the soil, too, was found an ally to every prospect of embellishment. Sheltered from north and east winds, plants grew here in the open air, which in less favoured spots needed the protection of the conservatory; and thus in the neatly shaven lawn were seen groups of blossoming shrubs or flowers of rare excellence, and the camellia and the salvia and the oleander blended with the tulip, the moss-rose, and the carnation, to stud the grass with their gorgeous colours.

Over the front of the cottage, for cottage it really was, a South American creeper, a sort of acanthus, grew, its crimson flowers hanging in rich profusion over cornice and architrave; while a passion-tree of great age covered the entire porch, relieving with its softened tints the almost over-brilliancy of the southern plant.

Seen from the water—and it came suddenly into view on rounding a little headland—few could forbear from an exclamation of wonder and admiration at this lovely spot; nor could all the pretentious grandeur of the rich-wooded parks, nor all the more imposing architecture of the great houses, detract from the marvellous charm of this simple home.

A tradition of a swan carried away by some rising of the river from the Castle of Portumna,

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and swept down the lake till it found refuge in the little bay, had given the name to the place, and for more than a hundred years was it known as the Swan's Nest. The swan, however, no longer existed, though a little thatched edifice at the water-side marked the spot it had once inhabited, aud sustained the truth of the legend.

The owner of the place was a Dr. Lendrick: he had come to it about twenty years before the time at which our story opens—a widower with two children, a son and a daughter. He was a perfect stranger to all the neighbourhood, though by name well known as the son of a distinguished judge, Baron Lendrick of the Court of Exchequer.

It was rumoured about, that, having displeased his father, first by adopting medicine instead of law as his profession, and subsequently by marrying a portionless girl of humble family, the Baron had ceased to recognise him in any way. Making a settlement of a few hundreds a year on him, he resolved to leave the bulk of his fortune to a step-son, the child of his second wife, a Colonel Sewell, then in India.

It was with no thought of practising his profession that Dr. Lendrick had settled in the neighbourhood; but as he was always ready to assist the poor by his advice and skill, and as the reputation of his great ability gradually got currency, he found himself constrained to yield to the insistance of his neighbours, and consent to practise generally. There were many things which made this course unpalatable to him. He was by nature shy, timid, and retiring; he was fastidiously averse to a new acquaintanceship; he had desired, besides, to live estranged from the world, devoting himself entirely to the education of his children; and he neither liked the forced publicity he became exposed to, nor that life of servitude which leaves the doctor at the hourly mercy of the world around him.

If he yielded, therefore, to the professional calls upon him, he resisted totally all social claims: he went nowhere but as the doctor.

No persuasion, no inducement, could prevail on him to dine out; no exigency of time or season prevent him returning to his home at night. There were in his neighbourhood one or two persons whose rank might have, it was supposed, influenced him in some degree to comply with their requests — and, certainly, whose desire for his society would have left nothing undone to secure it; but he was as obdurate to them as to others, and the Earl of Drumcarran and Sir Reginal Lacy, of Lacy Manor, were not a whit more successful in their blandishments than the Vicar of Killaloe—Old Bob Mills, as he was irreverently called—or Lendrick's own colleague, Dr. Tobin, who, while he respected his superior ability and admitted his knowledge, secretly hated him as only a rival doctor knows how to hate a brother practitioner.

For the first time for many years had Dr. Lendrick gone up to Dublin. A few lines from an old family physician, Dr. Beattie, had, however, called him up to town. The Chief Baron had been taken ill in Court and was conveyed home in a state of insensibility. It was declared that he had rallied and passed a favourable night; but as he was a man of very advanced age, at no time strong, and ever unsparing of himself in the arduous labours of his office, grave doubts were felt that he would ever again resume his seat on the Bench. Dr. Beattie well knew the long estrangement that had separated the father from the son; and although, perhaps, the most intimate friend the Judge had in the world, he never had dared to interpose a word or drop a hint as to the advisability of reconciliation.

Sir William Lendrick was indeed a man whom no amount of intimacy could render his friends familiar with. He was positively charming to mere acquaintanceship—his manner was a happy blending of deference with a most polished wit. Full of bygone experiences and reminiscences of interesting people and events, he never overlaid conversation by their mention, but made them merely serve to illustrate the present, either by contrast or resemblance. All this to the world and society was he; to the inmates of his house he was a perfect terror! It was said his first wife had died of a broken heart; his second, with a spirit fierce and combative as his own, had quarrelled with him so often, so seriously, and so hopelessly, that for the last fifteen years of life they had occupied separate houses, and only met as acquaintances, accepting and sending invitations to each other, and outwardly observing all the usages of a refined courtesy.

This was the man of whom Dr. Beattie wrote: "I cannot presume to say that he is *more* favourably disposed towards you than he has shown himself for years, but I would strenuously advise your being here, and sufficiently near, so that if a happier disposition should occur, or an opportunity arise to bring you once more together, the fortunate moment should not be lost. Come up, then, at once—come to my house, where your room is ready for you, and where you will neither be molested by visitors nor interfered with. Manage too, if you can, to remain here for some days."

It is no small tribute to the character of filial affection when one can say, and say truthfully, that scarcely any severity on a parent's part effaces the love that was imbibed in infancy, and that struck root in the heart before it could know what unkindness was! Over and over again in life have I witnessed this deep devotion. Over and over again have I seen a clinging affection to a memory which nothing short of a hallowed tie could have made so dear—a memory that retained whatever could comfort and sustain, and held nothing that recalled shame or sorrow.

Dr. Lendrick went up to town full of such emotions. All the wrong—it was heavy wrong too—he had suffered was forgotten; all the injustice wiped out. He only asked to be permitted to see his father—to nurse and watch by him. There was no thought for himself. By reconciliation he never meant restoration to his place as heir. Forgiveness and love he asked for—to be taken back to the heart so long closed against him, to hear himself called Tom by that voice he knew so well, and whose accents sounded through his dreams.

That he was not without a hope of such happiness, might be gathered from one circumstance. He had taken up with him two miniatures of his boy and girl to show "Grandfather"

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if good fortune should ever offer a fitting moment.

The first words which greeted him on reaching his friend's house were: "Better. A tolerably tranquil night. He can move his hands. The attack was paralysis, and his speech is also improved."

"And his mind? how is his mind?"

"Clear as ever it was—intensely eager to hear what is said about his illness, and insatiable as to the newspaper versions of the attack."

"Does he speak? Has he spoken of—his family at all?" said he, falteringly.

"Only of Lady Lendrick. He desired to see her. He dictated a note to me, in terms of very finished courtesy, asking her if, without incurring inconvenience, she would favour him with an early call. The whole thing was so like himself that I saw at once he was getting better."

"And so you think him better?" asked Lendrick, eagerly.

"Better! Yes—but not out of danger. I fear as much from his irritability as his malady. He will insist on seeing the newspapers, and occasionally his eye falls on some paragraph that wounds him. It was but yesterday that he read a sort of querulous regret from some writer that 'the learned judge had not retired some years ago, and before that failing health, acting on a very irascible temperament, had rendered him a terror alike to the bar and the suitors.' That unfortunate paragraph cost twenty leeches and ice to his temples for eight hours after."

"Cannot these things be kept from him? Surely your authority ought to be equal to this!"

"Were I to attempt it he would refuse to see me. In fact, any utility I can contribute depends on my apparent submission to him in everything. Almost his first question to me every morning is, 'Well, sir, who is to be my successor?' Of course I say that we all look with a sanguine hope to see him soon back in his court again. When I said this yesterday, he replied, 'I will sit on Wednesday, sir, to hear appeals; there will be little occasion for me to speak, and I trust another day or two will see the last of this difficulty of utterance. Pemberton, I know, is looking to the Attorney-Generalship, and George Haire thinks he may order his ermine. Tell them, however, from me, that the Chief Baron intends to preside in his court for many a year to come; that the intellect, such as it is, with which Providence endowed him, is still unchanged and unclouded.' This is his language—this his tone; and you may know how such a spirit jars with all our endeavours to promote rest and tranquillity."

Lendrick walked moodily up and down the room, his head sunk, and his eyes downcast. "Never to speak of me—never ask to see me," muttered he, in a voice of intense sadness.

"I half suspected at one time he was about to do so, and indeed he said, 'If this attack should baffle you, Beattie, you must not omit to give timely warning. There are two or three things to be thought of.' When I came away on that morning I sat down and wrote to you to come up here."

A servant entered at this moment and presented a note to the Doctor, who read it hastily and handed it to Lendrick. It ran thus:—

"DEAR DR. BEATTIE,—The Chief Baron has had an unfavourable turn, partly brought on by excitement. Lose no time in coming here; and believe me, yours sincerely,

"CONSTANTIA LENDRICK."

"They've had a quarrel; I knew they would. I did my best to prevent their meeting; but I saw he would not go out of the world without a scene. As he said last night, 'I mean her to hear my "charge." She must listen to my charge, Beattie;' and I'd not be astonished if this charge were to prove his own sentence."

"Go to him at once, Beattie; and if it be at all possible, if you can compass it in any way, let me see him once again. Take these with you; who knows but their bright faces may plead better than words for us?" and thus saying he gave him the miniatures; and overcome with emotion he could not control, turned away and left the room.

CHAPTER III.

A DIFFICULT PATIENT.

As Dr. Beattie drove off with all speed to the Chief Baron's house, which lay about three miles from the city, he had time to ponder as he went over his late interview. "Tom Lendrick," as he still called him to himself, he had known as a boy, and ever liked him. He had been a patient, studious, gentle-tempered lad, desirous to acquire knowledge, without any of that ambition that wants to make the knowledge marketable. To have gained a professorship would have appeared to have been the very summit of his ambition, and this rather as a quiet retreat to pursue his studies further than as a sphere wherein to display his own gifts. Anything more unlike that bustling, energetic, daring spirit, his father, would be hard to conceive. Throughout his whole career at the bar, and in Parliament, men were never quite sure what that brilliant speaker and most indiscreet talker would do next. Men secured his advocacy with a half misgiving whether they were doing the very best or the very worst for success. Give him difficulties to deal with, and he was a giant; let all go smoothly and well, and he would hunt up some crotchet—some obsolete usage—a doubtful point, that in its discussion very frequently led to the damage of his client's cause, and the defeat of his suit.

Display was ever more to him than victory. Let him have a great arena to exhibit in, and he was proof against all the difficulties and all the casualties of the conflict. Never had such a father a son less the inheritor of his temperament and nature; and this same disappointment rankling on through life—a disappointment that embittered all intercourse, and went so far as to make him disparage the high abilities of his son—created a gulf between them that Beattie knew could never be bridged over. He doubted, too, whether as a doctor he could conscientiously introduce a theme so likely to irritate and excite. As he pondered he opened the two

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miniatures, and looked at them. The young man was a fine manly, daring-looking fellow, with a determined brow and a resolute mouth, that recalled his grandfather's face: he was evidently well grown, and strong, and looked one that, thrown where he might be in life, would be likely to assert his own.

The girl, wonderfully like him in feature, had a character of subdued humour in her eye, and a half-hid laughter in the mouth, which the artist had caught up with infinite skill, that took away all the severity of the face, and softened its traits to a most attractive beauty. Through her rich brown hair there was a sort of golden *reflet* that imparted great brilliancy to the expression of the head, and her large eyes of grey-blue were the image of candour and softness, till her laugh gave them a sparkle of drollery whose sympathy there was no resisting. She, too, was tall and beautifully formed, with that slimness of early youth that only escapes being angular, but has in it the charm of suppleness, that lends grace to every action and every gesture.

"I wish he could see the originals," muttered Beattie. "If the old man, with his love of beauty, but saw that girl, it would be worth all the arguments in Christendom. Is it too late for this? Have we time for the experiment?"

Thus thinking he drove along the well-wooded approach, and gained the large ground-space before the door, whence a carriage was about to drive away. "Oh, Doctor," cried a voice, "I'm so glad you're come; they are most impatient for you." It was the Solicitor-General, Mr. Pemberton, who now came up to the window of Beattie's carriage.

"He has become quite unmanageable, will not admit a word of counsel or advice, resists all interference, and insists on going out for a drive."

"I see him at the window," said Beattie; "he is beckoning to me; good-bye," and he passed on and entered the house.

In the chief drawing-room, in a deep recess of a window sat the Chief Baron, dressed as if to go out, with an overcoat and even his gloves on. "Come and drive with me, Beattie," cried he, in a feeble, but harsh voice. "If I take my man Leonard they'll say it was a keeper. You know that the 'Post' has it this morning that my mind it is which has given way. They say they've seen me breaking for years back. Good heavens! can it be possible, think you, that the mites in a cheese speculate over the nature of the man that eats them? You stopped to talk with Pemberton, I saw; what did he say to you?"

"Nothing particular — a mere greeting, I think."

"No, sir, it was not; he was asking you how many hours there lay between him and the Attorney-Generalship. They've divided the carcass already. The lion has to assist at his autopsy—rather hard, isn't it? How it embitters death to think of the fellows who are to replace us!"

"Let me feel your pulse."

"Don't trust it, Beattie; that little dialogue of yours on the grass plot has sent it up thirty beats; how many is it?"

"Rapid—very rapid; you need rest—tranquillity."

"And you can't give me either, sir; neither you nor your craft together. You are the Augurs of modern civilisation, and we cling to your predictions just as our forefathers did, though we never believe you."

"This is not flattery," said Beattie, with a slight smile.

The old man closed his eyes and passed his hand slowly over his forehead. "I suppose I was dreaming, Beattie, just before you came up; but I thought I saw them all in the Hall, talking and laughing over my death. Burrowes was telling how old I must be, because I moved the amendment to Flood in the Irish Parliament in '97; and Eames mentioned that I was Curran's junior in the great Bagenal record; and old Tysdal set them all in a roar by saying he had a vision of me standing at the gate of heaven and instead of going in, as St. Peter invited me, stoutly refusing, and declaring I would move for a new trial! How like the rascals!"

"Don't you think you'd be better in your own room? there's too much light and glare here."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. You need quiet, and the absence of all that stimulates the action of the brain."

"And what do *you*, sir—what does any one, know about the brain's operations? You doctors have invented a sort of conventional cerebral organ which, like lunar caustic, is decomposed by light; and in your vulgar materialism you would make out that what affects *your* brain must act alike upon *mine*. I tell you, sir, it is darkness—obscurity, physical or moral, it matters not which—that irritates *me*, just as I feel provoked this moment by this muddling talk of yours about brain."

"And yet I'm talking about what my daily life and habits suggest *some* knowledge of," said Beattie mildly.

"So you are, sir, and the presumption is all on my side. If you'll kindly lend me your arm I'll go back to my room."

Step by step, slowly and painfully, he returned to his chamber, not uttering a word as he went.

"Yes; this is better, Doctor; this half light soothes; it is much pleasanter. One more kindness. I wrote to Lady Lendrick this morning to come up here. I suppose my combative spirit was high in me, and I wanted a round with the gloves—or, indeed, without them—at all events, I sent the challenge. But *now*, Doctor, I have to own myself a craven. I dread the visit. Could you manage to interpose? could you suggest that it is by your order I am not permitted to receive her? could you hint," here he smiled half-maliciously, "that you do not think the time is come for anodynes—eh, Doctor?"

"Leave it to me. I will speak to Lady Lendrick."

"There's another thing; not that it much matters; but it might perhaps be as well to send a few lines to the morning papers, to say the accounts of the Chief Baron are more favourable to-day; he passed a tranquil night, and so on. Pemberton won't like it; nor Hayes; but it will calm the fears of a very attached friend, who calls here twice daily. You'd never guess him. He is the agent of the Globe office, where I am insured. Ah, Doctor, it was a bright thought

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of Philanthropy to establish an industrial enterprise that is bound, under heavy recognisances, to be grieved at our death."

"I must not make you talk, Sir William. I must not encourage you to exert yourself. I'll say good-bye, and look in upon you this afternoon."

"Am I to have a book? Well; be it so. I'll sit and muse over the Attorney-General and his hopes."

"I have got two very interesting miniatures here. I'll leave them with you; you might like to look at them."

"Miniatures! whose portraits are they?" asked the other, hastily, as he almost snatched them from his hand. "What a miserable juggler; what a stale trick this!" said he, as he opened the case which contained the young man's picture. "So, sir; you lend yourself to such attempts as these."

"I don't understand you," said Beattie, indignantly.

"Yes, sir; you understand me perfectly. You would do, by a piece of legerdemain, what you have not the courage to attempt openly. These are Tom Lendrick's children."

"They are."

"And this simpering young lady is her mother's image; pretty, pretty, no doubt; and a little—a shade, perhaps—of *espiéglerie* above what her mother possessed. She was the silliest woman that ever turned a fool's head. She had the ineffable folly, sir, to believe she could persuade me to forgive my son for having married her; and when I handed her to a seat—for she was at my knees—she fainted."

"Well. It is time to forgive him now. As for her, she is beyond forgiveness, or favour either," said Beattie, with more energy than before.

"There is no such a trial to a man in a high calling as the temptation it offers him to step beyond it. Take care, sir, that with all your acknowledged ability, this temptation be not too much for you." The tone and manner in which the old judge delivered these words recalled the justice-seat. "It is an honour to me to have you as my doctor, sir. It would be to disparage my own intelligence to accept you as my confessor."

"A doctor but discharges half his trust when he fails to warn his patient against the effects of irritability."

"The man who would presume to minister to my temper or to my nature should be no longer medico of mine. With what intention, sir, did you bring me these miniatures?"

"That you might see two bright and beautiful faces, whose owners are bound to you by the strongest ties of blood."

"Do you know, sir—have you ever heard—how their father, by his wilfulness, by his folly, by his heartless denial of my right to influence him, ruined the fortune that cost my life of struggle and labour to create?"

The Doctor shook his head, and the other continued. "Then I will tell it to you, sir. It is more than seventeen years to-day when the then Viceroy here sent for me and said, 'Baron Lendrick, there is no man, after Plunkett, to whom we owe more than to yourself.' I bowed, and said, 'I do not accept the qualification, my Lord, even in favour of the distinguished Chancellor. I will not believe myself second to any.' I need not relate what ensued; the discussion was a long one; it was also a warm one; but he came back at last to the object of the interview, which was to say that the Prime Minister was willing to recommend my name to her Majesty for the Peerage—an honour, he was pleased to say, the public would see conferred upon me with approval; and I refused! Yes, sir, I refused what for thirty-odd years had formed the pride and the prize of my existence! I refused it, because I would not that her Majesty's favour should descend to one so unworthy of it as this fellow, or that his low-born children should inherit a high name of my procuring. I refused, sir, and I told the noble Marquess my reasons. He tried—pretty much as you have tried—to bring me to a more forgiving spirit; but I stopped him by saying, 'When I hear that your Excellency has invited to your table the scurrilous author of the lampoon against you in the 'Satirist,' I will begin to listen to the claims that may be urged on the score of forgiveness, not till then.'"

"I am wrong—very wrong—to let you talk on themes like this; we must keep them for calmer moments." Beattie laid his finger on the pulse as he spoke, and counted the beats by his watch.

"Well, sir, what says Death? will he consent to a 'nolle prosequi,' or must the cause go on?"

"You are not worse; and even that, after all this excitement, is something. Good-bye now till evening. No books—no newspapers, remember. Doze; dream; do anything but excite yourself."

"You are cruel, sir; you cut off all my enjoyments together. You deny me the resources of reading, and you deny me the solace of my wife's society." The cutting sarcasm of the last words was shown in the spiteful sparkle of his eye, and the insolent curl of his mouth; and as the Doctor retired, the memory of that wicked look haunted him throughout the day.

CHAPTER IV.

HOME DIPLOMACIES.

"Well, it's done now, Lucy, and it can't be helped," said young Lendrick to his sister, as, with an unlighted cigar between his lips, and his hands in the pockets of his shooting-jacket, he walked impatiently up and down the drawing-room. "I'm sure if I only suspected you were so strongly against it, I'd not have done it."

"My dear George, I'm only against it because I think papa would be so. You know we never see any one here when he is at home, and why should we now, because he is absent?"

"Just for that reason. It's our only chance, girl."

"Oh, George!"

"Well, I don't mean that exactly, but I said it to startle you. No, Lucy; but you see here's how the matter stands. I have been three

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whole days in their company. On Tuesday the young fellow gave me that book of flies and the top-joint of my rod. On yesterday I lunched with them. To-day they pressed me so hard to dine with them that I felt almost rude in persisting to refuse; and it was as much to avoid the awkwardness of the situation as anything else that I asked them up to tea this evening."

"I'm sure, George, if it would give you any pleasure——"

"Of course it gives me pleasure," broke he in; "I don't suspect that fellows of my age like to live like hermits. And whom do I ever see down here? Old Mills and old Tobin, and Larry Day the dog-breaker. I ask his pardon for putting him last, for he is the best of the three. Girls can stand this sort of nun's life, but I'll be hanged if it will do for us."

"And then, George," resumed she in the same tone; "remember they are both perfect strangers. I doubt if you even know their names."

"That I do—the old fellow is Sir Brook something or other. It's not Fogey, but it begins like it; and the other is called Trafford—Lionel, I think, is his Christian name. A glorious fellow too; was in the 9th Lancers and in the Blues, and is now here with the fifty—th because he went it too hard in the cavalry. He had a horse for the Derby two years ago." The tone of proud triumph in which he made this announcement seemed to say, Now all discussion about him may cease. "Not but," added he after a pause, "you might like the old fellow best; he has such a world of stories, and he draws so beautifully. The whole time we were in the boat he was sketching something; and he has a book full of odds and ends; a tea-party in China, quail-shooting in Java, a wedding in Candia—I can't tell what more; but he's to bring them up here with him."

"I was thinking, George, that it might be as well if you'd go down and ask Dr. Mills to come to tea. It would take off some of the awkwardness of our receiving two strangers."

"But they're not strangers, Lucy; not a bit of it. I call him Trafford, and he calls me Lendrick; and the old cove is the most familiar old fellow I ever met."

"Have you said anything to Nicholas yet?" asked she, in some eagerness.

"No, and that's exactly what I want you to do for me. That old bear bullies us all so, that I can't trust myself to speak to him."

"Well, don't go away, and I'll send for him now," and she rang the bell as she spoke. A smart-looking lad answered the summons, to whom she said, "Tell Nicholas I want him."

"Take my advice, Lucy, and merely say there are two gentlemen coming to tea this evening; don't let the old villain think you are consulting him about it, or asking his advice."

"I must do it my own way," said she; "only don't interrupt. Don't meddle, mind that, George." The door opened, and a very short, thick-set old man, dressed in a black coat and waistcoat, and drab breeches and white stockings, with large shoe-buckles in his shoes, entered. His face was large and red, the mouth immensely wide, and the eyes far set from each other, his low forehead being shadowed by a wig of coarse red hair, which moved when he spoke, and seemed almost to possess a sort of independent vitality.

He had been reading when he was summoned, and his spectacles had been pushed up over his forehead, while he still held the county paper in his hand—a sort of proud protest against being disturbed.

"You heard that Miss Lucy sent for you?" said George Lendrick, haughtily, as his eye fell upon the newspaper.

"I did," was the curt answer, as the old fellow, with a nervous shake of the head, seemed to announce that he was ready for battle.

"What I wanted, Nicholas, was this," interposed the girl in a voice of very winning sweetness; "Mr. George has invited two gentlemen this evening to tea."

"To tay!" cried Nicholas, as if the fact staggered all credulity.

"Yes, to tea; and I was thinking if you would go down to the town and get some biscuits, or a sponge-cake perhaps—whatever, indeed, you thought best; and also beg Dr. Mills to step in, saying that as papa was away——"

"That you was going to give a ball?"

"No. Not exactly that, Nicholas," said she, smiling; "but that two friends of my brother's——"

"And where did he meet his friends?" cried he, with a marked emphasis on the friends. "Two strangers. God knows who or what! Poachers as like as anything else. The ould one might be worse."

"Enough of this," said George, sternly. "Are you the master here? Go off, sir, and do what Miss Lucy has ordered you."

"I will not—the devil a step," said the old man, who now thrust the paper into a capacious pocket, and struck each hand on a hip. "Is it when the 'Jidge' is dying, when the newspapers has a column of the names that's calling to ask after him, you're to be carousing and feastin' here?"

"Dear Nicholas, there's no question of feasting. It is simply a cup of tea we mean to give, surely there's no carousing in that. And as to grandpapa, papa says that he was certainly better yesterday, and Dr. Beattie has hopes now."

"*I* haven't then, and I know him better than Dr. Beattie."

"What a pity they haven't sent for you for the consultation," said George, ironically.

"And look here, Nicholas," said Lucy, drawing the old man towards the door of a small room that led off the drawing-room. "We could have tea here; it will look less formal, and give less trouble; and Meares could wait—he does it very well; and you needn't be put out at all." These last words fell to a whisper; but he was beyond reserve, beyond flattery. The last speech of her brother still rankled in his memory, and all that fell upon his ear since that, fell unheeded.

"I was with your grandfather, Master George," said the old man, slowly, "twenty-one years before you were born! I carried his bag down to Court the day he defended Neal O'Gorman for high treason, and I was with him the morning he shot Luke Dillon at Castle Knock; and this I'll say and stand to, there's not a man in Ireland, high or low, knows the Chief Baron better than myself."

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"It must be a great comfort to you both," said George; but his sister had laid her hand on his mouth and made the words unintelligible.

"You'll say to Mr. Mills, Nicholas," said she, in a most coaxing way, "that I did not write, because I preferred sending my message by *you*, who could explain why I particularly wanted him this evening."

"I'll go, Miss Lucy, resarving the point, as they say in the law—resarving the point! because I don't give in that what you're doin' is right; and when the master comes home, I'm not goin' to defend it."

"We must bear up under that calamity as well as we can," said the young man, insolently; but Nicholas never looked towards or seemed to hear him.

"A barn-a-brack is better than a sponge-cake, because if there's some of it left it doesn't get stale, and one-and-sixpence will be enough; and I suppose you don't need a lamp?"

"Well, Nicholas, I must say, I think it would be better; and two candles on the small table, and two on the piano."

"Why don't you mention a fiddler?" said he, bitterly. "If it's a ball, there ought to be music?"

Unable to control himself longer, young Lendrick wrenched open the sash-door, and walked out into the lawn.

"The devil such a family for temper from this to Bantry!" said Nicholas; "and here's the company comin' already, or I'm mistaken. There's a boat makin' for the landing-place with two men in the stern."

Lucy implored him once more to lose no time on his errand, and hastened away to make some change in her dress to receive the strangers. Meanwhile George, having seen the boat, walked down to the shore to meet his friends.

Both Sir Brook and Trafford were enthusiastic in their praises of the spot. Its natural beauty was indeed great, but taste and culture had rendered it a marvel of elegance and refinement. Not merely were the trees grouped with reference to foliage and tint, but the flower-beds were so arranged that the laws of colour should be respected, and thus these plats of perfume were not less luxuriously rich in odour than they were captivating as pictures.

"It is all the governor's own doing," said George, proudly, "and he is continually changing the disposition of the plants. He says variety is a law of the natural world, and it is our duty to imitate it. Here comes my sister, gentlemen."

As though set in a beautiful frame, the lovely girl stood for an instant in the porch, where drooping honeysuckles and the tangled branches of a vine hung around her, and then came courteously to meet and welcome them.

"I am in ecstasy with all I see here, Miss Lendrick," said Sir Brook. "Old traveller that I am, I scarcely know where I have ever seen such a combination of beauty."

"Papa will be delighted to hear this," said she, with a pleasant smile; "it is the flattery he loves best."

"I'm always saying we could keep up a salmon-weir on the river for a tithe of what these carnations and primroses cost us," said George.

"Why, sir, if you had been in Eden you'd have made it a market-garden," said the old man.

"If the governor was a Duke of Devonshire all these caprices might be pardonable; but my theory is, roast-beef before roses."

While young Lendrick attached himself to Trafford, and took him here and there to show him the grounds, Sir Brook walked beside Lucy, who did the honours of the place with a most charming courtesy.

"I am almost ashamed, sir," said she, as they turned towards the house, "to have asked you to see such humble objects as these to which we attach value, for my brother tells me you are a great traveller; but it is just possible you have met in your journeys others who, like us, lived so much out of the world that they fancied they had the prettiest spot in it for their own."

"You must not ask me what I think of all I have seen here, Miss Lendrick, till my enthusiasm calms down;" and his look of admiration, so palpably addressed to herself, sent a flush to her cheeks. "A man's belongings are his history," said Sir Brook, quickly turning the conversation into an easier channel: "show me his study, his stable, his garden; let me see his hat, his cane, the volume he thrusts into his pocket, and I'll make you an indifferent good guess about his daily doings."

"Tell me of papa's. Come here, Tom," cried she, as the two young men came towards her, "and listen to a bit of divination."

"Nay, I never promised a lecture. I offered a confidence," said he in a half whisper; but she went on—"Sir Brook says that he reads people pretty much as Cuvier pronounced on a mastodon by some small minute detail that pertained to them. Here's Tom's cigar-case," said she, taking it from his pocket; "what do you infer from that, sir?"

"That he smokes the most execrable tobacco."

"But can you say why?" asked Tom, with a sly twinkle of his eye.

"Probably for the same reason I do myself," said Sir Brook, producing a very cheap cigar.

"Oh, that's a veritable Cuban compared to one of mine," cried Tom; "and by way of making my future life miserable, here has been Mr. Trafford filling my pockets with real Havannahs, giving me a taste for luxuries I ought never to have known of."

"Know everything, sir, go everywhere, see all that the world can show you; the wider a man's experiences the larger his nature and the more open his heart," said Fossbrooke, boldly.

"I like the theory," said Trafford to Miss Lendrick; "do you?"

"Sir Brook never meant it for women, I fancy," said she, in a low tone; but the old man overheard her, and said, "You are right. The guide ought to know every part of the mountain, the traveller need only know the path."

"Here comes a guide who is satisfied with very short excursions," cried Tom, laughing; "this is our parson, Dr. Mills."

The little mellow-looking, well-cared-for person who now joined them was a perfect type of old-bachelorhood, in its aspect of not unpleasant selfishness. Everything about him was neat, orderly, and appropriate; and though you saw at a glance it was all for himself and his

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own enjoyment it was provided, his good manners and courtesy were ever ready to extend its benefits to others; and a certain genial look he wore, and a manner that nature gifted him with, did him right good service in life, and made him pass for "an excellent fellow, though not much of a parson."

He was of use now, if only that by his presence Lucy felt more at ease, not to say that his violoncello, which always remained at the "Nest," made a pleasant accompaniment when she played, and that he sang with much taste some of those lyrics which are as much linked to Ireland by poetry as by music.

"I wish he was our chaplain—by Jove I do!" whispered Trafford to Lendrick; "he's the jolliest fellow of his cloth I have ever met."

"And such a cook," muttered the other.

"A cook!"

"Ay, a cook. I'll make him ask us to dinner, and you'll tell me if you ever ate fish as he gives it, or tasted maccaroni as dressed by him. I have a salmon for you, Doctor, a ten-pound fish. I wish it were bigger; but it is in splendid order."

"Did you set it?" asked the parson, eagerly.

"What does he mean by set it?" whispered Trafford.

"Setting means plunging it in very hot water soon after killing it, to preserve and harden the 'curd.' Yes; and I took your hint about the arbutus leaves too, Doctor. I covered it all up with them."

"You are a teachable youth, and shall be rewarded. Come and eat him to-morrow. Dare I hope that these gentlemen are disengaged, and will honour my poor parsonage? Will you favour me with your company at five o'clock, sir?"

Sir Brook bowed and accepted the invitation with pleasure.

"And you, sir?"

"Only too happy," said Trafford.

"Lucy, my dear, you must be one of us."

"Oh, I could not; it is impossible, Doctor—you know it is."

"I know nothing of the kind."

"Papa away—not to speak of his never encouraging us to leave home," muttered she, in a whisper.

"I accept no excuses, Lucy; such a rare opportunity may not occur to me in a hurry. Mrs. Brennan, my housekeeper, will be so proud to see you, that I'm not sure she'll not treat these gentlemen to her brandy peaches—a delicacy, I feel bound to say, she has never conceded to any one less than the bishop of the diocese."

"Don't ask me, Doctor. I know that papa——"

But he broke in, saying—

"'You know I'm your priest, and your conscience is mine;'

and besides, I really do want to see how the parsonage will look with a lady at the top of the table: who knows what it may lead to?"

"Come, Lucy, that's the nearest thing to a proposal I've heard for some time. You really must go now," said Tom.

"Papa will not like it," whispered she in his ear.

"Then he'll have to settle the matter with me, Lucy," said the Doctor, "for it was I who overruled you."

"Don't look to me, Miss Lendrick, to sustain you in your refusal," said Sir Brook, as the young girl turned towards him. "I have the strongest interest in seeing the Doctor successful."

If Trafford said nothing, the glance he gave her more than backed the old man's speech, and she turned away half vexed, half pleased, puzzled how to act, and flattered at the same time by an amount of attention so new to her and so strange. Still she could not bring herself to promise she would go, and wished them all good-night at last, without a pledge.

"Of course she will," muttered Tom in the Doctor's ear. "She's afraid of the governor; but I know he'll not be displeased—you may reckon on her."

CHAPTER V.

THE PICNIC ON HOLY ISLAND.

From the day that Sir Brook made the acquaintance of Tom Lendrick and his sister, he determined he would "pitch his tent," as he called it, for some time at Killaloe. They had, so to say, captivated the old man. The young fellow, by his frank, open, manly nature, his ardent love of sport in every shape, his invariable good-humour, and more than all these, by the unaffected simplicity of his character, had strongly interested him; while Lucy had made a far deeper impression by her gentleness, her refinement, an elegance in deportment that no teaching ever gives, and, along with these, a mind stored with thought and reflectiveness. Let us, however, be just to each, and own that her beauty and the marvellous fascination of her smile, gave her, even in that old man's eyes, an irresistible charm. It was a very long bygone, but he had once been in love, and the faint flicker of the memory had yet survived in his heart. It was just as likely Lucy bore no resemblance to her he had loved, but he fancied she did—he imagined that she was her very image. That was the smile, the glance, the tone, the gesture, which once had set his heart a-throbbing, and the illusion threw around her an immense fascination.

She liked him, too. Through all the strange incongruities of his character, his restless love of adventure and excitement, there ran a gentle liking for quiet pleasures. He loved scenery passionately, and with a painter's taste for colour and form; he loved poetry, which he read with a wondrous charm of voice and intonation. Nor was it without its peculiar power, this homage of an old old man, who rendered her the attentive service of a devoted admirer.

There is a very subtle flattering in the obsequious devotion of age to youth. It is, at least, an honest worship, an unselfish offering, and in this way the object of it may well feel proud of its tribute.

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From the Vicar, Dr. Mills, Fossbrooke had learned the chief events of Dr. Lendrick's history, of his estrangement from his father, his fastidious retirement from the world, and last of all his narrow fortune, apparently now growing narrower, since within the last year he had withdrawn his son from the University on the score of its expense.

A gold-medallist and a scholar, Dr. Lendrick would have eagerly coveted such honours for his son. It was probably the one triumph in life he would have set most store by, but Tom was one not made for collegiate successes. He had abilities, but they were not teachable qualities; he could pick up a certain amount of almost anything,—he could learn nothing. He could carry away from a chance conversation an amount of knowledge it had cost the talkers years to acquire, and yet, set him down regularly to work book-fashion, and either from want of energy, or concentration, or of that strong will which masters difficulties, just as a full current carries all before it—whichever of these was his defect—he arose from his task wearied, worn, but unadvanced.

When, therefore, his father would speak, as he sometimes did in confidence to the Vicar, in a tone of depression about Tom's deficiencies, the honest parson would feel perfectly lost in amazement at what he meant. To his eyes Tom Lendrick was a wonder, a prodigy. There was not a theme he could not talk on, and talk well too. "It was but the other day he told the chief engineer of the Shannon Company more about the geological formation of the river-basin than all his staff knew. Ay, and what's stranger," added the Vicar, "he understands the whole Colenso controversy better than I do myself." It is just possible that in the last panegyric there was nothing of exaggeration or excess. "And with all that, sir, his father goes on brooding over his neglected education, and foreshadowing the worst results from his ignorance."

"He is a fine fellow," said Fossbrooke, "but not to be compared with his sister."

"Not for mere looks, perhaps, nor for a graceful manner, and a winning address; but who would think of ranking Lucy's abilities with her brother's?"

"Not I," said Fossbrooke, boldly, "for I place hers far and away above them."

A sly twinkle of the Parson's eye showed to what class of advantages he ascribed the other's preference; but he said no more, and the controversy ended.

Every morning found Sir Brook at the Swan's Nest. He was fond of gardening, and had consummate taste in laying out ground, so that many pleasant surprises had been prepared for Dr. Lendrick's return. He drew, too, with great skill, and Lucy made considerable progress under his teaching; and as they grew more intimate, and she was not ashamed of the confession that she delighted in the Georgics of Virgil, they read whole hours together of those picturesque descriptions of rural life and its occupations, which are as true to nature at this hour as on the day they were written.

Perhaps the old man fancied that it was he who had suggested this intense appreciation of the poet. It is just possible that the young girl believed that she had reclaimed a wild, erratic, eccentric nature, and brought him back to the love of simple pleasures and a purer source of enjoyment. Whichever way the truth inclined, each was happy, each contented. And how fond are we all, of every age, of playing the missionary, of setting off into the savage districts of our neighbours' natures and combating their false idols, their superstitions and strange rites! The least adventurous and the least imaginative have these little outbursts of conversion, and all are more or less propagandists.

It was one morning, a bright and glorious one too, that while Tom and Lucy were yet at breakfast Sir Brook arrived and entered the breakfast-room.

"What a day for a grey hackle, in that dark pool under the larch trees!" cried Tom, as he saw him.

"What a day for a long walk to Mount Laurel!" said Lucy. "You said, t'other morning, you wanted cloud effects on the upper lake. I'll show you splendid ones to-day."

"I'll promise you a full basket before four o'clock," broke in Tom.

"I'll promise you a full sketch-book," said Lucy, with one of her sweetest smiles.

"And I'm going to refuse both; for I have a plan of my own, and a plan not to be gainsaid."

"I know it. You want us to go to work on that fish-pond. I'm certain it's that."

"No, Tom; it's the catalogue—the weary catalogue that he told me, as a punishment for not being able to find Machiavelli's Comedies last week, he'd make me sit down to on the first lovely morning that came."

"Better that than those dreary Georgics, which remind one of school, and the third form. But what's your plan, Sir Brook? We have thought of all the projects that can terrify us, and you look as if it ought to be a terror."

"Mine is a plan for pleasure, and pleasure only; so pack up at once, and get ready. Trafford arrived this morning."

"Where is he? I am so glad! Where's Trafford?" cried Tom, delighted.

"I have despatched him with the Vicar and two well-filled hampers to Holy Island, where I mean that we shall all picnic. There's my plan."

"And a jolly plan, too! I adhere unconditionally."

"And you, Lucy, what do you say?" asked Sir Brook, as the young girl stood with a look of some indecision and embarrassment.

"I don't say that it's not a very pleasant project, but——"

"But what, Lucy? Where's the but?"

She whispered a few words in his ear, and he cried out, "Isn't this too bad? She tells me Nicholas does not like all this gaiety; that Nicholas disapproves of our mode of life."

"No, Tom; I only said Nicholas thinks that papa would not like it."

"Couldn't we see Nicholas? Couldn't we have a commission to examine Nicholas?" asked Sir Brook, laughingly.

"I'll not be on it, that's all I know; for I should finish by chucking the witness into the Shannon. Come along, Lucy; don't let us lose this glorious morning. I'll get some lines and

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hooks together. Be sure you're ready when I come back."

As the door closed after him, Sir Brook drew near to Lucy where she stood in an attitude of doubt and hesitation. "I mustn't risk your good opinion of me rashly. If you really dislike this excursion, I will give it up," said he, in a low gentle voice.

"Dislike it? No; far from it. I suspect I would enjoy it more than any of you. My reluctance was simply on the ground that all this is so unlike the life we have been leading hitherto. Papa will surely disapprove of it. Oh, there comes Nicholas with a letter!" cried she, opening the sash-window. "Give it to me; it is from papa."

She broke the seal hurriedly, and ran rapidly over the lines. "Oh, yes! I will go now, and go with delight too. It is full of good news. He is to see grandpapa, if not to-morrow, the day after. He hopes all will be well. Papa knows your name, Sir Brook. He says, 'Ask your friend Sir Brook if he be any relative of a Sir Brook Fossbrooke who rescued Captain Langton some forty years ago from a Neapolitan prison. The print-shops were filled with his likeness when I was a boy.' Was he one of your family?" inquired she, looking up at him.

"I am the man," said he, calmly and coldly. "Langton was sentenced to the galleys for life for having struck the Count d'Aconi across the face with his glove; and the Count was nephew to the King. They had him at Capri working in chains, and I landed with my yacht's crew and liberated him."

"What a daring thing to do!"

"Not so daring as you fancy. The guard was surprised, and fled. It was only when reinforced that they showed fight. Our toughest enemies were the galley-slaves, who, when they discovered that we never meant to liberate them, attacked us with stones. This scar on my temple is a memorial of the affair."

"And Langton, what became of him?"

"He is now Lord Burrowfield. He gave me two fingers to shake the last time I met him at the Travellers."

"Oh, don't say that! Oh, don't tell me of such ingratitude!"

"My dear child, people usually regard gratitude as a debt, which, once acknowledged, is acquitted; and perhaps they are right. It makes all intercourse freer and less trammelled."

"Here comes Tom. May I tell him this story, or will you tell him yourself?"

"Not either, my dear Lucy. Your brother's blood is over-hot as it is. Let him not have any prompting to such exploits as these."

"But I may tell papa?"

"Just as well not, Lucy. There were scores of wild things attributed to me in those days. He may possibly remember some of them, and begin to suspect that his daughter might be in better company."

"How was it that you never told me of this exploit?" asked she, looking not without admiration at the hard stern features before her.

"My dear child, egotism is the besetting sin of old people, and even the most cautious lapse into it occasionally. Set me once a-talking of myself, all my prudence, all my reserve vanishes; so that as a measure of safety for my friends and myself too, I avoid the theme when I can. There! Tom is beckoning to us. Let us go to him at once."

Holy Island, or Inishcaltra, to give it its Irish name, is a wild spot, with little remarkable about it, save the ruins of seven churches and a curious well of fabulous depth. It was, however, a favourite spot with the Vicar, whose taste in localities was somehow always associated with some feature of festivity, the great merit of the present spot being that you could dine without any molestation from beggars. In such estimation, indeed, did he hold the class that he seriously believed their craving importunity to be one of the chief reasons of dyspepsia, and was profoundly convinced that the presence of Lazarus at his gate counterbalanced many of the goods which fortune had bestowed upon Dives.

"Here we dine in real comfort," said he, as he seated himself under the shelter of an ivy-covered wall, with a wide reach of the lake at his feet.

"When I come back from California with that million or two," said Tom, "I'll build a cottage here, where we can all come and dine continually."

"Let us keep the anniversary of the present day as a sort of foundation era," said the Vicar.

"I like everything that promises pleasure," said Sir Brook, "but I like to stipulate that we do not draw too long a bill on Fortune. Think how long a year is. This time twelvemonth, for example, you, my dear Doctor, may be a bishop, and not over inclined to these harmless levities. Tom there will be, as he hints, gold-crushing, at the end of the earth. Trafford, not improbably, ruling some rajah's kingdom in the far East. Of your destiny, fair Lucy, brightest of all, it is not for me to speak. Of my own it is not worth speaking."

"Nolo episcopari," said the Vicar; "pass me the madeira."

"You forget, perhaps, that is the phrase for accepting the mitre," said Sir Brook, laughing. "Bishops, like belles, say No when they mean Yes."

"And who told you that belles did?" broke in Lucy. "I am in a sad minority here, but I stand up for my sex."

"I repeat a popular prejudice, fair lady."

"And Lucy will not have it that belles are as illogical as bishops? I see I was right in refusing the bench," said the Vicar.

"What bright boon of Fortune is Trafford meditating the rejection of?" said Sir Brook; and the young fellow's cheek grew crimson as he tried to laugh off the reply.

"Who made this salad?" cried Tom.

"It was I; who dares to question it?" said Lucy. "The Doctor has helped himself twice to it, and that test I take to be a certificate to character."

"I used to have some skill in dressing a salad, but I have foregone the practice for many a day; my culinary gift got me sent out of Austria in twenty-four hours. Oh, it's nothing that deserves the name of a story," said Sir Brook, as the others looked at him for an explanation. "It was as long ago as the year 1806. Sir Robert Adair had been our minister at

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Vienna, when, a rupture taking place between the two Governments, he was recalled. He did not, however, return to England, but continued to live as a private citizen at Vienna. Strangely enough, from the moment that our embassy ceased to be recognised by the Government, our countrymen became objects of especial civility. I myself, amongst the rest, was the *bien-venu* in some of the great houses, and even invited by Count Cobourg Cohari to those *déjeûners* which he gave with such splendour at Maria Hülfe.

"At one of these, as a dish of salad was handed round, instead of eating it, like the others, I proceeded to make a very complicated dressing for it on my plate, calling for various condiments, and seasoning my mess in a most refined and ingenious manner. No sooner had I given the finishing touch to my great achievement when the Grand-duchess Sophia, who it seems had watched the whole performance, sent a servant round to beg that I would send her my plate. She accompanied the request with a little bow and a smile whose charm I can still recall. Whatever the reason, before I awoke next morning an agent of the police entered my room and informed me my passports were made out for Dresden, and that his orders were to give me the pleasure of his society till I crossed the frontier. There was no minister, no envoy to appeal to, and nothing left but to comply. They said Go, and I went."

"And all for a dish of salad!" cried the Vicar.

"All for the bright eyes of an Archduchess, rather," broke in Lucy, laughing.

"The old man's grateful smile at the compliment to his gallantry showed how, even in a heart so world-worn, the vanity of youth survived.

"I declare it was very hard," said Tom—"precious hard."

"If you mean to give up the salad, so think I too," cried the Vicar.

"I'll be shot if I'd have gone," broke in Trafford.

"You'd probably have been shot if you had stayed," replied Tom.

"There are things we submit to in life, not because the penalty of resistance affrights us, but because we half acquiesce in their justice. You, for instance, Trafford, are well pleased to be here on leave, and enjoy yourself, as I take it, considerably; and yet the call of duty—some very commonplace duty, perhaps—would make you return to-morrow in all haste."

"Of course it would," said Lucy.

"I'm not so sure of it," murmured Trafford, sullenly; "I'd rather go into close arrest for a week than I'd lose this day here."

"Bravo! here's your health, Lionel," cried Tom. "I do like to hear a fellow say he is willing to pay the cost of what pleases him."

"I must preach wholesome doctrine, my young friends," broke in the Vicar. "Now that we have dined well, I would like to say a word on abstinence."

"You mean to take no coffee, Doctor, then?" asked Lucy, laughing.

"That I do, my sweet child—coffee and a pipe too, for I know you are tolerant of tobacco."

"I hope she is," said Tom, "or she'd have a poor time of it in the house with me."

"I'll put no coercion upon my tastes on this occasion, for I'll take a stroll through the ruins, and leave you to your wine," said she, rising.

They protested in a mass against her going. "We cannot lock the door, Lucy, *de facto*," said Sir Brook, "but we do it figuratively."

"And in that case I make my escape by the window," said she, springing through an old lancet-shaped orifice in the Abbey wall.

"There goes down the sun and leaves us but a grey twilight," said Sir Brook, mournfully, as he looked after her. "If there were only enough beauty on earth I verily believe we might dispense with parsons."

"Push me over the bird's-eye, and let me nourish myself till your millennium comes," said the Vicar.

"What a charming girl she is! her very beauty fades away before the graceful attraction of her manner!" whispered Sir Brook to the Doctor.

"Oh, if you but knew her as I do! If you but knew how, sacrificing all the springtime of her bright youth, she has never had a thought save to make herself the companion of her poor father—a sad, depressed, sorrow-struck man, only rescued from despair by that companionship! I tell you, sir, there is more courage in submitting one's self to the nature of another than in facing a battery."

Sir Brook grasped the Parson's hand and shook it cordially. The action spoke more than any words. "And the brother, Doctor—what say you of the brother?" whispered he.

"One of those that the old adage says 'either makes the spoon or spoils the horn.' That's Master Tom there."

Low as the words were uttered they caught the sharp ears of him they spoke of, and with a laughing eye he cried out, "What's that evil prediction you're uttering about me, Doctor?"

"I am just telling Sir Brook here that it's pure head and tails how you turn out. There's stuff in you to make a hero, but it's just as likely you'll stop short at a highwayman."

"I think I could guess which of the two would best suit the age we live in," said Tom, gaily. "Are we to have another bottle of that madeira, for I suspect I see the Doctor putting up the corkscrew?"

"You are to have no more wine than what's before you till you land me at the quay of Killaloe. When temperance means safety as well as forbearance, it's one of the first of virtues."

The Vicar, indeed, soon grew impatient to depart. Fine as the evening was then, it might change. There was a feeling, too, not of damp, but chilliness; at all events, he was averse to being on the water late, and as he was the great promoter of these little convivial gatherings, his word was law.

It is not easy to explain how it happened that Trafford sat beside Lucy. Perhaps the trim of the boat required it; certainly, however, nothing required that the Vicar, who sat next Lucy on the other side, should fall fast asleep almost as soon as he set foot on board. Meanwhile, Sir Brook and Tom had engaged in an animated discussion as to the possibility of settling in Ireland as a man settles in some lone island in

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the Pacific, teaching the natives a few of the needs of civilisation and picking up a few convenient ways of theirs in turn. Sir Brook warming with the theme so far as to exclaim at last, "If I only had a few of those thousands left me which I lost, squandered, or gave away, I'd try the scheme, and you should be my lieutenant, Tom."

It was one of those projects, very pleasant in their way, where men can mingle the serious with the ludicrous—where actual wisdom may go hand in hand with downright absurdity; and so did they both understand it, mingling the very sagest reflections with projects the wildest and most eccentric. Their life, as they sketched it, was to be almost savage in freedom, untrammelled by all the tiresome conventionalities of the outer world, and at the same time offering such an example of contentedness and comfort as to shame the condition of all without the Pale.

They agreed that the Vicar must join them—he should be their Bishop. He might grumble a little at first about the want of hot plates or finger-glasses, but he would soon fall into their ways, and some native squaw would console him for the loss of Mrs. Brennan's housekeeping gifts.

And Trafford and Lucy all this time—what did they talk of? Did they, too, imagine a future and plan out a life-road in company? Far too timid for that—they lingered over the past, each asking some trait of the other's childhood, eager to hear any little incident which might mark character or indicate temper. And at last they came down to the present—to the very hour they lived in, and laughingly wondered at the intimacy that had grown up between them. "Only twelve days to-morrow since we first met," said Lucy, and her colour rose as she said it, "and here we are talking away as if—as if——"

"As if what?" cried he, only by an effort suppressing her name as it rose to his lips.

"As if we knew each other for years. To me it seems the strangest thing in the world—I who have never had friendships or companionships. To you, I have no doubt, it is common enough."

"But it is not," cried he, eagerly. "Such fortune never befell me before. I have gone a good deal into life—seen scores of people in country-houses and the like; but I never met any one before I could speak to of myself,—I mean, that I had courage to tell—not that exactly—but that I wanted them to know I wasn't so bad a fellow—so reckless or so heartless as people thought me."

"And is that the character you bear?" said she, with, though not visible to him, a faint smile on her mouth.

"I think it's what my family would say of me,—I mean now, for once on a time I was a favourite at home."

"And why are you not still?"

"Because I was extravagant; because I went into debt; because I got very easily into scrapes, and very badly out of them—not dishonourably, mind; the scrapes I speak of were money troubles, and they brought me into collision with my governor. That was how it came about I was sent over here. They meant as a punishment what has turned out the greatest happiness of my life."

"How cold the water is," said Lucy, as, taking off her glove, she suffered her hand to dip in the water beside the boat.

"Deliciously cold," said he, as, plunging in his hand, he managed, as though by accident, to touch hers. She drew it rapidly away, however, and then, to prevent the conversation returning to its former channel, said aloud, "What *are* you laughing over so heartily, Sir Brook? You and Tom appear to have fallen upon a mine of drollery. Do share it with us."

"You shall hear it all one of these days, Lucy. Jog the Doctor's arm now and wake him up, for I see the lights at the boathouse, and we shall soon be on shore."

"And sorry I am for it," muttered Trafford, in a whisper: "I wish this night could be drawn out to years."

CHAPTER VI.

WAITING ON.

On the sixth day after Dr. Lendrick's arrival in Dublin—a fruitless journey so far as any hope of reconciliation was concerned—he resolved to return home. His friend Beattie, however, induced him to delay his departure to the next day, clinging to some small hope from a few words that had dropped from Sir William on that same morning. "Let me see you to-night, Doctor; I have a note to show you which I could not to-day with all these people about me." Now the people in question resolved themselves into one person, Lady Lendrick, who indeed bustled into the room and out of it, slammed doors and upset chairs in a fashion that might well have excused the exaggeration that converted her into a noun of multitude. A very warm altercation had occurred, too, in the Doctor's presence with reference to some letter from India, which Lady Lendrick was urging Sir William to reply to, but which he firmly declared he would not answer.

"How I am to treat a man subject to such attacks of temper, so easily provoked, and so incessantly irritated, is not clear to me. At all events I will see him to-night, and hear what he has to say to me. I am sure it has no concern with this letter from India." With these words Beattie induced his friend to defer his journey for another day.

It was a long and anxious day to poor Lendrick. It was not alone that he had to suffer the bitter disappointment of all his hopes of being received by his father and admitted to some gleam of future favour, but he had discovered that certain debts which he had believed long settled by the Judge were still outstanding against him, Lady Lendrick having interfered to prevent their payment, while she assured the creditors that if they had patience Dr. Lendrick would one day or other be in a position to acquit them. Between two and three thousand pounds thus hung over him of indebtedness

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above all his calculations, and equally above all his ability to meet.

"We thought you knew all this, Dr. Lendrick," said Mr. Hack, Sir William's agent; "we imagined you were a party to the arrangement, understanding that you were reluctant to bring these debts under the Chief Baron's eyes, being moneys lent to your wife's relations."

"I believed that they were paid," was all his reply, for the story was a painful one of trust betrayed and confidence abused, and he did not desire to revive it. He had often been told that his step-mother was the real obstacle to all hope of reconciliation with his father, but that she had pushed her enmity to him to the extent of his ruin was more than he was prepared for. They had never met, but at one time letters had frequently passed between them. Hers were marvels of good wishes and kind intentions, dashed with certain melancholy reflections over some shadowy unknown something which had been the cause of his estrangement from his father, but which time and endurance might not impossibly diminish the bitterness of, though with very little hope of leading to a more amicable relation. She would assume, besides, occasionally a kind of companionship in sorrow, and as though the confession had burst from her unawares, avow that Sir William's temper was more than human nature was called upon to submit to, and that years only added to those violent outbursts of passion which made the existence of all around him a perpetual martyrdom. These always wound up with some sweet congratulations on "Tom's good fortune in his life of peaceful retirement," and the "tranquil pleasures of that charming spot of which every one tells me such wonders, and which the hope of visiting is one of my most entrancing daydreams." We give the passage textually, because it occurred without a change of a word thus in no less than five different letters.

This formal repetition of a phrase, and certain mistakes she made about the names of his children, first opened Lendrick's eyes as to the sincerity and affection of his correspondent, for he was the least suspicious of men, and regarded distrust as a disgrace to him who entertained it.

Over all these things now did he ponder during this long dreary day. He did not like to go out lest he should meet old acquaintances and be interrogated about his father, of whom he knew less than almost every one. He shunned the tone of compassionate interest men met him with, and he dreaded even the old faces that reminded him of the past. He could not read: he tried, but could not. After a few minutes he found that his thoughts wandered off from the book and centred on his own concerns, till his head ached with the weary round of those difficulties which came ever back, and back, and back again undiminished, unrelieved, and unsolved. The embarrassments of life are not, like chess problems, to be resolved by skilful combination: they are to be encountered by temper, by patience, by daring, at one time; by submission at another; by a careful consideration of a man's own powers, and by a clear-sighted estimate of his neighbours; and all these exercised not beforehand, nor in retirement, but on the very field itself where the conflict is raging and the fight at its hottest.

It was late at night when Beattie returned home, and entered the study where Lendrick sat awaiting him. "I am very late, Tom," said he, as he threw himself into an arm-chair, like one fatigued and exhausted; "but it was impossible to get away. Never in all my life have I seen him so full of anecdote, so abounding in pleasant recollections, so ready-witted, and so brilliant. I declare to you that if I could but recite the things he said, or give them even with a faint semblance of the way he told them, it would be the most amusing page of bygone Irish history. It was a grand review of all the celebrated men whom he remembered in his youth, from the eccentric Lord Bristol, the Bishop of Down, to O'Connell and Shiel. Nor did his own self-estimate, high as it was, make the picture in which he figured less striking, nor less memorable his concluding words, as he said, 'These fellows are all on history, Beattie,—every man of them. There are statues to them in our highways, and men visit the spots that gave them birth; and here am I, second to none of them. Trinity College and the Four Courts will tell you if I speak in vanity; and here am I; and the only question about me is, when I intend to vacate the bench, when it will be my good pleasure to resign—they are not particular which—my judgeship or my life. But, sir, I mean not to do either; I mean to live and protest against the inferiority of the men around me, and the ingratitude of the country that does not know how to appreciate the one man of eminence it possesses.' I assure you, Tom, vain and insolent as the speech was, as I listened I thought it was neither. There was a haughty dignity about him, to which his noble head and his deep sonorous voice and his commanding look lent effect that overcame all thought of attributing to such a man any over-estimate of his powers."

"And this note that he wished to show you—what was it?"

"Oh, the note was a few lines written in an adjoining room by Balfour, the Viceroy's secretary. It seems that his Excellency, finding all other seductions fail, thought of approaching your father through you."

"Through *me!* It was a bright inspiration."

"Yes; he sent Balfour to ask if the Chief Baron would feel gratified by the post of Hospital Inspector at the Cape being offered to you. It is worth eight hundred a-year, and a house."

"Well, what answer did he give?" asked Lendrick eagerly.

"He directed Balfour, who only saw Lady Lendrick, to reduce the proposal to writing. I don't fancy that the accomplished young gentleman exactly liked the task, but he did not care to refuse, and so he sat down and wrote one of the worst notes I ever read."

"Worst—in what way?"

"In every way. It was scarcely intelligible, without a previous knowledge of its contents, and so worded as to imply that when the Chief Baron had acceded to the proposal, he had so bound himself in gratitude to the Government that all honourable retreat was closed to him. I wish you saw your father's face when he read it. 'Beattie,' said he, 'I have no right to say

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Tom must refuse this offer; but if he should do so, I will make the document you see there be read in the House, and my name is not William Lendrick if it do not cost them more than that peerage they so insolently refused me. Go now and consult your friend; it was so he called you. If his wants are such that this place is of consequence to him, let him accept it. I shall not ask his reasons for whatever course he may take. *My* reply is already written, and to his Excellency in person.' This he said in a way to imply that its tone was one not remarkable for conciliation or courtesy.

"I thought the opportunity a favourable one to say that you were in town at the moment, that the accounts of his illness had brought you up, and that you were staying at my house.

"'The sooner will you be able to communicate with him, sir,' said he, haughtily."

"No more than that!"

"No more, except that he added, 'Remember, sir, his acceptance or his refusal is to be his own act, not to be intimated in any way to me, nor to come through me.'"

"This is unnecessary harshness," said Lendrick, with a quivering lip; "there was no need to tell me how estranged we are from each other."

"I fancied I could detect a struggle with himself in all his sternness; and his hand trembled when I took it to say 'good-bye.' I was going to ask if you might not be permitted to see him, even for a brief moment; but I was afraid, lest in refusing he might make a reconciliation still more remote, and so I merely said, 'May I leave you those miniatures I showed you a few days ago?' His answer was, 'You may leave them, sir.'

"As I came down to the hall I met Lady Lendrick. She was in evening dress, going out, but had evidently waited to catch me as I passed."

"'You find the Chief much better, don't you?' asked she. I bowed and assented. 'And he will be better still,' added she, 'when all these anxieties are over.' She saw that I did not or would not apprehend her meaning, and added, 'I mean about his resignation, which, of course, you will advise him to. The Government are really behaving so very well, so liberal, and withal so delicate. If they had been our own people I doubt if they would have shown anything like the same generosity.'

"'I have heard of nothing but the offer to Dr. Lendrick,' said I.

"She seemed confused, and moved on; and then recovering herself, said, 'And a most handsome offer it is. I hope he thinks so.'

"With this we parted, and I believe now I have told you almost word for word everything that occurred concerning you."

"And what do *you* say to all this, Beattie?" asked Lendrick, in a half sad tone.

"I say that if in your place, Tom, I would accept. It may be that the Chief Baron will interpose and say, Don't go; or it may be that your readiness to work for your bread should conciliate him; he has long had the impression that you are indisposed to exertion, and too fond of your own ease."

"I know it—I know it; Lady Lendrick has intimated as much to me."

"At all events, you can make no mistake in entertaining the project, and certainly the offer is not to be despised."

"It is of him, and of him alone, I am thinking, Beattie. If he would let me see him, admit me once more on my old terms of affection, I would go anywhere, do anything that he counselled. Try, my dear friend, to bring this about; do your best for me, and remember I will subscribe to any terms, submit to anything, if he will only be reconciled to me.

"It will be hard if we cannot manage this somehow," said Beattie; "but now let us to bed. It is past two o'clock. Good-night, Tom; sleep well, and don't dream of the Cape or the Caffres."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FOUNTAIN OF HONOUR.

THAT ancient and incongruous pile which goes by the name of the Castle in Dublin, and to which Irishmen very generally look as the well from which all honours and places flow, is not remarkable for either the splendour or space it affords to the inmates beneath its roof. Up held by a great prestige perhaps, as in the case of certain distinguished people, who affect a humble exterior and very simple belongings, it may deem that its own transcendent importance has no need of accessories. Certainly the ugliness of its outside is in no way unbalanced by the meanness within; and even the very highest of those which claim its hospitality are lodged in no princely fashion.

In a corner of the old red brick quadrangle, to the right of the state-entrance, in a small room whose two narrow windows looked into a lane, sat a very well-dressed young gentleman at a writing-table. Short and disposed to roundness in face as well as figure, Mr. Cholmondely Balfour scarcely responded in appearance to his imposing name. Nature had not been as bountiful, perhaps, as Fortune; for while he was rich, well-born, and considerably gifted in abilities, his features were unmistakably common and vulgar, and all the aids of dress could not atone for the meanness in his general look. Had he simply accepted his image as a thing to be quietly borne and submitted to, the case might not have been so very bad; but he took it as something to be corrected, changed, and ameliorated, and the result was a perpetual struggle to make the most ordinary traits and commonplace features appear the impress of one on whom Nature had written gentleman. It would have been no easy task to have imposed on him in a question of his duty. He was the private secretary of the Viceroy, who was his maternal uncle. It would have been a tough task to have misled or deceived him in any matter open to his intelligence to examine; but upon this theme, there was not the inventor of a hair-wash, a skin-paste, a whisker-dye, or a pearl-powder, that might not have led him captive. A bishop might have found difficulty in getting audience

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of him—a barber might have entered unannounced; and while the lieutenant of a county sat waiting in the antechamber, the tailor, with a new waistcoat pattern, walked boldly into the august presence. Entering life by that *petite porte* of politics, an Irish office, he had conceived a very humble estimate of the people amongst whom he was placed. Regarding his extradition from whitehall and its precincts as a sort of probationary banishment, he felt, however, its necessity; and as naval men are accredited with two years of service for every one year on the coast of Africa, Mr. Balfour was aware that a grateful Government could equally recognise the devotion of him who gave some of the years of his youth to the Fernando Po of statecraft.

This impression being rarely personal in its consequences was not of much moment, but it was conjoined with a more serious error, which was to imagine that all rule and governance in Ireland should be carried on with a Machiavellian subtlety. The people, he had heard, were quick-witted; he must therefore out-manœuvre them. Jobbery had been, he was told, the ruin of Ireland; he would show its inefficiency by the superior skill with which he could wield its weapon. To be sure his office was a very minor one, its influence very restricted, but Mr. Balfour was ambitious; he was a Viceroy's nephew; he had sat four months in the House, from which he had been turned out on a petition. He had therefore social advantages to build on, abilities to display, and wrongs to avenge; and as a man too late for the train speculates during the day how far on his road he might have been by this time or by that, so did Mr. Balfour continually keep reminding himself how, but for that confounded petition, he might now have been a Treasury this or a Board of Trade that—a corporal, in fact, in that great army whose commissioned officers are amongst the highest in Europe.

Let us now present him to our reader, as he lay back in his chair, and by a hand-bell summoned his messenger.

"I say, Watkins, when Clancy calls about those trousers show him in, and send some one over to the packet-office about the phosphorus blacking; you know we are on the last jar of it. If the Solicitor-General should come——"

"He is here, sir; he has been waiting these twenty minutes. I told him you were with his Excellency."

"So I was—so I always am," said he, throwing a half-smoked cigar into the fire. "Admit him."

A pale, careworn, anxious-looking man, whose face was not without traces of annoyance at the length of time he had been kept waiting, now entered and sat down.

"Just where we were yesterday, Pemberton," said Balfour, as he arose and stood with his back to the fire, the tails of his gorgeous dressing-gown hanging over his arms. "Intractable as he ever was; he won't die, and he won't resign."

"His friends say he is perfectly willing to resign if you agree to his terms."

"That may be possible; the question is, What are his terms? Have you a precedent of a Chief Baron being raised to the peerage?"

"It's not, as I understand, the peerage he insists on; he inclines to a moneyed arrangement."

"We are too poor, Pemberton,—we are too poor. There's a deep gap in our customs this quarter. It's reduction we must think of, not outlay."

"If the changes *are* to be made," said the other, with a tone of impatience, "I certainly ought to be told at once, or I shall have no time left for my canvass."

"An Irish borough, Pemberton—an Irish borough requires so little," said Balfour, with a compassionate smile.

"Such is not the opinion over here, sir," said Pemberton, stiffly; "and I might even suggest some caution in saying it."

"Caution is the badge of all our tribe," said Balfour, with a burlesque gravity. "By the way, Pemberton, his Excellency is greatly disappointed at the issue of these Cork trials; why didn't you hang these fellows?"

"Juries can no more be coerced here than in England; they brought them in not guilty."

"We know all that, and we ask you why? There certainly was little room for doubt in the evidence."

"When you have lived longer in Ireland, Mr. Balfour, you will learn that there are other considerations in a trial than the testimony of the witnesses."

"That's exactly what I said to his Excellency; and I remarked, If Pemberton comes into the House, he must prepare for a sharp attack about these trials."

"And it is exactly to ascertain if I am to enter Parliament that I have come here to-day," said the other, angrily.

"Bring me the grateful tidings that the Lord Chief Baron has joined his illustrious predecessors in that distinguished court, I'll answer you in five minutes."

"Beattie declares he is better this morning. He says that he has in all probabilty years of life before him."

"There's nothing so hard to kill as a judge, except it be an archbishop. I believe a sedentary life does it; they say if a fellow will sit still and never move he may live to any age."

Pemberton took an impatient turn up and down the room, and then wheeling about directly in front of Balfour, said—"If his Excellency knew perhaps that I do not want the House of Commons——"

"Not want the House—not wish to be in Parliament?"

"Certainly not. If I enter the House it is as a law-officer of the Crown; personally, it is no object to me."

"I'll not tell him that, Pem. I'll keep your secret safe, for I tell you frankly it would ruin you to reveal it."

"It's no secret, sir; you may proclaim it—you may publish it in the 'Gazette.' But really we are wasting much valuable time here. It is now two o'clock, and I must go down to Court. I have only to say that if no arrangement be come to before this time to-morrow——" He stopped short. Another word might have committed him, but he pulled up in time.

"Well, what then?" asked Balfour, with a half smile.

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"I have heard you pride yourself, Mr. Balfour," said the other, recovering, "on your skill in nice negotiation; why not try what you could do with the Chief Baron?"

"Are there women in the family?" said Balfour, caressing his mustache.

"No; only his wife."

"I've seen her," said he, contemptuously.

"He quarrelled with his only son, and has not spoken to him, I believe, for nigh thirty years, and the poor fellow is struggling on as a country doctor somewhere in the west."

"What if we were to propose to do something for him? Men are often not averse to see those assisted whom their own pride refuses to help."

"I scarcely suspect you'll acquire his gratitude that way."

"We don't want his gratitude, we want his place. I declare I think the idea a good one. There's a thing now at the Cape, an inspectorship of something—Hottentots or hospitals, I forget which. His Excellency asked to have the gift of it; what if we were to appoint this man?"

"Make the crier of his Court a Commissioner in Chancery, and Baron Lendrick will be more obliged to you," said Pemberton, with a sneer. "He is about the least forgiving man I ever knew or heard of."

"Where is this son of his to be found?"

"I saw him yesterday walking with Dr. Beattie. I have no doubt Beattie knows his address. But let me warn you once more against the inutility of the step you would take. I doubt if the old Judge would as much as thank you."

Balfour turned round to the glass and smiled sweetly at himself, as though to say that he had heard of some one who knew how to make these negotiations successful—a fellow of infinite readiness, a clever fellow, but withal one whose good looks and distinguished air left even his talents in the background.

"I think I'll call and see the Chief Baron myself," said he. "His Excellency sends twice a-day to inquire, and I'll take the opportunity to make him a visit—that is, if he will receive me."

"It is doubtful. At all events, let me give you one hint for your guidance. Neither let drop Mr. Attorney's name nor mine in your conversation; avoid the mention of any one whose career might be influenced by the Baron's retirement; and talk of him less as a human being than as an institution that is destined to endure as long as the British constitution."

"I wish it was a woman—if it was only a woman I had to deal with, the whole affair might be deemed settled."

"If you should be able to do anything before the mail goes out to-night, perhaps you will inform me," said Pemberton, as he bowed and left the room. "And these are the men they send over here to administer the country!" muttered he, as he descended the stairs—"such are the intelligences that are to rule Ireland! Was it Voltaire who said there was nothing so inscrutable in all the ways of Providence as the miserable smallness of those creatures to whom the destiny of nations was committed."

Ruminating over this, he hastened on to a *nisi prius* case.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PUZZLING COMMISSION.

As Colonel Cave re-entered his quarters after morning parade in the Royal Barracks of Dublin, he found the following letter, which the post had just delivered. It was headed, "Strictly Private," with three dashes under the words:—

"*Holt-Trafford.*

"MY DEAR COLONEL CAVE,—Sir Hugh is confined to bed with a severe attack of gout—the doctors call it flying gout. He suffers greatly, and his nerves are in a state of irritation that makes all attempt at writing impossible. This will be my apology for obtruding upon you, though perhaps the cause in which I write might serve for excuse. We are in the deepest anxiety about Lionel. You are already aware how heavily his extravagance has cost us. His play-debts amounted to above ten thousand pounds, and all the cleverness of Mr. Joel has not been able to compromise with the tradespeople for less than as much more; nor are we yet done with demands from various quarters. It is not, however, of these that I desire to speak. Your kind offer to take him into your own regiment, and exercise the watchful supervision of a parent, has relieved us of much anxiety, and his own sincere affection for you is the strongest assurance we can have that the step has been a wise one. Our present uneasiness has, however, a deeper source than mere pecuniary embarrassment. The boy—he is very little more than a boy in years—has fallen in love, and gravely writes to his father for consent that he may marry. I assure you the shock brought back all Sir Hugh's most severe symptoms; and his left eye was attacked with an inflammation such as Dr. Gole says he never saw equalled. So far as the incoherency of his letter will permit us to guess, the girl is a person in a very humble condition of life, the daughter of a country doctor, of course without family or fortune. That he made her acquaintance by an accident, as he informs us, is also a reason to suppose that they are not people in society. The name, as well as I can decipher it, is Lendrich or Hendrich—neither very distinguished!

"Now, my dear Colonel, even to a second son, such an alliance would be perfectly intolerable—totally at variance with all his father's plans for him, and inconsistent with the station he should occupy. But there are other considerations—too sad ones, too melancholy indeed to be spoken of, except where the best interests of a family are to be regarded, which press upon us here. The last accounts of George from Madeira leave us scarcely a hope. The climate, from which so much was expected, has done nothing. The season has been unhappily most severe, and the doctors agree in declaring that the malady has not yielded in any respect. You will see, therefore, what a change any day may accomplish in Lionel's prospects, and how doubly important it is that he should contract no ties inconsistent with a station of no mean importance. Not that these considerations would weigh with Lionel in the least: he was always headstrong, rash, and self-willed; and

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if he were, or fancied that he were, bound in honour to do a thing, I know well that all persuasions would be unavailing to prevent him. I cannot believe, however, that matters can have gone so far here. This acquaintanceship must be of the very shortest; and however designing and crafty such people may be, there will surely be some means of showing them that their designs are impracticable, and of a nature only to bring disappointment and disgrace upon themselves. That Sir Hugh would give his consent is totally out of the question—a thing not to be thought of for a moment; indeed I may tell you in confidence that his first thought on reading L.'s letter was to carry out a project to which George had already consented, and by which the entail should be cut off, and our third son, Harry, in that case would inherit. This will show you to what extent his indignation would carry him.

"Now what is to be done? for, really, it is but time lost in deploring when prompt action alone can save us. Do you know, or do you know any one who does know, these Hendrichs or Lendrichs—who are they, what are they? Are they people to whom I could write myself? or are they in that rank in life which would enable us to make some sort of compromise? Again, could you in any way obtain L.'s confidence and make him open his heart to you *first?* This is the more essential, because the moment he hears of anything like coercion or pressure his whole spirit will rise in resistance, and he will be totally unmanageable. You have perhaps more influence over him than any one else, and even your influence he would resent if he suspected any dominance.

"I am madly impatient to hear what you will suggest. Will it be to see these people? to reason with them? to explain to them the fruitlessness of what they are doing? Will it be to talk to the girl herself?

"My first thought was to send for Lionel, as his father was so ill, but on consideration I felt that a meeting between them might be the thing of all others to be avoided. Indeed, in Sir Hugh's present temper, I dare not think of the consequences.

"Might it be advisable to get Lionel attached to some foreign station? If so, I am sure I could manage it—only, would he go? there's the question—would he go? I am writing in such distress of mind, and so hurriedly, too, that I really do not know what I have set down, and what I have omitted. I trust, however, there is enough of this sad case before you to enable you to counsel me, or, what is much better, act for me. I wish I could send you L.'s letter; but Sir Hugh has put it away, and I cannot lay my hand on it. Its purport, however, was to obtain authority from us to approach this girl's relations as a suitor, and to show that his intentions were known to and concurred in by his family. The only gleam of hope in the epistle was his saying, 'I have not the slightest reason to believe she would accept me, but the approval of my friends will certainly give me the best chance.'

"Now, my dear Colonel, compassionate my anxiety, and write to me at once—something—anything. Write such a letter as Sir Hugh may see; and if you have anything secret or confidential, enclose it as a separate slip. Was it not unfortunate that we refused that Indian appointment for him? All this misery might have been averted. You may imagine how Sir Hugh feels this conduct the more bitterly, coming, as I may say, on the back of all his late indiscretions.

"Remember, finally, happen what may, this project must not go on. It is a question of the boy's whole future and life. To defy his father is to disinherit himself; and it is not impossible that this might be the most effectual argument you could employ with these people who now seek to entangle him.

"I have certainly no reason to love Ireland. It was there that my cousin Cornwallis married that dreadful creature who is now suing him for cruelty, and exposing the family throughout England.

"Sir Hugh gave directions last week about lodging the purchase-money for his company, but he wrote a few lines to Cox's last night—to what purport I cannot say—not impossibly to countermand it. What affliction all this is!"

As Colonel Cave read over this letter for a second time, he was not without misgivings about the even small share to which he had contributed in this difficulty. It was evidently during the short leave he had granted that this acquaintanceship had been formed; and Fossbrooke's companionship was the very last thing in the world to deter a young and ardent fellow from anything high-flown or romantic. "I ought never to have thrown them together," muttered he, as he walked his room in doubt and deliberation.

He rang his bell and sent for the Adjutant. "Where's Trafford?" asked he.

"You gave him three days' leave yesterday, sir. He's gone down to that fishing village where he went before."

"Confound the place! Send for him at once—telegraph. No—let us see—his leave is up to-morrow?"

"The next day at ten he was to report."

"His father is ill—an attack of gout," muttered the Colonel, to give some colour to his agitated manner. "But it is better, perhaps, not to alarm him. The seizure seems passing off."

"He said something about asking for a longer term; he wants a fortnight, I think. The season is just beginning now."

"He shall not have it, sir. Take good care to warn him not to apply. It will breed discontent in the regiment to see a young fellow who has not been a year with us obtain a leave every ten or fifteen days."

"If it were any other than Trafford, there would be plenty of grumbling. But he is such a favourite!"

"I don't know that a worse accident could befall any man. Many a fine fellow has been taught selfishness by the over-estimate others have formed of him. See that you keep him to his duty, and that he is to look for no favouritism."

The Colonel did not well know why he said this, nor did he stop to think what might come of it. It smacked, to his mind, however, of something prompt, active, and energetic.

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His next move was to write a short note to Lady Trafford, acknowledging hers, and saying that Lionel being absent—he did not add where—nothing could be done till he should see him. "On to-morrow—next day at farthest—I will report progress. I cannot believe the case to be so serious as you suppose: at all events, count upon me."

"Stay!" cried he to the Adjutant, who stood in the window awaiting further instructions; "on second thoughts, do telegraph. Say, 'Return at once.' This will prepare him for something."

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CHAPTER IX.

A BREAKFAST AT THE VICARAGE.

On the day after the picnic Sir Brook went by invitation to breakfast with the Vicar.

"When a man asks you to dinner," said Fossbrooke, "he generally wants you to talk; when he asks you to breakfast, he wants to talk to you."

Whatever be the truth of this adage generally, it certainly had its application in the present case. The Vicar wanted very much to talk to Sir Brook.

As they sat, therefore, over their coffee and devilled kidneys, chatting over the late excursion, and hinting at another, the Vicar suddenly said, "By the way, I want you to tell me something of the young fellow who was one of us yesterday. Tobin, our doctor here, who is a perfect commission-agent for scandal, says he is the greatest scamp going; that about eight or ten months ago the 'Times' was full of his exploits in bankruptcy; that his liabilities were tens of thousands—assets *nil*. In a word, that notwithstanding his frank, honest look, and his unaffected manner, he is the most accomplished scapegrace of the age."

"And how much of this do you believe?" asked Sir Brook, as he helped himself to coffee.

"That is not so easy to reply to; but I tell you, if you ask me, that I'd rather not believe one word of it."

"Nor need you. His Colonel told me something about the young fellow's difficulties; he himself related the rest. He went most recklessly into debt; betted largely on races, and lost; lent freely, and lost; raised at ruinous interest, and renewed at still more ruinous: but his father has paid every shilling of it out of that fortune which one day was to have come to him, so that Lionel's thirty thousand pounds is now about eight thousand. I have put the whole story into the fewest possible words, but that's the substance of it."

"And has it cured him of extravagance?"

"Of course it has not. How should it? *You* have lived some more years in the world than he has, and *I* a good many more than *you*, and will you tell me that time has cured either of us of any of our old shortcomings? *Non sum qualis eram* means, I can't be as wild as I used to be."

"No, no; I won't agree to that. I protest most strongly against the doctrine. Many men are wiser, through experience, and consequently better."

"I sincerely believe I knew the world better at four-and-twenty than I know it now. The reason why we are less often deceived in after than in early life is not that we are more crafty or more keen-eyed. It is simply because we risk less. Let us hazard as much at sixty as we once did at six-and-twenty, and we'll lose as heavily."

The Vicar paused a few moments over the other's words, and then said, "To come back to this young man, I half suspect he has formed an attachment to Lucy, and that he is doing his utmost to succeed in her favour."

"And is there anything wrong in that, Doctor?"

"Not positively wrong; but there is what may lead to a great deal of unhappiness. Who is to say how Trafford's family would like the connection? Who is to answer for Lendrick's approval of Trafford?"

"You induce me to make a confidence I have no right to impart; but I rely so implicitly on your discretion. I will tell you what was intrusted to me as a secret; Trafford has already written to his father to ask his consent."

"Without speaking to Lendrick? without even being sure of Lucy's?"

"Yes, without knowing anything of either; but on my advice he has first asked his father's permission to pay his addresses to the young lady. His position with his family is peculiar; he is a younger son, but not exactly as free as most younger sons feel to act for themselves. I cannot now explain this more fully, but it is enough if you understand that he is entirely dependent on his father. When I came to know this, and when I saw that he was becoming desperately in love, I insisted on this appeal to his friends before he either entangled Lucy in a promise or even made any declaration himself. He showed me the letter before he posted it. It was all I could wish. It is not a very easy task for a young fellow to tell his father he's in love; but he, in the very frankness of his nature, acquitted himself well and manfully."

"And what answer has he received?"

"None as yet. Two posts have passed. He might have heard through either of them; but no letter has come, and he is feverishly uneasy and anxious."

The Vicar was silent, but a grave motion of his head implied doubt and fear.

"Yes," said Sir Brook, answering the gesture—"yes, I agree with you. The Traffords are great folk in their own country. Trafford was a strong place in Saxon times. They have pride enough for all this blood, and wealth enough for both pride and blood."

"They'd find their match in Lendrick, quiet and simple as he seems," said the Vicar.

"Which makes the matter worse. Who is to give way? Who is to *céder le pas*?"

"I am not so sure I should have advised that letter. I am inclined to think I would have counselled more time, more consideration. Fathers and mothers are prudently averse to these loves at first sight, and they are merciless in dealing with what they deem a mere passing sentiment."

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"Better that than suffer him to engage the girl's affections, and then learn that he must either desert her or marry her against the feeling of his family. Let us have a stroll in the garden. I have made you one confidence; I will now make you another."

They lit their cigars, and strolled out into a long alley fenced on one side by a tall, dense hedge of laurels, and flanked on the other by a low wall over which the view took in the wide reach of the river and the distant mountains of Scariff and Meelick.

"Was not that where we picnicked yesterday?" asked Sir Brook, pointing to an island in the distance.

"No; you cannot see Holy Island from this."

Sir Brook smoked on for some minutes without a word; at last, with a sort of abruptness, he said, "She was so like her, not only in face and figure, but her manner; the very tone of her voice was like; and then that half-caressing, half-timid way she has in conversation, and, more than all, the sly quietness with which she caps you when you fancy that the smart success is all your own."

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of another Lucy," said Sir Brook, with a deep melancholy. "Heaven grant that the resemblance follow them not in their lives as in their features. It was that likeness, however, which first attracted me towards Miss Lendrick. The first moment I saw her it overcame me; as I grew to know her better it almost confused me, and made me jumble in your hearing things of long ago with the present. Time and space were both forgotten, and I found my mind straying away to scenes in the Himalaya with those I shall never see more. It was thus that, one day carried away by this delusion, I chanced to call her Lucy, and she laughingly begged me not to retract it, but so to call her always." For some minutes he was silent, and then resumed, "I don't know if you ever heard of a Colonel Frank Dillon, who served on Napier's staff in Scinde. Fiery Frank was his nickname among his comrades, but it only applied to him on the field of battle and with an enemy in front. Then he was indeed fiery—the excitement rose to almost madness, and led him to acts of almost incredible daring. At Meanee he was nearly cut to pieces, and as he lay wounded and to all appearance dying, he received a lance-wound through the chest that the surgeon declared must prove fatal. He lived, however, for eight months after—he lived long enough to reach the Himalayas, where his daughter, an only child, joined him from England. On her way out she became acquainted with a young officer, who was coming out as aide-de-camp to the Governor-General. They were constantly thrown together on the journey, and his attentions to her soon showed the sentiments he had conceived for her. In fact, very soon after Lucy had joined her father, Captain Sewell appeared 'in the hills' to make a formal demand of her in marriage.

"I was there at the time, and I remember well poor Dillon's expression of disappointment after the first meeting with him. His daughter's enthusiastic description of his looks, his manner, his abilities, his qualities generally, had perhaps prepared him for too much. Indeed, Lucy's own intense admiration for the soldier-like character of her father's features assisted the mistake, for, as Dillon said, 'There must be a dash of the *sabreur* in the fellow that will win Lucy.' I came into Dillon's room immediately after the first interview. The instant I caught his eye I read what was going on in his brain. 'Sit down here, Brook,' cried he, 'sit in my chair here,' and he arose painfully as he spoke; 'I'll show you the man;' with this he hobbled over to a table where his cap lay, and, placing it rakishly on one side of his head, he stuck his eyeglass in one eye, and, with a hand in his trousers-pocket, lounged forward towards where I sat, saying, "How d'ye do, Colonel? wound doing better, I hope. The breezy climate up here soon set you up." Familiar enough this, sir,' cried Dillon, in his own stern voice; 'but without time to breathe, as it were—before almost I had exchanged a greeting with him—he entered upon the object of his journey. I scarcely heard a word he said; I knew its purport—I could mark the theme—but no more. It was not the fellow himself that filled my mind; my whole thoughts were upon my daughter, and I went on repeating to myself, "Good heavens! is this Lucy's choice? Am I in a trance? Is it this contemptible cur—for he was a cur, sir—that has won the affections of my darling, high-hearted, generous girl? Is the romantic spirit that I have so loved to see in her to bear no better fruit than this? Does the fellow realise to her mind the hero that fills men's thoughts?" I was so overcome, so excited, so confused, Brook, that I begged him to leave me for a while, that one of my attacks of pain was coming on, and that I should not be able to converse farther. He said something about trying one of his cheroots—some impertinence or other, I forget what; but he left me, and I, who never knew a touch of girlish weakness in my life, who when a child had no mood of softness in my nature—I felt the tears trickling along my cheeks and my eyes dimmed with them.' My poor friend," continued Fossbrooke, "could not go on, his emotions mastered him, and he sat with his head buried between his hands and in silence. At last he said, 'She'll not give him up, Brook; I have spoken to her—she actually loves him. Good heavens!' he cried, 'how little do we know about our children's hearts! how far astray are we as to the natures that have grown up beside us, imbibing, as we thought, our hopes, our wishes, and our prejudices! We awake some day to discover that some other influence has crept in to undo our teachings, and that the fidelity on which we would have staked our lives has changed allegiance.'

"He talked to me long in this strain, and I saw that the effects of this blow to all his hopes had made themselves deeply felt on his chance of recovery. It only needed a great shock to depress him to make his case hopeless. Within two months after his daughter's arrival he was no more.

"I became Lucy's guardian. Poor Dillon gave me the entire control over her future fortune, and left me to occupy towards her the place he had himself held. I believe that next

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to her father I held the best place in her affections—of such affections, I mean, as are accorded to a parent. I was her godfather, and from her earliest infancy she had learned to love me. The reserve, it was positive coldness, with which Dillon had always treated Sewell had caused a certain distance, for the first time in their lives, between the father and daughter. She thought, naturally enough, that her father was unjust; that, unaccustomed to the new tone of manners which had grown up amongst young men—their greater ease, their less rigid observance of ceremonial, their more liberal self-indulgence—he was unfairly severe upon her lover. She was annoyed, too, that Sewell's attempts to conciliate the old man should have turned out such complete failures. But none of these prejudices extended to me, and she counted much on the good understanding that she expected to find grow up between us.

"If I could have prevented the marriage I would. I learned many things of the man that I disliked. There is no worse sign of a man than to be at the same time a man of pleasure and friendless. These he was—he was foremost in every plan of amusement and dissipation, and yet none liked him. Vain fellows get quizzed for their vanity, and selfish men laughed at for their selfishness, and close men for their avarice; but there is a combination of vanity, egotism, small craftiness, and self-preservation in certain fellows that is totally repugnant to all companionship. Their lives are a series of petty successes, not owing to any superior ability or greater boldness of daring, but to a studious outlook for small opportunities. They are ever alive to know 'the right man,' to be invited to the 'right house,' to say the 'right thing.' Never linked with whatever is in disgrace or misfortune, they are always found backing the winning horse, if not riding him.

"Such men as these, so long as the world goes well with them, and events turn out fortunately, are regarded simply as sharp, shrewd fellows, with a keen eye to their own interests. When, however, the weight of any misfortune comes, when the time arrives that they have to bear up against the hard pressure of life, these fellows come forth in their true colours, swindlers and cheats.

"Such was he. Finding that I was determined to settle the small fortune her father had left her inalienably on herself, he defeated me by a private marriage. He then launched out into a life of extravagance to which their means bore no proportion. I was a rich man in those days, and knew nothing better to do with my money than assist the daughter of my oldest friend. The gallant Captain did not balk my good intentions. He first accepted, he then borrowed, and last of all he forged my name. I paid the bills and saved him, not for his sake, I need not tell you, but for hers, who threw herself at my feet, and implored me not to see them ruined. Even this act of hers he turned to profit. He wrote to me to say that he knew his wife had been to my house, that he had long nurtured suspicions against me—I that was many years older than her own father—that for the future he desired all acquaintance should cease between us, and that I should not again cross his threshold.

"By what persuasions or by what menaces he led his wife to the step, I do not know; but she passed me when we met without a recognition. This was the hardest blow of all. I tried to write her a letter; but after a score of attempts I gave it up, and left the place.

"I never saw her for eight years. I wish I had not seen her then. I am an old, hardened man of the world, one whom life has taught all its lessons to in the sternest fashion. I have been so baffled, and beaten, and thrown back by all my attempts to think well of the world, that nothing short of a dogged resolution not to desert my colours has rescued me from a cold misanthropy; and yet, till I saw, I did not believe there was a new pang of misery my heart had not tasted. What! it is incredible—surely that is not she who once was Lucy Dillon—that bold-faced woman with lustrous eyes and rouged cheeks—brilliant, indeed, and beautiful, but not the beauty that is allied to the thought of virtue—whose every look is a wile, whose every action is entanglement. She was leaning on a great man's arm, and in the smile she gave him told me how she knew to purchase such distinctions. He noticed me, and shook my hand as I passed. I heard him tell her who I was; and I heard her say that I had been a hanger-on, a sort of dependant, of her father's, but she never liked me! I tried to laugh, but the pain was too deep. I came away, and saw her no more."

He ceased speaking, and for some time they walked along side by side without a word. At last he broke out—"Don't believe the people who say that men are taught by anything they experience in life. Outwardly they may affect it. They may assume this or that manner. The heart cannot play the hypocrite, and no frequency of disaster diminishes the smart. The wondrous resemblance Miss Lendrick bears to Lucy Dillon renews to my memory the bright days of her early beauty, when her poor father would call her to sit down at his feet and read to him, that he might gaze at will on her, weaving whole histories of future happiness and joy for her. 'Is it not like sunshine in the room to see her, Brook?' would he whisper to me. 'I only heard her voice as she passed under my window this morning, and I forgot some dark thought that was troubling me.' And there was no exaggeration in this. The sweet music of her tones vibrated so softly on the ear, they soothed the sense, just as we feel soothed by the gentle ripple of a stream.

"All these times come back to me since I have been here, and I cannot tell you how the very sorrow that is associated with them has its power over me. Every one knows with what attachment the heart will cling to some little spot in a far-away land that reminds one of a loved place at home—how we delight to bring back old memories, and how we even like to name old names, to cheat ourselves back into the past. So it is that I feel when I see this girl. The other Lucy was once as my daughter; so, too, do I regard her, and with this comes that dreadful sorrow I have told you of, giving my interest in her an intensity unspeakable. When I saw Trafford's attention to her, the only thing I thought of was how unlike he was to him who won the other Lucy. His frank, unaffected bearing, his fine, manly trustfulness,

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the very opposite to the other's qualities, made me his friend at once. When I say friend, I mean well-wisher, for my friendship now bears no other fruit. Time was when it was otherwise."

"What is it, William?" cried the Vicar, as his servant came hurriedly forward.

"There's a gentleman in the drawing-room, sir, wants to see Sir Brook Fossbrooke."

"Have I your leave?" said the old man, bowing low. "I'll join you here immediately."

Within a few moments he was back again. "It was Trafford. He has just got a telegram to call him to his regiment. He suspects something has gone wrong; and seeing his agitation, I offered to go back with him. We start within an hour."

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CHAPTER X.

LENDRICK RECOUNTS HIS VISIT TO TOWN.

The Vicar having some business to transact in Limerick, agreed to go that far with Sir Brook and Trafford, and accompanied them to the railroad to see them off.

A down train from Dublin arrived as they were waiting, and a passenger descending, hastily hurried after the Vicar and seized his hand. The Vicar, in evident delight, forgot his other friends for a moment, and became deeply interested in the new-comer. "We must say good-bye Doctor," said Fossbrooke, "here comes our train."

"A thousand pardons, my dear Sir Brook. The unlooked-for arrival of my friend here—but I believe you don't know him. Lendrick, come here. I want to present you to Sir Brook Fossbrooke. Captain Trafford, Dr. Lendrick."

"I hope these gentlemen are not departing," said Lendrick, with the constraint of a bashful man.

"It is our misfortune to do so," said Sir Brook; "but I have passed too many happy hours in this neighbourhood not to come back to it as soon as I can."

"I hope we shall see you. I hope I may have an opportunity of thanking you, Sir Brook."

"Dublin! Dublin! Dublin! get in gentlemen; first class, this way, sir," screamed a guard, amidst a thundering rumble, a scream, and a hiss. All other words were drowned, and with a cordial shake-hands the new friends parted.

"Is the younger man his son?" asked Lendrick; "I did not not catch the name?"

"No, he's Trafford, a son of Sir Hugh Trafford—a Lincolnshire man, isn't he?"

"I don't know. It was of the other I was thinking. I felt it so strange to see a man of whom when a boy I used to hear so much. I have an old print somewhere of two overdressed 'Bloods,' as they were called in those days, with immense whiskers, styled 'Fossy and Fussy,' meaning Sir Brook and the Baron Geramb, a German friend and follower of the Prince."

"I suspect a good deal changed since that day, in person as well as purse," said the Vicar, sadly.

"Indeed! I heard of his having inherited some immense fortune."

"So he did, and squandered every shilling of it."

"And the chicks are well, you tell me?" said Lendrick, whose voice softened as he talked of home and his children.

"Couldn't be better. We had a little picnic on Holy Island yesterday, and only wanted yourself to have been perfectly happy. Lucy was for refusing at first."

"Why so?"

"Some notion she had that you wouldn't like it. Some idea about not doing in your absence anything that was not usual when you are here."

"She is such a true girl, so loyal," said Lendrick, proudly.

"Well, I take the treason on my shoulders. I made her come. It was a delightful day, and we drank your health in as good a glass of madeira as ever ripened in the sun. Now for your own news?"

"First let us get on the road. I am impatient to be back at home again. Have you your car here?"

"All is ready, and waiting for you at the gate."

As they drove briskly along, Lendrick gave the Vicar a detailed account of his visit to Dublin. Passing over the first days, of which the reader already has heard something, we take up the story from the day on which Lendrick learned that his father would see him.

"My mind was so full of myself, Doctor," said he, "of all the consequences which had followed from my father's anger with me, that I had no thought of anything else till I entered the room where he was. Then, however, as I saw him propped up with pillows in a deep chair, his face pale, his eyes colourless, and his head swathed up in a bandage after leeching, my heart sickened, alike with sorrow and shame at my great selfishness.

"I had been warned by Beattie on no account to let any show of feeling or emotion escape me, to be as cool and collected as possible, and in fact, he said, to behave as though I had seen him the day before.

"'Leave the room, Poynder,' said he to his man, 'and suffer no one to knock at the door—mind, not even to knock, till I ring my bell.' He waited till the man withdrew, and then, in a very gentle voice said, 'How are you, Tom? I can't give you my right hand—the rebellious member has ceased to know me!' I thought I should choke as the words met me; I don't remember what I said, but I took my chair and sat down beside him.

"'I thought you might have been too much agitated, Tom, but otherwise I should have wished to have had your advice along with Beattie. I believe, on the whole, however, he has treated me well.'

"I assured him that none could have done more skilfully.

"'The skill of the doctor with an old patient is the skill of an architect with an old wall. He must not breach it, or it will tumble to pieces.'

"'Beattie is very able, sir,' said I.

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"'No man is able,' replied he, quickly, 'when the question is to repair the wastes of time and years. Draw that curtain, and let me look at you. No; stand yonder, where the light is stronger. What! is it my eyes deceive me—is your hair white?'

"'It has been so eight years, sir.'

"'And I had not a grey hair till my seventy-second year—not one. I told Beattie, t'other day, that the race of the strong was dying out. Good heavens, how old you look! Would any one believe in seeing us that you could be my son?'

"'I feel perhaps even more than I look it, sir.'

"'I could swear you did. You are the very stamp of those fellows who plead guilty—guilty, my lord; we throw ourselves on the mercy of the court. I don't know how the great judgment-seat regards these pleas—with *me* they meet only scorn. Give me the man who says, "Try me, test me." Drop that curtain, and draw the screen across the fire. Speak lower too, my dear,' said he, in a weak soft voice; 'you suffer yourself to grow excited, and you excite *me*.'

"'I will be more cautious, sir,' said I.

"'What are these drops he is giving me? They have an acrid sweet taste.'

"'Aconite, sir; a weak solution.'

"'They say that our laws never forgot feudalism, but I declare I believe medicine has never been able to ignore alchemy; drop me out twenty, I see that your hand does not shake. Strange thought, is it not, to feel that a little phial like that could make a new Baron of the Exchequer? You have heard, I suppose, of the attempts—the indecent attempts—to induce me to resign. You have heard what they say of my age. They quote the registry of my baptism, as though it were the date of a conviction. I have yet to learn that the years a man has devoted to his country's service are counts in the indictment against his character. Age has been less merciful to me than to my fellows—it has neither made me deaf to rancour nor blind to ingratitude. I told the Lord-Lieutenant so yesterday.'

"'You saw him then, sir?' asked I.

"'Yes, he was gracious enough to call here; he sent his secretary to ask if I would receive a visit from him. I thought that a little more tact might have been expected from a man in his station—it is the common gift of those in high places. I perceive,' added he, after a pause, 'you don't see what I mean. It is this: royalties, or mock royalties, for they are the same in this, condescend to these visits as death-bed attentions. They come to us with their courtesies as the priest comes with his holy cruet, only when they have the assurance that we are beyond recovery. His Excellency ought to have felt that the man to whom he proposed this attention was not one to misunderstand its significance.'

"'Did he remain long, sir?'

"'Two hours and forty minutes. I measured it by my watch.'

"'Was the fatigue not too much for you?'

"'Of course it was; I fainted before he got to his carriage. He twice rose to go away, but on each occasion I had something to say that induced him to sit down again. It was the whole case of Ireland we reviewed—that is, *I* did. I deployed the six millions before him, and he took the salute. Yes, sir, education, religious animosities, land-tenure, drainage, emigration, secret societies, the rebel priest and the intolerant parson, even nationality and mendicant insolence, all marched past, and he took the salute! "And now, my Lord," said I, "it is the man who tells you these things, who has the courage to tell, and the ability to display them, and it is this man for whose retirement your Excellency is so eager, that you have actually deigned to make him a visit, that he may carry away into the next world, perhaps, a pleasing memory of this; it is this man, I say, whom you propose to replace,—and by what, my Lord, and by whom? Will a mere lawyer, will any amount of *nisi prius* craft or precedent, give you the qualities you need on that bench, or that you need, sadly need, at this council-board? Go back, my Lord, and tell your colleagues of the Cabinet that Providence is more merciful than a Premier, and that the same overruling hand that has sustained me through this trial, will uphold me, I trust, for years, to serve my country, and save it for some time longer from your blundering legislation."

"'He stood up, sir, like a prisoner when under sentence; he stood up, sir, and as he bowed, I waved my adieu to him as though saying, You have heard me, and you are not to carry away from this place a hope, the faintest, that any change will come over the determination I have this day declared.

"'He went away, and I fainted. The exertion was too long sustained, too much for me. I believe, after all,' added he, with a smile, 'his Excellency bore it very little better. He told the Archbishop the same evening that he'd not go through another such morning for 'the garter.' Men in his station hear so little of truth, that it revolts them like coarse diet. They'd rather abstain altogether till forced by actual hunger to touch it. When they come to me, however, it is the only fare they will find before them.'

"There was a long pause after this," continued Lendrick. "I saw that the theme had greatly excited him, and I forbore to say a word, lest he should be led to resume it. 'Too old for the bench!' burst he out suddenly; 'my Lord, there are men who are never too old, as there are those who are never too young. The oak is but a sapling when the pine is in decay. Is there that glut of intellect just now in England, are we so surfeited with ability, that, to make room for the coming men, we, who have made our mark on the age, must retire into obscurity?' He tried to rise from his seat; his face was flushed, and his eyes flashing; he evidently forgot where he was, and with whom, for he sank back with a faint sigh, and said, 'Let us talk of it no more. Let us think of something else. Indeed it was to talk of something else I desired to see you.' He went on then to say that he wished something could be done for me. His own means were, he said, sadly crippled; he spoke bitterly, resentfully, I thought. 'It is too long a story to enter on, and were it briefer, too disagreeable a one,' added he. 'I ought to be a rich man, and I am

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poor; I should be powerful, and I have no influence. All has gone ill with me.' After a silence, he continued, 'They have a place to offer you; the inspectorship, I think they call it, of hospitals at the Cape; it is worth altogether nigh a thousand a-year, a thing not to be refused.'

"'The offer could only be made in compliment to you, sir; and if my acceptance were to compromise your position——'

"'Compromise *me!*' broke he in. 'I'll take care it shall not. No man need instruct me in the art of self-defence, sir. Accept at once.'

"'I will do whatever you desire, sir,' was my answer.

"'Go out there yourself alone, at first, I mean. Let your boy continue his college career; the girl shall come to me.'

"'I have never been separated from my children, sir,' said I, almost trembling with anxiety.

"'Such separations are bearable,' added he, 'when it is duty dictates them, not disobedience.'

"He fixed his eyes sternly on me, and I trembled as I thought that the long score of years was at last come to the reckoning. He did not dwell on the theme, however, but in a tone of much gentler meaning went on, 'It will be an act of mercy to let me see a loving face, to hear a tender voice. Your boy would be too rough for me.'

"'You would like him, sir. He is thoroughly truthful and honest.'

"'So he may, and yet be self-willed, be noisy, be over-redolent of that youth which age resents like outrage. Give me the girl, Tom; let her come here, and bestow some of those loving graces on the last hours of my life her looks show she should be rich in. For your sake she will be kind to me. Who knows what charm there may be in gentleness, even to a tiger-nature like mine? Ask her, at least, if she will make the sacrifice.'

"I knew not what to answer. If I could not endure the thought of parting from Lucy, yet it seemed equally impossible to refuse his entreaty, old, friendless, and deserted as he was. I felt, besides, that my only hope of a real reconciliation with him lay through this road; deny him this, and it was clear he would never see me more. He said, too, it should only be for a season. I was to see how the place, the climate, suited for a residence. In a word, every possible argument to reconcile me to the project rushed to my mind, and I at last said, 'Lucy shall decide, sir. I will set out for home at once, and you shall have her own answer.'

"'Uninfluenced, sir,' cried he; 'mind that. If influence were to be used, I could, perhaps, tell her what might decide her at once; but I would not that pity should plead for me, till she should have seen if I be worth compassion! There is but one argument I will permit in my favour—tell her that her picture has been my pleasantest companion these three long days. There it lies, always before me. Go, now, and let me hear from you as soon as may be.' I arose, but somehow my agitation, do what I would, mastered me. It was so long since we had met! All the sorrows the long estrangement had cost me came to my mind, together with little touches of his kindness in long-past years, and I could not speak. 'Poor Tom, poor Tom!' said he, drawing me towards him; and he kissed me."

As Lendrick said this, emotion overcame him, and he covered his face with his hands, and sobbed bitterly. More than a mile of road was traversed before a word passed between them. "There they are, Doctor! There's Tom, there's Lucy! They are coming to meet me," cried he. "Good-bye, Doctor; you'll forgive me, I know—good-bye;" and he sprang off the car as he spoke, while the Vicar, respecting the sacredness of the joy, wheeled his horse round and drove back towards the town.

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CHAPTER XI.

CAVE CONSULTS SIR BROOK.

A FEW minutes after the Adjutant had informed Colonel Cave that Lieutenant Trafford had reported himself, Sir Brook entered the Colonel's quarters, eager to know what was the reason of the sudden recall of Trafford, and whether the regiment had been unexpectedly ordered for foreign service.

"No, no," said Cave, in some confusion. "We have had our turn of India and the Cape; they can't send us away again for some time. It was purely personal; it was, I may say, a private reason. You know," added he, with a slight smile, "I am acting as a sort of guardian to Trafford just now. His family sent him over to me as to a reformatory."

"From everything I have seen of him, your office will be an easy one."

"Well, I suspect that, so far as mere wildness goes—extravagance and that sort of thing—he has had enough of it; but there are mistakes that a young fellow may make in life—mistakes in judgment—which will damage him more irreparably than all his derelictions against morality."

"That I deny—totally, entirely deny. I know what you mean—that is, I think I know what you mean; and if I guess aright, I am distinctly at issue with you on this matter."

"Perhaps I could convince you, notwithstanding. Here's a letter which I have no right to show you; it is marked, 'Strictly confidential and private.' You shall read it—nay, you must read it—because you are exactly the man to be able to give advice on the matter. You like Trafford and wish him well. Read that over carefully, and tell me what you would counsel."

Fossbrooke took out his spectacles, and having seated himself comfortably, with his back to the light, began in leisurely fashion to peruse the letter. "It's his mother who writes," said he, turning to the signature—"one of the most worldly women I ever met. She was a Lascelles. Don't you know how she married Trafford?"

"I don't remember if I ever heard."

"It was her sister that Trafford wanted to marry, but she was ambitious to be a peeress; and as Bradbrook was in love with her, she told Sir Hugh, 'I have got a sister so like me nobody

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can distinguish between us. She'd make an excellent wife for you. She rides far better than me, and she isn't half so extravagant. I'll send for her.' She did so, and the whole thing was settled in a week."

"They have lived very happily together."

"Of course they have. They didn't 'go in,' as the speculators say, for enormous profits; they realised very fairly, and were satisfied. I wish her handwriting had been more cared for. What's this she says here about a subscription?"

"That's supervision—the supervision of a parent."

"Supervision of a fiddlestick! the fellow is six feet one inch high, and seven-and-twenty years of age; he's quite beyond supervision. Ah! brought back all his father's gout, has he? When will people begin to admit that their own tempers have something to say to their maladies? I curse the cook who made the mulligatawny, but I forget that I ate two platefuls of it. So it's the Doctor's daughter she objects to. I wish she saw her. I wish *you* saw her, Cave. You are an old frequenter of courts and drawing-rooms. I tell you you have seen nothing like this doctor's daughter since Laura Bedingfield was presented, and that was before your day."

"Every one has heard of the Beauty Bedingfield; but she was my mother's contemporary."

"Well, sir, her successors have not eclipsed her! This doctor's daughter, as your correspondent calls her, is the only rival of her that I have ever seen. As to wit and accomplishments, Laura could not compete with Lucy Lendrick."

"You know her, then?" asked the Colonel; and then added, "Tell me something about the family."

"With your leave I will finish this letter first. Ah! here we have the whole secret. Lionel Trafford is likely to be that precious prize, an eldest son. Who could have thought that the law of entail could sway a mother's affections? 'Contract no ties inconsistent with his station.' This begins to be intolerable, Cave. I don't think I can go on."

"Yes, yes; read it through."

"She asks you if you know any one who knows these Hendrichs or Lendrichs; tell her that you do; tell her that your friend is one of those men who have seen a good deal of life, heard more too than he has seen. She will understand that, and that his name is Sir Brook Fossbrooke, who, if needed, will think nothing of a journey over to Lincolnshire to afford her all the information she could wish for. Say this, Cave, and take my word for it, she will put very few more questions to you."

"That would be to avow I had already consulted with you. No, no; I must not do that."

"The wind-up of the epistle is charming. 'I have certainly no reason to love Ireland.' Poor Ireland! here is another infliction upon you. Let us hope you may never come to know that Lady Trafford cannot love you."

"Come, come, Fossbrooke, be just, be fair; there is nothing so very unreasonable in the anxiety of a mother that her son, who will have a good name and a large estate, should not share them both with a person beneath him."

"Why must she assume that this is the case—why take it for granted that this girl must be beneath him? I tell you, sir, if a prince of the blood had fallen in love with her, it would be a reason to repeal the Royal Marriage Act."

"I declare, Fossbrooke, I shall begin to suspect that your own heart has not escaped scatheless," said Cave, laughing.

The old man's face became crimson, but not with anger. As suddenly it grew pale; and in a voice of deep agitation he said, "When an old man like myself lays his homage at her feet, it is not hard to believe how a young man might love her."

"How did you come to make this acquaintance?" said Cave, anxious to turn the conversation into a more familiar channel.

"We chanced to fall in with her brother on the river. We found him struggling with a fish far too large for his tackle, and which at last smashed his rod and got away. He showed not alone that he was a perfect angler, but that he was a fine-tempered fellow, who accepted his defeat manfully and well; he had even a good word for his enemy, sir, and it was that which attracted me. Trafford and he, young-men-like, soon understood each other; he came into our boat, lunched with us, and asked us home with him to tea. There's the whole story. As to the intimacy that followed, it was mostly my own doing. I own to you I never so much as suspected that Trafford was smitten by her; he was always with her brother, scarcely at all in her company; and when he came to tell me he was in love, I asked him how he caught the malady, for I never saw him near the infection. Once that I knew of the matter, however, I made him write home to his family."

"It was by your advice, then, that he wrote that letter?"

"Certainly; I not only advised, I insisted on it—I read it, too, before it was sent off. It was such a letter as, if I had been the young fellow's father, would have made me prouder than to hear he had got the thanks of Parliament."

"You and I, Fossbrooke, are old bachelors; we are scarcely able to say what we should have done if we had had sons."

"I am inclined to believe it would have made us better, not worse," said Fossbrooke, gravely.

"At all events, as it was at your instigation this letter was written, I can't well suggest your name as an impartial person in the transaction—I mean, as one who can be referred to for advice or information."

"Don't do so, sir, or I shall be tempted to say more than may be prudent. Have you never noticed, Cave, the effect that a doctor's presence produces in the society of those who usually consult him—the reserve—the awkwardness—the constraint—the apologetic tone for this or that little indiscretion—the sitting in the draught or the extra glass of sherry? So is it, but in a far stronger degree, when an old man of the world like myself comes back amongst those he formerly lived with—one who knew all their past history, how they succeeded here, how they failed there—what led the great man of fashion to finish his days in a colony, and why the Court beauty married a bishop. Ah, sir, we are the physicians who have all these secrets in our keeping. It is ours to know what sorrow is covered by that smile, how that merry laugh

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has but smothered the sigh of a heavy heart. It is only when a man has lived to my age, with an unfailing memory too, that he knows the real hollowness of life—all the combinations falsified, all the hopes blighted—the clever fellows that have turned out failures, or worse than failures, the lovely women that have made shipwreck through their beauty. It is not only, however, that he knows this, but he knows how craft and cunning have won where ability and frankness have lost; how intrigue and trick have done better than genius and integrity. With all this knowledge, sir, in their heads, and stout hearts within them, such men as myself have their utility in life. They are a sort of walking conscience that cannot be ignored. The railroad millionaire talks less boastfully before him who knew him as an errand-boy; the *grande dame* is less superciliously insolent in the presence of one who remembered her in a very different character. Take my word for it, Cave, Nestor may have been a bit of a bore amongst the young Greeks of fashion, but he had his utility too."

"But how am I to answer this letter? what advice shall I give her?"

"Tell her frankly that you have made the inquiry she wished; that the young lady, who is as well-born as her son, is without fortune, and if her personal qualities count for nothing, would be what the world would call a 'bad match.'"

"Yes, that sounds practicable. I think that will do."

"Tell her also, that if she seriously desire that her son should continue in the way of that reformation he has so ardently followed for some time back, and especially so since he has made the acquaintance of this family, such a marriage as this would give her better reasons for confidence than all her most crafty devices in match-making and settlements."

"I don't think I can exactly tell her that," said Cave, smiling.

"Tell her, then, that if this connection be not to her liking, to withdraw her son at once from this neighbourhood before this girl should come to care for him; for if she should, by heavens! he shall marry her, if every acre of the estate were to go to a cousin ten times removed!"

"Were not these people all strangers to you t'other day, Fossbrooke?" said Cave, in something like a tone of reprehension.

"So they were. I had never so much as heard of them; but she, this girl, has a claim upon my interest, founded on a resemblance so strong, that when I see her, I live back again in the long past and find myself in converse with the dearest friends I ever had. I vow to heaven I never knew the bitterness of want of fortune till now! I never felt how powerless and insignificant poverty can make a man till I desired to contribute to this girl's happiness; and if I were not an old worthless wreck—shattered and unseaworthy—I'd set to work to-morrow to refit and try to make a fortune to bestow on her."

If Cave was half disposed to banter the old man on what seemed little short of a devoted attachment, the agitation of Fossbrooke's manner—his trembling lip, his shaken voice, his changing colour—all warned him to forbear, and abstain from what might well have proved a perilous freedom.

"You will dine with us at mess, Fossbrooke, won't you?"

"No. I shall return at once to Killaloe. I made Dr. Lendrick's acquaintance just as I started by the train. I want to see more of him; besides, now that I know what was the emergency that called young Trafford up here, I have nothing to detain me."

"Shall you see him before you go?"

"Of course. I'm going over to his quarters now."

"You will not mention our conversation?"

"Certainly not."

"I'd like to show you my letter before I send it off. I'd be glad to think it was what you recommended."

"Write what you feel to be a fair statement of the case, and if by any chance an inclination to partiality crosses you, let it be in favour of the young. Take my word for it, Cave, there is a selfishness in age that needs no ally. Stand by the sons—the fathers and mothers will take care of themselves. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XII.

A GREAT MAN'S SCHOOLFELLOW.

Whether it was that the Chief Baron had thrown off an attack which had long menaced him, and whose slow approaches had gradually impaired his strength and diminished his mental activity, or whether, as some of his "friends" suggested, that the old man's tenure of life had been renewed by the impertinences of the newspapers and the insolent attacks of political foes—an explanation not by any means far-fetched,—whatever the cause, he came out of his illness with all the signs of renewed vigour, and with a degree of mental acuteness that he had not enjoyed for many years before.

"Beattie tells me that this attack has inserted another life in my lease," said he; "and I am glad of it. It is right that the men who speculated on my death should be reminded of the uncertainty of life by the negative proof. It is well, too, that there should be men long-lived enough to bridge over periods of mediocrity, and connect the triumphs of the past with the coming glories of the future. We are surely not destined to a perpetuity of Pendletons and Fitzgibbons!"

It was thus he discoursed to an old legal comrade—who, less gifted and less fortunate, still wore his stuff gown, and pleaded for the outer bar—poor old Billy Haire, the dreariest advocate, and one of the honestest fellows that ever carried his bag into court. While nearly all of his contemporaries had risen to rank and eminence, Billy toiled on through life with small success, liked by his friends, respected by the world, but the terror of attorneys, who only saw in him the type of adverse decisions and unfavourable verdicts.

For forty-odd years had he lived a life that any but himself would have deemed martyr-

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dom—his law laughed at, his eloquence ridiculed, his manner mimicked, jeered at by the bench, quizzed by the bar, sneered at by the newspapers, every absurd story tagged to his name, every stupid blunder fathered on him, till at last, as it were, by the mere force of years, the world came to recognise the incomparable temper that no provocation had ever been able to irritate, the grand nature that rose above all resentment, and would think better of its fellows than these moods of spiteful wit or impertinent drollery might seem to entitle them to.

The old Judge liked him; he liked his manly simplicity of character, his truthfulness, and his honesty; but perhaps more than all these did he like his dulness. It was so pleasant to him to pelt this poor heavy man with smart epigrams and pungent sarcasms on all that was doing in the world, and see the hopeless effort he made to follow him.

Billy, too, had another use—he alone, of all the Chief Baron's friends, could tell him what was the current gossip of the hall; what men thought, or, at least, what they said of him. The genuine simplicity of Haire's nature gave to his revelations a character so devoid of all spitefulness—it was so evident that, in repeating, he never identified himself with his story, that Lendrick would listen to words from him that, coming from another, his resentment would have repelled with indignation.

"And you tell me that the story now is, my whole attack was nothing but temper?" said the old Judge, as the two men walked slowly up and down on the grass lawn before the door.

"Not that exactly; but they say that constitutional irritability had much to say to it."

"It was, in fact, such a seizure as with a man like yourself would have been a mere nothing."

"Perhaps so."

"I am sure of it, sir; and what more do they say?"

"All sorts of things, which of course they know nothing about. Some have it that you refused the peerage, others that it was not offered."

"Ha!" said the old man, irritably, while a faint flush tinged his cheek.

"They say, too," continued Haire, "that when the Viceroy informed you that you were not to be made a peer, you said, 'Let the Crown look to it then. The Revenue cases all come to my court; and so long as I sit there they shall never have a verdict.'"

"You must have invented that yourself, Billy," said the Judge, with a droll malice in his eye. "Come, confess it is your own. It is *so* like you."

"No, on my honour," said the other, solemnly.

"Not that I would take it ill, Haire, if you had. When a man has a turn for epigram, his friends must extend their indulgence to the humour."

"I assure you, positively, it is not mine."

"That is quite enough; let us talk of something else. By the way, I have a letter to show you. I put it in my pocket this morning, to let you see it; but, first of all, I must show you the writer—here she is." He drew forth a small miniature case, and, opening it, handed it to the other.

"What a handsome girl! downright beautiful!"

"My granddaughter, sir," said the old man, proudly.

"I declare I never saw a lovelier face," said Haire. "She must be a rare cheat if she be not as good as she is beautiful. What a sweet mouth!"

"The brow is fine; there is a high intelligence about the eyes and the temples."

"It is the smile, that little lurking smile, that captivates me. What may her age be?"

"Something close on twenty. Now for her letter. Read that."

While Haire perused the letter the old Judge sauntered away, looking from time to time at the miniature, and muttering some low inaudible words as he went.

"I don't think I understand it. I am at a loss to catch what she is drifting at," said Haire, as he finished the first side of the letter. "What is she so grateful for?"

"You think the case is one which calls for little gratitude then. What a sarcastic mood you are in this morning, Haire," said the Judge, with a malicious twinkle of the eye. "Still there are young ladies in the world who would vouchsafe to bear me company in requital for being placed at the head of such a house as this."

"I can make nothing of it," said the other, hopelessly.

"The case is this," said the Judge, as he drew his arm within the other's. "Tom Lendrick has been offered a post of some value—some value to a man poor as he is—at the Cape. I have told him that his acceptance in no way involves me. I have told those who have offered the place that I stand aloof in the whole negotiation—that in their advancement of my son they establish no claim upon *me*. I have even said I will know nothing whatever of the incident." He paused for some minutes, and then went on. "I have told Tom, however, if his circumstances were such as to dispose him to avail himself of this offer, that—unless he assured himself that the place was one to his liking, that it gave a reasonable prospect of permanence, that the climate was salubrious, and the society not distasteful—I would take his daughter to live with me."

"He has a son too, hasn't he?"

"He has, sir, and he would fain have induced me to take *him* instead of the girl; but this I would not listen to. I have not nerves for the loud speech and boisterous vitality of a young fellow of four or five and twenty. His very vigour would be a standing insult to me, and the fellow would know it. When men come to my age they want a mild atmosphere in morals and manners, as well as in climate. My son's physiology has not taught him this, doctor though he be."

"I see—I see it all, now," said Haire; "and the girl, though sorry to be separated from her father, is gratified by the thought of becoming a tie between him and you."

"This is not in the record, sir," said the Judge, sternly. "Keep to your brief." He

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took the letter sharply from the other's hand as he spoke. "My granddaughter has not had much experience of life; but her woman's tact has told her that her real difficulty—her only one perhaps—will be with Lady Lendrick. She cannot know that Lady Lendrick's authority in in this house is nothing—less than nothing. I would never have invited her to come here, had it been otherwise."

"Have you apprised Lady Lendrick of this arrangement?"

"No, sir; nor shall I. It shall be for you to do that 'officiously,' as the French say, to distinguish from what is called 'officially.' I mean you to call upon her and say, in the course of conversation, informally, accidentally, that Miss Lendrick's arrival at the Priory has been deferred, or that it is fixed for such a date—in fact, sir, whatever your own nice tact may deem the neatest mode of alluding to the topic, leaving to her the reply. You understand me?"

"I'm not so sure that I do."

"So much the better; your simplicity will be more inscrutable than your subtlety, Haire. I can deal with the one—the other masters me."

"I declare frankly I don't like the mission. I was never, so to say, a favourite with her Ladyship."

"Neither was I, sir," said the other, with a peremptory loudness that was almost startling.

"Hadn't you better intimate it by a few lines in a note? Hadn't you better say that, having seen your son during his late visit to town, and learnt his intention to accept a colonial appointment——"

"All this would be apologetic, sir, and must not be thought of. Don't you know, Haire, that every unnecessary affidavit is a flaw in a man's case? Go and see her; your very awkwardness will imply a secret, and she'll be so well pleased with her acuteness in discovering the mystery, she'll half forget its offence."

"Let me clearly understand what I've got to do. I'm to tell her, or to let her find out, that you have been reconciled to your son Tom?"

"There is not a word of reconciliation, sir, in all your instructions. You are to limit yourself to the statement that touches my granddaughter."

"Very well; it will be so much the easier. I'm to say, then, that you have adopted her, and placed her at the head of your house; that she is to live here in all respects as its mistress?"

He paused, and as the Judge bowed a concurrence, he went on, "Of course you will allow me to add that I was never consulted; that you did not ask my opinion, and that I never gave one?"

"You are at liberty to say all this."

"I would even say that I don't exactly see how the thing will work. A very young girl, with of course a limited experience of life, will have no common difficulties in dealing with a world so new and strange, particularly without the companionship of one of her own sex."

"I cannot promise to supply that want, but she shall see as much of *you* as possible." And the words were uttered with a blended courtesy and malice, of which he was perfect master. Poor Haire, however, only saw the complimentary part, and hurriedly pledged himself to be at Miss Lendrick's orders at all times.

"Come and let me show you how I mean to lodge her. I intend her to feel a perfect independence of me and my humours. We are to see each other from inclination, not constraint. I intend, sir, that we should live on good terms, and as the Church will have nothing to say to the compact, it is possible it may succeed.

"These rooms are to be hers," said he, opening a door which offered a vista through several handsomely furnished rooms, all looking out upon a neatly-kept flower-garden. "Lady Lendrick, I believe, had long since destined them for a son and daughter-in-law of hers, who are on their way home from India. The plan will be now all the more difficult of accomplishment."

"Which will not make my communication to her the pleasanter."

"But redound so much the more to the credit of your adroitness, Haire, if you succeed. Come over here this evening and report progress." And with this he nodded an easy good-bye, and strolled down the garden.

"I don't envy Haire his brief in this case," muttered he. "He'll not have the 'court with him,' that's certain;" and he laughed spitefully to himself as he went.

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CHAPTER XIII.

LAST DAYS.

It may seem a hardship, but, not improbably, it is in its way an alleviation, that we are never involved in any of the great trials in life, without having to deal with certain material embarrassments, questions of vulgar interest which concern our pockets and affect our finances.

Poor Lendrick's was a case in point. He was about to leave his country—to tear himself from a home he had embellished—to separate from his children that he loved so dearly, to face a new life in a new land, friendless and alone; and with all these cares on his heart, he had creditors to satisfy, debts to insure payment of by security, and, not least of his troubles, his house to re-let. Now the value the world sets on that which is not for sale is very unlike its estimate for the same commodity when brought to market. The light claret your friend pronounced a very pleasant little wine at your own table, he would discover, when offered for purchase, to be poor, washy, and acrid. The horse you had lent him, and whose performance he had encomiumised, if put up to auction, would be found spavined, or wind-galled, or broken down. Such a stern test is money, so fearfully does its coarse jingle jar upon all the music of flattery, and make discord of all compliment. To such a pitch is the process carried that even pretty women, who as wives were objects of admiration to despairing and disappointed adorers, have become, by widowhood, very ordinary creatures, simply because they are once more "in the market."

It is well for us that Heaven itself was not in the *Price Current*, or we might have begun to think lightly of it. At all events we'd have higgled about the cost, and tried to get there as cheaply as might be.

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From the day that the Swan's Nest appeared in the Dublin papers "to be let furnished, for the three years of an unexpired term," Lendrick was besieged by letters and applications. All the world apparently wanted the place, but wanted it in some way or other quite out of his power to accord. One insisted on having it unfurnished, and for a much longer period than he could give. Another desired more land, and the right of shooting over several hundred additional acres. A third would like the house and garden, but would not burden himself with the lawn, and could not see why Lendrick might not continue to hold the meadow land, and come back from the Cape or anywhere else to mow the grass and rick it in due season.

A schoolmistress proposed he should build a dormitory for thirty young ladies, and make the flower-garden into a playground; and a miller from Limerick inquired whether he was willing to join in a suit to establish a right of water-power by diverting a stream from the Shannon through the dining-room to turn an undershot wheel.

It was marvellous with what patience and courtesy Lendrick replied to these and such-like, politely assuring the writers how he regretted his inability to meet their wishes, and modestly confessing that he had neither the money nor the time to make his house other than it was.

All these, however, were as nothing to his trials when the day arrived when the house and grounds, in the language of the advertisement, were "on view," and the world of the curious and idle were free to invade the place, stroll at will through rooms and gardens, comment and criticise not merely the objects before them, but the taste and the fortunes, the habits and the lives of those who had made this their home, and these things part of their own natures.

In a half-jesting humour, but really to save Lendrick from a mortification which to a nature timid and sensitive as his would have been torture, Sir Brook and Tom agreed to divide the labours of ciceroneship between them; the former devoting his attentions to the house and furniture, while Tom assumed the charge ot grounds and gardens. To complete the arrangement, Lendrick and Lucy were banished to a small summer-house, and strictly enjoined never to venture abroad so long as the stranger horde overran the territory.

"I declare, my dear, I almost think the remedy worse than the disease," said Lendrick to his daughter, as he paced with short feverish steps the narrow limits of his prison-house. "This isolation here has something secret, something that suggests shame about it. I think I could almost rather face all the remarks our visitors might make than sit down here to fancy and brood over them."

"I suspect not, dearest papa; I believe the plan will spare us much that might pain us."

"After all, child, these people have a right to be critical, and they are not bound to know by what associations you and I are tied to that old garden-seat, or that bookstand, and we ought to be able to avoid showing them this."

"Perhaps we ought, papa; but could we do so? that's the question."

"Surely the tradesman affects no such squeamishness about what he offers for sale."

"True, papa; because none of his wares have caught any clue to his identity. They have never been his in the sense which makes possession pleasure."

"I wish they would not laugh without there; Their coarse laughter sounds to me so like vulgar ridicule. I hardly thought all this would have made me so irritable; even the children's voices jar on my nerves."

He turned away his head, but her eyes followed him, and two heavy tears stole slowly along her cheek, and her lip quivered as she looked.

"There, they are going away," said he, listening; "I am bettor now."

"That's right, dearest papa; I knew it was a mere passing pang," said she, drawing her arm within his, and walking along at his side. "How kind Sir Brook is!"

"How kind every one, we might say. Poor Mills is like a brother, and Tobin too—I scarcely expected so much heart from him. He gave me his old lancet-case as a keepsake yesterday, and I declare his voice trembled as he said good-bye."

"As for the poor people, I hear, papa, that one would think they had lost their nearest and dearest. Molly Dew says they were crying in her house this morning over their breakfast as if it was a funeral."

"Is it not strange, Lucy, that what touches the heart so painfully should help to heal the pang it gives? There is that in all this affection for us that gladdens while it grieves. All—all are so kind to us! That young fellow—Trafford I think his name is—he was waiting at the post for his letters this morning when I came up, and it seems that Fossbrooke had told him of my appointment—indiscreet of him, for I would not wish it talked of; but Trafford turned to him and said, 'Ask Dr. Lendrick, i she decided about going,' and when he heard that I was, he scarcely said good-bye, but jumped into a cab, and drove off full speed.

"'What does that mean?' asked I.

"'He was so fond of Tom,' said Fossbrooke, 'they were never separate this last month or five weeks;' so you see, darling, each of us has his sphere of love and affection."

Lucy was crimson over face and neck, but never spoke a word. Had she spoken it would have been, perhaps, to corroborate Sir Brook, and to say, How fond the young men were of each other. I do not affirm this, I only hint that it is likely. Where there are blanks in this narrative, the reader has as much right to fill them as myself.

"Sir Brook," continued Lendrick, "thinks well of the young man; but for my own part I hardly like to see Tom in close companionship with one so much his superior in fortune. He is easily led, and has not yet learned that stern lesson in life, how to confess that there are many things he has no pretensions to aspire to."

"Tom loves you too sincerely, papa, ever to do that which would seriously grieve you."

"He would not deliberately—he would not in cold blood, Lucy; but young men when together have not many moods of deliberation or

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cold blood. But let us not speculate on trouble that may never come. It is enough for the present that he and Trafford are separated, if Trafford was even likely to lead him into ways of extravagance."

"What's that? Isn't it Tom? He's laughing heartily at something. Yes; here he comes."

"You may come out—the last of them has just driven off," cried Tom, knocking at the door, while he continued to laugh on immoderately.

"What is it, Tom? what are you laughing at?"

"You should have seen it; it's nothing to tell, but it was wonderful to witness. I'll never forget it as long as I live."

"But what was it?" asked she, impatiently.

"I thought we had fully done with all our visitors—and a rum set they were, most of them, not thinking of taking the place, but come out of mere curiosity—when who should drive up with two postilions and four spicy greys but Lady Drumcarron and a large party, three horsemen following. I just caught the word 'Excellency,' and found out from one of the servants that a tall old man with white hair and very heavy eyebrows was the Lord-Lieutenant. He stooped a good deal, and walked tenderly; and as the Countess was most eager about the grounds and the gardens, they parted company very soon, he going into the house to sit down, while she prosecuted her inquiries without doors.

"I took him into the library; we had a long chat about fishing, and fish-curing, and the London markets, and flax, and national education, and land tenure, and suchlike. Of course I affected not to know who he was, and I took the opportunity to say scores of impertinences about the stupidity of the Castle, and the sort of men they send over here to govern us; and he asked me if I was destined for any career or profession, and I told him frankly that whenever I took up anything I always was sure to discover it was the one very thing that didn't suit me, and as I made this unlucky discovery in law, medicine, and the church, I had given up my college career, and was now in a sort of interregnal period, wondering what it was to be next. I didn't like to own that the *res angustiæ* had anything to say to it. It was no business of his to know about that.

"'You surely have friends able and willing to suggest something that would fit you,' said he. 'Is not the Chief Baron your grandfather?'

"'Yes, and he might make me crier of his court, but I think he has promised the reversion to his butler. The fact is, I'd not do over well with any fixed responsibilities attached to me. I'd rather be a guerilla than serve in the regulars, and so I'll just wait and see if something won't turn up in that undisciplined force I'd like to serve with.'

"'I'll give you my name,' said he, 'before we part, and possibly I may know some one who might be of use to you.'

"I thanked him coolly, and we talked of something else, when there came a short plump little fellow, all beard and gold chains, to say that Lady Drumcarron was waiting for him. 'Tell her I'm coming,' said he; 'and, Balfour,' he cried out, 'before you go away, give this gentleman my address, and if he should call, take care that I see him.'

"Balfour eyed me and I eyed him, with, I take it, pretty much the same result, which said plainly enough, 'You're not the man for me.'

"'What in heaven's name is this?' cried the Viceroy, as he got outside and saw Lady Drumcarron at the head of a procession carrying plants, slips, and flower-pots down to the carriage.

"'Her ladyship has made a raid amongst the greeneries,' said Balfour, 'and tipped the head-gardener, that tall fellow there with the yellow rose-tree; as the place is going to be sold, she thought she might well do a little genteel pillage.' Curious to see who our gardener could be, all the more that he was said to be 'tall,' I went forward, and what do you think I saw? Sir Brook, with a flower-pot under one arm and a quantity of cuttings under the other, walking a little after the Countess, who was evidently giving him ample directions as to her intentions. I could scarcely refrain from an outburst of laughing, but I got away into the shrubbery and watched the whole proceedings. I was too far off to hear, but this much I saw. Sir Brook had deposited his rose-tree and his slips on the rumble, and stood beside the carriage with his hat off. When his Excellency came up a sudden movement took place in the group, and the Viceroy, seeming to push his way through the others, cried out something I could not catch, and then grasped Sir Brook's hand with both his own. All was tumult in a moment. My lady, in evident confusion and shame—that much I could see—was curtseying deeply to Sir Brook, who seemed not to understand her apologies; at least he appeared stately and courteous, as usual, and not in the slightest degree put out or chagrined by the incident. Though Lady Drumcarron was profuse of her excuses, and most eager to make amends for her mistake, the Viceroy took Sir Brook's arm and led him off to a little distance, where they talked together for a few moments.

"'It's a promise, then, Fossbrooke—you promise me!' cried he aloud, as he approached the carriage.

"'Rely upon me,—and within a week or ten days at farthest,' said Sir Brook, as they drove away.

"I have not seen him since, and I scarcely know if I shall be able to meet him without laughing."

"Here he comes," cried Lucy; "and take care, Tom, that you do nothing that might offend him."

The caution was so far unnecessary that Sir Brook's manner, as he drew near, had a certain stately dignity that invited no raillery.

"You have been detained a long time a prisoner, Dr. Lendrick," said Fossbrooke, calmly; "but your visitors were so charmed with all they saw, that they lingered on, unwilling to take their leave."

"Tom tells me we had some of our county notabilities—Lord and Lady Drumcarron, the Lacys, and others," said Lendrick.

"Yes; and the Lord-Lieutenant too, whom I used to know at Christ Church. He would

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have been well pleased to have met you. He told me your father was the ablest and most brilliant talker he ever knew."

"Ah! we are very unlike," said Lendrick, blushing modestly. "Did he give any hint as to whether his party are pleased or the reverse with my father's late conduct?"

"He only said, 'I wish you knew him, Fossbrooke; I sincerely wish you knew him, if only to assure him that he will meet far more generous treatment from us than from the Opposition.' He added, that we were men to suit each other; and this, of course, was a flattery for which I am very grateful."

"And the tall man with the stoop was the Lord-Lieutenant?" asked Tom. "I passed half an hour or more with him in the library, and he invited me to call upon him, and told a young fellow, named Balfour, to give me his address, which he forgot to do."

"We can go together, if you have no objection; for I, too, have promised to pay my respects," said Sir Brook.

Tom was delighted at the suggestion, but whispered in his sister's ear, as they passed out into the garden, "I thought I'd have burst my sides laughing when I met him; but it's the very last thing in my thoughts now. I declare I'd as soon pull a tiger's whiskers as venture on the smallest liberty with him."

"I think you are right, Tom," said she, squeezing his arm affectionately, to show that she not alone agreed with him, but was pleased that he had given her the opportunity of doing so.

"I wonder is he telling the governor what happened this morning? It can scarcely be that, though, they look so grave."

"Papa seems agitated, too," said Lucy.

"I just caught Trafford's name as they passed. I hope he's not saying anything against him. It is not only that Lionel Trafford is as good a fellow as ever lived, but that he fully believes Fossbrooke likes him. I don't think he could be so false; do you, Lucy?"

"I'm certain he is not. There, papa is beckoning to you; he wants you;" and Lucy turned hurriedly away, anxious to conceal her emotion, for her cheeks were burning, and her lips trembled with agitation.

CHAPTER XIV.

TOM CROSS-EXAMINES HIS SISTER.

It was decided on that evening that Sir Brook and Tom should set out for Dublin the next morning. Lucy knew not why this sudden determination had been come to, and Tom, who never yet had kept a secret from her, was now reserved and uncommunicative. Nor was it merely that he held aloof his confidence, but he was short and snappish in his manner, as though she had someway vexed him, and vexed him in some shape that he could not openly speak of or resent.

This was very new to her from him, and yet how was it? She had not courage to ask for an explanation. Tom was not exactly one of those people of whom it was pleasant to ask explanations. Where the matter to be explained might be one of delicacy, he had a way of abruptly blurting out the very thing one would have desired might be kept back. Just as an awkward surgeon will tear off the dressing, and set a wound a-bleeding, would he rudely destroy the work of time in healing by a moment of rash impatience. It was knowing this—knowing it well—that deterred Lucy from asking what might lead to something not over-agreeable to hear.

"Shall I pack your portmanteau, Tom?" asked she. It was a task that always fell to her lot.

"No; Nicholas can do it—any one can do it," said he, as he mumbled with an unlit cigar between his teeth.

"You used to say I always did it best, Tom—that I never forgot anything," said she, caressingly.

"Perhaps I did—perhaps I thought so. Look here, Lucy," said he, as though by an immense effort he had got strength to say what he wanted, "I'm half-vexed with you, if not more than half."

"Vexed with *me*, Tom—vexed with *me!* and for what?"

"I don't think that you need ask. I am inclined to believe that you know perfectly well what I mean, and what I would much rather not say, if you will only let me."

"I do not," said she, slowly and deliberately.

"Do you mean to say, Lucy," said he, and his manner was almost stern as he spoke, "that you have no secrets from me? that you are as frank and outspoken with me to-day as you were three months ago?"

"I do say so."

"Then, what's the meaning of this letter?" cried he, as, carried away by a burst of passion, he overstepped all the prudential reserve he had sworn himself to regard. "What does this mean?"

"I know nothing of that letter, nor what it contains," said she, blushing till her very brow became crimson.

"I don't suppose you do, for though it is addressed to you, the seal is unbroken; but you know whose handwriting it's in, and you know that you have had others from the same quarter."

"I believe the writing is Mr. Trafford's," said she, as a deathlike paleness spread over her face, "because he himself once asked me to read a letter from him in the same handwriting."

"Which you did?"

"No; I refused. I handed the letter back to him unopened, and said that, as I certainly should not write to him without my father's knowledge and permission, I would not read a letter from him without the same."

"And what was the epistle, then, that the Vicar's housekeeper handed him from you?"

"That same letter I have spoken of. He left it on my table, insisting and believing that on second thoughts I would read it. He thought so because it was not to me though addressed to me, but the copy of a letter he had written to his mother, about me certainly." Here she blushed deeply again. "As I continued, however, of the same mind, determined not to see

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what the letter contained, I re-enclosed it and gave it to Mrs. Brennan to hand to him."

"And all this you kept a secret from me?"

"It was not my secret. It was his. It was his till such time as he could speak of it to my father, and this he told me had not yet come."

"Why not?"

"I never asked him that. I do not think, Tom," said she, with much emotion, "it was such a question as you would have had me ask."

"Do you love—come, darling Lucy, don't be angry with me. I never meant to wound your feelings. Don't sob that way, my dear, dear Lucy. You know what a rough coarse fellow I am, but I'd rather die than offend you. Why did you not tell me of all this? I never liked any one so well as Trafford, and why leave me to the chance of misconstruing him? Wouldn't it have been the best way to have trusted me as you always have?"

"I don't see what there was to have confided to you. Mr. Trafford might if he wished. I mean that if there was a secret at all. I don't know what I mean," cried she, covering her face with her handkerchief, while a convulsive motion of her shoulders showed how she was moved.

"I am as glad as if I had got a thousand pounds, to know you have been so right, so thoroughly right, in all this, Lucy; and I am glad, too, that Trafford has done nothing to make me think less well of him. Let's be friends—give me your hand, like a dear, good girl, and forgive me if I have said what pained you."

"I am not angry, Tom," said she, giving her hand, but with head still averted.

"God knows, it's not the time for us to fall out," said he, with a shaking voice. "Going to separate as we are, and when to be together again not so easy to imagine."

"You are surely going out with papa?" asked she, eagerly.

"No; they say not."

"Who says not?"

"The governor himself—Sir Brook—old Mills—everybody, in fact. They have held a committee of the whole house on it. I think Nicholas was present too; and it has been decided that as I am very much given to idleness, bitter beer, and cigars, I ought not to be anywhere where these ingredients compose the chief part of existence. Now the Cape is precisely one of these places; and if you abstract the idleness, the bitter beer, and the tobacco, there is nothing left but a little Hottentotism, which is neither pleasant nor profitable. Voted, therefore, I am not to go to the Cape. It is much easier, however, to open the geography books, and show all the places I am unfit for, than to hit upon the one that will suit me. And so I am going up to Dublin to-morrow with Sir Brook to consult—I don't well know whom, perhaps a fortune-teller—what's to be done with me. All I do know is, I am to see my grandfather, and to wait on the Viceroy, and I don't anticipate that any of us will derive much pleasure from the event."

"Oh, Tom! what happiness it would be to me if grandpapa——" she stopped, blushed, and tried in vain to go on.

"Which is about the least likely thing in the world, Lucy," said he, answering her unspoken sentence. "I am just the sort of creature he couldn't abide; not to add that, from all I have heard of him, I'd rather take three years with hard labour at the hulks than live with him. It will do very well with you. You have patience, and a soft forgiving disposition. You'll fancy yourself, besides, heaven knows what of a heroine, for submitting to his atrocious temper, and imagine slavery to be martyrdom. Now, *I* couldn't. I'd let him understand that I was one of the family, and had a born right to be as ill-tempered, as selfish, and as unmannerly as any other Lendrick."

"But if he should like you, Tom? If you made a favourable impression upon him when you met?"

"If I should, I think I'd go over to South Carolina and ask some one to buy me as a negro, for I'd know in my heart it was all I could be fit for."

"Oh! my dear, dear Tom, I wish you would meet him in a different spirit, if only for poor papa's sake. You know what store he lays by grandpapa's affection."

"I see it, and it puzzles me. If any one should continue to ill-treat me for five-and-twenty years, I'd not think of beginning to forgive him till after fifty more, and I'm not quite sure I'd succeed then."

"But you are to meet him Tom," said she, hopefully. "I trust much to your meeting."

"That's more than I do, Lucy. Indeed, I'd not go at all except on the condition which I have made with myself, to accept nothing from him. I had not meant to tell you this; but it has escaped me, and can't be helped. Don't hang your head and pout your lip over that bad boy brother Tom. I intend to be as submissive and as humble in our interview as if I was going to owe my life to him, just because I want him to be very kind and gracious to you; and I'd not wish to give him any reason for saying harsh things of me, which would hurt you to listen to. If I only knew how—and I protest I do not—I'd even try and make a favourable impression upon him; for I'd like to be able to come and see you, Lucy, now and then, and it would be a sore blow to me if he forbade me."

"You don't think I'd remain under his roof if he should do so?" asked she, indignantly.

"Not if you saw him turn me away—shutting the door in my face; but what scores of civil ways there are of intimating that one is not welcome! But why imagine all these?—none of them may happen; and, as Sir Brook says, the worst misfortunes of life are those that never come to us; and I, for one, am determined to deal only with real, actual, present enemies. Isn't he a rare old fellow?—don't you like him, Lucy?"

"I like him greatly."

"He loves you, Lucy—he told me so; he said you were so like a girl whose godfather he was, and that he had loved her as if she were his own. Whether she had died, or whether something had happened that estranged them, I couldn't make out; but he said you had raised up some old, half-dead embers in his heart, and kindled a flame where he had thought all was to be cold for ever; and the tears came into his eyes, and

that great deep voice of his grew fainter and fainter, and something that sounded like a sob stopped him. I always knew he was a brave, stout-hearted, gallant fellow; but that he could feel like this I never imagined. I almost think it was some girl he was going to be married to once that you must be so like. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know; I cannot even guess," said she, slowly.

"It's not exactly the sort of nature where one would expect to find much sentiment; but, as he said one day, some old hearts are like old chateaux, with strange old chambers in them that none have traversed for years and years, and with all the old furniture moth-eaten and crumbling, but standing just where it used to be. I'd not wonder if it was of himself he was speaking."

She remained silent and thoughtful, and he went on,—"There's a deal of romance under that quaint, stern exterior. What do you think he said this morning?—'Your father's heart is wrapped up in this place, Tom; let us set to work to make money and buy it for him.' I did not believe he was serious, and I said some stupid nonsense about a diamond necklace and earrings for you on the day of presentation; and he turned upon me with a fierce look, and in a voice trembling with anger said, 'Well, sir, and whom would they become better? Is it her birth or her beauty would disparage them, if they were the jewels of a crown?' I know I'll not cross another whim of his in the same fashion again; though he came to my room afterwards to make an apology for the tone in which he had spoken, and assured me it should never be repeated."

"I hope you told him you had not felt offended."

"I did more—I did at least what pleased him more—I said I was delighted with that plan of his about buying up The Nest, and that the very thought gave a zest to any pursuit I might engage in; and so, Lucy, it is settled between us that if his Excellency won't make me something with a fine salary and large perquisites, Sir Brook and I are to set out, I'm not very sure where, and we are to do, I'm not quite certain what; but two such clever fellows, uniting experience with energy, can't fail, and the double event—I mean the estate and the diamonds—are just as good as won already. Well, what do you want, Nicholas?" cried Tom, as the grim old man put his head inside the door and retired again, mumbling something as he went. "Oh, I remember it now; he has been tormenting the governor all day about getting him some place—some situation or other, and the old rascal thinks we are the most ungrateful wretches under the sun, to be so full of our own affairs and so forgetful of his: we are certainly not likely to leave him unprovided for; he can't imagine that.

"Here he comes again. My father is gone in to Killaloe, Nicholas; but don't be uneasy, he'll not forget you."

"Forgettin's one thing, Master Tom, and rememberin' the right way is another," said Nicholas, sternly. "I told him yesterday, and I repeated it to-day, I won't go among them Hottentots."

"Has he asked you?"

"Did he ask me?" repeated the old man, leaning forward and eyeing him fiercely—"did he ask me?"

"My brother means, Nicholas, that papa couldn't expect you to go so far away from your home and your friends."

"And where's my home and my friends?" cried the irascible old fellow; "and I forty-eight years in the family? Is that the way to have a home or friends either?"

"No, Tom, no—I entreat—I beg of you," said Lucy, standing between her brother and the old man, and placing her hand on Tom's lips; "you know well that he can't help it."

"That's just it," cried Nicholas, catching the words; "I can't help it, I'm too old to help it. It isn't after eight-and-forty years one ought to be looking out for new sarvice."

"Papa hopes that grandpapa will have no objection to taking you, Nicholas; he means to write about it to-day; but if there should be a difficulty, he has another place."

"Maybe I'm to 'list and be a sodger—faix it woudn't be much worse than going back to your grandfather."

"Why, you discontented old fool," burst in Tom, "haven't you been teasing our souls out these ten years back by your stories of the fine life you led in the Chief Baron's house?"

"The eatin' was better, and the drinkin' was better," said Nicholas, resolutely. "Wherever the devil it comes from, the small beer here bangs Banagher; but for the matter of temper he was one of yourselves! and by my sowl it's a family not easily matched!"

"I agree with you; any other man than my father would have pitched you neck and crop into the Shannon years ago—I'll be shot if *I* wouldn't."

"Mind them words. What you said there is a threat—it's what the law makes a constructive threat, and we'll see what the Coorts say to it."

"I declare, Nicholas, you would provoke any one; you will let no one be your friend," said Lucy; and taking her brother's arm she led him away, while the old man, watching them till they entered the shrubbery, seated himself leisurely in a deep arm-chair, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "By my conscience," muttered he, "it takes two years off my life every day I have to keep yez in order."

CHAPTER XV.

MR. HAIRE'S MISSION.

ALTHOUGH the Chief Baron had assured Haire that his mission had no difficulty about it, that he'd find her ladyship would receive him in a very courteous spirit, and, finally, that "he'd do the thing" admirably, the unhappy little lawyer approached his task with considerable misgivings, which culminated in actual terror as he knocked at the door of the house where Lady Lendrick resided in Merrion Square, and sent up his name.

"The ladies are still in committee, sir," said

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a bland-looking, usher-like personage, who, taking up Haire's card from the salver, scanned the name with a half supercilious look.

"In committee! ah, indeed, I was not aware," stammered out Haire. "I suspect—that is—I have reason to believe her ladyship is aware—I mean my name is not unknown to Lady Lendrick—would you kindly present my card?"

"Take it up, Bates," said the man in black, and then turned away to address another person, for the hall was crowded with people of various conditions and ranks, and who showed in their air and manner a something of anxiety, if not of impatience.

"Mr. MacClean—where's Mr. MacClean?" cried a man in livery, as he held forth a square-shaped letter. "Is Mr. MacClean there?"

"Yes. I'm Mr. MacClean," said a red-faced, fussy-looking man. "I'm Mr. George Henry MacClean, of 41 Mount Street."

"Two tickets for Mr. MacClean," said the usher, handing him the letter with a polite bow.

"Mr. Nolan, Balls Bridge—does any one represent Mr. Nolan of Balls Bridge?" said the usher, haughtily.

"That's me," said a short man, who wiped the perspiration from his face with a red-spotted handkerchief, as large as a small bed-quilt—"that's me."

"The references not satisfactory, Mr. Nolan," said the usher, reading from a paper in his hand.

"Not satisfactory?—what do you mean? Is Peter Arkins, Esquire, of Clontarf, unsatisfactory? Is Mr. Ryland of Abbey Street unsatisfactory?"

"I am really, sir, unable to afford you the explanation you desire. I am simply deputed by her Ladyship to return the reply that I find written here. The noise is really so great here, I can hear nothing. Who are you asking for, Bates?"

"Mr. Mortimer O'Hagan."

"He's gone away," cried a voice; "he was here since eleven o'clock."

"Application refused. Will some one tell Mr. O'Hagan his application is refused?" said the usher, austerely.

"Might I be bold enough to ask what is going forward?" whispered Hare.

"Mr. W. Haire, Ely Place," shouted out the man in livery. "Card refused for want of a reference."

"You ought to have sent up two names—well-known names, Mr. Haire," said the usher, with a politeness that seemed marked. "It's not too late yet; let me see," and he looked at his watch, "we want a quarter to one; be back here in half-an-hour. Take a car—you'll find one at the door. Get your names, and I'll see if I can't do it for you."

"I am afraid I don't understand you, and I am sure you don't understand me. I came here by appointment——" The rest of the sentence was lost by a considerable bustle and movement that now ensued, for a number of ladies descended the stairs, chatting and laughing freely; while the servants rushed hither and thither, calling up carriages, or inquiring for others not yet come. The usher, frantically pushing the crowd aside to clear a path for the ladies, was profuse of apologies for the confusion; adding at the same time that "it was twice as bad an hour ago. There weren't less than two hundred here this morning."

A number of little pleasantries passed as the bland usher handed the ladies to their carriages; and it was evident by their laughter that his remarks were deemed pungent and witty. Meanwhile the hall was becoming deserted. The persons who had crowded there, descending singly or in groups, went their several ways, leaving Haire the only one behind. "And now, sir," said the usher, "you see it's all over. You wouldn't take my advice. They are all gone, and it's the last meeting."

"Will you favour me so far as to say for what did they meet? What was the object of the gathering?"

"I suppose, sir, you are not a reader of the morning papers?"

"Occasionally. Indeed I always glance at them."

"Well, sir, and has not your glance fallen upon the announcement of the ball—the grand ball to be given at the Rotundo for the orphan asylum called the 'Rogues' Redemptory,' at Rathmines, at the head of whose patronesses stands my lady's name?"

Haire shook his head in negative.

"And have you not come like the rest with an application for permission to attend the ball?"

"No; I have come to speak to Lady Lendrick,—and by appointment too."

A faint but prolonged whistle expressed the usher's astonishment, and he turned and whispered a few words to a footman at his side. He disappeared, and returned in a moment to say that her ladyship would see Mr. Haire.

"I trust you will forgive me, sir," said Lady Lendrick—a very large, very showy, and still handsome woman—as she motioned him to be seated. "I got your card when my head was so full of this tiresome ball, and I made the absurd mistake of supposing you came for tickets. You are, I think your note says, an old friend of Mr. Thomas Lendrick?"

"I am an old friend of his father's, madam! The Chief Baron and myself were schoolfellows."

"Yes, yes; I have no doubt," said she, hurriedly; "but from your note—I have it here somewhere," and she rummaged amongst a lot of papers that littered the table—"Your note gave me to understand that your visit to me regarded Mr. Thomas Lendrick, and not the Chief Baron. It is possible, however, I may have mistaken your meaning. I wish I could find it. I laid it out of my hand a moment ago. Oh, here it is! now we shall see which of us is right," and with a sort of triumph she opened the letter and read aloud, slurring over the few commencing lines till she came to "that I may explain to your ladyship the circumstances by which Mr. Thomas Lendrick's home will for the present be broken up, and entreat of you to extend to his daughter the same kind interest and favour you have so constantly extended to her father." "Now, sir, I hope I may say that it is not *I* have been mistaken. If I read this passage aright, it bespeaks my consideration for a young lady who will shortly need a home and a protectress."

"I suppose I expressed myself very ill. I

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mean, madam, I take it, that in my endeavour not to employ any abruptness, I may have fallen into some obscurity. Shall I own, besides," added he, with a tone of half-desperation in his voice, "that I had no fancy for this mission of mine at all—that I undertook it wholly against my will? Baron Lendrick's broken health, my old friendship for him, his insistance, and you can understand what *that* is, eh?"—he thought she was about to speak; but she only gave a faint equivocal sort of smile, and he went on—"All these together overcame my scruples, and I agreed to come." He paused here as though he had made the fullest and most ample explanation, and that it was now her turn to speak.

"Well, sir," said she, "go on: I am all ears for your communication."

"There it is: that's the whole of it, madam. You are to understand distinctly that with the arrangement itself I had no concern whatever. Baron Lendrick never asked my advice: I never tendered it. I'm not sure that I should have concurred with his notions—but that's nothing to the purpose; all that I consented to was to come here, to tell you the thing is so, and why it is so—there;" and with this he wiped his forehead, for the exertion had heated and fatigued him.

"I know I'm very dull, very slow of comprehension, and in compassion for this defect, will you kindly make your explanation a little, a very little, fuller. What is it that is *so?*" and she emphasised the last word with a marked sarcasm in her tone.

"Oh, I quite see that your ladyship may not quite like it. There is no reason why you should like it—all things considered; but, after all, it may turn out very well. If she suit him, if she can hit it off with his temper—and she may—young folks have often more forbearance than older ones—there's no saying what it may lead to."

"Once for all, sir," said she, haughtily, for her temper was sorely tried, "what is this thing which I am not to like, and yet bound to bear?"

"I don't think I said that; I trust I never said your ladyship was bound to bear anything. So well as I can recall the Chief Baron's words,—and, God forgive me, but I wish I was—no matter what or where—when I heard them,—this is the substance of what he said: 'Tell her,' meaning your ladyship—'tell her that, rightly understood, the presence of my granddaughter as mistress of my house——'"

"What do you say, sir?—is Miss Lendrick coming to reside at the Priory?"

"Of course—what else have I been saying this half-hour?"

"To take the position of lady of the house?" said she, not deigning to notice his question.

"Just so, madam."

"I declare, sir, bold as the step is,"—she arose as she spoke, and drew herself haughtily up—"bold as the step is, it is not half so bold as your own courage in coming to tell of it. What the Chief Baron had not the hardihood to communicate in writing, you dare to deliver to me by word of mouth—you dare to announce to me that my place, the station I ought to fill, is to be occupied by another, and that whenever I pass the threshold of the Priory, I come as the guest of Lucy Lendrick! I do hope, sir, I may attribute to the confusion of your faculties—a confusion of which this short interview has given me proof—that you really never rightly apprehended the ignominy of the mission your friend intrusted to you."

"You're right there," said he, placing both his hands on the side of his head; "confusion is just the name for it."

"Yes, sir; but I apprehend you must have undertaken this office in a calm moment, and let me ask you how you could have lent yourself to such a task? You are aware, for the whole world is aware, that in living apart from the Chief Baron, I am yielding to a necessity imposed by his horrible, his insufferable temper; now how long will this explanation be valid, if my place, in any respect, should be occupied by another? The isolation in which he now lives, his estrangement from the world, serve to show that he has withdrawn from society, and accepted the position of a recluse. Will this continue now? will these be the habits of the house with a young lady at its head, free to indulge all the caprices of ignorant girlhood? I declare, sir, I wonder how a little consideration for your friend might not have led you to warn him against the indiscretion he was about to commit. The slight to *me*," said she, sarcastically, and flushing deeply, "it was possible you might overlook; but I scarcely see how you could have forgotten the stain that must attach to that 'large intellect—that wise and truly great man.' I am quoting a paragraph I read in the 'Post' this morning, with which, perhaps, you are familiar."

"I did not see it," said Haire, helplessly.

"I declare, sir, I was unjust enough to think you wrote it: I thought no one short of him who had come on your errand to-day could have been the author."

"Well, I wish with all my heart I'd never come," said he, with a melancholy gesture of his hands.

"I declare, sir, I am not surprised at your confession. I suppose you are not aware that in the very moment adopted for this—this—this new establishment, there is something like studied insult to me. It is only ten days ago I mentioned to the Chief Baron that my son, Colonel Sewell, was coming back from India on a sick leave. He has a wife and three little children, and, like most soldiers, is not over well off. I suggested that, as the Priory was a large roomy house, with abundant space for many people without in the slightest degree interfering with each other, he should offer the Sewells to take them in. I said nothing more—nothing about *ménage*—no details of any kind. I simply said: 'Couldn't you give the Sewells the rooms that look out on the back lawn? Nobody ever enters them; even when you receive in the summer evenings they are not opened. It would be a great boon to an invalid to be housed so quietly, so removed from all noise and bustle.' And to mark how I intended no more, I added, 'They wouldn't bore you, nor need you ever see them unless you wished for it.' And what was his reply? 'Madam, I never liked soldiers. I'm not sure that his young wife wouldn't be displeasing to me, and I know that his children would be insufferable.'

"I said, 'Let me take the dear children then.'

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'Do, by all means, and their dear parents also,' he broke in: 'I should be in despair if I thought I had separated you.' Yes, sir, I give you his very words. This wise and truly great man, or truly wise and great—which is it?—had nothing more generous nor more courteous to say to me than a sarcasm and an impertinence. Are you not proud of your friend?"

Never was there a more unlucky peroration, from the day when Lord Denman conducted an eloquent defence of a queen's innocence by appealing to the unhappy illustration which called forth the touching words, "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone at her." Never was there a more signal blunder than to ask this man to repudiate the friendship which had formed the whole pride and glory of his life.

"I should think I *am* proud of him, madam," said he, rising and speaking with a boldness that amazed even himself. "I was proud to be his class-fellow at school; I was proud to sit in the same division with him in college—proud when he won his gold medal and carried off his fellowship. It was a proud day to me when I saw him take his seat on the bench, and my heart nearly burst with pride when he placed me on his right hand at dinner and told the Benchers and the Bar that we had walked the road of life together, and that the grasp of my hand—he called it my honest hand—had been the ever-present earnest of each success he had achieved in his career. Yes, madam, I am very proud of him; and my heart must be cold indeed before I cease to be proud of him."

"I declare, sir, you astonish, you amaze me. I was well aware how that truly great and wise man had often inspired the eloquence of attack. Many have assailed—many have vituperated him; but that any one should have delivered a panegyric on the inestimable value of his friendship! his friendship of all things!—is what I was not prepared for."

Haire heard the ringing raillery of her laugh, he was stung by he knew not what tortures of her scornful impertinence; bitter, biting words, very cruel words too, fell over and around him like a sort of hail; they beat on his face and rattled over his head and shoulders: he was conscious of a storm, and conscious too that he sought neither shelter nor defence, but only tried to fly before the hurricane, whither he knew not.

How he quitted that room, descended the stairs, and escaped from the house, he never was able to recall. He was far away outside the city wandering along through an unfrequented suburb ere he came to his full consciousness, murmuring to himself ever as he went—What a woman, what a woman! what a temper—ay, and what a tongue!

Without any guidance of his own—without any consciousness of it—he walked on and on, till he found himself at the gate-lodge of the Priory; a carriage was just passing in, and he stopped to ask whose it was. It was the Chief Baron's granddaughter, who had arrived that morning by train. He turned back when he heard this, and returned to town. "Whether you like it or not, Lady Lendrick, it is done now, and there's no good in carrying on the issue after the verdict;" and with this reflection, embodying possibly as much wisdom as his whole career had taught him, he hastened homeward, secretly determining, if he possibly could, never to reveal anything to the Chief Baron of his late interview with Lady Lendrick.

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CHAPTER XVI.

SORROWS AND PROJECTS.

Dr. Lendrick and his son still lingered at the Swan's Nest after Lucy's departure for the Priory. Lendrick, with many things to arrange and prepare for his coming voyage, was still so overcome by the thought of breaking up his home and parting from his children, that he could not address his mind to anything like business. He would wander about for hours through the garden and the shrubberies, taking leave, as he called it, of his dear plants and flowers, and come back to the house, distressed and miserable. Often and often would he declare to Sir Brook, who was his guest, that the struggle was too much for him. "I never was a man of ardour or energy, and it is not now, when I have passed the middle term of life, that I am to hope for that spring and elasticity which were denied to my youth. Better for me send for Lucy, and stay where I am; nowhere shall I be so happy again." Then would come the sudden thought that all this was mere selfishness, that in this life of inaction and indolence he was making no provision for that dear girl he loved so well. Whatever hopes the reconciliation with his father might lead to, would of course be utterly scattered to the winds by an act so full of disobedience as this. "It is true," thought he, "I may fail abroad as I have failed at home. Success and I are scarcely on speaking terms—but the grandfather cannot leave the granddaugher whom he has taken from her home, totally uncared and unprovided for."

As for young Tom, Sir Brook had pledged himself to take care of him. It was a vague expression enough; it might mean anything, everything, or nothing. Sir Brook Fossbrooke had certainly, in worldly parlance, not taken very good care of himself—far from it; he had squandered and made away with two large estates and an immense sum in ready money. It was true he had friends everywhere—some of them very great people with abundant influence, and well able to help those they cared for; but Fossbrooke was not one of those who ask; and the world has not yet come to the millennial beatitude in which one's friends importune them with inquiries how they are to be helped, what and where they wish for.

Many a time in the course of country-house life—at breakfast, as the post came in, and during the day, as a messenger would deliver a telegram—some great man would say, "There is a vacancy there—such a one has died—so-and-so has retired. There's a thing to suit you, Fossbrooke"—and Sir Brook would smile, say a word or two that implied nothing, and so would end the matter. If my "Lord" ever retained any memory of the circumstance some time after, it

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would be that he had offered something to Fossbrooke who wouldn't take it, didn't care for it. For so is it throughout life; the event which to one is the veriest trifle of the hour, is to another a fate and a fortune; and then, great folk who lead lives of ease and security are very prone to forget that humble men have often a pride very disproportioned to their condition, and are timidly averse to stretch out the hand for what it is just possible it may not be intended they should touch.

At all events, Fossbrooke went his way through the world a mystery to many and a puzzle—some averring that it was a shame to his friends in power that he had "got nothing," others as stoutly declaring that he was one whom no office would tempt, nor would any place requite him for the loss of liberty and independence.

He himself was well aware of each of these theories, but too proud to say a word to those who professed either of them. If, however, he was too haughty to ask for himself, he was by no means above being a suitor for his friends; and many a one owed to his active solicitude the advancement which none stood more in need of than himself.

"We shall make the Viceroy do something for us, Tom," he would say. "Think over what it shall be—for that's the invariable question—What is it you want? And it's better far to say, Make me an archbishop, than have to own that you want anything, and are, maybe, fit for nothing."

Though Lendrick was well disposed towards Fossbrooke, and fully sensible of his manly honesty and frankness, he could not help seeing that he was one of those impulsive sanguine natures that gain nothing from experience beyond the gift of companionship. They acquire all that can make them delightful in society—boons they are—and especially to those whose more prudent temperament inclines them to employ their gifts more profitably. Scores of these self-made men, rich to overflowing with all that wealth could buy around them, would say, What a happy fellow was Fossbrooke! what a blessing it was to have his nature, his spirits, buoyancy, and suchlike—to be able to enjoy life as he did. Perhaps they believed all that they said, too—who knows? When they made such speeches to himself, as they would at times, he heard them with the haughty humility of one who hears himself praised for that which the flatterer deems a thing too low for envy. He well understood how cheaply others estimated his wares, for they were a scrip that figured in no share-list, and never were quoted at a premium.

Lendrick read him very correctly, and naturally thought that a more practical and a more worldly guide would have been better for Tom—some one to hold him back, not to urge him forward; some one to whisper prudence, restraint, denial, not daring, and dash, and indulgence. But somehow these flighty, imaginative, speculative men have very often a wonderful persuasiveness about them, and can give to the wildest dreams a marvellous air of substance and reality. A life so full of strange vicissitudes as Fossbrooke's seemed a guarantee for any—no matter what—turn of fortune. Hear him tell of where he had been, what he had done, and with whom, and you at once felt you were in presence of one to whom no ordinary laws of worldly caution or prudence applied.

That his life had compassed many failures and few successes was plain enough. He never sought to hide the fact. Indeed, he was candour itself in his confessions, only that he accompanied them by little explanations, showing the exact spot and moment in which he had lost the game. It was wonderful what credit he seemed to derive from these disclosures. It was like an honest trader showing his balance-sheet to prove that, but for the occurrence of such ills as no prudence could ward off, his condition must have been one of prosperity.

Never did he say anything more truthful than that "he had not ever cared for money." So long as he had it he used it lavishly, thoughtlessly, very often generously. When he ceased to have it the want scarcely appeared to touch him personally. Indeed, it was only when some necessity presented itself to aid this one, or extricate that, he would suddenly remember his impotence to be of use, and then the sting of his poverty would sorely pain him.

Like all men who have suffered reverses, he had to experience the different acceptance he met with in his days of humble fortune from what greeted him in his era of prosperity. If he felt this, none could detect it. His bearing and manner betrayed nothing of such consciousness. A very slight increase of stateliness might possibly have marked him in his poverty, and an air of more reserved dignity, which showed itself in his manner to strangers. In all other respects he was the same.

That such a character should have exercised a great influence over a young man like Tom Lendrick—ardent, impetuous, and desirous of adventure—was not strange.

"We must make a fortune for Lucy, Tom," said Sir Brook. "Your father's nature is too fine strung to be a money-maker, and she must be cared for." This was a desire which he continued to utter day after day; and though Fossbrooke usually smoked on after he had said it without any intimation as to where, and when, and how this same fortune was to be amassed, Tom Lendrick placed the most implicit faith in the assurance that it would be done "somehow."

One morning as Lendrick was walking with his son in the garden, making, as he called it, his farewell visit to his tulips and moss-roses, he asked Tom if any fixed plan had been decided on as to his future.

"We have got several, sir. The difficulty is the choice. Sir Brook was at one time very full of buying a great tract in Donegal, and stocking it with all sorts of wild animals. We began with deer, antelopes, and chamois; and last night we got to wolves, bears, and a tiger. We were to have a most commodious shooting-box, and invite parties to come and sport, who, instead of going to Bohemia, the Rocky Mountains, and to Africa, would find all their savagery near home, and pay us splendidly for the privilege.

"There are some difficulties in the plan, it is true; our beasts might not be easy to keep within bounds. The jaguar might make an excursion into the market-town; the bear

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might eat a butcher. Sir Brook, besides, doubts if *feræ* could be preserved under the game laws. He has sent a case to Brewster for his opinion."

"Don't tell me of such absurdities," said Lendrick, trying to repress his quiet laugh. "I want you to speak seriously and reasonably."

"I assure you, sir, we have the whole details of this on paper, even to the cost of the beasts, and the pensions to the widows of the keepers that may be devoured. Another plan that we had, and it looked plausible enough, too, was to take out a patent for a wonderful medical antidote. As Sir Brook says, there is nothing like a patent medicine to make a man rich; and by good luck he is possessed of the materials for one. He has the secret for curing the bite of the rattlesnake. He got it from a Tuscarora Indian, who, I believe, was a sort of father-in-law to him. Three applications of this to the wound have never been known to fail."

"But we are not infested with rattlesnakes, Tom."

"That's true, sir. We thought of that, and decided that we should alter the prospectus of our Company, and we have called it 'The antidote to an evil of stupendous magnitude and daily recurrence.'

"A new method of flotation in water, by inflating the cellular membrane to produce buoyancy; a translation of the historical plays of Shakespeare into Tonga, for the interesting inhabitants of those islands; artificial rainfall, by means of the voltaic battery: these are a few of his jottings down in a little book in manuscript he has entitled, 'Things to be Done.'

"His favourite project, however, is one he has revolved for years in his mind, and he is fully satisfied that it contains the germ of boundless wealth. It has been shown, he says, that in the smoke issuing from the chimneys of great smelting furnaces, particles of subtilised metal are carried away to the amount of thousands of pounds sterling: not merely is the quantity great, but the quality, as might be inferred, is of the most valuable and precious kind. To arrest and precipitate this waste is his project, and he has been for years making experiments to this end. He has at length, he believes, arrived at the long-sought-for problem, and as he possesses a lead mine in the island of Sardinia, he means that we should set out there, and at once begin operations."

Dr. Lendrick shook his head gravely as he listened; indeed, Tom's manner in detailing Sir Brook's projects was little calculated to inspire serious confidence.

"I know, father," cried he, "what you mean. I know well how wild and flighty these things appear; but if you had only heard them from him—had you but listened to his voice, and heard him speak of his own doubts and fears—how he canvasses, not merely the value of his project, but what the world will say of it, and of him—how modestly he rates himself—how free of all the cant of the discoverer he is—how simply he enters into explanations—how free to own the difficulties that bar success,—I say, if you had experienced these, I feel sure you would not escape from him without catching some of that malady of speculation which has so long beset him. Nor is one less disposed to trust him that he makes no parade of these things. Indeed, they are his deepest, most inviolable secrets. In his intercourse with the world, no one has ever heard him allude to one of these projects, and I have given him my solemn pledge not to speak of them, save to you."

"It is a reason to think better of the man, Tom, but not to put more faith in the discoveries."

"I believe I take the man and his work together; at all events, when I am along with him, and listening to him, he carries me away captive, and I am ready to embark in any enterprise he suggests. Here he comes, with two letters, I see, in his hand. Did you ever see a man less like a visionary, father? Is not every trait of his marked with thought and struggle?" This was not the way Tom's father read Fossbrooke, but there was no time to discuss the point further.

"A letter for each of you," said Sir Brook, handing them; and then taking out a cigar, he strolled down an alley, while they were engaged in reading.

"We have got a tenant at last," said Lendrick. "The Dublin house-agent has found some one who will take the place as it stands; and now, to think of my voyage."

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CHAPTER XVII.

A LUNCHEON AT THE PRIORY.

It was well for poor Lendrick that he was not to witness the great change which, in a few short weeks, had been effected in his once home. So complete, indeed, was the transformation, there was but very little left beyond the natural outline of the scenery to remind one of that lovely nook in which the tasteful cottage nestled. The conservatory had been converted into a dining-room; the former dining-room being fitted up for a billiard-room. The Swiss cow-house, a pretty little conceit, on which Lendrick had lavished some money and more time, was turned into a stable, with three loose-boxes; and the neat lawn, whose velvet sward was scarce less beautiful than the glittering flower-beds that studded it, was ruthlessly cut up into a racecourse, with hurdles and fences and double ditches, to represent a stiff country, and offer all the features of a steeple-chase.

It needed not the assurance of Mr. Kimball, the house-agent, to proclaim that his client was very unlike the last occupant of the place. "*He* was no recluse, no wretched misanthropist, hiding his discontent amongst shrubs and forcing-beds; he was a man of taste and refinement, with knowledge of life and its requirements. He would be an acquisition to any neighbourhood."

Now, the last phrase—and he invariably made it his peroration—has a very wide and sweeping acceptation. It appeals to the neighbourhood with all the charms that pertain to social intercourse; a guest the more and a host the more are no small claims in small

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places. It appeals to the Parson, as another fountain from which to draw draughts of benevolence. To the Doctor it whispers fees and familiar dinners. Galen knows that the luckiest of men are not exempt from human ills, and that gout comes as a frequent guest where the cook is good and the wine tempting; and the Butcher himself revels in the thought of a "good family" that consumes sirloins and forestalls sweetbreads.

It was somewhat trying to young Tom Lendrick, who had gone down to the Nest to fetch away some remnants of fishing-tackle he had left there, to hear these glowing anticipations of the new-comer, so evidently placed in contrast with the quiet and inexpensive life his father had led. How unlike were his father, and this "acquisition to any neighbourhood," was impressed upon him at any moment! How could a life of unobtrusive kindness, of those daily ministerings to poor men's wants, compete with the glitter and display which were to adorn a neighbourhood?

Already were people beginning to talk of Lendrick as odd, eccentric, peculiar; to set down his finest qualities as strange traits of a strange temperament, and rather, on the whole, to give themselves credit for the patience and forbearance which they had shown to one who, after all, was "simply an egotist."

Yes, such are not unfrequent judgments in this same world of ours; and if you would have men's suffrages for the good you do, take care that you do it conventionally. Be in all things like those around you; and if there be a great man in your vicinity, whenever a doubt arises in your mind as to any course of action, do as you may imagine he might do.

Young Lendrick came away not a little disgusted with this taste of human fickleness. The sight of their old home changed even to desecration was bad enough, but this cold ingratitude was worse.

Had he gone into the cabins of the poor, had he visited the humble dwellings where his father's generous devotion had brought him face to face with famine and fever, he would have heard much to redress the balance of these opinions. He would have heard those warm praises that come from sorrow-stricken hearts, the wail of the friendless and forlorn. Tom heard not these, and he returned to town with a feeling of anger and resentment against the world he had never known before.

"How absurd it is in old Fossbrooke," thought he, "to go on saying money cannot do this, that, and t'other! Why, it can do everything. It does not alone make a man great, powerful, and influential, but it gains him the praise of being good and kind and generous. Look at my poor father, who never had a thought but for others, who postponed himself to all around him; and yet here is some one, whose very name is unknown, more eagerly looked for, more ardently desired, than would he be were it to be announced to-morrow he was coming back to live amongst them. What nonsense it is to say, that the world cares for any qualities save those it can utilise! and I am only amazed how a man could have seen so much of life as Sir Brook and gained so little by his experience."

It was in this mood he got back to the little lodging in a humble suburb called Cullen's Wood, where Sir Brook awaited him. It is not impossible that the disparities of temperament in this world are just as beneficial, just as grateful, as are the boundless variety and change we find in nature. To Tom Lendrick's depression, almost disgust with life, Sir Brook brought that bright, hopeful, happy spirit, which knew how to throw sunlight on every path to be travelled.

He had received good news, or what he thought was good news, from Sardinia. A new vein of ore had been struck—very "fat" ore they called it—some eighty-odd per cent, and a fair promise of silver in it. "They ask me for thirty thousand francs, though, Tom," said he, with a smile; "they might as well have written 'pounds' when they were about it. They want to repair the engine and erect a new crane. They say, too, the chains are worn and unsafe—a thing to be looked to, or we shall have some accidents. In fact, they need fully double what they ask for; and seeing how impossible was the performance, I am astonished at their modesty."

"And what do you mean to do, sir?" asked Tom, bluntly.

"I have been thinking of two courses; my first thought was to make a formal conveyance of the Mine to you and your sister, for your joint use and benefit. This done, and I standing aloof from all possible interest in it, I bethought me of a loan to be raised on the security of the property—not publicly, not generally, but amongst your father's friends and well-wishers—beginning with the neighbourhood where he has lived so long, and around which he has sowed the seeds of such benefits as needs must ripen in gratitude."

"Indulge no delusions on that score, sir. There is not a man in the county, except old Mills the vicar perhaps, has a good word for us; and as to going to one of them for assistance, I'd rather sweep a crossing. You shake your head, Sir Brook, and you smile at my passionate denunciation; but it is true, every word of it. I heard, in the few hours I spent there, scores of stories of my poor father's eccentricity—his forgetfulness, his absence, and what not—but never a syllable of his noble liberality, his self-sacrifice, or his gentleness."

"My dear Tom," said the old man, solemnly, "when you have lived to one-half my age you will discover that the world is not so much cursed with ill-nature as with levity, and that when men talk disparagingly of their fellows, they do so rather to seem witty than to be just. There was not, perhaps, one of those who tried to raise a laugh at your father's oddities, or who assumed to be droll at his expense, who would not in a serious mood have conceded to him every good and great trait of his nature. The first step in worldly knowledge is to rise above all consideration of light gossip. Take my word for it, we often confirm men in wrong thinking by opposition, who, if left to themselves and their own hearts, would review their judgments, and even retract them."

Tom took a hasty turn up and down the room; a ready reply was on his lip, indeed it was with difficulty he repressed it, but he did so, and

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stood in seeming acquiescence to what he had heard. At last he said, "And the other plan, Sir Brook—what was that?"

"Perhaps a more likely one, Tom," said the old man, cheerfully. "It was to apply directly to your grandfather, a man whose great intelligence would enable him to examine a project with whose details he had not ever before versed himself, and ask whether he would not make the advance we require on mortgage or otherwise."

"I don't think I'd like to ask him," said Tom, with a grim smile.

"The proposal could come from me," said Sir Brook, proudly, "if he would graciously accord me an interview."

Tom turned away to hide a smile, for he thought, if such a meeting were to take place, what he would give to be an unseen witness of it: to watch the duel between antagonists so different, and whose weapons were so unlike.

"My sister knows him better than any of us," said Tom, at last; "might I consult her as to the likelihood of any success with him?"

"By all means; it is what I would have myself advised."

"I will do so then to-day. I ought to have gone to see her yesterday; but I will go to-day, and report progress when I come back. I have a long budget for her," added he, with a sigh—"a catalogue of all the things I am not going to do. I am not going to be a medallist, nor win a fellowship, nor even be a doctor; it will, however, give me great courage if I can say, I'll be a miner."

Tom Lendrick was right when he said he should have gone to see his sister on the day before, though he was not fully aware how right. The Chief Baron, in laying down a few rules for Lucy's guidance, made a point of insisting that she should only receive visitors on one day of the week; and in this regulation he included even her brother. So averse was the old man to be exposed to even a passing meeting with strangers, that on these Tuesdays he either kept his room or retired to a little garden of which he kept the key, and from whose precincts all were rigorously excluded.

Well knowing her brother's impatience of anything like restricted liberty, and how rapidly he would connect such an injunction as this with a life of servitude and endurance, Lucy took care to make the time of receiving him appear a matter of her own choice and convenience, and at the time of parting would say, "Good-bye till Tuesday, Tom; don't forget Tuesday, for we shall be sure to be alone, and to ourselves." He the more easily believed this, that on these same Tuesdays the whole place seemed deserted and desolate. The grave-looking man in black, who preceded him up the stairs, ushered him along a corridor, and finally announced him, awaited him like a piece of machinery, repeating every movement and gesture with an unbroken uniformity, and giving him to understand that not only his coming was expected, but all the details of his reception had been carefully prescribed and determined on.

"As I follow that fellow along the passage, Lucy," said Tom, one day, "I can't help thinking that I experience every sensation of a man going to be hanged—his solemn face, his measured tread, the silence, and the gloom—only needing pinioned arms to make the illusion perfect."

"Tie them around me, dearest Tom," said she, laughing, and drawing him to a seat beside her on the sofa; "and remember," added she, "you have a long day. Your sentence will not come off for another week;" and thus jestingly did she contrive to time his coming without ever letting him know the restrictions that defined his visits.

Now, the day before this conversation between Sir Brook and Tom took place, being a Tuesday, Lucy had watched long and anxiously for his coming. She knew he had gone down to Killaloe on the preceding Saturday, but he had assured her he would be back and be with her by Tuesday. Lucy's life was far from unhappy, but it was one of unbroken uniformity, and the one sole glimpse of society was that meeting with her brother, whose wayward thoughts and capricious notions imparted to all he said a something striking and amusing. He usually told her how his week had been passed—where he had been, and with whom—and she had learned to know his companions, and ask after them by name. Her chief interest was, however, about Sir Brook, from whom Tom usually brought a few lines, but always in an unsealed envelope, inscribed, "By the favour of Mr. Lendrick, jun."

How often would Tom quiz her about the respectful devotion of her old admirer; and jestingly ask her if she could consent to marry him? "I know he'll ask you the question one of these days, Lucy, and it's your own fault if you give him such encouragement as may mislead him." And then they would talk over the romance of the old man's nature, wondering whether the real world would be rendered more tolerable or the reverse by that ideal tone which so imaginative a temperament could give it. "Is it not strange," said Tom, one day, "that I can see all the weakness of his character wherever my own interests do not come? but the moment he presents before me some bright picture of a splendid future, a great name to achieve, a great fortune to make, that moment he takes me captive, and I regard him not as a visionary or a dreamer, but as a man of consummate shrewdness and great knowledge of life."

"In this you resemble Sancho Panza, Tom," said she, laughing. "He had little faith in his master's chivalry, but he implicitly believed in the island he was to rule over;" and from that day forward she called her brother Sancho and Sir Brook the Don.

On the day after that on which Tom's visit should have been but was not paid, Lucy sat at luncheon with her grandfather in a small breakfast-room which opened on the lawn. The old Judge was in unusual spirits; he had just received an address from the bar, congratulating him on his recovery, and expressing hope that he might be soon again seen on that Bench he had so much ornamented by his eloquence and his wisdom. The newspapers, too, with a fickleness that seems their most invariable feature, spoke most flatteringly of his services, and placed his name beside those who had conferred highest honour on the judgeship.

"It is neatly worded, Lucy," said the old man,

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taking up the paper on which the address was written; "and the passage that compares me with Mansfield is able as well as true. Both Mansfield and myself understood how there stands above all written law that higher, greater, grander law, that is based in the heart of all humanity, in the hope of an eternal justice, and soars above every technicality, by the intense desire of truth. It would have been, however, no more than fair to have added that, to an intellect the equal of Mansfield, I brought a temper which Mansfield had not, and a manner which, if found in the courts of royalty, is seldom met with on the bench. I do not quite like that phrase, 'the rapid and unerring glance of Erskine.' Erskine was brilliant for a Scotchman, but a brilliant Scotchman is but a third-rate Irishman. They who penned this might have known as much. I am better pleased with the words, 'the noble dignity of Lord Eldon.' There, my child, there, they indeed have hit upon a characteristic. In Eldon nature seemed to have created the judicial element in a high degree. It would be the vulgarity of modesty to pretend not to recognise in my own temperament a like organisation.

"May I read you, Lucy, the few words in which I mean to reply to this courteous address. Will it bore you, my dear?"

"On the contrary, sir, I shall feel myself honoured as well as interested."

"Sit where you are, then, and I will retire to the far corner of the room. You shall judge if my voice and delivery be equal to the effort; for I mean to return my thanks in person, Lucy. I mean to add the force of my presence to the vigour of my sentiments. I have bethought me of inviting those who have signed this document to luncheon here; and it may probably be in the large drawing-room that I shall deliver this reply. If not, it may possibly be in my Court before rising—I have not fully determined." So saying, he arose; and with feeble steps—assisting himself as he went by the table, and then grasping a chair—he moved slowly across the room. She knew him too well to dare to offer her arm, or appear in any way to perceive his debility. That he felt, and felt bitterly, "the curse of old age," as he once profanely called it, might be marked in the firm compression of his lips and the stern frown that settled on him, while, as he sank into a seat, a sad weary sigh declared the utter exhaustion that overcame him.

It was not till after some minutes that he rallied sufficiently to unroll his manuscript and adjust his spectacles. The stillness in the room was now perfect; not a sound was heard save the faint hum of a bee which had strayed into the room and was vaguely floating about to find an exit. Lucy sat in an attitude of patient attention—her hands crossed before her, and her eyes slightly downcast.

A faint low cough, and he began, but in a voice tremulous and faint, "'Mr. Chief Sergeant, and Gentlemen of the Bar'—do you hear me, Lucy?"

"Yes, sir, I hear you."

"I will try to be more audible; I will rest for a moment." He laid his paper on his knees, closed his eyes, and sat immovable for some seconds.

It was at this moment, when to the intense stillness was added a sense of expectancy, the honeysuckle that grew across the window moved, the frail branches gave way, and a merry voice called out,—"Scene the first: a young lady discovered at luncheon!" and with a spring Tom Lendrick bounced into the room, and, ere her cry of alarm had ended, was clasping his sister in his arms.

"Oh, Tom, dearest Tom, why to-day? Grandpapa—grandpapa is here," sighed she, rather than whispered, in his ear.

The young man started back, more struck by the emotion she had shown than by her words, and the Chief Baron advanced towards him with a manner of blended courtesy and dignity, saying, "I am glad to know you. Your sister's brother must be very welcome to me."

"I wish I could make a proper excuse for this mode of entry, sir. First of all, I thought Lucy was alone, and secondly——"

"Never mind the second plea; I submit to a verdict on the first," said the Judge, smiling.

"Tom forgot, it was Tuesday was his day," began Lucy.

"I have no day; days are all alike to me, Lucy. My occupations of Monday could be transferred to a Saturday, or if need be postponed indefinitely beyond it."

"The glorious leisure of the fortunate," said the Judge, with a peculiar smile.

"Or the vacuity of the unlucky, possibly," said Tom, with an easy laugh.

"At all events, young gentleman, you carry your load jauntily."

"One reason is, perhaps, that I never knew it was a load. I have always paraded in heavy marching order, so that I don't mind the weight of my pack."

For the first time did the old man's features relax into a look of kindly meaning. To find the youth not merely equal to appreciate a figure of speech, but able to carry on the illustration, seemed so to identify him with his own blood and kindred that the old Judge felt himself instinctively drawn towards him.

"Lucy, help your brother to something; there was an excellent curry there a while ago—if it be not cold."

"I have set my affections on that cold beef. It seems to me an age since I have seen a real sirloin."

A slight twitch crossed the Judge's face—a pang he felt at what might be an insinuated reproach at his inhospitality; and he said, in a tone of almost apology, "We see no one—absolutely no one—here. Lucy resigns herself to the companionship of a very dreary old man whom all else have forgotten."

"Don't say so, grandpapa, on the day when such a testimony of esteem and affection reaches you."

Young Lendrick looked up from his plate, turning his eyes first towards his sister, then towards his grandfather; his glance was so palpably an interrogatory, there was no mistaking it. Perhaps the old man's first impulse was not to reply; but his courtesy or his vanity, or a blending of both, carried the day, and he said, in a voice of much feeling, "Your sister refers to an address I have just received—an address which the Irish Bar have deemed proper to

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transmit to me with their congratulations on my recovery. It is as gratifying, it is as flattering, as she says. My brethren have shown that they can rise above all consideration of sect or party in tendering their esteem to a man whom no administration has ever been able to convert into a partisan."

"But you have always been a Whig, sir, haven't you?" said Tom, bluntly.

"I have been a Whig, sir, in the sense that a King is a Royalist," said the old man, haughtily; and though Tom felt sorely provoked to reply to this pretentious declaration, he only gave a wicked glance at his sister, and drank off his wine.

"It was at the moment of your unexpected appearance," continued the Judge, that I was discussing with your sister, whether my reply to this compliment would come better if delivered here, or from my place on the bench."

"I'd say from the bench," said Tom, as he helped himself to another slice of beef.

The old man gave a short cough, with a start. The audacity of tendering advice so freely and positively overcame him, and his colour, faint indeed, rose to his withered cheek, and his eye glittered as he said, "Might I have the benefit of hearing the reasons which have led you to this opinion?"

"First of all," said Tom, in a careless off-hand way, "I take it the thing would have more—what shall I say?—dignity; secondly, the men who have signed the address might feel they were treated with more consideration; and, lastly,—it's not a very good reason, but I am bound to own it—I'd like to hear it myself, which I could if it were delivered in public, but which I am not so likely to do if spoken here."

"Oh, Tom, dear Tom!" whispered his sister, in dismay at a speech so certain to be accepted in its least pleasing signification.

"You have already to-day reminded me of my deficiencies in hospitality, sir. This second admonition was uncalled for. It is happy for *me* that my defence is unassailable. It is happy for *you* that your impeachment is unwitnessed."

"You have mistaken me, sir," said Tom, eagerly. "I never thought of reflecting on your hospitality. I simply meant to say that as I find myself here to-day by a lucky accident, I scarcely look to Fortune to do me such another good turn in a hurry."

"Your father's fault—a fault that would have shipwrecked fourfold more ability than ever he possessed—was a timidity that went to very cowardice. He had no faith in himself, and he inspired no confidence in others. Yours is, if possible, a worse failing. You have boldness without knowledge. You have the rashness that provokes a peril, and no part of the skill that teaches how to meet it. It was with a wise prescience that I saw we should not be safe company for each other."

He arose as he spoke, and, motioning back Lucy as she approached to offer her arm, he tottered from the room, to all seeming more overcome by passion than even by years and infirmity.

"Well!" said Tom, as he threw his napkin on the table, and pushed his chair back, "I'll be shot if I know how I provoked that burst of anger, or to what I owe that very neat and candid appreciation of my character."

Lucy threw her arm around his neck, and, bending over his shoulder till her face touched his own, said, "Oh, my dearest Tom, if you only knew how nervous and susceptible he is, in part from his nature, but more, far more, from suffering and sorrow! Left to the solitude of his own bitter thoughts for years, without one creature to whisper a kind word or a hopeful thought, is it any wonder if his heart has begun to consume itself?"

"Devilish bitter diet it must find it! Pass me over the madeira, Lucy. I mean to have my last glass to the old gentleman's health and better temper."

"He has moments of noble generosity that would win all your love," said she, enthusiastically.

"You have a harder lot than ever I thought it, my poor Lucy," said he, looking into her eyes with an affectionate solicitude. "This is so unlike our old home."

"Oh so unlike!" said she; and her lip quivered and her eyes grew glazy.

"And can you bear it, girl? does it not seem to you like a servitude to put up with such causeless passion—such capricious anger as this?"

She shook her head mournfully, but made no answer.

"If it be your woman's nature enables you to do it, all I can say is, I don't envy you your sex."

"But, Tom, remember his years—remember his age."

"By Jove, he took good care to remind me of my own!—not that he was so far wrong in what he said of me, Lucy. I felt all the while he had 'hit the blot,' and I would have owned it, too, if he hadn't taken himself off so quickly."

"If you had, Tom,—if you had said but one word to this purport—you would have seen how nobly forgiving he could be in an instant."

"Forgiving—humph! I don't think the forgiveness was to have come from *him*."

"Sir William wishes to speak with you, Miss Lucy," said the butler, entering hastily.

"I must go, Tom—good-bye. I will write to you to-morrow—to-night if I can—good-bye, my dearest brother; be sure to come on Tuesday—mind Tuesday. You will be certain to find me alone."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FIRST LETTER HOME.

The post of the morning after the events of our last chapter brought Lucy a letter from her father. It was the first since his departure. What chapters in life are these first letters after absence! how do they open to us glimpses of not only new scenes and incidents, but of emotions and sentiments which, while we had relied upon them, we had never so palpably realised before! There is such ecstasy in thinking that

time and space are no barriers against love, and that, even as we read, the heart that sent the message is beating with affection for us.

Lendrick's letter to his daughter was full of fondness; her image had evidently gone with him through all the changes of the voyage, and their old home mingled in every thought of the new life before him. It was plain enough how unwillingly he turned from the past to the present, and how far rather he would revel in the scenes around the Shannon than turn to the solitary existence that awaited him beyond the seas.

"I console myself, dear Lucy," wrote he, "as well as I may, by thinking that in my great sacrifice I have earned the love of my father—that love from which I have lived so long estranged, and for which my heart had never ceased to yearn; and I delight to think how by this time you must have grown into his heart, soothed many a care for him, and imparted to his solitary life the blessing of that bright hopefulness which gave even to my own dull existence a glow of glad sunshine. Out of my selfishness I cannot help asking you to remind him of all I have given him. And now that my egotism is so fully aroused, let me tell of myself. The voyage was less dreary than my fears had made it. I suffered at first, it is true; and when at last use had inured me to the sea, I fell into a sort of low feverish state, more the result of home-sickness, perhaps, than real malady. It was a condition of rather depression than disease. Nothing could engage, nothing interest me. I could not read, neither could I partake in any of the various pastimes by which my fellow-voyagers beguiled the hours, and I found myself in that pitiable state of sinking daily lower and lower, without what I could call a cause for the depression.

"I have more than once in my experience as a doctor had to deal with such cases, and I own now that I have neither valued their intensity nor understood their importance. I did not, it is true, go to the vulgar extent of calling them hippishness; but I did the next worst thing—I treated them as the offspring of an over-easy existence—of a placid frictionless life.

"With much shame do I recall how often I have rallied these poor sufferers on the vast space that separated them from real sorrow. There is no unreality, dearest Lucy, in whatever so overcomes the brain, that thought is all but madness, and so pains the heart that the whole wish is for death. There are subtler influences in our nature than those that work by the brain or the blood, and the maladies of these have but one physician.

"It was my great good fortune to have a fellow-traveller who took the kindest interest in me. If he could not cure, he certainly did much to console me. He was a young man lately gazetted on the commander-in-chief's staff, and who came on board of us in the Downs from a frigate bound for England. It was the merest accident that he did not miss us and lose his passage.

"I am not a very attractive person, and it was with some astonishment that I heard he desired to make my acquaintance, and on meeting he said, 'Though you have forgotten me, Dr. Lendrick, I had the honour of being presented to you at Killaloe by my friend Sir Brook Fossbrooke; and I then remembered all about it, and how it was his features were so familiar to me—very good features, too, they were, with much candour and manliness in the expression—altogether a handsome young fellow, and with an air of good birth about him just as distinctive as his good looks.

"I am so unused to be singled out by a stranger as the object of attentions, that I never fully got over the surprise which this young man's attachment to me inspired; and I am not using too strong a word, Lucy, when I call it attachment. There might have been, at least to his eyes, something in our respective fortunes that suggested this drawing towards me. Who knows whether he, too, might not have parted from a loved home and friends!

"When he came first on board his manner was wild—almost incoherent—he ran here and thither, like one in search of something or of somebody, but whose name he had forgotten. Indeed he actually startled me by the eagerness with which he addressed me; and when I informed him that I was alone, quite alone, and as friendless as himself, on board, I thought he would have fainted. In all this suffering and emotion I suspected that I found what led him to a companionship with one as sorrow-stricken as himself.

"As it was, there was no care he did not bestow on me. My own dear boy himself could not have nursed me more tenderly, nor tried to rally my spirits with more affectionate solicitude. He read for me, played chess with me, he even lent himself to the sort of reading I liked best, to become more companionable to me, withdrawing all this while from the gay and pleasant society of young fellows like himself. In a word, Lucy, by his devotion to me, he sent through my heart a lurking thought, almost like a hope, that I must somehow have certain qualities for which the world at large had not yet credited me, which could make me of interest to a young bright-natured creature, fresh to life and all its enjoyments; and from the self-esteem of this notion I really believe I drew more encouragement than from any amount of more avowed approbation.

"I feel I am not wearying you, my darling Lucy, by dwelling even with prolixity on what beguiled the long hours of absence, the weary, weary days at sea.

"When we landed, for a time at least, I only met him now and then; he had his duties, and I had mine. I had to look out for a house. My predecessor's family are still occupying the official residence, and have begged of me leave to remain there a little longer. I had my visits of duty or compliment to make, and a whole round of little courtesies to perform, for which I well know I have all your sympathy. Every one was, however, kind and polite, some were even friendly. Indeed, my very want of manner, my awkward bashfulness and deficient tact, have, I can see, not injured me in the esteem of those whose worldly breeding and knowledge have taught them to be compassionate as well as courteous.

"Amongst the many persons to whom I was presented I made two acquaintances of more than common interest to me—I will not go far-

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ther, and say of any great degree of gratification. In dining with the Governor on yesterday week, he said, 'You will meet a relation to-day, Dr. Lendrick. His ship has just put in to coal, and he and his wife dine with us.' Though quite persuaded the Governor was labouring under some mistake, I waited with anxiety as the different arrivals were announced, and at last came Colonel and Mrs. Sewell—the Colonel being Lady Lendrick's son by her first marriage,—what relation to myself all my skill in genealogy is unable to pronounce.

"We met, however, shook hands very cordially, and I had the honour to conduct Mrs. Sewell to table. I am unfortunately terribly prone to first impressions, and all those that I entertain regarding the Colonel are adverse. He is a tall handsome man, easy in manner, and with the readiness in speech and address that shows familiarity with life. He, however, will never suffer your eyes to meet his, never exchange a frank look with you, and seems, from some cause or other, to be always labouring under an impatient anxiety to be somewhere else than where he stands at the moment.

"He asked about my father, and never waited for my reply; and he laughingly said, with a bad taste that shocked me, 'My mother and he never could "hit it" off together.'

"Mrs. Sewell interested me more than her husband. She is still very handsome; she must at one time have been perfectly beautiful. She is very gentle, low-voiced, and quiet, talking with a simplicity that even I can detect only covers a deep knowledge of life and the world. The dread of her husband seems, however, to pervade all she says or does. She changes colour when he looks at her, and if he addresses her, she sometimes seems about to faint. His slightest word is accepted as a command; and yet with all this terror—terror it was—I caught a look that once passed between them that actually overwhelmed me with amazement. It was the very look that two accomplices might have interchanged in a moment when they could not communicate more freely. Don't think that there is any exaggeration in this, Lucy, or that I am assuming to possess a finer insight into human motives than my neighbours; but my old craft as a doctor supplies me with a technical skill that no acquaintance with the mere surface life of the world could have given: for the Medico reads mankind by a stronger and steadier light than ever shone out of conventionalities or social usages.

"'We are on our way to England, to Ireland, perhaps,' he said to me, in a careless way; but she, not aware of his speech, told me they had been invited to the Priory—a piece of information which I own startled me. First of all, they are not by any means like people who would be agreeable to my father, nor, so far as I can guess, are they persons who would easily sacrifice their own modes of life and habits to the wishes of a recluse. Least of all, dearest Lucy, do I desire this lady to be your companion. She has, I see, many attractive qualities; she may have others as good and excellent; but if I do not greatly err, her whole nature and being are in subjection to a very stern, cold, and unscrupulous man, and she is far from being all that she should be with such gifts as she possesses, and farther again from what she might have been with a happier destiny in marriage.

"If it were not that you are so certain to meet, and not improbably see much of these people, I should not have filled so much of my letter with them; but I confess to you, since I saw them they have never been out of my thoughts. Our relationship—if that be the name for it—led us rapidly into considerable intimacy; he brought his children—two lovely girls, and a little cherub of a boy of three years old—to see me yesterday, and Mrs. Sewell comes to take me to drive every day after luncheon. She expresses the most ardent desire to meet you, and says she knows you will love each other. She carried off your picture t'other day, and I was in real terror till I got it back again. She seemed in ecstasy on being told that you were living with your grandfather; but I saw a look she shot across to her husband as I told it, and I saw his reply by another glance that revealed to me how my tidings had caused surprise, and something more than surprise.

"You must not set me down as fanciful or captious, dear Lucy, but the simple truth is, I have never had a quiet moment since I knew these people. They inspire me with the same sort of anxiety I have often felt when, in the course of my profession, some symptom has supervened in a case not very grave or startling in itself, but still such as I have always found heralding in very serious combinations. It is therefore the Doctor as much as the Father that takes alarm here.

"It is just possible—mind I say possible—that I am a little jealous of these Sewells already, for they have already seduced from me my young friend Lionel, who was so kind to me on the voyage. I scarcely see him now, he is always with them; and yesterday I heard—it may not be true—that he is already weary of Cape Town, and means to return home by the next ship—that is, along with the Sewells, who are to sail on Friday.

"I am certain that Sewell is neither a good nor a safe companion for a young fellow so bashful and unsuspecting as Lionel Trafford.

"There are men who read the world the way certain dishonest critics quote a book or an article, by extracting all that is objectionable, and, omitting context and connection, place passage after passage in quick sequence. By such a process as this, human life is a pandemonium. I half suspect Sewell to be one of this scornful school; and if so, a most dangerous intimate. The heartfelt racy enjoyment of his manner, as he records some trait of rascality or fraud, is not more marked than the contemptuous sneer with which he receives a story that bears testimony to generosity or trustfulness, throwing over his air in each that tone of knowledge of life and the world that seems to say, 'These are the things we all of us know well, though only a few have either the manliness or the honesty to declare them openly.'

"I may have tired you with this long tirade, my dear Lucy, but I am pouring out to you my thoughts as they come—come, too, out of the fulness of much reflection. Remember, too, my sweet child, that I have often told you, 'It is

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just some half-dozen people with whom we are intimate, who make or mar our fate in life.' Big as the world is, we play a very small game in one corner of the board, and it behoves us to look well to those with whom we are to play it.

"If I am jealous of the Sewells for having robbed me of my young friend, I am envious of himself also, for he is going back to England —going back to the loved faces and scenes he has left—going back to Home. There's the word, Lucy, that gathers all that we come to live for, when life really is a blessing.

"It would seem too early to pronounce, but I think I can already see this is not a place to which I would like to bring you; but I will not prejudge it. It may be that time will reconcile me to some things I now dislike; it may be, too, that the presence of my own around me will dispose me to take a cheerier view of much that now depresses me. I have a great deal to do, I am employed during the whole day, and never really free till evening, when society claims me. This latter is my only severe burden. You can imagine me daily dining out, and fancy the martyrdom it costs me.

"I am most anxious to hear of you, and how you like your new life—I mean, how you bear it. Liking is not the word for that which entails separation. I feel assured that you will love my father. You will be generous towards those traits which the host of mere acquaintanceship took pleasure in exaggerating, and you will be fair enough not to misjudge his great qualities because of certain faults of temper. He has great gifts, Lucy; and, as you will see, the two pendulums of his nature, heart and head, swing together, and he is as noble in sentiment as he is grand in action.

"It almost consoles me for separation when I think that I have transferred to him the blessings of that presence that made my own sunshine. Mind that you send me a diary of your life. I want your whole day; I want to see how existence is filled, so that whenever my mind flies back to you I may say, 'She is in her garden—she is working—she is at her music—she is reading to him.'

"It was a mistake to send me here, Lucy. There are men in scores who would rejoice in the opportunities of such a place, and see in it the road to rapid fortune. I only look at one feature of it—the banishment. Not that by nature I am discontented—I hope and believe this is not so—but I feel that there are many things in life far worse than poverty. I have not the same dread of narrow means most men have. I do not sink down in spirits when I lie down under a very humble roof, and sit down to a coarse meal; nor has splendour the power to exhilarate or elevate me. I am essentially humble, and I need nothing that is not generally within the reach of the humble; and I vow to you in all truth, I'd rather be your grandfather's gardener than be the governor of this great colony. There's an ignoble confession, but keep it for yourself.

"I have written a long letter to Tom by this post, and addressed it to Mr. Dempster, who will forward it if he should have left before this. It distresses me greatly when I think that I have not been able to give him any definite career in life before we parted. Mere aptitude has no value with the world. You may be willing and ready to do fifty things, but some fourth-rate fellow who *knows* how to do one will beat you. The remarkable quality in life is skill: the thing least in request is genius. Tom has this harsh lesson yet to learn, but learn it he must, for the world is a schoolmaster that will stand no skulking, and however little to our taste be its tasks, we must come up when called on, and go on with our lesson as well as we may.

"In many respects Sir Brook Fossbrooke was an unfortunate companion for him to have chanced upon. A man of considerable resources, who had employed them all unprofitably, is a bad pilot. The very waywardness of such a nature was exactly the quality to be avoided in Tom's case; but what was to be done? Poverty can no more select its company than its climate; and it would have been worse than ungracious to have rejected a friendship so generously and freely offered.

"I am curious—I am more than curious, I am anxious—to know if Tom should have ever met my father. They are so intensely alike in many things, that I fear me their meeting could not lead to good. I know well that Tom resents, and would like to show that he resents, what he deems the harsh treatment evinced towards me, and I dread anything like interchange of words between them. My whole hope is, that you would prevent such a mischance, or, if it did occur, would take measures to obviate its dangers.

"Tell me particularly about this when you write. Tell me also, have you met Lady Lendrick, and if so, on what terms? I have ever found her obliging and good-natured, and with many qualities which the world has not given her credit for. Give her my most respectful regards when you see her.

"It is daybreak; the hot sun of Africa is already glancing into the room, and I must conclude. I cannot bear to think of the miles these lines must travel ere they meet you, but they will be with you at last, and they are in this more fortunate than your loving father,

"T. LENDRICK."

Lucy sat long pondering over this letter. She read it, too, again and again, and by a light which was certainly not vouchsafed to him who wrote it. To *her* there was no mystery in Trafford's conduct. It was plain enough he had gone out, expecting to find her as his fellow-passenger. His despair—his wretchedness—his devotion to her father, the last resource of that disappointment he could not subdue—were all intelligible enough. Less easy, however, to read the sudden attachment he had formed for the Sewells. What did this mean? Had it any meaning? and if so, was it one that concerned her to know?

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CHAPTER XIX.

OFFICIAL MYSTERIES.

"I THINK I had better see him myself," said, Fossbrooke, after patiently listening to Tom

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Lendrick's account of his meeting with his grandfather. "It is possible I may be able to smooth down matters a little, and dispose the old gentleman, besides, to accord us some aid in our Sardinian project, for I have resolved upon that, Tom."

"Indeed, sir; the gold mine?"

"No, the load—the lead and silver. In the rough calculation I made last night on this slip of paper, I see my way to something like seven thousand a-year to begin with; untold wealth will follow. There are no less than eleven products available—the black lead of pencils and the white used by painters being the chief; while in my new salt, which I am disposed to call the 'pyro-chloride of plumbium,' we have a sedative that will allay the pangs of hydrophobia."

"I wish it would quiet the Chief Baron," muttered Tom; and Sir Brook, not hearing him correctly, continued,—

"I think so—I think the Chief Baron eminently calculated to take a proper estimate of my discovery. A man of fine intellect is ever ready to accept truth, albeit it come in a shape and through a channel in which he has himself not pursued it. Will you write a line to your sister and ask if it would be his lordship's convenience to receive me, and at what time?"

"Of course, sir, whatever you wish," said Tom, in some confusion; "but might I ask if it be your intention to ask my grandfather to aid me with his purse?"

"Naturally. I mean that he should, by advancing, let us say, eight hundred pounds, put you in a position to achieve a speedy fortune. He shall see, too, that our first care has been your sister's interests. Six-sixteenths of the profits for fifty years are to be hers; three each we reserve for ourselves; the remaining four will form a reserve fund for casualties, a capital for future development, and a sum at interest to pay superannuations, with some other objects that you will find roughly jotted down here, for which, however, they will amply suffice. I take it his lordship knows something of metallurgy, Tom."

"I believe he knows a little of everything."

"Chemistry I feel sure he must have studied."

"I won't answer for the study; but you'll find that when you come to talk with him, you'll scarcely wander very far out of his geography. But I was going to say, sir, that I am not quite easy at the thought of asking him for money."

"It's not money—at least, it's no gift—we require of him. We are in possession of a scheme certain to secure a fortune. We know where a treasure lies hid, and we want no more than the cost of the journey to go and fetch it. He shall be more than repaid. The very dispositions we make in your sister's favour will show him in what spirit we mean to deal. It is possible—I am willing to own it—it is possible I might approach a man of inferior intelligence with distrust and fear, but in coming before Baron Lendrick I have no misgivings. All my experience of life has shown me that the able men are the generous men. In the ample stretch of their minds they estimate mankind by larger averages, and thus they come to see that there is plenty of good in human nature."

"I believe the old judge is clever enough, and some speak very well of his character; but his temper—his temper is something that would swallow up all the fine qualities that ever were accorded to one man; and even if you were about to go on a mission I liked better, I'd say, Don't ask to see him, don't expose yourself to the risk of some outrageous affront—something you couldn't bear and wouldn't resent."

"I have never yet found myself in the predicament you speak of," said Sir Brook, drawing himself up haughtily, "nor do I know of any contingency in life from which I could retreat on account of its perils. It may be, indeed it is more than likely, from what you tell me, that I shall make no appeal to your grandfather's generosity; but I shall see him, to tender your regrets for any pain you may have caused him, and to tell also so much of our future intentions as it is becoming the head of your house should hear. I also desire to see your sister, and say good-bye."

"Ask her to let me do so too. I can't go away without seeing her again." Tom took a turn or two up and down the room as though he had not made up his mind whether to say something or not. He looked out of the window, possibly in search of something to distract his thoughts, and then turning suddenly about, he said, "I was thinking, sir, that if it was your opinion—mind I don't want to insinuate that it ought to be, or even that it is my own—but that if you came to the conclusion that my sister was not happy with my grandfather—that her life was one of depression and suffering—what would you say to her coming along with us?"

"To Sardinia. Coming to Sardinia do you mean, Tom?" said the old man in astonishment.

"Yes, sir, that is what I meant."

"Have I not told you the sort of life that lies before us in the island—the hardships, the dangers, the bitter privations we shall have to endure? Is it to these we can invite a young girl, trained and accustomed to every elegance and every comfort?"

"She'd not shrink from her share—that much I'll warrant you; and the worst roughing of that rugged life would be easier to bear than this old man's humour."

"No, no; it must not be thought of," said Fossbrooke, sternly. "What meaning has our enterprise if it be not to secure her future fortune? She cannot—she shall not—pay any part of the price. Let me think over this, Tom. It may be that we ought not to leave her; it may be that we should hit upon something nearer home. I will go up to the Castle and see the Viceroy."

He made a light grimace as he said this. Such a visit was by no means to his taste. If there was anything totally repugnant to his nature, it was to approach men whom he had known as friends or intimates, with anything like the request for a favour. It seemed to him to invert all the relations which ought to subsist between men in society. The moment you had stooped to such a step, in his estimation you had forfeited all right to that condition of equality which renders intercourse agreeable.

"I must have something for this young fellow—something that may enable him to offer his sister a home if she should need it. I will

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accept nothing for myself—on that I am determined. It is a sorry part that of suppliant, but so long as it is for another it is endurable. Not that I like it, though—not that it sits easy on me—and I am too old to acquire a new manner." Thus muttering to himself, he went along till he found himself at the chief entrance of the Castle.

"You will have to wait on Mr. Balfour, sir, his Excellency's private secretary, the second door from the corner," said the porter, scarcely deigning a glance at one so evidently unversed in viceregal observances. Sir Brook nodded and withdrew. From a groom who was holding a neat-looking cob pony Fossbrooke learned that Mr. Balfour was about to take his morning's ride. "He'll not see you now," said the man. "You'll have to come back about four or half-past."

"I have only a question to ask," said Sir Brook, half to himself, as he ascended the stairs. As he gained the landing and rang, the door opened, and Mr. Balfour appeared. "I regret to detain you, sir," began Sir Brook, as he courteously raised his hat. "Mr. Balfour, I believe."

"You are right as to my name, but quite as wrong if you fancy that you will detain me," said that plump and very self-satisfied gentleman, as he moved forward.

"And yet, sir, such is my intention," said Sir Brook, placing himself directly in front of him.

"That is a matter very soon settled," said Balfour, returning to the door and calling out—"Pollard, step down to the lower yard and send a policeman here."

Sir Brook heard the order unmoved in manner, and even made way for his servant to pass down the stairs. No sooner, however, was the man out of hearing, than he said, "It would be much better, sir, not to render either of us ridiculous. I am Sir Brook Fossbrooke, and I come here to learn at what time it would be his Excellency's pleasure to receive me."

The calm quiet dignity in which he spoke, even more than the words, had its effect on Balfour, who with more awkwardness than he would like to have owned, asked Sir Brook to walk in and be seated. "I have had a message for you from his Excellency these three or four days back, and knew not where to find you."

"Did it never occur to you to try what assistance the police might afford, sir?" said he, with deep gravity.

"One thinks of these generally as a last resource," said Balfour, coolly, and possibly not sorry to show how imperturbable he could be under a sarcasm.

"And now for the message, sir," said Fossbrooke.

"I'll be shot if I remember it. Wasn't it something about an election riot? You thrashed a priest named Malcahy, eh?"

"I opine not, sir," said Sir Brook, with a faint smile.

"No, no; you are the great man for acclimatisation; you want to make the ornithorhynchus as common as the turkey. Am I right?"

Sir Brook shook his head.

"I never have my head clear out of office hours, that's the fact," said Balfour, impatiently. "If you had called on me between twelve and three, you'd have found me like a directory."

"Put no strain upon your recollection, sir. When I see the Viceroy it is probable he will repeat the message."

"You know him, then?"

"I have known him eight-and-forty years."

"Oh, I have it—I remember it all now. You used to be with Colonel Hanger, and Hugh Seymour, and O'Kelly, and all the Carlton House lot."

Fossbrooke bowed a cold assent.

"His Excellency told us the other evening that there was not a man in England who had so many stories of the Prince. Didn't Moore go to you about his life of Sheridan?—yes, of course—and you promised him some very valuable documents; and sent him five-and-twenty protested bills of poor Brinsley's labelled 'indubitable records.'"

"This does not lead us to the message, sir," said Fossbrooke, stiffly.

"Yes, but it does though—I'm coming to it. I have a system of artificial memory, and I have just arrived at you now through Carlton House, milk-punch, and that story about Lord Grey and yourself riding postilions to Ascot, and you on the wheelers tipping up Grey with your whip till he grew frantic. Wasn't that a fact?"

"I wait for the message, sir; or rather I grow impatient at not hearing it."

"I remember it perfectly. It's a place he wants to offer you; it's a something under the Courts of Law. You are to do next to nothing—nothing at all, I believe, if you prefer it, as the last fellow did. He lived in Dresden for the education of his children, and he died there, and we didn't know when he died—at least they suspect he signed some dozen life-certificates that his doctor used to forward at quarter-day. Mind I don't give you the story as mine; but the impression is, that he held the office for eight years after his death."

"Perhaps, sir, you would now favour me with the name and nature of the appointment."

"He was called the Deputy-Assistant Sub-something of somewhere in Exchequer; and he had to fill, or to register, or to put a seal, or, if not a seal, a stamp, on some papers; but the marrow of the matter is, he had eight hundred a-year for it: and when the Act passed requiring two seals, he asked for an increase of salary and an assistant clerk, and they gave him two hundred more, but they refused the clerk. They do such shabby things in those short sittings over the Estimates!"

"And am I to understand that his Excellency makes me an offer of this appointment?"

"Well, not exactly; there's a hitch in it—I may say there are two hitches: first of all, we're not sure it's in our gift; and, secondly ——"

"Perhaps I may spare you the secondly—the 'firstly' is more than enough for me."

"Yes, but I'd like to explain. Here's how it is: the Chief Baron claimed the patronage about twenty years ago, and we made, or the people who were in power made, some sort of a compromise about an ultimate nomination, and he was to have the first. Now his man

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only died t'other day, having held the office, as I said, upwards of twenty years—a most unconscionable thing—just one of those selfish acts small official fellows are always doing; and so *I* thought, as I saw your name down for something on his Excellency's list, that I'd mention *you* for the post, as a sort of sop to Baron Lendrick, saying, 'Look at our man; we are not going to saddle the country with one of your long-annuity fellows—*he's* eighty if he's a day.' I say, I'd press this point, because the old judge says he is no longer bound by the terms of the compromise, for that the office was abolished and reconstructed by the 58th of Victoria, and that he now insists on the undivided patronage."

"I presume that the astute reasons which induced you to think of *me* have not been communicated to the Viceroy."

"I should think not. I mention them to you frankly, because his Excellency said you were one of those men who must be dealt with openly. 'Play on the square with Fossbrooke,' said he, 'and, whether he win or lose, you'll see no change in him. Try to overreach him, and you'll catch a tiger.'"

"I am very grateful for his kind estimate of me. It is, however, no more than I looked for at his hands." This he said with a marked feeling, and then added, in a lighter tone, "I have also a debt of gratitude to yourself, of which I know not how to acquit myself better than by accepting this appointment, and taking the earliest opportunity to die afterwards."

"No, don't do that; I don't mean that. You can do like that fellow they made a Pope because he looked on the verge of the grave, and who pitched his crutch into the air when he had put on the tiara."

"I understand; so that it is only in Baron Lendrick's eyes I am to look short-lived."

"Just so; call on him—have a meeting with him; say that his Excellency desires to act with every delicacy towards him—that should it be discovered hereafter the right of nomination lies with the Court and not with us, we'll give him an equivalent somewhere else, till—till——"

"Till I shall have vacated the post," chimed in Sir Brook, blandly; "a matter, of course, of very brief space."

"You see the whole thing—you see it in all its bearings; and now, if you only could know something about the man you have to deal with, there would be nothing more to tell you."

"I have heard about him passingly."

"Oh yes, his eccentricities are well known. The world is full of stories of him, but he is one of those men who play wolf on the species—he must be worrying somebody to keep him from worrying himself; he smashed the last two Governments here, and he'd have upset *us* too if *I* hadn't been here. He hates me cordially; and if you don't want to rouse his anger, don't let your lips murmur the name, Cholmondely Balfour."

"You may rely upon me, sir," said Sir Brook, bowing. "I have scarcely ever met a gentleman whose name I am not more likely to recall than your own."

"Sharp, that; did you mean it?" said Balfour, with his glass to his eye.

"I am never ambiguous, sir, though it occasionally happens to me to say somewhat less than I feel. I wish you a good day.

——o——

CHAPTER XX.

IN COURT.

When the day arrived that the Chief Baron was to resume his place on the Bench, no small share of excitement was seen to prevail within the precincts of the Four Courts. Many opined that his recovery was far from perfect, and that it was not his intention ever to return to the justice-seat. Some maintained that the illness had been far less severe than was pretended, and that he had employed the attack as a means of pressure on the Government, to accord to his age and long services the coveted reward. Less argumentative partisans there were who were satisfied to wager that he would or would not reappear on the Bench, and bets were even laid that he would come for one last time, as though to show the world in what full vigour of mind and intellect was the man the Government desired to consign to inactivity and neglect.

It is needless to say that he was no favourite with the Bar. There was scarcely a man from the highest to the lowest whom he had not on some occasion or another snubbed, ridiculed, or reprimanded. Whose law had he not controverted, whose acuteness had he not exposed, whose rhetoric not made jest of? The mere presence of ability before him seemed to stimulate his combative spirit, and incite him to a passage at arms with one able to defend himself. No first-rate man could escape the shafts of his barbed and pointed wit; it was only dulness, hopeless dulness, that left his court with praise of his urbanity, and a eulogy over his courteous demeanour.

Now hopeless dulness is not the characteristic of the Irish Bar, and with the majority the Chief Baron was the reverse of popular.

No small tribute was it therefore to his intellectual superiority, to that mental power that all acknowledged while they dreaded, that his appearance was greeted with a murmur of approbation, which swelled louder and louder as he moved across the hall, till it burst out at last into a hoarse, full cheer of welcome. Mounting the steps with difficulty, the pale old man, seared with age and wrinkled with care, turned round towards the vast crowd, and with an eye of flashing brightness, and a heightened colour, pressed his hand upon his heart, and bowed. A very slight motion it was—less, far less, perhaps, than a sovereign might have accorded; but in its dignity and grace it was a perfect recognition of all the honour he felt had been done him.

How broken! how aged! how fearfully changed! were the whispered remarks that were uttered around as he took his seat on the Bench, and more significant even than words were the looks interchanged when he attempted to speak; and instead of that clear metallic ring

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which once had been audible even outside the court, a faint murmuring sound was only heard.

A few commonplace motions were made and discharged. A somewhat wearisome argument followed on a motion for a new trial, and the benches of the bar gradually grew thinner and thinner, as the interest of the scene wore off, and as each in turn had scanned, and, after his own fashion, interpreted, the old judge's powers of mind and body; when suddenly, and as it were without ostensible cause, the court began to fill—bench after bench was occupied, till at last even all the standing-space was crowded; and when the massive curtain moved aside, vast numbers were seen without, eagerly trying to enter. At first the Chief Baron appeared not to notice the change, but his sharp eye no sooner detected it than he followed with his glance the directed gaze of the crowd, and saw it fixed on the gallery opposite the jury-box, now occupied by a well-dressed company, in the midst of whom, conspicuous above all, sat Lady Lendrick. So well known were the relations that subsisted between himself and his wife, such publicity had been given to their hates and quarrels, that her presence here was regarded as a measure of shameless indelicacy. In the very defiant look, too, that she bestowed on the body of the court she seemed to accept the imputation, and to dare it.

Leisurely and calmly did she scan the old man's features through her double eyeglass, while from time to time, with a simpering smile, she would whisper some words to the lady at her side—words it was not needful to overhear, they were so palpably words of critical comment upon him she gazed at.

So engrossed was attention by the gross indecency of this intrusion, which had not even the shallow pretext of an interesting cause to qualify it, that it was only after a considerable time it was perceived that the lady who sat next Lady Lendrick was exceedingly beautiful. If no longer in her first youth, there were traits of loveliness in her perfectly-formed features which even years respect; and in the depth of her orbits and the sculptural elegance of her nostrils and her mouth, there was all that beauty we love to call Greek, but in which no classic model ever could compete with the daughters of England.

Her complexion was of exceeding delicacy, as was the half-warm tint of her light-brown hair. But it was when she smiled that the captivation of her beauty became perfect; and it seemed as though each and all there appropriated that radiant favour to himself, and felt his heart bound with a sort of ecstasy. It had been rumoured in the morning through the hall that the Chief Baron, at the rising of the Court, would deliver a short reply to the address of the Bar; and now, as the last motion was being disposed of, the appearance of eager expectation and curiosity became conspicuous on every side.

That the unlooked-for presence of his wife had irritated and embarrassed the old man was plain to the least observant. The stern expression of his features; the steadfast way in which he gazed into the body of the court, to avoid even a chance glance at the gallery; the fretful impatience with which he moved his hands restlessly amongst his papers,—all showed discomposure and uneasiness. Still it was well known that the moment he was called on for a mental effort intellect ever assumed the mastery over temper, and all felt that when he should arise not a trace of embarrassment would remain to mar the calm dignity of his manner.

It was amidst a hushed silence that he stood up, and said, "Mr. Chief Sergeant, and Gentlemen of the Bar: I had intended to-day—I had even brought down with me some notes of a reply which I purposed to make to the more than flattering address which you so graciously offered to me. I find, however, that I have overrated the strength that remains to me. I find I have measured my power to thank you by the depth of my gratitude, and not by the vigour of my frame. I am too weak to say all that I feel, and too deeply your debtor to ask you to accept less than I owe you. Had the testimony of esteem you presented to me only alluded to those gifts of mind and intellect with which a gracious Providence was pleased to endow me—had you limited yourself to the recognition of the lawyer and the judge, I might possibly have found strength to assure you that I accepted your praise with the consciousness that it was not all unmerited. The language of your address, however, went beyond this; your words were those of regard, even of affection. I am unused to such as these, gentlemen. They unsettle—they unman me. Physicians tell us that the nerves of the student acquire a morbid and diseased acuteness for want of those habits of action and physical exertion which more vulgar organisations practise. So do I feel that the mental faculties gain an abnormal intensity in proportion as the affections are neglected, and the soil of the heart left untilled.

"Mine have been worse than ignored," said he, with an elevated tone, and in a voice that rang through the court. "They have been outraged, and when the time comes that biography will have to deal with my character and my fortunes, if there be but justice in the award, the summing-up will speak of me as one ever linked with a destiny that was beneath him. He was a Lawyer—he ought to have been a Legislator. He sat on the Bench, while his place was the Cabinet; and when at the end of a laborious life his brethren rallied round him with homage, and with tender regard, they found him like a long beleaguered city, starved into submission, carrying a bold port towards the enemy, but torn by dissension within, and betrayed by the very garrison that should have died in its defence."

The savage fierceness of these words turned every eye in the court to the gallery, where Lady Lendrick sat, and where, with a pleasant smile on her face, she not only listened with seeming pleasure, but beat time with her fan to the rhythm of the well-rounded periods.

A quivering of the lip, and a strange flattening of the cheek of one side, succeeded to the effort with which he delivered these words, and when he attempted to speak again his voice failed him; and after a few attempts he placed his hand on his brow, and with a look of intense and most painful significancy, bowed around him to both sides of the court and retired.

"That woman, that atrocious woman, has killed him," muttered poor Haire, as he hastened to the Judge's robing-room.

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"I am sorry, my dear, you should not have heard him in a better vein, for he is really eloquent at times," said Lady Lendrick to her beautiful companion, as they moved through the crowd to their carriage.

"I trust his present excitement will not have bad consequences," said the other softly. "Don't you think we ought to wait and ask how he is?"

"If you like. I have only one objection, and that is, that we may be misconstrued. There are people here malicious enough to impute the worst of motives to our anxiety. Oh, here is Mr. Pemberton! Mr. Pemberton, will you do me the great favour to inquire how the Chief Baron is? Would you do more, and say that I am most eager to know if I could be of any use to him?"

"If Mr. Pemberton had no fancy for his mission, he could not very well decline it. While he was absent, the ladies took a turn through the hall, inspecting the two or three statues of distinguished lawyers, and scanning the living faces, whose bewigged expression seemed to blend the overwise and the ridiculous in the strangest imaginable manner.

A sudden movement in the crowd betokened some event; and now, through a lane formed in the dense mass, the Chief Baron was seen approaching. He had divested himself of his robes, and looked the younger for the change. Indeed there was an almost lightness in his step, as he came forward, and with a bland smile, said, "I am most sensible of the courtesy that led you here. I only wish my strength had been more equal to the occasion." And he took Lady Lendrick's hand with a mingled deference and regard.

"Sir William, this is my daughter-in-law. She only arrived yesterday, but was determined not to lose the opportunity of hearing you."

"To have *heard* me to-day was disappointment," said the old man, as he raised the young lady's hand to his lips. "To *see* her is none. I am charmed to meet one so closely tied to me—of such exquisite beauty. Ah, madam! it's a dear-bought privilege, this candid appreciation of loveliness we old men indulge in. May I offer you my arm?"

And now through the dense crowd they passed along; all surprised and amazed at the courteous attentions of the old Judge, whom but a few moments before they had seen almost convulsed with passion.

"She almost had won the game, Haire," said the Chief Baron, as, having handed the ladies to their carriage, he went in search of his own. "But I have mated her. My sarcasm has never given me one victory with that woman," said he, sternly. "I have never conquered her except by courtesy."

"Why did she come down to court at all?" blurted out Haire. "It was positively indecent."

"The Spanish women go to bull-fights, but I never heard that they stepped down into the arena. She has great courage—very great courage."

"Who was the handsome woman with her?"

"Her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Sewell. Now, that is what I call beauty, Haire. There is the element which is denied to us man — to subdue without effort—to conquer without conflict."

"Your granddaughter is handsomer to my thinking."

"They are like each other—strangely like. They have the same dimpling of the cheek before they smile, and her laugh has the same ring as Lucy's."

Haire muttered something, not very intelligibly indeed, but certainly not sounding like assent.

"Lady Lendrick had asked me to take these Sewells in at the Priory, and I refused her. Perhaps I'd have been less peremptory had I seen this beauty. Yes, sir! There is a form of loveliness—this woman has it—as distinctly an influence as intellectual superiority, or great rank, or great riches. To deny its power you must live out of the world, and reject all the ordinances of society."

"Coquettes, I suppose, have their followers, but I don't think you or I need be of the number."

"You speak with your accustomed acuteness, Haire; but coquetry is the exercise of many gifts, beauty is the display of one; I can parry off the one; I cannot help feeling the burning rays of the other. Come, come, don't sulk; I am not going to undervalue your favourite Lucy. They have promised to dine with me on Sunday; you must meet them."

"Dine with you!—dine with you, after what you said to-day in open court!"

"That I could invite them, and they accept my invitation, is the best reply to those who would, in their malevolence, misinterpret whatever may have fallen from me. The wound of a sharp arrow is never very painful till some inexpert bungler endeavours to withdraw the weapon. It is then that agony becomes excruciating, and peril imminent."

"I suppose I am the bungler, then?"

"Heaven forbid I should say so! but as I have often warned you, Haire, your turn for sarcasm is too strong for even your good sense. When you have shotted your gun with a good joke, you will make a bull's-eye of your best friend."

"By George, then, I don't know myself, that's all; and I could as easily imagine myself a rich man as a witty one."

"You are rich in gifts more precious than money; and you have the quintessence of all wit in that property that renders you suggestive; it is like what chemists call latent heat. But to return to Mrs. Sewell; she met my son at the Cape, and reports favourably of his health and prospects."

"Poor fellow! what a banishment he must feel it."

"I wonder, sir, how many of us go through life without sacrifices! She says that he goes much into the world, and is already very popular in the society of the place—a great and happy change to a man who had suffered his indolence and self-indulgence to master him. Had he remained at home, I might have been able to provide for him. George Ogle's place is vacant, and I am determined to exercise my right of appointment."

"First Registrar, was he not?"

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"Yes; a snug berth for incapacity—one thousand a-year. Ogle made more of it by means we shall not inquire into, but which shall not be repeated."

"You ought to give it to your grandson," said Haire, bluntly.

"You ought to know better than to say so, sir," said the Judge, with a stern severity. "It is to men like myself the public look for example and direction, and it would be to falsify all the teaching of my life if I were to misuse my patronage. Come up early on Saturday morning, and go over the lists with me. There are one hundred and twenty-three applicants, backed by peers, bishops, members of Parliament, and men in power."

"I don't envy you your patronage."

"Of course not, sir. The one hundred and twenty-two disappointed candidates would present more terror to a mind like yours than any consciousness of a duty fulfilled would compensate for; but I am fashioned of other stuff."

"Well, I only hope it may be a worthy fellow gets it."

"If you mean worthy in what regards a devotion to the public service, I may possibly be able to assure you on that head."

"No, no, I mean a good fellow—a true-hearted, honest fellow, to whom the salary will be a means of comfort and happiness."

"Sir, you ask far too much. Men in my station investigate fitness and capacity; they cannot descend to inquire how far the domestic virtues influence those whom they advance to office."

"You may drop me here; I am near home," said Haire, who began to feel a little weary of being lectured.

"You will not dine with me?"

"Not to-day. I have some business this evening. I have a case to look over."

"Come up on Saturday, then—come to breakfast, bring me any newspapers that treat of the appointment, and let us see if we cannot oppose this spirit of dictation they are so prone to assume; for I am resolved I will never name a man to office who has the Press for his patron."

"It may not be his fault."

"It shall be his misfortune, then. Stop, Drab; Mr. Haire wishes to get down. To the Priory," said he, as his friend went his way; and now, leaning back in his carriage, the old man continued to talk aloud, and addressing an imaginary audience, declaim against the encroaching spirit of the newspapers, and inveigh against the perils to which their irresponsible counsels exposed the whole framework of society; and thus speaking, and passionately gesticulating, he reached his home.

CHAPTER XXI

A MORNING CALL.

As Sir William waited breakfast for Haire on Saturday morning, a car drove up to the door, and the butler soon afterwards entered with a card and a letter. The card bore the name "Sir Brook Fossbrooke," and the letter was sealed with the viceregal arms, and had the name "Wilmington" on the corner. Sir William broke it open, and read—

"MY DEAR CHIEF BARON,—This will come to your hand through Sir Brook Fossbrooke, one of my oldest and choicest friends. He tells me he desires to know you, and I am not aware of any more natural or legitimate ambition. It would be presumption in me to direct your attention to qualities you will be more quick to discover and more able to appreciate than myself. I would only add, that your estimate will, I feel assured, be not less favourable that it will be formed of one of whose friendship I am proud. It may be that his visit to you will include a matter of business; if so, give it your courteous attention: and believe me ever, my dear Chief Baron, your faithful friend,

"WILMINGTON."

"Show the gentleman in," said the Judge; and he advanced towards the door as Sir Brook entered. "I am proud to make your acquaintance, Sir Brook," said he, presenting his hand.

"I would not have presumed to call on you at such an hour, my Lord Chief Baron, save that my minutes are numbered. I must leave for England this evening; and I wished, if possible, to meet you before I started."

"You will, I hope, join me at breakfast?"

"I breakfasted two hours ago—if I dare to dignify by the name my meal of bread and milk. But, pray, let me not keep you from yours—that is, if you will permit me to speak to you while so occupied."

"I am at your orders, sir," said the old Judge, as he seated himself and requested his visitor to sit beside him.

"His Excellency tells me, my lord, that there is just now vacant a situation of which some doubt exists as to the patron—a Registrarship, I think he called it, in your Court?"

"There is no doubt whatever, sir. The patronage is mine."

"I merely quote the Viceroy, my lord—I assert nothing of myself."

"It may not impossibly save time, sir, when I repeat that his Excellency has misinformed you. The office is in my gift."

"May I finish the communication with which he charged me?"

"Sir, there is no case before the court," said the Judge. "I can hear you, as a matter of courtesy, but it cannot be your object to be listened to on such terms?"

"I will accept even so little. If it should prove that the view taken by his Excellency is the correct one—pray, sir, let me proceed——"

"I cannot; I have no temper for a baseless hypothesis. I will not, besides, abuse your time any more than my own forbearance; and I therefore say, that if any portion of your interest in making my acquaintance concerns that question you have so promptly broached, the minutes employed in the discussion would be thrown away by us both."

"Mr. Haire," said the servant at this moment; and the Chief Baron's old friend entered rather heated by his walk.

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"You are late by half-an-hour, Haire; let me present you to Sir Brook Fossbrooke, whose acquaintance I am now honoured in making. Sir Brook is under a delusive impression, Haire, which I told you a few days ago would demand some decisive step on my part: he thinks that the vacant registrarship is at the disposal of the Crown."

"I ask pardon," said Fossbrooke. "As I understood his Excellency, they only claim the alternate appointment."

"And they shall not assert even that, sir."

"Sir William's case is strong—it is irrefutable. I have gone over it myself," broke in Haire.

"There, sir! listen to that. You have now wherewithal to go back and tell the Viceroy that the opinion of the leading man of the Irish Bar has decided against his claim. Tell him, sir, that accident timed your visit here at the same moment with my distinguished friend's, and that you in this way obtained a spontaneous decision on the matter at issue. When you couple with that judgment the name of William Haire, you will have said enough."

"I bow to this great authority," said Sir Brook, with deep courtesy, "and, accepting your Lordship's statement to the fullest, I would only add, that as it was his Excellency's desire to have named me to this office, might I so far presume, on the loss of the good fortune that I had looked for, to approach you with a request, only premising that it is not on my own behalf?"

"I own, sir, that I do not clearly appreciate the title to your claim. You are familiar with the turf, Sir Brook, and you know that it is only the second horse has a right to demand his entry."

"I have not been beaten, my lord. You have scratched my name and prevented my running."

"Let us come back to fact, sir," said the Chief Baron, not pleased with the retort. "How can you base any right to approach me with a request on the circumstance that his Excellency desired to give you what belonged to another?"

"Yes, that puts it forcibly—unanswerably—to my thinking," said Haire.

"I may condole with disappointment, sir, but I am not bound to compensate defeat," said the old Judge; and he arose and walked the room with that irritable look and manner which even the faintest opposition to him often evoked, and for which even the utterance of a flippant rebuke but partly compensated him.

"I take it, my Lord Chief Baron," said Fossbrooke, calmly, "that I have neither asked for condolence nor compensation. I told you, I hoped distinctly, that what I was about to urge was not in my own behalf."

"Well, sir, and I think the plea is only the less sustainable. The Viceroy's letter might give a pretext for the one; there is nothing in our acquaintance would warrant the other."

"If you knew, sir, how determined I am not to take offence at words which certainly imperil patience, you would possibly spare me some of these asperities. I am in close relations of friendship with your grandson; he is at present living with me; I have pledged myself to his father to do my utmost in securing him some honourable livelihood, and it is in his behalf that I have presented myself before you to-day. Will you graciously accord me a hearing on this ground?"

There was a quiet dignity of manner in which he said this, a total forgetfulness of self, and a manly simplicity of purpose so palpable, that the old Judge felt he was in presence of one whose character called for all his respect; at the same time he was not one to be even suddenly carried away by a sentiment, and in a very measured voice he replied: "If I'm flattered, sir, by the interest you take in a member of my family, I am still susceptible of a certain displeasure that it should be a stranger should stand before me to ask me for any favour to my own."

"I am aware, my Lord Chief Baron, that my position is a false one, but so is your own."

"Mine, sir! mine? what do you mean? Explain yourself."

"If your Lordship's interest had been exerted as it might have been, Dr. Lendrick's son would never had needed so humble a friend as he has found in me."

"And have you come here, sir, to lecture me on my duty to my family? Have you presented yourself under the formality of a vice-regal letter of introduction to tell a perfect stranger to you how he should have demeaned himself to his own?"

"Probably I might retort, and ask by what right you lecture me on my manners and behaviour? But I am willing to be taught by so consummate a master of everthing; and though I was once a courtier, I believe that I have much to learn on the score of breeding. And now, my lord, let us leave this unpromising theme, and come to one which has more interest for each of us. If this registrarship, this place, whatever it be, would be one to suit your grandson, will the withdrawal of *my* claim serve to induce your Lordship to support *his*? In one word, my lord, will you let him have the appointment?"

"I distinctly refuse, sir," said the Judge, waving his hand with an air of dignity. "Of the young gentleman for whom you intercede I know but little; but there are two disqualifications against him, more than enough either of them to outweigh your advocacy."

"May I learn them?" asked Sir Brook, meekly.

"You shall, sir. He carries my name without its prestige; he inherits *my* temper, but not my intellect." The blood rushed to his face as he spoke, and his chest swelled, and his whole bearing bespoke the fierce pride that animated him; when suddenly, as it were, recollecting himself, he added, "I am not wont to give way thus, sir. It is only in a moment of forgetfulness that I could have obtruded a personal consideration into a question of another kind. My friend here will tell you if it has been the habit of my life to pension my family on the public."

"Having failed in one object of my coming, let me hope for better success in another. May I convey to your Lordship your grandson's regret for having offended you? It has caused him sincere sorrow, and much self-reproach. May I return with the good tidings of your forgiveness?"

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"The habits of my order are opposed to rash judgments, and consequently to hasty reversions. I will consider the case, and let you hear my opinion upon it."

"I think that is about as much as you will do with him," muttered Haire in Sir Brook's ear, and with a significant gesture towards the door.

"Before taking my leave, my lord, would it be too great a liberty if I begged to present my personal respects to Miss Lendrick?"

"I will inform her of your wish, sir," said the Judge, rising and ringing the bell. After a pause of some minutes, in which a perfect silence was maintained by all, the servant returned to say, "Miss Lendrick would be happy to see Sir Brook."

"I hope, sir," said the Chief Baron, as he accompanied him to the door, "I have no need to request that no portion of what has passed here to-day be repeated to my granddaughter." A haughty bow of assent was all the reply.

"I make my advances to her heart," said the Judge, with a tone of more feeling in his voice, "through many difficulties. Let these not be increased to me—let her not think me unmindful of my own."

"Give her no reason to think so, my lord, and you may feel very indifferent to the chance words of a passing acquaintance."

"For the third time to-day, sir, have you dared to sit in judgment over my behaviour to my family. You cannot plead want of experience of life, or want of converse with men, to excuse this audacity. I must regard your intrusion, therefore, as a settled project to insult me. I accept no apologies, sir," said the old man, with a haughty wave of his hand, while his eyes glittered with passion. "I only ask, and I hope I ask as a right, that I may not be outraged under my own roof. Take your next opportunity to offend me when I may not be hampered by the character of your host. Come down into the open arena, and see how proud you will feel at the issue of the encounter." He rang the bell violently as he spoke, and continued to ring it till the servant came.

"Accompany this gentleman to the gate," said he to the man.

Not a change came over Sir Brook's face during the delivery of this speech, and as he bowed reverentially and withdrew, his manner was all that courtesy could desire.

"I see he's not going to visit Lucy," muttered Haire as Sir Brook passed the window.

"I should think not, sir. There are few men would like to linger where they have been so ingloriously defeated." He walked the room with a proud defiant look for some minutes, and then, sinking faintly into a chair, said, in a weak tremulous tone, "Haire, these trials are too much for me. It is a cruel aggravation of the ills of old age to have a heart and a brain alive to the finest sense of injury." Haire muttered something like concurrence.

"What is it you say, sir? Speak out," cried the Judge.

"I was saying," muttered the other, "I wish they would not provoke—would not irritate you; that people ought to see the state your nerves are in, and should use a little discretion how they contradict and oppose you." The bland smile of the Chief-Justice, and an assenting gesture of his hand, emboldened Haire to continue, and he went on: "I have always said, Keep away such as excite him; his condition is not one to be bettered by passionate outbreaks. Calm him, humour him."

"What a pearl above price is a friend endowed with discretion! Leave me, Haire, to think over your nice words. I would like to ponder them alone and to myself. I'll send for you by-and-by."

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CHAPTER XXII.

COMING-HOME THOUGHTS.

HAD a mere stranger been a guest on that Sunday when the Chief Baron entertained at dinner Lady Lendrick, the Sewells, and his old schoolfellow Haire, he might have gone away under the impression that he had passed an evening in the midst of a happy and united family.

Nothing could be more perfect than the blending of courtesy and familiarity. The old Chief himself was in his best of humours, which means, that with the high polish of a past age, its deference and its homage, he combined all the readiness and epigrammatic smartness of a later period. Lady Lendrick was bland, courteous, and attentive. Colonel Sewell took the part assigned him by his host, alternate talker and listener; and Mrs. Sewell herself displayed with true woman's wit, how she knew to fall in with the Judge's humour, as though she had known him for years, and that, in each sally of his wit, and each flash of his repartee, he was but reviving memories of such displays in long past years. As for Haire, no enchantment could be more complete; he found himself not only listened to but appealed to. The Chief asked him to correct him about some fact or other of recent history; he applied to him to relate some incident in a trial he had taken part in; and, greatest triumph of all, he was called on to decide some question about the dressing of Mrs. Sewell's hair, his award being accepted as the last judgment of connoisseurship.

Lucy talked little, but seemed interested by all around her. It was a bit of high-life comedy, really amusing, and she had that mere suspicion—it was no more—of the honesty and loyalty of the talkers to give an added significancy to all she saw and heard. This slight distrust, however, gave way, when Mrs. Sewell sat down beside her in the drawing-room, and talked to her of her father. Oh, how well she appeared to know him; how truly she read the guileless simplicity of his noble nature; how she distinguished—it was not all who did so—between his timid reserve and pride; how she saw that what savoured of haughtiness was in reality an excess of humility, shrouding itself from notice; how she dwelt on his love for children, and the instantaneous affection he inspired in them towards himself. Last of all, how she won the poor girl's heart as she said, "It will never do to leave him there, Lucy; we must have him here, at home with us. I think you may intrust it to me; I generally find my way in these sort of things."

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Lucy could have fallen at her feet with gratitude as she heard these words, and she pressed her hand to her lips and kissed it fervently. 'Why isn't your brother here? is he not in Dublin?" asked Mrs. Sewell, suddenly.

"Yes, he is in town," stammered out Lucy, "but grandpapa scarcely knows him, and when they did meet, it was most unfortunate. I'll tell you all about it another time."

"We have many confidences to make each other," said Mrs. Sewell, with a sigh so full of sorrow that Lucy instinctively pressed her hand with warmth, as though to imply her trustfulness would not be ill deposited.

At last came the hour of leave-taking, and the Judge accompanied his guests to the door, and even bare-headed handed Lady Lendrick to her carriage. To each, as they said "good-night," he had some little appropriate speech — a word or two of gracious compliment, uttered with all his courtesy.

"I call this little dinner a success, Lucy," said he, as he stood to say "good-night" on the stairs. "Lady Lendrick was unusually amiable, and her daughter-in-law is beyond praise."

"She is indeed charming," said Lucy, fervently.

"I found the Colonel also agreeable—less dictatorial than men of his class generally are. I suspect we shall get on well together with further acquaintance; but, as Haire said, I was myself to-night, and would have struck sparks out of the dullest rock, so that I must not impute to him what may only have been the reflex of myself. Ah, dear! there was a time when these exertions were the healthful stimulants of my life; now they only weary and excite —good-night, dear child, good-night."

As Lady Lendrick and her party drove homeward, not a word was uttered for some minutes after they had taken their seats. It was not till after they had passed out of the grounds, and gained the highroad, that she herself broke silence. "Well, Dudley," said she at last, "is he like my description? was my portrait too highly coloured?"

"Quite the reverse. It was a faint weak sketch of the great original. In all my life I never met such inordinate vanity and such overweening pretension. I give him the palm as the most conceited man and the greatest bore in Christendom."

"Do you wonder now if I couldn't live with him?" asked she, half triumphantly.

"I'll not go that far. I think I could live with him if I saw my way to any advantage by it."

"I'm certain you could not! The very things you now reprobate are the few endurable traits about him. It is in the resources of his intense conceit he finds whatever renders him pleasant and agreeable. I wish you saw his other humour."

"I can imagine it may not be all that one would desire; but still——"

"It comes well from you to talk of submitting and yielding," burst out Lady Lendrick. "I certainly have not yet detected these traits in your character; and I tell you frankly, you and Sir William could not live a week under the same roof together. Don't you agree with me, Lucy?"

"What should she know about it?" said he, fiercely; and before she could reply, "I don't suspect she knows a great deal about *me*—she knows nothing at all about *him*."

"Well, would you like to live with him yourself, Lucy?" asked Lady Lendrick.

"I don't say I'd *like* it; but I think it might be done," said she faintly, and scarcely raising her eyes as she spoke.

"Of course, then, my intractable temper is the cause of all our incompatibility; my only consolation is, that I have a son and a daughter-in-law so charmingly endowed, that their virtues are more than enough to outweigh my faults."

"What I say is this," said the Colonel, sternly —"I think the man is a bore, or a bully; but that he needn't be both if one doesn't like it. Now I'd consent to be bored, to escape being bullied, which is precisely the reverse of what you appear to have done."

"I am charmed with the perspicuity you display. I hope, Lucy, that it tends to the happiness of your married life to have a husband so well able to read character."

Apparently this was a double-headed shot, for neither spoke for several minutes.

"I declare I almost wish he would put you to the test," said Lady Lendrick. "I mean, I wish he'd ask you to the Priory."

"I fancy it is what he means to do," said Mrs. Sewell, in the same low tone—"at least, he came to me when I was standing in the small drawing-room, and said, 'How would you endure the quiet stilness and uniformity of such a life as I lead here? Would its dulness overpower you?"

"Of course you said it would be paradise," broke in her Ladyship; "you hinted all about your own resources, and suchlike."

"She did no such thing; she took the pathetic line, put her handkerchief to her eyes, and implied how she would love it, as a refuge from the cruel treatment of a bad husband—eh, am I right?" Harsh and insolent as the words were, the accents in which they were uttered were far more so. "Out with it madam! was it not something like that you said?"

"No," said she, gently. "I told Sir William I was supremely happy, blessed in every accident and every relation of my life, and that hitherto I had never seen the spot which could not suit the glad temper of my heart."

"You keep the glad temper confoundedly to yourself then," burst he out. "I wish you were not such a niggard of it."

"Dudley, Dudley, I say," cried Lady Lendrick, in a tone of reproof.

"I have learned not to mind these amenities," said Mrs. Sewell in a quiet voice, "and I am only surprised that Colonel Sewell thinks it worth while to continue them."

"If it be your intention to become Sir William's guest, I must say such habits will require to be amended," said her Ladyship, gravely.

"So they shall, mother. Your accomplished and amiable husband, as you once called him in a letter to me, shall only see us in our turtle moods, and never be suffered to approach our cage save when we are billing and cooing."

The look of aversion he threw at his wife as he spoke was something that words cannot con-

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vey; and though she never raised her eyes to meet it, a sickly pallor crept over her cheek as the blight fell on her.

"I am to call on him to-morrow by appointment. I wish he had not said twelve. One has not had his coffee by twelve; but as he said, 'I hope that will not be too early for you,' I felt it better policy to reply, 'By no means;' and so I must start as if for a journey."

"What does he mean by asking you to come at that hour? have you any notion what his business is?"

"Not the least. We were in the hall. I was putting on my coat, when he suddenly turned round and asked me if I could, without inconvenience, drop in about twelve."

"I wonder what it can be for."

"I'll tell you what I hope it may not be for! I hope it may not be to show me his conservatory, or his Horatian garden, as he pedantically called it, or his fish-ponds. If so, I think I'll invite him some fine morning to turn over all my protested bills, and the various writs issued against me. Bore for Bore, I suspect we shall come out of the encounter pretty equal."

"He has some rare gems. I'd not wonder if it was to get you to select a present for Lucy."

"If I thought so, I'd take a jeweller with me, as though my friend, to give me a hint as to the value."

"He admires you Lucy, greatly; he told me so as he took me down-stairs."

"She has immense success with men of that age: nothing over eighty seems able to resist her."

This time she raised her eyes, and they met his, not with their former expression, but full of defiance, and of an insolent meaning, so that after a moment he turned away his gaze, and after a seeming struggle looked abashed and ashamed. "The first change I will ask you to make in that house," said Lady Lendrick, who had noticed this by-play, "if ever you become its inmates, will be to dismiss that tiresome old hanger-on Mr. Haire. I abhor him."

"My first reform will be in the sherry. To get rid of that vile sugary compound of horrid nastiness he gives you after soup. The next will be the long-tailed black coach-horses. I don't think a man need celebrate his own funeral every time he goes out for a drive."

"Haire," resumed Lady Lendrick, in a tone of severity, meant, perhaps, to repress all banter on a serious subject—"Haire not only supplies food to his vanity, but stimulates his conceit by little daily stories of what the world says of him. I wish he would listen to *me* on that subject—I wish he would take *my* version of his place in popular estimation."

"I opine that the granddaughter should be got rid of," said the Colonel.

"She is a fool—only a fool," said Lady Lendrick.

"I don't think her a fool," said Mrs. Sewell, slowly.

"I don't exactly mean so much, but that she has no knowledge of life, and knows nothing whatever of the position she is placed in, nor how to profit by it."

"I'd not even go that far," said Mrs. Sewell, in the same quiet tone.

"Don't pay too much attention to *that*," said the Colonel to his mother. "It's one of her ways always to see something in every one that nobody else has discovered."

"I made that mistake once too often for my own welfare," said she, in a voice only audible to his ear.

"She tells me, mother, that she made that same mistake once too often for her own welfare; which, being interpreted, means in taking me for her husband—a civil speech to make a man in presence of his mother."

"I begin to think that politeness is not the quality any of us are eager about," said Lady Lendrick; "and I must say I am not at all sorry that the drive is over."

"If I had been permitted to smoke, you'd not have been distressed by any conversational excesses on my part," said the Colonel.

"I shall know better another time, Dudley; and possibly it would be as well to be suffocated with tobacco as half-choked with anger. Thank heaven we are at the door!"

"May I take your horses as far as the Club?" asked Sewell as he handed her out.

"Yes, but not to wait. You kept them on Tuesday night till past four o'clock."

"On second thought I'll walk," said he, turning away. "Good-night;" and leaving his wife to be assisted down the steps by the footman, he lighted his cigar, and walked away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A VERY HUMBLE DWELLING.

The little lodging occupied by Sir Brook and young Lendrick was in a not very distinguished suburb near Cullen's Wood. It was in a small one-storeyed cottage, whose ricketty gate bore the inscription Avoca Villa on a black board, under which, in a form of permanence that indicated frequent changes of domicile, were the words—"Furnished Apartments, and Board if required." A small enclosure, with three hollyhocks in a raised mound in the centre, and a luxurious crop of nettles around, served as garden: a narrow path of very rough shingle conducted to the door.

The rooms within were very small, low, and meanly furnished; they bespoke both poverty and neglect; and while the broken windows, the cobwebbed ceiling, and the unwashed floor, all indicated that no attention was bestowed on comfort, or even decency, over the fireplace, on a large black frame, was a painting representing the genealogical tree of the house of the proprietor, Daniel O'Reardon, Esquire, the lineal descendent of Frenok-Dhubh-na-Bochlish O'Reardon, who was king of West Carbarry, A.D. 703, and who, though at present only a doorkeeper in H. M. Court of Exchequer, had royal blood in his veins, and very kingly thoughts in his head.

If a cruel destiny compelled Mr. O'Reardon to serve the Saxon, he "took it out" in a most hearty hatred of his patron. He denounced him when he talked, and he reviled him when he sang. He treasured up paragraphs of all the atrocities of the English press, and he revelled

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in the severe strictures which the Irish papers bestowed on them. So far as hating went, he was a true patriot.

If some people opined that Mr. O'Reardon's political opinions rather partook of what was in vogue some sixty-odd years ago than what characterised our own day, there were others, less generous critics, who scrupled not to say that he was a paid spy of the Government, and that all the secret organisation of treason—all the mysterious plotting of rebellion that seems never to die completely out in Ireland—were known to and reported by this man to the "Castle." Certain it was that he lived in a way his humble salary at the Four Courts could not have met, and indulged in convivial excesses far beyond the reach of his small pay.

When Sir Brook and Tom Lendrick became his lodgers, he speedily saw that they belonged to a class far above what usually resorted to his humble house. However studiously simple they might be in all their demands, they were unmistakably gentlemen; and this fact, coupled with their evident want of all employment or occupation, considerably puzzled Mr. O'Reardon, and set him a-thinking what they could be, who they were, and, as he phrased it, what they were at. No letters came for them, nor, as they themselves gave no names, was there any means of tracing their address; and to his oft-insinuated request, "If any one asks for you, sir, by what name shall I be able to answer?" came the same invariable "No one will call;" and thus was Mr. O'Reardon reduced to designate them to his wife as the "old chap," and the "young one," titles which Sir Brook and Tom more than once overheard through the frail partitions of the ill-built house.

It is not impossible that O'Reardon's peculiar habits and line of life disposed him to attach a greater significance to the seeming mystery that surrounded his lodgers than others might have ascribed; it is probable that custom had led him to suspect everything that was any way suspicious. These men draw many a cover where there is no fox, but they rarely pass a gorse thicket and leave one undetected. His lodgers thus became to him a study. Had he been a man of leisure, he would have devoted the whole of it to their service; he would have dogged their steps, learned their haunts, and watched their acquaintances—if they had any. Sunday was, however, his one free day, and by some inconceivable perversity they usually spent the entire of it at home.

The few books they possessed bore no names; some of them were in foreign languages, and increased thereby Mr. O'Reardon's suspicious distrust, but none gave any clue to their owners. There was another reason for his eagerness and anxiety; for a long time back Ireland had been generally in a condition of comparative quiet and prosperity; there was less of distress, and consequently less of outrage. The people seemed at length to rely more upon themselves and their own industry, than on the specious promises of trading politicians, and Mr. O'Reardon, whose functions, I fear, were not above reproach in the matter of secret information, began to fear lest some fine morning he might be told his occupation was gone, and that his employers no longer needed the fine intelligence that could smell treason, even by a sniff: he must, he said, do something to revive the memory of his order, or the chance was it would be extinguished for ever.

He had to choose between denouncing them as French emissaries or American sympathisers. A novel of Balzac's that lay on the table decided for the former, for he knew enough to be aware it was in French; and fortified with this fact, he proceeded to draw up his indictment for the Castle.

It was, it must be confessed, a very meagre document; it contained little beyond the writer's one suspicions. Two men who were poor enough to live in Avoca Villa, and yet rich enough to do nothing for their livelihood, who gave no names, went out at unseasonable hours, and understood French, ought to be dangerous, and required to be watched, and therefore he gave an accurate description of their general appearance, age, and dress, at the office of the Private Secretary, and asked for his "instructions" in consequence.

Mr. O'Reardon was not a bad portrait-painter with his pen, and in the case of Sir Brook there were peculiarities enough to make even a caricature a resemblance: his tall narrow head, his long drooping mustache, his massive grey eyebrows, his look of stern dignity, would have marked him, even without the singularities of dress which recalled the fashions of fifty years before.

Little indeed did the old man suspect that his high-coloured coat and bell-shaped hat were subjecting him to grave doubts upon his loyalty. Little did he think, as he sauntered at evening along the green lanes in this retired neighbourhood, that his thoughts should have been on treason and bloodshed.

He had come to the little lodging, it is true, for privacy. After his failure in that memorable interview with Sir William Lendrick, he had determined that he would not either importune the Viceroy for place, nor would he be in any way the means of complicating the question between the Government and the Chief Baron by exciting the Lord-Lieutenant's interest in his behalf.

"We must change our lodging, Tom," said he, when he came home on that night. "I am desirous that for the few days we remain here none should trace nor discover us. I will not accept what are called compensations, nor will I live on here to be either a burden or a reproach to men who were once only my equals."

"You found my worthy grandfather somewhat less tractable than you thought for, sir," asked Tom.

"He was very fiery and very haughty, but on the whole there was much that I liked in him. Such vitality in a man of his years is in itself a grand quality, and in even its aggressiveness suggests much to regard. He refused to hear of me for the vacant office, and he would not accept you."

"How did he take your proposal to aid us by a loan?"

"I never made it. The terms we found ourselves on after half-an-hour's discussion of other matters rendered such a project impossible."

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"And Lucy—how did she behave through it all?"

"She was not there; I did not see her."

"So that it turned out as I predicted—a mere meeting to exchange amenities."

"The amenities were not many, Tom, and I doubt much if your grandfather will treasure up any very delightful recollections of my acquaintance."

"I'd like to see the man, woman, or child," burst out Tom, "who ever got out of his cage without a scratch. I don't believe that Europe contains his equal for irascibility."

"Don't dwell on these views of life," said Sir Brook, almost sternly. "You, nor I, know very little what are the sources of those intemperate outbreaks we so often complain of—what sore trials are ulcerating the nature, what agonising maladies, what secret terrors, what visions of impending misery; least of all do we know or take count of the fact, that it is out of these high-strung temperaments we obtain those thrilling notes of human passion and tenderness coarser natures never attain to. Let us bear with a passing discord in the instrument whose cadences can move us to very ecstasy."

Tom hung his head in silence, but he certainly did not seem convinced. Sir Brook quietly resumed, "How often have I told you that the world has more good than bad in it—yes, and what's more, that as we go on in life this conviction strengthens in us, and that our best experiences are based on getting rid of our disbeliefs. Hear what happened me this morning. You know that for some days back I have been negotiating to raise a small loan of four hundred pounds to take us to Sardinia and start our Mine. Mr. Waring, who was to have lent me this sum on the security of the Mine itself, took it into his head to hesitate at the last hour, and inserted an additional clause that I should insure my life in his behalf.

"I was disconcerted, of course, by this—so much so, that had I not bought a variety of tools and utensils on trust, I believe I would have relinquished the bargain and tried elsewhere. It was, however, too late for this: I was driven to accept his terms, and, accredited with a printed formula from an Insurance, I waited on the Doctor who was to examine me.

"A very brief investigation satisfied him that I was not seaworthy; he discovered I know not what about the valves of my heart, that implied mischief, and after 'percussing' me, as he called it, and placing his ear to my chest, he said, 'I regret to say, sir, that I cannot pronounce you insurable.'

"I could have told him that I came of a long-lived race on either side; that during my life I had scarcely known an illness, that I had borne the worst climates without injury, and suchlike —but I forbore; I had too much deference for his station and his acquirements to set my judgment against them, and I rose to take my leave. It is just possible, though I cannot say I felt it, that this announcement might have affected me—at all events, the disappointment did so, and I was terrified about the difficulties in which I saw myself involved. I became suddenly sick, and I asked for a glass of water; before it came I had fainted, a thing that never in my whole life had befallen me. When I rallied, he led me to talk of my usual habits and pursuits, and gradually brought me to the subject which had led me to his house. 'What!' said he, 'ask for any security beyond the property itself! It is absurd; Waring is always doing these things. Let me advance this money. I know a great deal more about you, Sir Brook, than you think; my friend Dr. Lendrick has spoken much of you, and of all your kindness to his son; and though you may not have heard of my name—Beattie,—I am very familiar with yours.'

"In a word, Tom, he advanced the money. It is now in that writing-desk; and I have—I feel it—a friend the more in the world. As I left his door, I could not help saying to myself, What signify a few days more or less of life, so long as such generous traits as this follow one to the last! He made me a happier man by his noble trust in me than if he had declared me a miracle of strength and vigour. Who is that looking in at the window, Tom? It's the second time I have seen a face there."

Tom started to his feet and hurried to the door. There was, however, no one there; and the little lane was silent and deserted. He stopped a few minutes to listen, but not a footfall could be heard, and he returned to the room believing it must have been a mere illusion.

"Let us light candles, Tom, and have out our maps. I want to see whether Marseilles will not be our best and cheapest route to the island."

They were soon poring eagerly over the opened map, Sir Brook carefully studying all the available modes of travel; while Tom, be it owned, let his eyes wander from land to land, till, following out the Danube to the Black Sea, he crossed over and stretched away into the mountain gorges of Circassia, where Schamyl and his brave followers were then fighting for liberty. For maps, like the lands they picture, never offer to two minds kindred thoughts; each follows out in space the hopes and ambitions that his heart is charged with; and where one reads wars and battle-fields, another but sees pastoral pleasures and a tranquil existence—home and home happiness.

'Yes, Tom; here I have it. These coasting craft, whose sailing-lines are marked here, will take us and our traps to Cagliari for a mere trifle —here is the route."

As the young man bent over the map the door behind opened, and a stranger entered. "So I have found you, Fossbrooke!" cried he, "though they insisted you had left Ireland ten days ago."

"Mercy on me! Lord Wilmington!" said Sir Brook, as he shaded his eyes to stare at him. "What could have brought you here?"

"I'll tell you," said he, dropping his voice. "I read a description so very like you in the secret report this morning, that I sent my servant Curtis, who knows you well, to see if it was not yourself; when he came back to me—for I waited for him at the end of the lane—with the assurance that I was right, I came on here. I must tell you that I took the precaution to have your landlord detained, as if for examination, at

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the Under-Secretary's office; and he is the only one here who knows me. Mr. Lendrick, I hope you have not forgotten me? we met some months ago on the Shannon."

"What can I offer you?" said Sir Brook. "Shall it be tea? We were just going to have it."

"I'll take whatever you like to give me; but let us profit by the few moments I can stay. Tell me how was it you failed with the Chief Baron?"

"He wouldn't have me, that's all. He maintains his right to an undivided patronage, and will accept of no dictation."

"Will he accept of your friend here? He has strong claims on him."

"As little as myself, my lord: he grew eloquent on his public virtue, and of course became hopeless."

"Will he retire and let us compensate him?"

"I believe not. He thinks the country has a vested interest in his capacity, and as he cannot be replaced, he has no right to retire."

"He may make almost his own terms with us, Fossbrooke," said the Viceroy. "We want to get rid of himself and an intractable Attorney-General together. Will you try what can be done?"

"Not I, my lord. I have made my first and last advances in that quarter."

"And yet I believe you are our last chance. He told Pemberton yesterday you were the one man of ability that ever called on him with a message from a Viceroy."

"Let us leave him undisturbed in his illusion, my lord."

"I'd say let us profit by it, Fossbrooke. I have been in search of you these eight days to beg you would take the negotiation in hand. Come, Mr. Lendrick, you are interested in this; assist me in persuading Sir Brook to accept this charge. If he will undertake the mission, I am ready to give him ample powers to treat."

"I suspect, my lord," said Tom, "you do not know my grandfather. He is not a very manageable person to deal with."

"It is for that reason I want to place him in the hands of my old friend here."

"No, no, my lord; it is quite hopeless. Had we never met, I might have come before him with some chance of success; but I have already prejudiced myself in his eyes, and our one interview was not very gratifying to either of us."

"I'll not give in Fossbrooke, even though I am well aware I can do nothing to requite the service I ask of you."

"We leave Ireland to-morrow evening. We have a project which requires our presence in the island of Sardinia. We are about to make our fortunes, my lord, and I'm sure you're not the man to throw any obstacle in the way."

"Give me half an hour of your morning, Fossbrooke; half an hour will suffice. Drive out to the Priory; see the Chief Baron; tell him I intrusted the negotiation to you, as at once more delicate to each of us. You are disconnected with all party ties here. Say it is not a question of advancing this man or that—that we well know how inferior must any successor be to himself, but that certain changes are all-essential to us. We have not—I may tell you in confidence—the right man as our law advisor in the House; and add, 'It is a moment to make your own terms; write them down, and you shall have your reply within an hour—a favourable one I may almost pledge myself it to be. At all events, every detail of the meeting is strictly between us, and on honour.' Come, now, Fossbrooke; do this for me as the greatest service I could entreat of you."

"I cannot refuse you any longer. I will go. I only premise that I am to limit myself strictly to the statement you shall desire me to repeat. I know nothing of the case; and I cannot be its advocate."

"Just so. Give me your card. I will merely write these words—'See Sir Brook for me.—WILMINGTON.' Our object is his resignation, and we are prepared to pay handsomely for it. Now, a word with you, Mr. Lendrick. I heard most honourable mention of you yesterday from the vice-provost; he tells me that your college career was a triumph so long as you liked it, and that you have abilities for any walk in life. Why not continue, then, on so successful a path? why not remain, take out your degree, and emulate that distinguished relative who has thrown such lustre on your family?"

"First of all, my lord, you have heard me much overrated. I am not at all the man these gentlemen deem me; secondly, if I were, I'd rather bring my abilities to any pursuit my friend here could suggest. I'd rather be *his* companion than be my grandfather's rival. You have heard what he said a while ago—we are going to seek our fortune."

"He said to make it," said Lord Wilmington, with a smile.

"Be it so, my lord. *I'll* seek, and *he'll* find; at all events, I shall be his companion; and I'm a duller dog than I think myself if I do not manage to be the better of it."

"You are not the only one he has fascinated," said the Viceroy, in a whisper. "I'm not sure I'd disenchant you if I had the power."

"Must I positively undertake this negotiation?" asked Fossbrooke, with a look of entreaty."

"You must."

"I know I shall fail."

"I dont believe it."

"Well, as Lady Macbeth says, if we fail, we *fail;* and though murdering a king be an easier thing than muzzling a Chief Baron—here goes."

As he said this the door was gently moved, and a head protruded into the room.

"Who is that?" cried Tom, springing rapidly towards the door; but all was noiseless and quiet, and no one to be seen. "I believe we are watched here," said he, coming back into the room.

"Good-night, then. Let me have your report as early as may be, Fossbrooke. Good-night."

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CHAPTER XXIV.

A MORNING AT THE PRIORY.

The morning after this interview was that on which the Chief Baron had invited Colonel Sewell to inspect his gardens and hothouses, a promise of pleasure which, it is but fair to own, the Colonel regarded with no extravagant delight. To his thinking, the old Judge was an insupportable Bore. His courtesy, his smartness, his anecdotes, his reminiscences, were all Boredom. He was only endurable when by the excess of his conceit he made himself ridiculous. Then alone did Sewell relish his company; for he belonged to that class of men, and it is a class, who feel their highest enjoyment whenever they witness any trait in human nature that serves to disparage its dignity or tarnish its fame.

That a man of unquestionable ability and power like the Chief Baron should render himself absurd, through his vanity, was a great compensation to such a persou as Sewell. To watch the weaknesses and note the flaws in a great nature, to treasure up the consolation that, after all, these "high intelligences" occasionally make precious fools of themselves, are very congenial pastimes to small folk. Perhaps, indeed, they are the sole features of such men they are able to appreciate, and, like certain reptiles, they never venture to bite save where corruption has preceded them.

Nothing in his manner betrayed this tendency—he was polished and courteous to a degree. A very critical eye might have detected in his bearing that he had been long a subordinate. His deference was a little—a very little—overstrained; he listened with a slight tinge of over-attention; and in his humility as he heard an order, and his activity as he obeyed it, you could read at once the aide-de-camp in waiting.

It is not necessary to remind the reader that all this lacquer of good breeding covered a very coarse and vulgar nature. In manner he was charming—his approach, his address, his conversation, were all perfect; he knew well when to be silent—when to concur by a smile with what he was not expected to confirm by a word—when to seem suddenly confronted with a new conviction, and how to yield assent as though coerced to what he would rather have resisted. In a word, he was perfect in all the training of those superb poodles who fetch and carry for their masters, that they may have the recompense of snarling at all the rest of mankind.

As there are heaven-born doctors, lawyers, divines, and engineers, so are there men specially created for the antechamber, and Sewell was one of them.

The old Judge had given orders for a liberal breakfast. He deemed a soldier's appetite would be a hearty one, and he meant to treat him hospitably. The table was therefore very generously spread, and Sewell looked approvingly at the fare, and ventured on a few words of compliment on the ample preparations before him.

"It is the only real breakfast-table I have seen since I left Calcutta," said he, smiling graciously.

"You do me honour sir," replied the old man, who was not quite sure whether or not he felt pleased to be complimented on a mere domestic incident.

Sewell saw the hitch at once, and resumed. "I remember an observation Lord Commorton made me, when I joined his staff in India. I happened to make some remark on a breakfast, set out pretty much like this, and he said, 'Bear in mind, Captain Sewell, that when a man who holds a high function sits down to a well-served breakfast, it means that he has already completed the really important work of the day. The full head means the empty stomach."

"His Excellency was right, sir; had he always been inspired with sentiments of equal wisdom, we should never have been involved in that unhappy Cantankankarabad war."

"It was a very disastrous affair indeed," sighed Sewell; "I was through the whole of it."

"When I first heard of the project," continued the Judge, "I remarked to a friend who was with me—one of the leading men at the bar—'This campaign will tarnish our arms, and imperil our hold on India. The hill-tribes are eminently warlike, and however specious in their promises to us, their fidelity to their chiefs has never been shaken.'"

"If your judgment had been listened to, it would have saved us a heavy reverse, and saved me a very painful wound; both bones were fractured here," said Sewell, showing his wrist.

The Chief Baron scarcely deigned a glance at the cicatrix; he was high above such puny considerations. He was at that moment Governor-General of India and Prime Minister of England together. He was legislating for hundreds of millions of dark skins, and preparing his explanations of his policy for the pale faces at home.

"'Mark my words, Haire,' said I," continued the Judge, with increased pomposity of manner, "'this is the beginning of insurrection in India.' We have a maxim in law, Colonel Sewell, Like case, like rule. So was it there. May I help you to this curry?"

"I declare, my lord, I was beginning to forget how hungry I was. Shall I be deemed impertinent if I ask how you obtained your marvellous—for it is marvellous—knowledge of India?"

"Just as I know the Japanese constitution; just as I know Central Africa; just as I know, and was able to quote some time back, that curious chapter of the Brehon laws on substitutes in penal cases. My rule of life has been, never to pass a day without increasing the store of my acquirements."

"And all this with the weighty charge and labour of your high office!"

"Yes, sir; I have been eighteen years on the bench. I have delivered in that time some judgments which have come to be deemed amongst the highest principles of British law. I have contributed largely to the periodical literature of the time. In a series of papers—you may not have heard of them—signed 'Icon,' in the 'Lawyer's Treasury of Useful Facts,' I have defended the Bar against the aggressive violence of the Legislature, I hope it is not too much to say, triumphantly."

"I remember Judge Beale, our Indian Chief-

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Justice referring to those papers as the most splendid statement of the position and claims of the barrister in Great Britain."

"Beale was an ass, sir; his law was a shade below his logic—both were pitiable."

"Indeed?—yes, a little more gravy. Is your cook a Provençal—that omelette would seem to say so."

"My cook is a woman, and an Irishwoman, sir. She came to me from Lord Manners, and, I need not say, with the worst traditions of her art, which, under Lady Lendrick's training, attained almost to the dignity of poisoning."

Sewell could not restrain himself any longer, but laughed out at this sudden outburst. The old Judge was, however, pleased to accept the emotion as complimentary; he smiled and went on—"I recognised her aptitude, and resolved to train her, and to this end I made it a practice to detain her every morning after prayers, and read to her certain passages from approved authors on cookery, making her experiment on the receipts for the servants' hall. We had at first some slight cases of illness, but not more serious than colic and violent cramps. In the end she was successful, sir, and has become what you see her."

"She would be a *cordon bleu* in Paris."

"I will take care, sir, that she hears of your approval. Would you not like a glass of Maraschino to finish with?"

"I have just tasted your brandy, and it is exquisite."

"I cannot offer you a cigar, Colonel; but you are at liberty to smoke if you have one."

"If I might have a stroll in that delicious garden that I see there, I could ask nothing better. Ah, my lord," said he as they sauntered down a richly scented alley, "India has nothing like this—I doubt if Paradise has any better."

"You mean to return there?"

"Not if I can help it—not if an exchange is possible. The fact is, my lord, my dear wife's health makes India impossible, so far as she is concerned; the children, too, are of the age that requires removal to Europe; so that, if I go back, I go back alone." He said this with a voice of deep depression, and intending to inspire the sorrow that overwhelmed him. The old Judge, however, fancied he had heard of heavier calamities in life than living separated from the wife of his bosom; he imagined, at least, that with courage and fortitude the deprivation might be endured; so he merely twitched the corners of his mouth in silence.

The Colonel misread his meaning, and went on: "Aspiring to nothing in life beyond a home and home happiness, it is, of course, a heavy blow to me to sacrifice either my career or my comfort. I cannot possibly anticipate a return earlier than eight or ten years; and who is to count upon eight or ten years in that pestilent climate? Assuredly not a man already broken down by wounds and jungle fever!"

The justice of the remark was, perhaps, sufficient for the Chief Baron. He paid no attention to its pathetic side, and so did not reply.

Sewell began to lose patience, but he controlled himself, and, after a few puffs of his cigar, went on: "If it were not for the children, I'd take the thing easy enough. Half-pay is a beggarly thing, but I'd put up with it. I'm not a man of expensive tastes. If I can relish thoroughly such sumptuous fare as you gave me this morning, I can put up with very humble diet. I am a regular soldier in that."

"An excellent quality, sir," said the old man, dryly.

"Lucy, of course, would suffer. There are privations which fall very heavily on a woman, and a woman, too, who has always been accustomed to a good deal of luxury."

The Chief bowed an assent.

"I suppose I might get a depôt appointment for a year or two. I might also—if I sold out—manage a barrackmastership, or become an inspector of yeomanry, or some such vulgar makeshift: but I own, my lord, when a man has filled the places I have—held staff appointments—been a private secretary—discharged high trusts, too, for in Mooraghabad I acted as Deputy-Resident for eight months—it does seem a precious come-down to ask to be made a paymaster in a militia regiment, or a subaltern in the mounted police."

"Civil life is always open to a man of activity and energy," said the Judge, calmly.

"If civil life means a profession, it means the sort of labour a man is very unfit for after five-and-thirty. The Church, of course, is open on easier terms; but I have scruples about the Church. I really could not take orders without I could conscientiously say, This is a walk I feel called to."

"An honourable sentiment, sir," was the dry rejoinder.

"So that the end will be, I suppose, one of these days I shall just repack my bullock-trunk, and go back to the place from whence I came, with the fate that attends such backward journeys!"

The Chief Baron made no remark. He stooped to attach a fallen carnation to the stick it had been attached to, and then resumed his walk. Sewell was so provoked by the sense of failure—for it had been a direct assault—that he walked along silent and morose. His patience could endure no longer, and he was ready now to resent whatever should annoy him.

"Have you any of the requirements, sir, that civil services demand?" asked the Judge, after a long pause.

"I take it I have such as every educated gentleman possesses," replied Sewell, tartly.

"And what may these be in your estimation?"

"I can read and write, I know the first three rules of arithmetic, and I believe these are about the qualifications that fit a man for a place in the cabinet."

"You are right, sir. With these, and the facility to talk platitudes in Parliament, a man may go very far and very high in life. I see that you know the world."

Sewell, for a moment, scarcely knew whether to accept the speech as irony or approval; but a sidelong glance showed him that the old man's face had resumed its expression of mingled insolence and vanity, and convinced him that he was now sincere. "The men," said the Judge, pompously, "who win their way to high station in these days are either the crafty tricksters of party or the gross flatterers of the people; and

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whenever a man of superior mould is discovered, able to leave his mark on the age, and capable of making his name a memory, they have nothing better to offer him, as their homage, than an entreaty that he would resign his office and retire."

"I go with every word you say, my lord," cried Sewell, with a well-acted enthusiasm.

"I want no approval, sir; I can sustain my opinions without a following!" A long silence ensued; neither was disposed to speak; at last the Judge said—and he now spoke in a more kindly tone, divested alike of passion and of vanity—"Your friends must see if something cannot be done for you, Colonel Sewell. I have little doubt but that you have many and warm friends. I speak not of myself; I am but a broken reed to depend on. Never was there one with less credit with his party. I might go farther, and say, never was there one whose advocacy would be more sure to damage a good cause; therefore exclude *me* in all questions of your advancement. If you could obliterate our relationship it might possibly serve you."

"I am too proud of it, my lord, to think so."

"Well, sir," said he, with a sigh, "it is possibly a thing a man need not feel ashamed of, at least I hope as much. But we must take the world as it is, and when we want the verdict of public opinion, we must not presume to ask for a special jury. What does that servant want? Will you have the kindness to ask him whom he is looking for?"

"It is a visitor's card, my lord," said Sewell, handing it to the old man as he spoke.

"There is some writing on it. Do me the favour to read it."

Sewell took the card and read, "See Sir B. for me.—WILMINGTON. Sir Brook Fossbrooke." The last words Sewell spoke in a voice barely above a whisper, for a deadly sickness came over him, and he swayed to and fro like one about to faint.

"What! does he return to the charge?" cried the old man, fiercely. "The Viceroy was a diplomatist once. Might it not have taught him that, after a failure, it would be as well to employ another envoy?"

"You have seen this gentleman already then?" asked Sewell, in a low faint tone.

"Yes, sir. We passed an hour and half together — an hour and half that neither of us will easily forget."

"I conjecture, then, that he made no very favourable impression upon you, my lord?"

"Sir, you go too fast. I have said nothing to warrant your surmise; nor am I one to be catechised as to the opinions I form of other men. It is enough on the present occasion if I say I do not desire to receive Sir Brook Fossbrooke, accredited though he be from so high a quarter. Will you do me the very great favour"—and now his voice became almost insinuating in its tone—"will you so deeply oblige me as to see him for me? Say that I am prevented by the state of my health; and the rigorous injunctions of my doctor to avoid all causes of excitement—lay stress on excitement—deprive me of the honour of receiving him in person; but that *you*—mention our relationship—have been deputed by me to hear, and if necessary to convey to me any communication he may have to make. You will take care to impress upon him that if the subject-matter of his visit be the same as that so lately discussed between ourselves, you will avail yourself of the discretion confided to you not to report it to me. That my nerves have not sufficiently recovered from the strain of that excitement to return to a topic no less full of irritating features than utterly hopeless of all accommodation. Mind, sir, that you employ the word as I give it—'accommodation.' It is a Gallicism, but all the better, where one desires to be imperative, and not precise. You have your instructions, sir."

"Yes, I think I understand what you desire me to do. My only difficulty is to know whether the matters Sir Brook Fossbrooke may bring forward be the same as those you discussed together. If I had any clue to these topics, I should at once be in a position to say — These are themes I must decline to present to the Chief Baron."

"You have no need to know them, sir," said the old man, haughtily. "You are in the position of an attesting witness; you have no dealing with the body of the document. Ask Sir Brook the question as I have put it, and reply as I have dictated."

Sewell stood for a moment in deep thought. Had the old man but known over what realms of space his mind was wandering—what troubles and perplexities that brain was encountering—he might have been more patient and more merciful as he gazed on him.

"I don't think, sir, I have confided to you any very difficult or very painful task," said the Judge at last.

"Nothing of the kind, my lord," replied he, quickly; "my anxiety is only that I may acquit myself to your perfect satisfaction. I'll go at once."

"You will find me here whenever you want me."

Sewell bowed, and went his way; not straight towards the house, however, but into a little copse at the end of the garden, to recover his equanimity, and collect himself. Of all the disasters that could befall him, he knew of none he was less ready to confront than the presence of Sir Brook Fossbrooke in the same town with himself. No suspicion ever crossed his mind that he would come to Ireland. The very last he had heard of him was in New Zealand, where it was said he was about to settle. What, too, could be his business with the Chief Baron? had he discovered their relationship, and was he come to denounce and expose him? No — evidently not. The Viceroy's introduction of him could not point in this direction, and then the old Judge's own manner negatived this conjecture. Had he heard but one of the fifty stories Sir Brook could have told him, there would be no question of suffering him to cross his threshold.

"How shall I meet him? how shall I address him?" muttered he again and again to himself, as he walked to and fro in a perfect agony of trouble and perplexity. With almost any other man in the world Sewell would have relied on his personal qualities to carry him through a passage of difficulty. He could assume a temper of complete imperturbability; he could put on

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calm, coldness, deference, if needed, to any extent; he could have acted his part—it would have been mere acting—as man of honour and man of courage, to the life, with any other to confront him but Sir Brook.

This, however, was the one man on earth who knew him—the one man by whose mercy he was able to hold up his head and maintain his station; and this one man should now be here! here, within a few yards of where he stood!

"I could murder him as easily as I go to meet him," muttered Sewell, as he turned towards the house.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

As Sir Brook sat in the library waiting for the arrival of the Chief Baron, Lucy Lendrick came in to look for a book she had been reading. "Only think, sir," said she, flushing deeply with joy and astonishment together—"to find you here! What a delightful surprise!"

"I have come, my dear child," said he, gravely, "to speak with Sir William on a matter of some importance, and evidently he is not aware that my moments are precious, for I have been here above half an hour alone."

"But now that I am with you," said she, coquettishly, "you'll surely not be so churlish of your time, will you?"

"There is no churlishness, my darling Lucy, in honest thrift. I have nothing to give away. The deep sadness of his voice showed how intensely his words were charged with a stronger significance. "We are off to-night."

"To-night!" cried she, eagerly.

"Yes, Lucy. It's no great banishment—only to an island in the Mediterranean, and Tom came up here with me in the vague, very vague, hope he might see you. I left him in the shrubbery near the gate, for he would not consent to come farther."

"I'll go to him at once. We shall meet again," said she, as she opened the sash-door and hastened down the lawn at speed.

After another wait of full a quarter of an hour, Fossbrooke's patience became exhausted, and he drew nigh the bell to summon a servant; his hand was on the rope, when the door opened, and Sewell entered. Whatever astonishment Fossbrooke might have felt at this unexpected appearance, nothing in his manner or look betrayed it. As for Sewell, all his accustomed ease had deserted him, and he came forward with an air of assumed swagger, but his colour came and went, and his hands twitched almost convulsively.

He bowed, and, smiling courteously, invited Fossbrooke to be seated. Haughtily drawing himself up to his full height, Sir Brook said, in his own deep sonorous voice, "There can be nothing between us, sir, that cannot be dismissed in a moment—and as we stand."

"As you please, sir," rejoined Sewell, with an attempt at the same haughty tone. "I have been deputed by my step-father, the Chief Baron, to make his excuses for not receiving you—his health forbids the excitement. It is his wish that you may make to *me* whatever communication you had destined for *him*."

"Which I refuse, sir, at once," interrupted Sir Brook.

"I opine, then, there is no more to be said," said Sewell, with a faint smile.

"Nothing more, sir—not a word; unless perhaps you will be gracious enough to explain to the Chief Baron the reasons—they cannot be unknown to you—why I refuse all and any communication with Colonel Sewell."

"I have no presumption to read your mind and know your thoughts," said Sewell, with quiet politeness.

"You would discover nothing in either to your advantage, sir," said Fossbrooke, defiantly.

"Might I add, sir," said Sewell, with an easy smile, "that all your malevolence cannot exceed my indifference to it?"

Fossbrooke waived his hand haughtily, as though to dismiss the subject and all discussion of it, and after a few seconds' pause, said, "We have a score that must be settled one day. I have deferred the reckoning out of reverence to the memory of one whose name must not be uttered between us, but the day for it shall come. Meanwhile, sir, you shall pay me interest on your debt."

"What do you assume me to owe you?" asked Sewell, whose agitation could no longer be masked.

"You would laugh if I said, your character before the world and the repute through which men keep your company; but you will not laugh—no, sir, not even smile, when I say that you owe me the liberty by which you are at large, instead of being, as I could prove you, a forger and a felon."

Sewell threw a hurried and terrified look around the room, as there might possibly be some to overhear the words; he grasped the back of a chair to steady himself, and in the convulsive effort seemed as if he was about to commit some act of violence.

"None of that, sir," said Fossbrooke, folding his arms.

"I meant nothing; I intended nothing; I was faint, and wanted support," stammered out Sewell in a broken voice. "What do you mean by interest? how am I to pay interest on an indefinite sum?"

"It may relieve you of some anxiety to learn that I am not speaking of money in the interest I require of you. What I want—what I shall exact—is this, that you and yours——" he stopped, and grew scarlet; the fear lest something coarse or offensive might fall from him in a moment of heat and anger arrested his words, and he was silent.

Sewell saw all the difficulty. A less adroit man would have deemed the moment favourable to assert a triumph; Sewell was too acute for this, and waited without speaking a word.

"My meaning is this," said Fossbrooke, in a voice of emotion. "There is a young lady here for whom I have the deepest interest. I desire that, so long as she lives estranged from her father's roof, she should not be exposed to other influences than such as she has met

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there. She is new to life and the world, and I would not that she should make acquaintance with them, through any guidance save of her own nearest and dearest friends."

"I hear, sir; but, I am free to own, I greatly mistrust myself to appreciate your meaning."

"I am sorry for it," said Fossbrooke, sighing. "I wanted to convey my hope that, in your intercourse here, Miss Lendrick might be spared the perils of—of——"

"My wife's friendship, you would say, sir," said Sewell, with a perfect composure of voice and look.

Fossbrooke hung his head. Shame and sorrow alike crushed him down. Oh that the day should came when he could speak thus of Frank Dillon's daughter!

"I will not say with what pain I hear you, Sir Brook," said Sewell, in a low gentle voice. "I am certain that you never uttered such a speech without much suffering. It will alleviate your fears when I tell you that we only remain a few days in town. I have taken a country house, some sixty or seventy miles from the capital, and we mean to live there entirely."

"I am satisfied," said Sir Brook, whose eagerness to make reparation was now extreme.

"Of course I shall mention nothing of this to my wife," said Sewell.

"Of course not, sir; save with such an explanation as I could give of my meaning, it would be an outrage."

"I was not aware that there was—that there could be—an explanation," said Sewell, quietly; and then seeing the sudden flash that shot from the old man's eyes, he added hastily, "This is far too painful to dwell on—let it suffice, sir, that I fully understand you, and that you shall be obeyed."

"I ask no more," said Fossbrooke, bowing slightly.

"You will comprehend, Sir Brook," resumed Sewell, "that as I am precluded from making this conversation known to my wife, I shall not be able to limit any intimacy between her and Miss Lendrick farther than by such intimations and hints as I may offer without exciting suspicion. It might happen, for instance, that in coming up to town we should be Sir William's guests. Am I to suppose that you interdict this?"

"I hope I am not capable of such a condition," said Sir Brook, flushing, for at every step and stage of the negotiation he felt that his zeal had outrun his judgment, and that he was attempting, not only more than he could, but more than he ought to do.

"In fairness, Sir Brook," said Sewell, with an assumed candour that sat very well on him, "I ought to tell you that your conditions are very easy ones. My wife has come to this country to recruit her health and look after her children. I myself shall probably be on my way back to India soon after Christmas. Our small means totally preclude living in the gay world; and," added he with a laugh, "if we really had any blandishments or captivations at our disposal, they would be best bestowed on the Horse Guards, to extend my leave, or assist me to an exchange."

There was high art in the way in which Sewell had so contrived to get the old man involved in the conflict of his own feelings, that he was actually grateful for the easy and even familiar tone employed towards him.

"I have wounded this man deeply," said Fossbrooke to himself. "I have said to him things alike unfeeling and ungenerous, and yet he has temper enough to treat me amicably, even courteously."

It was almost on his lips to say that he had still some influence with the Horse Guards, that a great man there had been one of his most intimate friends in life, and that he was ready to do anything in his power with him, when a sudden glance at Sewell's face recalled him at once to himself, and he stammered out—"I will detain you no longer, sir. Be kind enough to explain to the Lord Chief Baron, that my communication was of a character that could not be made indirectly. His Excellency's name on my card probably suggested as much. It might be proper to add, that the subject was one solely attaching to his lordship, and to his lordship's interest. He will himself understand what I mean."

Sewell bowed acquiescence. As he stood at the half-open door, he was disposed to offer his hand. It was a bold step, but he knew if it should succeed it would be a great victory. The opportunity was too good to be lost, and just as Sir Brook turned to say good-morning, Sewell, like one carried away by a sudden impulse, held out his hand, and said, "You may trust me, Sir Brook."

"If you wish me to do so, sir, let me not touch your hand," said the old man, with a look of stern and haughty defiance, and he strode out without a farewell.

Sewell staggered back into the room and sat down. A clammy cold perspiration covered his face and forehead, for the rancour that filled his heart sickened him like a malady. "You shall pay for this—by heaven! you shall," muttered he as he wiped the great drops from his brow. "The old fool himself has taught me where he was vulnerable, and as I live he shall feel it."

"His lordship wants to see you, sir; he is in the garden," said a servant, and Sewell rose and followed him. He stopped twice as he went to compose his features and regain his calm. On the last time he even rehearsed the few words and the smile by which he meant to accost the Judge. The little artifice was however forestalled, as Sir William met him abruptly with the words—"What a time you have been, sir,—forty-eight minutes by my watch."

"I assure you, my lord, I'd have made it shorter if I could," said Sewell, with a smile of some significance.

"I am unable to see why you could not have done so. The charge I gave you was to report to me, not to negotiate on your own part."

"Nor did I, my lord. Sir Brook Fossbrooke distinctly declared that he would only communicate with yourself personally—that what he desired to say referred to yourself, and he should be answered by yourself."

"On hearing which, sir, you withdrew?"

"So far as your lordship was concerned, no more was said between us. What passed after this I may be permitted to call private."

"What, sir! You see a person in *my* house, at *my* instance, and with *my* instructions—who

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comes to see and confer with *me;* and you have the hardihood to tell me that you took that opportunity to discuss questions which you call private!"

"I trust, my lord, you will not press me in this matter; my position is a most painful one."

"It is worse than painful, sir. It is humiliating. But," added he, after a short pause, "I have reason to be grateful to you. You have rescued me from perhaps a very grave indiscretion. Your position—your wife's health—your children's welfare, had all interested me. I might have—no matter what, sir. I have recovered the balance of my mind. I am myself again."

"My lord, I will be open with you."

"I will accept of no forced confidences, sir," said the Judge, waving his hand haughtily.

"They are not forced, my lord, farther than my dislike to give you pain renders them so. The man to whom you sent me this morning is no stranger to me—would that he had been!—would that I had never known nor heard of him! Very few words will explain why, my lord; I only entreat that, before I say them, they may be in strictest confidence between us."

"If they require secrecy, sir, they shall have it."

"Quite enough, my lord—amply sufficient for me is this assurance. This person then, my lord, was the old friend and brother officer of Sir Frank Dillon, my father-in-law. They lived as young men in closest friendship together, shared perils, amusements, and purse together. For many years nothing occurred to interrupt the relations between them, though frequent remonstrances from Dillon's family against the intimacy might possibly have caused a coolness; for the world had begun to talk of Fossbrooke with a certain distrust, comparing his mode of living with the amount of his fortune, and half hinting that his successes at play were more than accidental.

"Still Dillon held to him, and to break the tie at last his family procured an Indian appointment for him, and sent him to Calcutta. Fossbrooke no sooner heard of it than he sold off his town house and horses, and actually sailed in the same packet with him."

"Let us sit down, Colonel Sewell; I am wearied with walking, and I should like to hear the remainder of this story."

"I will make it very brief, my lord. Here is a nice bench to rest on. Arrived in India they commenced a style of living the most costly and extravagant imaginable. Their receptions, their dinners, their equipages, their retinues, completely eclipsed the splendours of the native princes. For a while these were met promptly by ready money; later on came bills, at first duly met, and at last dishonoured. On investigation, however, it was found that the greater number—far the greater number—of the acceptances were issued by Dillon alone; a circumstance which puzzled none so much as Dillon himself, who never remembered the circumstances that had called for them."

"They were forgeries by Fossbrooke," said the Judge.

"You are right, my lord, they were, but so adroitly done that Dillon was the first to declare the signatures his own; nor was the fraud ever discovered. To rescue his friend, as it were, Fossbrooke sold off everything, and paid, I know not what amount, and they both left for Ceylon, where Dillon was named Commander of the Forces.

"Here Dillon married, and on the birth of his first child, Fossbrooke was the godfather, their affection being stronger than ever. Once more the life of extravagance burst forth, and now, besides the costly household and reckless expenditure, the stories of play became rife and frequent, several young fellows being obliged to leave the service and sell their commissions to meet their debts. The scandal reached England, and Dillon was given his choice to resign or resume active service at his old rank. He accepted the last, and went back to India. For a while they were separated. My father-in-law made a brilliant campaign, concluding with the victory of Atteyghur. He was named Political Resident at the seat of government, and found himself in the receipt of a large revenue, and might in a few years have become wealthy and honoured. His evil genius, however, was soon at his side. Fossbrooke arrived, as he said, to see him before leaving for Europe; he never left him till his death. From that day dated my father-in-law's inevitable ruin. Mal-administration, corruption, forced loans on every side. Black-mail was imposed on all the chiefs, and a system of iniquity instituted that rendered the laws a farce, and the office of judge a degradation.

"Driven almost to desperation by his approaching ruin, and yet blind to the cause of it, Sir Frank took service against the Affghans, and fell, severely wounded, at Walhalla. Fossbrooke followed him to the Hills, where he went to die. The infatuation of that fatal man was unbroken, and on his deathbed he not only confided to him all the deeds and documents that concerned his fortune, but gave him the guardianship and control of his daughter. In the very last letter he ever penned are these words:—'Scandal may some day or other dare to asperse him (Sir Brook)—the best have no immunity on that score—but I charge you, however fortune may deal with you, share it with him if he need it—your father never had so true, so noble, so generous a friend. Have full courage in any course he approves of, and never distrust yourself so completely as when he differs from you; above all, believe no ill of him.'

"I have seen this letter—I have read it more than once; and with my full knowledge of the man, with my memory stored with stories about him, it was very hard to see him exercise an influence in my house, and a power over my wife. For a while I tried to respect what had been the faith of her childhood; I could not bear to destroy what formed one of the links that bound her to her father's memory; but the man's conduct obliged me to abandon this clemency. He insisted on living upon us, and living in a style, not merely costly, but openly, flagrantly disreputable. Of his manner to myself I will not speak; he treated me not alone as a dependant, but as one whose character and fortune were in his hands. To what comments this exposed me in my own house I leave you to imagine: I remonstrated at first, but my endurance became exhausted, and I turned him from my house.

"Then began his persecution of me—not

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alone of myself, but my wife, and all belonging to me. I must not dwell on this, or I should forget myself.

"We left India, hoping never to hear more of him.

"There was a story that he had gone on a visit to a Rajah in Oude, and would in all likelihood live there till he died. Imagine what I felt, my lord, when I read his name on that visiting-card. I knew, of course, what his presence meant, a pretended matter of business with you—the real object was to traduce and vilify me. He had ascertained the connection between us, and determined to turn it to profit. So long as I followed my career in India—a poor soldier of fortune—I was not worth persecution; but here at home, with perhaps friends, possibly with friends able and willing to aid me, I at once assumed importance in his eyes. He well knows how dear to us is the memory of my wife's father, what sacrifices we have made, what sacrifices we would make again, that his name should not be harshly dealt with by the world. He feels, too, all the power and weight he can wield by that letter of poor Dillon's, given so frankly, so trustfully, and so unfortunately, on his deathbed. In one word, my lord, this man has come back to Europe to exert over me the pressure which he once on a time used over my father-in-law. For reasons I cannot fathom, the great people who knew him once, and who ought to know who and what he has become, are still willing to acknowledge him. It is true he no longer frequents their houses and mixes in their society—but they recognise him. The very card he sent in this morning bore the Viceroy's name—and from this cause alone, even if there were not others, he would be dangerous. I weary you, my lord, and I will conclude. By an accidental admission he let drop that he would soon leave Ireland for a while; let it seem, my lord, so long as he remains here, that I am less intimate here, less frequent as a visitor, than he has imagined. Let him have grounds to imagine that my presence here was a mere accident, and that I am not at all likely to enjoy any share of your lordship's favour—in fact, let him believe me as friendless here as he saw me in India, and he will cease to speculate on persecuting me."

"There would be an indignity in such a course, sir," cried the Judge, fiercely; "the man has no terrors for me."

"Certainly not, my lord, nor for me personally; I speak on my wife's behalf; it is for her sake and for her peace of mind I am alone thinking here."

"I will speak to her myself on this head."

"I entreat you not, my lord. I implore you never to approach the subject. She has for years been torn between the terrible alternative of obeying the last injunctions of her father or yielding to the wishes of her husband. Her life has been a continual struggle, and her shattered health has been the consequence. No, my lord; let us go down for a few weeks or months as it may be to this country place they have taken for us; a little quietness will do us both good. My leave will not expire till March; there is still time to look about me."

"Something shall be done for you, sir," said the Judge, pompously. Sewell bowed low; he knew how to make his bow a very deep acknowledgment of gratitude; he knew the exact measure of deference, and trustfulness, and thankfulness to throw into his expression as he bent his head, while he seemed too much overpowered to speak.

"Yes, sir, you shall be cared for," said the old man. "And if this person, this Sir Brook Fossbrooke, return here, it is with me he will have to deal—not you."

"My lord, I entreat you never to admit him; neither see nor correspond with him. The man is a desperado, and holds his own life too cheap to care for another's."

"Sir, you only pique my curiosity to meet with him. I have heard of such fellows, but never saw one."

"From all I have heard, my lord, *your* courage requires no proofs."

"You have heard the truth, sir. It has been tested in every way, and found without alloy. This man came here a few days ago to ask me to nominate my grandson to an office in my gift; but, save a lesson for his temerity, he 'took nothing by his motion.'" The old Judge walked up and down with short impatient steps, his eyebrows moving fiercely, and his mouth twitching angrily. "The Viceroy must be taught that it is not through such negotiators he can treat with men like myself. We hear much about the dignity of the Bench; I would that his Excellency should know that the respect for it is a homage to be rendered by the highest as well as the lowest, and that I for one will accept of nothing less than all the honours that befit my station."

Relieved, as it were, by this outburst of vanity, his heart unburdened of a load of self-conceit, the old man felt freer and better; and in the sigh he heaved there seemed a something that indicated a sense of alleviation. Then, turning to Sewell, with a softened voice, he said, "How grieved I am that you should have passed such a morning! It was certainly not what I had intended for you."

"You are too good to me my lord—far too good, and too thoughtful of me," said Sewell, with emotion.

"I am one of those men who must go to the grave misconstrued and misrepresented. He who would be firm in an age of cowardice, he who would be just in an age of jobbery, cannot fail to be calumniated. But, sir, there is a moral stature, as there is a material stature, that requires distance for its proportions; and it is possible posterity will be more just to me than my contemporaries."

"I would only hope, my lord, that the time for such a judgment may be long deferred."

"You are a courtier, sir," said the Judge, smiling. "It was amongst courtiers I passed my early youth, and I like them. When I was a young man, Colonel Sewell, it was the fashion to make the tour of Europe as a matter of education and good breeding. The French court was deemed, and justly deemed, the first school of manners, and I firmly believe France herself has suffered in her forms of politeness from having ceased to be the centre of supply to the world. She adulterated the liquor as the consumers decreased in taste and increased in number."

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"How neatly, how admirably expressed!" said Sewell, bowing.

"I had some of that gift once," said the old man with a sigh; "but it is a weapon out of use nowadays. Epigram has its place in a museum now as rightfully as an Andrea Ferrara."

"I declare, my lord, it is two o'clock. Here is your servant coming to announce luncheon. I am ashamed to think what a share of your day I have monopolised."

"You will stay and take some mutton broth, I hope?"

"No, my lord. I never eat luncheon; and I am, besides, horrified at inflicting you so long already."

"Sir, if I suffer many of the miseries of old age, I avail myself of some of its few privileges. One of the best of these is, never to be bored. I am old and feeble enough to be able to say to him who wearies me, Leave me—leave me to myself and my own dreariness. Had you 'inflicted' me, as you call it, I'd have said as much two hours ago. Your company was, however, most agreeable. You know how to talk; and, what is rarer, you know how to listen."

Sewell bowed respectfully and in silence.

"I wish the school that trains aides-de-camp could be open to junior barristers and curates," muttered he, half to himself, then added aloud, "Come and see me soon again. Come to breakfast, or, if you prefer it, to dinner. We dine at seven;" and without further adieu than a slight wave of his hand, he turned away and entered the house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SIR BROOK IN CONFUSION.

Tom Lendrick had just parted with his sister as Fossbrooke came up, and, taking his arm in silence, moved slowly down the road.

Seeing his deep preoccupation, Tom did not speak for some time, but walked along without a word. "I hope you found my grandfather in better temper, sir?" asked Tom at last.

"He refused to receive me; he pleaded illness; or rather he called it by its true name, indisposition. He deputed another gentleman to meet me—a Colonel Sewell, his stepson."

"That's the man my father saw at the Cape; a clever sort of person he called him, but, I suspect, not one to his liking; too much man of the world—too much man of fashion for poor Dad."

"I hope so," muttered Fossbrooke, unconsciously.

"Indeed, sir; and why?" asked Tom, eagerly.

"What of Lucy?" said Sir Brook, abruptly; "how did you think she was looking?"

"Well, sir, on the whole, well. I've seen her jollier; but, to be sure, it was a leave-taking today, and that's not the occasion to put one in high spirits. Poor girl, as she said, 'Is it not hard, Tom? there are only three of us, and we must all live apart.'"

"So it is—hard; very hard. I'd have tried once more to influence the old Judge if he'd have given me a meeting. He may do worse with that office than bestow it on you, Tom. I believe I'd have told him as much."

"It's perhaps as well, sir, that you did not see him," said Tom, with a faint smile.

"Yes," said Fossbrooke, following along the train of his own thoughts, and not noticing the other's remark. "He may do worse; he may give it to *him*, and thus draw closer the ties between them; and if *that* man once gets admission there he'll get influence."

"Of whom are you talking, sir?"

"I was not speaking, Tom. I was turning over some things in my mind. By the way, we have much to do before evening. Go over to Hodgen's about those tools; he has not sent them yet; and the blasting powder, too, has not come down. I ought, if I could manage the time, to test it; but it's too late. I must go to the Castle for five minutes—five minutes will do it; and I'll pass by Grainger's on my way back, and buy the flannel—miners' flannel they call it in the advertisement. We must look our *métier*, Tom, eh? You told Lucy where to write, and how to address us, I hope?"

"Yes, sir, she wrote it down. By the way, that reminds me of a letter she gave me for you. It was addressed to her care, and came yesterday."

The old man thrust it in his pocket without so much as a look at it.

"I think the post-mark was Madeira," said Tom, to try and excite some curiosity.

"Possibly. I have correspondents everywhere."

"It looked like Trafford's writing, I thought."

"Indeed! let us see;" and he drew forth the letter, and broke the envelope. "Right enough, Tom—it is Trafford."

He ran his eyes rapidly over the first lines, turned to the next side, and then to the end of the letter, and then once more began at the beginning.

"This is his third attempt, he says, to reach me, having written twice without any acknowledgment, hence he has taken the liberty—and a very great liberty, too—to address the present to the care of your sister. His brother died in March last, and the younger brother has now shown symptoms of the same malady, and has been sent out to Madeira. 'I could not,' he writes—'I could not refuse to come out here with him, however eager I was to go to Ireland. You can well believe'"—here the old man slurred over the words, and murmured inaudibly for some seconds. "I see," added he at last, "he has gone back to his old regiment, with good hopes of the majority. 'Hinks is sick of the service, and quite willing to leave. Harvey, however, stands above me, and deems it a cruel thing to be passed over. I must have your advice about this, as well as about ——'" Here again he dropped his voice and mumbled unintelligibly. At length he read on—"'What is Tom doing? What a shame it would be if a fellow with such abilities should not make his way!'"

"A crying shame," burst in Tom, "but I neither see the abilities nor the way; would he kindly indicate how to find either or both?"

"'My mother suggested,'" read on Sir Brook, "'two or three things which my father could readily obtain, but you know the price of the pro-

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motion; you know what I would have to——'"
Here, once more, the old man stopped abruptly.

"Pray go on sir," cried Tom, eagerly; "this interests me much, and as it touches myself I have half a claim to hear it."

Sir Brook gave no heed to the request, but read on in silence and to himself. Turning to the last page, he said—"'I may then hope to be in Ireland by the end of the month. I shall not go down to Holt, but straight to Dublin. My leave will expire on the 28th, and this will give me a good excuse for not going home. I am sure you will agree with me that I am doing the right thing.

"'If I am fortunate enough to meet you in Dublin I can ask your advice on many things which press for solution; but if you should have left Ireland, and gone heaven knows where, what is to become of me?'"

"Got into debt again, evidently," said Tom, as he puffed his cigar.

"Nothing of the kind. I know thoroughly what he alludes to, though I am not at liberty to speak of it. He wishes me to leave our address with Colonel Cave at the barracks, and that if we should have left Ireland already, he'll try and manage a month's leave, and pay us a visit."

"I declare that I guessed that!" burst out Tom. "I had a dread of that, from the very day we first planned our project. I said to myself, so sure as we settle down to work—to work like men who have no thought but how to earn their bread—some lavender-gloved fellow, with a dressing-case and three hat-boxes, will drop down to disgust us alike with our own hardships and *his* foppery."

"He'll not come," said Sir Brook, calmly; "and if he should, he will be welcome."

"Oh! as to that," stammered out Tom, somewhat ashamed of his late warmth, "Trafford is perhaps the one exception to the sort of thing I am afraid of. He is a fine, manly, candid fellow, with no affectations nor any pretensions."

"A gentleman, sir!—just a gentleman, and of a very good type."

The last few lines of the letter were small and finely written, and cost the old man some time to decipher. At last he read them aloud.

"'Am I asking what you would see any objection to accord me, if I entreat you to give me some letter of introduction or presentation to the Chief Baron? I presume that you know him; and I presume that he might not refuse to know *me*. It is possible I may be wrong in either or both of these assumptions. I am sure you will be frank in your reply to this request of mine, and say No, if you dislike to say Yes. I made the acquaintance of Colonel Sewell, the Judge's stepson, at the Cape; but I suspect—I may be wrong—but I suspect that to be presented by the Colonel might not be the smoothest road to his lordship's acquaintance—I was going to write "favour"—but I have no pretension, as yet at least, to aspire that far.

"'The Colonel himself told me that his mother and Sir William never met without a quarrel. His affectionate remark was, that the Chief Baron was the only creature in Europe whose temper was worse than Lady Lendrick's, and it would be a blessing to humanity if they could be induced to live together

"'I saw a good deal of the Sewells at the Cape. She is charming! She was a Dillon, and her mother a Lascelles, some forty-fifth cousin of my mother's — quite enough of relationship, however, to excuse a very rapid intimacy, so that I dined there when I liked, and uninvited. I did not like him so well, but then he beat me at billiards, and always won my money at ecarté, and of course these are detracting ingredients which ought not to be thrown into the scale.

"'How she sings! I don't know how you, with your rapturous love of music, would escape falling in love with her; all the more that she seems to me one who expects that sort of homage, and thinks herself defrauded if denied it. If the Lord Chief Baron is fond of ballads, he has been her captive this many a day.

"'My love to Tom, if with you, or within reach of you, and believe me ever yours affectionately,

"'LIONEL TRAFFORD.'"

"It was the eldest son who died," said Tom, carelessly.

"Yes, the heir. Lionel now succeeds to a splendid fortune and the baronetcy."

"He told me once that his father had made some sort of compact with his eldest son about cutting off the entail, in case he should desire to do it. In fact, he gave me to understand that he wasn't a favourite with his father, and that, if by any course of event she were likely to succeed to the estate, it was more than probable his father would use this power, and merely leave him what he could not alienate—a very small property that pertained to the baronetage."

"With reference to what did he make this revelation to you? What had you been talking of?"

"I scarcely remember. I think it was about younger sons, how hardly they were treated, and how unfairly."

"Great hardship truly that a man must labour! not to say that there is not a single career in life he can approach without bringing to it greater advantages than befall humbler men—a better and more liberal education, superior habits as regards society, powerful friends, and what in a country like ours is inconceivably effective—the prestige of family. I cannot endure this compassionate tone about younger sons. To my thinking they have the very best opening that life can offer, if they be men to profit by it, and if they are not, I care very little what becomes of them."

"I do think it hard that my elder brother should have fortune and wealth to over-abundance, while my pittance will scarcely keep me in cigars."

"You have no right, sir, to think of his affluence. It is not in the record; the necessities of your position have no relation to his superfluities. Bethink you of yourself, and if cigars are too expensive for you, smoke cavendish. Trafford was full of this cant about the cruelty of primogeniture, but I would have none of it. Whenever a man tells me that he deems it a hardship that he should do anything for his livelihood, I leave him, and hope never to see more of him."

"Trafford surely did not say so."

"No—certainly not; there would have been no correspondence between us if he had. But I want to see these young fellows showing the

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world that they shrink from no competitorship with any. They have long proved, that to confront danger and meet death they are second to none. Let them show that in other qualities they admit of no inferiority—that they are as ready for enterprise, as well able to stand cold and hunger and thirst, to battle with climate and disease. *I* know well they can do it, but I want the world to know it."

"As to intellectual distinctions," said Tom, "I think they are the equals of any. The best man in Trinity in my day was a fellow-commoner."

This speech seemed to restore the old man to his best humour. He slapped young Lendrick familiarly on the shoulder, and said, "It would be a grand thing, Tom, if we could extend the application of that old French adage, '*Noblesse oblige*,' and make it apply to every career in life, and every success. Come along down this street; I want to buy some nails—we can take them home with us."

They soon made their purchases, and each, armed with a considerably-sized brown paper parcel, issued from the shop—the old man eagerly following up the late theme, and insisting on all the advantages good birth and blood conferred, and what a grand resource was the gentleman element in moments of pressure and temptation.

"His Excellency wishes to speak to you, sir," said a footman, respectfully standing hat in hand before him. "The carriage is over the way."

Sir Brook nodded an assent, and then, turning to Tom, said, "Have the kindness to hold this for me for a moment; I will not detain you longer;" and placing in young Lendrick's hands a good-sized parcel, he stepped across the street, totally forgetting that over his left arm, the hand of which was in his pocket, a considerable coil of strong rope depended, being one of his late purchases. As he drew nigh the carriage, he made a sign that implied defeat; and mortified as the Viceroy was at the announcement, he could not help smiling at the strange guise in which the old man presented himself.

"And how so, Fossbrooke?" asked he, in answer to the other's signal.

"Simply, he would not see me, my lord. Our first meeting had apparently left no very agreeable memories of me, and he scarcely cared to cultivate an acquaintance that opened so inauspiciously."

"But you sent him your card with my name?"

"Yes; and his reply was, to depute another gentleman to receive me, and take my communication."

"Which you refused, of course, to make?"

"Which I refused."

"Do you incline to suppose that the Chief Baron guessed the object of your visit?"

"I have no means of arriving at that surmise, my lord. His refusal of me was so peremptory, that it left me no clue to any guess."

"Was the person deputed to receive you one with whom it was at all possible to indicate such an intimation of your business, as might convey to the Chief Baron the necessity of seeing you?"

"Quite the reverse, my lord; he was one with whom, from previous knowledge, I could hold little converse."

"Then there is, I fear, nothing to be done."

"Nothing."

"Except to thank you heartily, my dear Fossbrooke, and ask you once more, why are you going away?"

"I told you last night, I was going to make a fortune. I have—to my own astonishment, I own it—begun to feel that narrow means are occasionally most inconvenient; that they limit a man's action in so many ways, that he comes at last to experience a sort of slavery; and instead of chafing against this, I am resolved to overcome it, and become rich."

"I hope, with all my heart, you may. There is no man whom wealth will more become, or who will know how to dispense it more reputably."

"Why, we have gathered a crowd around us, my lord," said Fossbrooke, looking to right and left, where now a number of people had gathered, attracted by the Viceroy's presence, but still more amused by the strange-looking figure with the hank of rope over his arm, who discoursed so freely with his Excellency. "This is one of the penalties of greatness, I take it," continued he. "It's your Excellency's Collar of St. Patrick costs you these attentions——"

"I rather think it's *your* '*grand cordon*,' Fossbrooke," said the Viceroy, laughing, while he pointed to the rope.

"Bless my stars!" exclaimed Sir Brook, blushing deeply, "how forgetful I am growing. I hope you forgive me. I am sure you could not suppose——"

"I could never think anything but good of you, Fossbrooke. Get in, and come out to 'the Lodge' to dinner."

"No, no; impossible. I am heartily ashamed of myself. I grow worse and worse every day; people will lose patience at last, and cut me; good-bye."

"Wait one moment. I want to ask you something about young Lendrick. Would he take an appointment in a colonial regiment—would he?——" But Fossbrooke had elbowed his way through the dense crowd by this time, and was far out of hearing—shocked with himself, and overwhelmed with the thought that, in his absurd forgetfulness, he might have involved another in ridicule.

"Think of me standing talking to his Excellency with this on my arm, Tom!" said he, flushing with shame and annoyance: "how these absent fits keep advancing on me! When a man begins to forget himself in this fashion, the time is not very distant when his friends will be glad to forget him. I said so this moment to Lord Wilmington, and I am afraid that he agreed with me. Where are the screws, Tom—have I been forgetting them also?"

"No, sir, I have them here; the holdfasts were not finished, but they will be sent over to us this evening, along with the cramps you ordered."

"So, then, my head was clear so far," cried he, with a smile. "In my prosperous days, Tom, these freaks of mine were taken as good jokes, and my friends laughed at them over my

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burgundy; but when a man has no longer burgundy to wash down his blunders with, it is strange how different becomes the criticism, and how much more candid the critic."

"So that, in point of enlightenment, sir, it is better to be poor."

"It is what I was just going to observe to you," said he, calmly. "Can you give me a cigar?"

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CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TWO LUCYS.

Within a week after this incident, while Fossbrooke and young Lendrick were ploughing the salt sea towards their destination, Lucy sat in her room one morning engaged in drawing. She was making a chalk copy from a small photograph her brother had sent her, a likeness of Sir Brook, taken surreptitiously as he sat smoking at a window, little heeding or knowing of the advantage thus taken of him.

The head was considerably advanced, the brow and the eyes were nearly finished, and she was trying, for the third time, to get an expression into the mouth which the photograph had failed to convey, but which she so often observed in the original. Eagerly intent on her work, she never heard the door open behind her, and was slightly startled as a very gentle hand was laid on her shoulder.

"Is this a very presumptuous step of mine, dear Lucy?" said Mrs. Sewell, with one of her most bewitching smiles: "have I your leave for coming in upon you in this fashion?"

"Of course you have, my dear Mrs. Sewell; it is a great pleasure to me to see you here."

"And I may take off my bonnet, and my shawl, and my gloves, and my company manner, as my husband calls it?"

"Oh! you have no company manner," broke in Lucy.

"I used to think not; but men are stern critics, darling, and especially when they are husbands. You will find out, one of these days, how neatly your liege lord will detect every little objectionable trait in your nature, and with what admirable frankness he will caution you against—yourself."

"I almost think I'd rather he would not."

"I'm very certain of it, Lucy," said the other, with greater firmness than before. "The thing we call love, in married life has an existence only a little beyond that of the bouquet you carried to the wedding-breakfast; and it would be unreasonable in a woman to expect it, but she might fairly ask for courtesy and respect, and you would be amazed how churlish even gentlemen can become about expending these graces in their own families."

Lucy was both shocked and astonished at what she heard, and the grave tone in which the words were uttered surprised her most of all.

Mrs. Sewell had by this time taken off her bonnet and shawl, and, pushing back her luxuriant hair from her forehead, looked as though suffering from headache, for her brows were contracted, and the orbits around her eyes dark and purple-looking.

"You are not quite well to-day," said Lucy, as she sat down on the sofa beside her, and took her hand.

"About as well as I ever am," said she, sighing; and then, as if suddenly recollecting herself, added, "India makes such an inroad on health and strength! No buoyancy of temperament ever resisted that fatal climate. You wouldn't believe it, Lucy, but I was once famed for high spirits."

"I can well believe it."

"It was, however, very long ago. I was little more than a child at the time—that is, I was about fourteen or fifteen—when I left England, to which I returned in my twentieth year. I went back very soon afterwards to nurse my poor father, and be married."

The depth of sadness in which she spoke the last words made the silence that followed intensely sad and gloomy.

"Yes," said she, with a deep melancholy smile, "papa called me madcap. Oh dear, if our fathers and mothers could look back from that eternity they have gone to, and see how the traits they traced in our childhood have saddened and sobered down into sternest features, would they recognise us as their own? I don't look like a madcap now, Lucy, do I?" As she said this, her eyes swam in tears, and her lip trembled convulsively. Then standing hastily up, she drew nigh the table, and leaned over to look at the drawing at which Lucy had been engaged.

"What!" cried she, with almost a shriek—"what is this? Whose portrait is this? tell me at once; who is it?"

"A very dear friend of mine and of Tom's. One you could not have ever met, I'm sure."

"And how do you know whom I have met?" cried she, fiercely. "What can you know of my life and my associates?"

"I said so, because he is one who has lived long estranged from the world," said Lucy, gently; for in the sudden burst of the other's passion she only saw matter for deep compassion. It was but another part of a nature torn and distracted by unceasing anxieties.

"But his name, his name?" said Mrs. Sewell, wildly.

"His name is Sir Brook Fossbrooke."

"I knew it, I knew it!" cried she, wildly. "I knew it!" and said it over and over again. "Go where we will we shall find him. He haunts us like a curse—like a curse!" And it was in almost a shriek the last word came forth.

"You cannot know the man, if you say this of him," said Lucy, firmly.

"Not know him!—not know him! You will tell me next that I do not know myself—not know my own name—not know the life of bitterness I have lived—the shame of it—the ineffable shame of it!" and she threw herself on her face on the sofa, and sobbed convulsively. Long and anxiously did Lucy try all in her power to comfort and console her. She poured out her whole heart in pledges of sisterly love and affection. She assured her of a sympathy that would never desert her; and, last of all,

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she told her that her judgment of Sir Brook was a mistaken one; that in the world there lived not one more true-hearted, more generous, or more noble.

"And where did you learn all this, young woman?" said the other, passionately. "In what temptations and trials of your life have these experiences been gained? Oh, don't be angry with me, dearest Lucy: forgive this rude speech of mine; my head is turning, and I know not what I say. Tell me, child, did this man speak to you of my husband?"

"No."

"Nor of myself?"

"Not a word. I don't believe he was aware that we were related to each other."

"He not aware! Why, it's his boast that he knows every one and every one's connections. You never heard him speak without this parade of universal acquaintanceship. But why did he come here? how did you happen to meet him?"

"By the merest accident. Tom found him one day fishing the river close to our house, and they got to talk together; and it ended by his coming to us to tea. Intimacy followed very quickly, and then a close friendship."

"And do you mean to tell me that all this while he never alluded to us?"

"Never."

"This is so unlike him—so unlike him," muttered she, half to herself. "And the last place you saw him, where was it?"

"Here, in this house."

"Here! do you mean that he came here to see you?"

"No, he had some business with grandpapa, and called one morning, but he was not received. Grandpapa was not well, and sent Colonel Sewell to meet him."

"He sent my husband! And did he go?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I know it."

"I never heard of this," said she, holding her hands to her temples. "About what time was it?"

"It was on Friday last. I remember the day, because it was the last time I saw poor Tom."

"On Friday last," said she, pondering. "Yes, you are right. I do remember that Friday;" and she drew up the sleeve of her dress, and looked at a dark blue mark upon the fair white skin of her arm; but so hastily was the action done that Lucy did not remark it.

"It was on Friday morning. It was on the forenoon of Friday, was it not?"

"Yes. The clock struck one, I remember, as I got back to the house."

"Tell me, Lucy," said she, in a caressing tone, as she drew her arm round the girl's waist—"tell me, darling, how did Colonel Sewell look after that interview? did he seem angry or irritated?—I'll tell you why I ask this some other time—but I want to know if he seemed vexed or chagrined by meeting this man."

"I did not see him after; he went away almost immediately after Sir Brook. I heard his voice talking with grandpapa in the garden, but I went to my room, and we did not meet."

"As they spoke in the garden were their voices raised? did they talk like men excited or in warmth?"

"Yes. Their tone and manner were what you say—so much so that I went away, not to overhear them. Grandpapa, I know, was angry at something, and when we met at luncheon he barely spoke to me."

"And what conclusion did you draw from all this?"

"None! There was nothing to induce me to dwell on the circumstance; besides," added she, with some irritation, "I am not given to reason upon the traits of people's manner, or their tone in speaking."

"Nor perhaps accustomed to inquire, when your grandfather is vexed, what it is has irritated him?"

"Certainly not. It is a liberty I should not dare to take."

"Well, darling," said she, with a saucy laugh, "he is more fortunate in having *you* for a granddaughter than *me*. I'm afraid I should have less discretion—at all events less dread."

"Don't be so sure of that," said Lucy, quietly. "Grandpapa is no common person. It is not his temper but his talent that one is loath to encounter."

"I do not suspect that either would terrify me greatly. As the soldiers say, Lucy, 'I have been under fire' pretty often, and I don't mind it now. Do you know, child, that we have got into a most irritable tone with each other? each of us is saying something that provokes a sharp reply, and we are actually sparring without knowing it."

"I certainly did not know it," said Lucy, taking her hand within both her own, "and I ask pardon if I have said anything to hurt you."

Leaving her hand to Lucy unconsciously, and not heeding one word of what she said, Mrs. Sewell sat with her eyes fixed on the floor, deep in thought. "I'm sure, Lucy," said she at last, "I don't know why I asked you all those questions a while ago. That man, Sir Brook I mean, is nothing to me; he ought to be, but he is not. My father and he were friends; that is, my father thought he was his friend, and left him the guardianship of me on his deathbed."

"Your guardian—Sir Brook your guardian?" cried Lucy, with intense eagerness.

"Yes; with more power than the law, I believe, would accord to any guardian." She paused and seemed lost in thought for some seconds, and then went on, "Colonel Sewell and he never liked each other. Sir Brook took little trouble to be liked by him; perhaps Dudley was as careless on his side. What a tiresome vein I have got in. How should *you* care for all this?"

"But I do care—I care for all that concerns you."

"I take it if you were to hear Sir Brook's account, we should not make a more brilliant figure than himself. He'd tell you about our mode of life and high play, and the rest of it; but, child, every one plays high in India, every one does scores of things there they wouldn't do at home, partly because the ennui of life tempts to anything—anything that would relieve it; and then all are tolerant because all are equally—I was going to say wicked; but I don't mean wick-

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edness—I mean bored to that degree that there is no stimulant left without the breach of the decalogue."

"I think that might be called wickedness," said Lucy, dryly.

"Call it what you like, only take my word for it you'd do the self-same things if you lived there. I was pretty much what you are now when I left England, and if any naughty creature like myself were to talk, as I am doing to you now, and make confession of all her misdeeds and misfortunes, I'm certain I'd have known how to bridle up and draw away my hand, and retire to a far end of the sofa, and look unutterable pruderies, just as you do this moment."

"Without ever suspecting it, certainly," said Lucy, laughing.

"Tear up that odious drawing, dear Lucy," said she, rising and walking the room with impatience. "Tear it up; or if you won't do that, let me write a line under it—one line, I ask for no more—so that people may know at whom they are looking."

"I will do neither; nor will I sit here to listen to one word against him."

"Which means, child, that your knowledge of life is so much greater than mine, you can trust implicitly to your own judgment. I can admire your courage, certainly, though I am not captivated by your prudence."

"It is because I have so little faith in my own judgment that I am unwilling to lose the friend who can guide me."

"Perhaps it would be unsafe if I were to ask you to choose between *him* and *me*," said Mrs. Sewell, very slowly, and with her eyes fully bent on Lucy.

"I hope you will not."

"With such a warning I certainly shall not do so. Who could have believed it was so late?" said she, hastily looking at her watch; "what a seductive creature you must be, child, to slip over one's whole morning without knowing it—two o'clock already. You lunch about this time?"

"Yes, punctually at two."

"Are you sufficiently lady of the house to invite me, Lucy?"

"I am sure you *need* no invitation here; you are one of us."

"What a little Jesuit it is," said Mrs. Sewell, patting her cheek. "Come, child, I'll be equal with you. I'll enter the room on your arm and say, 'Sir William, your granddaughter insisted on my remaining; I thought it an akwardness, but she tells me she is the mistress here, and I obey.'"

"And you will find he will be too well bred to contradict you," said Lucy, while a deep blush covered her face and throat.

"Oh, I think him positively charming!" said Mrs. Sewell, as she arranged her hair before the glass; "I think him charming. My mother-in-law and I have a dozen pitched battles every day on the score of his temper and his character. *My* theory is, the only intolerable thing on earth is a fool; and whether it be that Lady Lendrick suspects me of any secret intentions to designate one still nearer to her by this reservation, I do not know, but the declaration drives her half crazy. Come, Lucy, we shall be keeping grandpapa waiting for us."

They moved down the stairs, arm-in-arm, without a word; but as they gained the door of the dining-room Mrs. Sewell turned fully round and said in a low deep voice, "Marry anything—rake, gambler, villain—anything, the basest and the blackest; but never take a fool, for a fool means them all combined."

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NEST WITH STRANGE "BIRDS" IN IT.

To the Swan's Nest, very differently tenanted from what we saw it at the opening of our story, we have now to conduct our reader. Its present occupant, "the acquisition to any neighbourhood," as the house-agent styled him, was Colonel Sewell.

Lady Lendrick had taken the place for her son, on finding that Sir William would not extend his hospitality to him. She had taken the precaution not merely to pay a year's rent in advance, but to make a number of changes in the house and its dependencies, which she hoped might render the residence more palatable to him, and reconcile him in some degree to its isolation and retirement.

The Colonel was, however, one of those men—they are numerous enough in this world—who canvass the mouth of the gift-horse, and have few scruples in detecting the signs of his age. He criticised the whole place with a most commendable frankness. It was a "poky little hole. It was dark, it was low-ceilinged. It was full of inconveniences. The furniture was old-fashioned. You had to mount two steps into the drawing-room, and go down three into the dining-room. He had to cross a corridor to his bath-room, and there was a great Tudor window in the small breakfast-parlour, that made one feel as if sitting in a lantern."

As for the stables, "he wouldn't put a donkey into them." No light, no ventilation, no anything, in short. To live surrounded with so many inconveniences was the most complete assertion of his fallen condition, and, as he said, "he had never realized his fall in the world till he settled down in that miserable Nest."

There are men whose especial delight it is to call your attention to their impaired condition, their threadbare coat, their patched shoes, the shabby equipage, or their sorry dwelling, as though they were framing a sort of indictment against Fate and setting forth the hardships of persons of merit like them being subjected to this unjustifiable treatment by Fortune.

"I suppose you never thought to see me reduced to this," is the burden of their song; and it is very strange how, by mere repetition and insistance, these people establish for themselves a sort of position, and oblige the world to yield them a black-mail of respect and condolence.

"This was not the sort of tipple I used to set before you once on a time, old fellow," will be uttered by one of whose hospitalities you have never partaken. "It was another guess sort of beast I gave you for a mount when we met last," will be said by a man who never rose

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above a cob pony; and one is obliged to yield a kind of polite assent to such balderdash, or stand forward as a public prosecutor and arraign the rascal for a humbug.

In this self-commiseration Sewell was a master, and there was not a corner of the house he did not make the butt of his ridicule—to contrast its littleness and vulgarity with the former ways and belongings of his own once splendour.

"You're capital fellows," said he to a party of officers from the neighbouring garrison, "to come and see me in this dog-hole. Try and find a chair you can sit on, and I'll ask my wife if we can give you some dinner. You remember me up at Rangoon, Hobbes? another guess sort of place, wasn't it? I had the Rajah's palace and four elephants at my orders. At Guzerat, too I was the Resident, and by Jove I never dreamed of coming down to this!"

Too indolent or too indifferent to care where or how she was lodged, his wife gave no heed to his complaints, beyond a little half-supercilious smile as he uttered them. "If a fellow will marry, however, he deserves it all," was his usual wind-up to all his lamentations; and in this he seemed to console himself by the double opportunity of pitying himself and insulting his wife.

All that Colonel Cave and his officers could say in praise of the spot, its beauty, its neatness, and its comfort, were only fresh aliment to his depreciation, and he more than half implied that possibly the place was quite good enough for *them*, but that was not exactly the question at issue.

Some men go through life permitted to say scores of things for which their neighbour would be irrevocably cut and excluded from society. Either that the world is amused at their bitterness, or that it is regarded as a malady, far worse to him who bears than to him who witnesses it—whatever the reason—people endure those men, and make even a sort of vicious pets of them. Sewell was of this order, and a fine specimen too.

All the men around him were his equals in every respect, and yet there was not one of them who did not accept a position of quiet, unresisting inferiority to him for the sake of his bad temper and his bad tongue. It was "his way," they said, and they bore it.

He was a consummate adept in all the details of a household; and his dinners were perfection, his wine good, and his servants drilled to the very acme of discipline. These were not mean accessories to any pretension; and as they sat over their claret, a pleasanter and more social tone succeeded than the complaining spirit of their host had at first promised.

The talk was chiefly professional. Pipe-clay will ever assert its preeminence, and with reason; for it is a grand leveller; and Smooks, who joined three months ago, may have the Army List as well by heart as the oldest major in the service; and so they discussed, Where was Hobson? what made Jobson sell out? how did Bobson get out of that scrape with the paymaster? and how long will Dobson be able to live at his present rate, in that light cavalry corps? Everything that fell from them showed the most thorough intimacy with the condition, the fortune, and the prospects of the men they discussed—familiarity there was enough of, but no friendship. No one seemed to trouble himself whether the sick-leave or the sell-out meant hopeless calamity—all were dashed with a species of well-bred fatalism that was astonished with nothing, rejoiced at nothing, repined at nothing.

"I wish Trafford would make up his mind!" cried one. "Three weeks ago he told me positively he would leave, and now I hear he offered Craycroft three thousand pounds to retire from the majority."

"That's true; Craycroft told me so himself; but old Joe is a wily bird, and he'll not be taken so easily."

"He's an eldest son now," broke in another. "What does he care whether he be called major or captain!"

"An eldest son!" cried Sewell, suddenly; "how is that? When I met him at the Cape he spoke of an elder brother."

"So he had, then; but he's 'off the hooks.'"

"I don't think it matters much," said the Colonel. "The bulk of the property is disentailed, and Sir Hugh can leave it how he likes."

"That's what I call downright shameful," said one; but he was the minority, for a number of voices exclaimed—

"And perfectly right; that law of primogeniture is a positive barbarism."

While the dispute waxed warm and noisy, Sewell questioned the Colonel closely about Trafford—how it happened that the entail was removed, and why there was reason to suppose that Sir Hugh and his son were not on terms of friendship.

Cave was frank enough when he spoke of the amount of the fortune and the extent of the estate, but used a careful caution in speaking of family matters, merely hinting that Trafford had gone very fast, spent a deal of money, had his debts twice paid by his father, and was now rather in the position of a reformed spendthrift, making a good character for prudence and economy.

"And where is he?—not in Ireland?" asked Sewell, eagerly.

"No; he is to join on Monday. I got a hurried note from him this morning, dated Holyhead. You said you had met him?"

"Yes, at the Cape; he used to come and dine with us there occasionally."

"Did you like him?"

"In a way. Yes, I think he was a nice fellow—that is, he might be made a nice fellow, but it was always a question into what hands he fell; he was at the same time pliant and obstinate. He would always imitate—he would never lead. So he seemed to me; but, to tell you the truth, I left him a good deal to the women; he was too young and too fresh for a man like myself."

"You are rather hard on him," said Cave, laughing; "but you are partly right. He has, however, fine qualities—he is generous and trustful to any extent."

"Indeed!" said Sewell, carelessly, as he bit off the end of a cigar.

"Nothing would make him swerve from his word; and if placed in a difficulty where a friend was involved, his own interests would be the last he'd think of."

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"Very fine, all that. Are you drinking claret?—if so, finish that decanter, and let's have a fresh bottle."

Cave declined to take more wine, and he arose, with the rest, to repair to the drawing-room for coffee.

It was not very usual for Sewell to approach his wife or notice her in society; now, however, he drew a chair near her as she sat at the fire, and, in a low whisper, said—"I have some pleasant news for you."

"Indeed!" she said, coldly—"what a strange incident."

"You mean it is a strange channel for pleasant news to come through, perhaps," said he, with a curl of his lip.

"Possibly that is what I meant," said she, as quietly as before.

"None of these fine lady-airs with me, madam," said he, reddening with anger; "there are no two people in Europe ought to understand each other better than we do."

"In that I quite agree with you."

"And as such is the case, affectations are clean thrown away, madam; we *can* have no disguises for each other."

A very slight inclination of her head seemed to assent to this remark, but she did not speak.

"We came to plain speaking many a day ago," said he, with increased bitterness in his tone. "I don't see why we are to forego the advantage of it now—do you?"

"By no means. Speak as plainly as you wish; I am quite ready to hear you."

"You have managed, however, to make people observe us," muttered he between his teeth—"it's an old trick of yours, madam. You can play martyr at the shortest notice." He rose hastily and moved to another part of the room, where a very noisy group were arranging a party for pool at billiards.

"Won't you have me?" cried Sewell in his ordinary tone. "I'm a perfect boon at pool; for I'm the most unlucky dog at everything."

"I scarcely think you'll expect us to believe *that*," said Cave, with a glance of unmistakable admiration towards Mrs. Sewell.

"Ay," cried Sewell, fiercely, and answering the unspoken sentiment—"ay, sir, and *that*"—he laid a stern emphasis on the word—"and *that* the worst luck of all."

"I've been asking Mrs. Sewell to play a game with us, and she says she has no objection," said a young subaltern, "if Colonel Sewell does not dislike it."

"I'll play whist, then," said Sewell. "Who'll make a rubber?—Cave, will you? Here's Houghton and Mowbray—eh?"

"No, no," said Mowbray—"you are all too good for me."

"How I hate that—too good for *me*," said Sewell. "Why, man, what better investment could you ask for your money than the benefit of good teaching? Always ride with the best hounds—play with the best players, talk with the best talkers."

"And make love to the prettiest women," added Cave, in a whisper, as Mowbray followed Mrs. Sewell into the billiard-room.

"I heard you, Cave," whispered Sewell, in a still lower whisper; "there's devilish little escapes my ears, I promise you." The bustle and preparation of the card-table served in part to cover Cave's confusion, but his cheek tingled and his hand shook with mingled shame and annoyance.

Sewell saw it all, and knew how to profit by it. He liked high play, to which Cave generally objected; but he well knew that on the present occasion Cave would concur in anything to cover his momentary sense of shame.

"Pounds and fives, I suppose," said Sewell; and the others bowed, and the game began.

As little did Cave like three-handed whist, but he was in no mood to oppose anything; for, like many men who have made an awkward speech, he exaggerated the meaning through his fears, and made it appear absolutely monstrous to himself.

"Whatever you like," was therefore his remark; and he sat down to the game.

Sewell was a skilled player; but the race is no more to the swift in cards than in anything else—he lost, and lost heavily. He undervalued his adversaries too, and, in consequence, he followed up his bad luck by increased wagers. Cave tried to moderate the ardour he displayed, and even remonstrated with him on the sums they were staking, which, he good-humouredly remarked, were far above his own pretensions; but Sewell resented the advice, and replied with a coarse insinuation about winners' counsels. The ill luck continued, and Sewell's peevishness and ill temper increased with every game. "What have I lost to you?" cried he, abruptly, to Cave; "it jars on my nerves every time you take out that cursed memorandum, so that all I can do is not to fling it into the fire."

"I'm sure I wish you would, or that you would let me do it," said Cave, quietly.

"How much is it?—not short of three hundred, I'll be bound."

"It is upwards of five hundred," said Cave, handing the book across the table.

"You'll have to wait for it, I promise you. You must give me time, for I'm in all sorts of messes just now." While Cave assured him that there was no question of pressing for payment—to take his own perfect convenience—Sewell, not heeding him, went on, "This confounded place has cost me a pot of money. My wife, too, knows how to scatter her five-pound notes; in short, we are a wasteful lot. Shall we have one rubber more, eh?"

"As you like. I am at your orders."

"Let us say double or quits, then, for the whole sum."

Cave made no reply, and seemed not to know how to answer.

"Of course if you object," said Sewell, pushing back his chair from the table, as though about to rise, "there's no more to be said."

"What do *you* say, Houghton?" asked Cave.

"Houghton has nothing to say to it; *he* hasn't won twentv pounds from me," said Sewell, fiercely.

"Whatever you like, then," said Cave, in a tone in which it was easy to see irritation was with difficulty kept under, and the game began.

The game began in deep silence. The restrained temper of the players and the heavy sum together impressed them, and not a word was dropped. The cards fell upon the table

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with a clear, sharp sound, and the clink of the counters resounded through the room, the only noises there.

As they played, the company from the billiard-room poured in and drew around the whist-table, at first noisily enough; but seeing the deep preoccupation of the players, their steadfast looks, their intense eagerness, made more striking by their silence, they gradually lowered their voices, and at last only spoke in whispers, and rarely.

The first game of the rubber had been contested trick by trick, but ended by Cave winning it. The second game was won by Sewell, and the third opened with his deal.

As he dealt the cards, a murmur ran through the bystanders that the stake was something considerable, and the interest increased in consequence. A few trifling bets were laid on the issue, and one of the group, in a voice slightly raised above the rest, said, "I'll back Sewell for a pony."

"I beg you will not, sir," said Sewell, turning fiercely round. "I'm in bad luck already, and I don't want to be swamped altogether. There, sir, your interference has made me misdeal," cried he, passionately, as he flung the cards on the table.

Not a word was said as Cave began his deal. It was too plain to every one that Sewell's temper was becoming beyond control, and that a word or a look might bring the gravest consequences.

"What cards!" said Cave, as he spread his hand on the table: "four honours, and nine trumps."

Sewell stared at them, moved his fingers through them to separate and examine them, and then, turning his head round, he looked behind. It was his wife was standing at the back of his chair, calm, pale, and collected. "By Heaven!" cried he, savagely, "I knew who was there as well as if I saw her. The moment Cave spread out his cards, I'd have taken my oath that *she* was standing over me."

She moved hastily away at the ruffianly speech, and a low murmur of indignant anger filled the room. Cave and Houghton quitted the table, and mingled with the others; but Sewell sat still, tearing up the cards one by one, with a quiet, methodical persistence that betrayed no passion. "There!" said he, as he threw the last fragment from him, "you shall never bring good or bad luck to any one more." With the ease of one to whom such paroxysms were not unfrequent, he joined in the conversation of a group of young men, and with a familiar jocularity soon set them at their ease towards him; and then, drawing his arm within Cave's, he led him apart, and said, "I'll go over to the Barrack to-morrow and breakfast with you. I have just thought of how I can settle this little debt."

"Oh, don't distress yourself about that," said Cave. "I beg you will not let it give you a moment's uneasiness."

"Good fellow!" said Sewell, clapping him on the shoulder; "but I have the means of doing it without inconvenience, as I'll show you to-morrow. Don't go yet; don't let your fellows go. We are going to have a broil, or a devilled biscuit, or something." He walked over and rang the bell, and then hastily passed on into a smaller room, where his wife was sitting on a sofa, an old doctor of the regiment seated at her side.

"I won't interrupt the consultation," said Sewell, "but I have just one word to say." He leaned over the back of the sofa, and whispered in her ear, "Your friend Trafford has become an eldest son. He is at the Bilton Hotel, Dublin; write and ask him here. Say I have some cock-shooting—there are harriers in the neighbourhood. Are you listening to me, madam?" said he, in a harsh, hissing voice, for she had half turned away her head, and her face had assumed an expression of sickened disgust. She nodded, but did not speak. "Tell him that I've spoken to Cave—he'll make his leave all right—that I'll do my best to make the place pleasant to him, and that—in fact, I needn't try to teach you to write a sweet note. You understand me, eh?"

"Oh, perfectly," said she, rising, and a livid paleness now spread over her face, and even her lips were bloodless.

"I was too abrupt with my news. I ought to have been more considerate; I ought to have known it might overcome you," said he, with a sneering bitterness. "Doctor, you'll have to give Mrs. Sewell some cordial, some restorative—that's the name for it. She was overcome by some tidings I brought her. Even pleasant news will startle us occasionally. As the French comedy has it, 'La joie fait peur,'" and with a listless, easy air he sauntered away into another room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SEWELL VISITS CAVE.

Punctual to his appointment, Sewell appeared at breakfast the next morning with Colonel Cave. Of all the ill humour and bad conduct of the night before, not a trace now was to be seen. He was easy, courteous, and affable. He even made a half-jesting apology for his late display of bad temper; attributing it to an attack of coming gout. "So long as the malady," said he, "is in a state of menace, one's nerves become so fine strung, that there's no name for the irritability; but when once a good honest seizure has taken place, a man recovers himself and stands up to his suffering manfully and well."

"To-day, for instance," said he, pointing to a shoe divided by long incisions, "I have got my enemy fixed, and I let him do his worst.

The breakfast proceeded pleasantly; Cave was in admiration of his guest's agreeability; for he talked away, not so much of things as of people. He had, in a high degree, that man-of-the-world gift, of knowing something about every one. No name could turn up of which he could not tell you something the owner of it had said or done, and these "scratch" biographies are often very amusing, particularly when struck off with the readiness of a practised talker.

It was not, then, merely that Sewell obliterated every memory of the evening before, but he made Cave forget the actual object for which he had come that morning. Projects, besides,

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for future pleasure did Sewell throw out, like a man who had both the leisure, the means, and the taste for enjoyment. There was some capital shooting he had just taken; his neighbour, an old squire, had never cared for it, and let him have it "for a song." They were going to get up hack races too, in the Park—"half-a-dozen hurdles and a double ditch to tumble over," as he said, "will amuse our garrison fellows—and my wife has some theatrical intentions—if you will condescend to help her."

Sewell talked with that blended munificence and shiftiness which seems a specialty with a certain order of men. Nothing was too costly to be done, and yet everything must be accomplished with a dexterity that was almost a dodge. The men of this gift are great scene-painters. They dash you off a view—be it a wood or a rich interior, a terraced garden or an Alpine hut—in a few loose touches. Ay, and they "smudge" them out again before criticism has had time to deal with them. "By the way," cried he, suddenly stopping in the full swing of some description of a possible regatta, "I was half forgetting what brought me here this morning. I am in your debt, Cave."

He stopped as though his speech needed some rejoinder, and Cave grew very red and very uneasy—tried to say something—anything—but could not. The fact was, that, like a man who had never in all his life adventured on high play or risked a stake that could possibly be of importance to him, he felt pretty much the same amount of distress at having won as he would have felt at having lost. He well knew that if by any mischance he had incurred such a loss as a thousand pounds, it would have been a most serious embarrassment—by what right, then, had he won it? Now, although feelings of this sort were about the very last to find entrance into Sewell's heart, he well knew that there were men who were liable to them, just as there were people who were exposed to plague or yellow fever, and other maladies from which he lived remote. It was, then, with a sort of selfish motive that he saw Cave's awkward hesitating manner, and read the marks of the shame that was overwhelming him.

"A heavy sum too," said Sewell, jauntily; "we went the whole 'pot' on that last rubber."

"I wish I could forget it—I mean," muttered Cave, "I wish we could both forget it."

"I have not the least objection to that," said Sewell, gaily, "only let it first be paid."

"Well, but—what I meant was—what I wanted to say, or rather, what I hoped—was—in plain words, Sewell," burst he out, like a man to whom desperation gave courage,—"in plain words, I never intended to play such stakes as we played last night—I never have—I never will again."

"Not to give me my revenge?" said Sewell, laughing.

"No, not for anything. I don't know what I'd have done—I don't know what would have become of me, if I had lost; and I pledge you my honour, I think the next worst thing is to have won."

"Do you, by George!"

"I do, upon my sacred word of honour. My first thoughts on waking this morning were more wretched than they have been for any day in the last twenty years of life, for I was thoroughly ashamed of myself."

"You'll not find many men afflicted with your malady, Cave; and, at all events, it is not contagious."

"I know nothing about that," said Cave, half irritably; "I never was a play man, and have little pretension to understand their feelings."

"They haven't got any," said Sewell, as he lit his cigar.

"Perhaps not; so much the worse for them. I can only say, if the misery of losing be only proportionate to the shame of winning, I don't envy a gambler; such an example, too, to exhibit to my young officers. It was too bad—too bad."

"I declare I don't understand this," said Sewell, carelessly; "when I commanded a battalion, I never imagined I was obliged to be a model to the subs or the junior captains." The tone of banter went, this time, to the quick, and Cave flushed a deep crimson, and said,

"I'm not sorry that my ideas of my duty are different; though in the present case, I have failed to fulfil it."

"Well, well, there's nothing to grow angry about," said Sewell, laughing, "even though you won't give me my revenge. My present business is to book up," and, as he spoke, he sat down at the table, and drew a roll of papers from his pocket, and laid it before him.

"You distress me greatly by all this, Sewell," said Cave, whose agitation now almost overcame him. "Cannot we hit upon some way? can't we let it lie over? I mean—is there no arrangement by which this cursed affair can be deferred; you understand me?"

"Not in the least. Such things are never deferred without loss of honour to the man in default. The stake that a man risks is supposed to be in his pocket, otherwise play becomes trade, and accepts all the vicissitudes of trade."

"It's the first time I ever heard them contrasted to the disparagement of honest industry."

"And I call billiards, tennis, whist, and ecarté, honest industries too, though I won't call them trades. There, there," said he, laughing at the other's look of displeasure, "don't be afraid; I am not going to preach these doctrines to your young officers, for whose morals you are so much concerned. Sit down here, and just listen to me for one moment."

Cave obeyed, but his face showed in every feature how reluctantly.

"I see, Cave," said Sewell, with a quiet smile—"I see you want to do me a favour—so you shall. I am obliged to own that I am an exception to the theory I have just now enunciated. I staked a thousand pounds, and I had *not* the money in my pocket. Wait a moment—don't interrupt me. I had not the money in gold or bank notes, but I had it here"—and he touched the papers before him—"in a form equally solvent, only that it required that he who won the money should be not a mere acquaintance, but a friend—a friend to whom I could speak with freedom and in confidence. This," said he, "is a bond for twelve hundred pounds, given by my wife's guardian in satis-

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faction of a loan once made to him; he was a man of large fortune, which he squandered away recklessly, leaving but a small estate, which he could neither sell nor alienate. Upon this property this is a mortgage. As an old friend of my father-in-law—a very unworthy one, by the way—I could of course not press him for the interest, and, as you will see, it has never been paid; and there is now a balance of some hundred pounds additional against him. Of this I could not speak, for another reason—we are not without the hope of inheriting something by him—and to allude to this matter would be ruinous. Keep this, then. I insist upon it. I declare to you, if you refuse, I will sell it to-morrow to the first money-lender I can find, and send you my debt in hard cash. I've been a play man all my life but never a defaulter."

There was a tone of proud indignation in the way he spoke that awed Cave to silence; for in good truth he was treating of themes of which he knew nothing whatever; and of the sort of influences which swayed gamblers, of the rules that guided, and the conventionalities that bound them, he was profoundly ignorant.

"You'll not get your money, Cave," resumed Sewell, "till this old fellow dies; but you will be paid at last—of that I can assure you. Indeed, if by any turn of luck I was in funds myself, I'd like to redeem it. All I ask is, therefore, that you'll not dispose of it, but hold it over in your own possession till the day—and I hope it may be an early one—it may be payable."

Cave was in no humour to dispute anything. There was no condition to which he would not have acceded, so heartily ashamed and abashed was he by the position in which he found himself. What he really would have liked best, would have been to refuse the bond altogether, and say, Pay when you like, how you like, or, better still, not at all. This of course was not possible, and he accepted the terms proposed to him at once.

"It shall be all as you wish," said he hurriedly. "I will do everything you desire; only let me assure you that I would infinitely rather this paper remained in *your* keeping than in *mine*. I'm a careless fellow about documents," added he, trying to put the matter on the lesser ground of a safe custody. "Well, well, say no more; you don't wish it, and that's enough."

"I must be able to say," said Sewell, gravely, "that I never lost over night what I had not paid the next morning, and I will even ask of you to corroborate me, so far as this transaction goes. There were several of your fellows at my house last night; they saw what we played for, and that I was the loser. There will be—there always is—plenty of gossip about these things, and the first question is, 'Has he booked up?' I'm sure it's not asking more than you are ready to do, to say that I paid my debt within twenty-four hours."

"Certainly; most willingly. I don't know that any one has a right to question me on the matter."

"I never said he had. I only warned you how people will talk, and how necessary it is to be prepared to stifle a scandal even before it has flared out."

"It shall be cared for. I'll do exactly as you wish," said Cave, who was too much flurried to know what was asked of him, and to what he was pledged.

"I'm glad this is off my mind," said Sewell, with a long sigh of relief. "I lay awake half the night thinking of it; for there are scores of fellows who are not of your stamp, and who would be for submitting these documents to their lawyer, and asking, heaven knows, what this affair related to. Now I tell you frankly, I'd have given no explanations. He who gave that bond is, as I know, a consummate rascal, and has robbed me—that is, my wife—out of two-thirds of her fortune; but *my* hands are tied regarding him. I couldn't touch him, except he should try to take my life—a thing, by the way, he is quite capable of. Old Dillon, my wife's father, believed him to be the best and truest of men, and my wife inherited this belief, even in the face of all the injuries he had worked us. She went on saying, My father always said, Trust Fossy; there's at least one man in the world that will never deceive you."

"What was the name you said?" asked Cave, quickly.

"Oh, only a nickname. I don't want to mention his name. I have sealed up the bond with this superscription—'Colonel Sewell's bond.' I did this, believing you would not question me farther; but if you desire to read it over, I'll break the envelope at once."

"No, no; nothing of the kind. Leave it just as it is."

"So that," said Sewell, pursuing his former line of thought, "this man not alone defrauded me, but he sowed dissension between me and my wife. Her faith is shaken in him, I have no doubt; but she'll not confess it. Like a genuine woman, she will persist in asserting the convictions she has long ceased to be held by, and quote this stupid letter of her father in the face of every fact.

"I ought not to have got into these things," said Sewell, as he walked impatiently down the room. "These family bedevilments should be kept from one's friends; but the murder is out now, and you can see how I stand—and see, besides, that if I am not always able to control my temper, a friend might find an excuse for me."

Cave gave a kindly nod of assent to this, not wishing, even by a word, to increase the painful embarrassment of the scene.

"Heigh ho!" cried Sewell, throwing himself down in a chair, "there's one care off my heart, at least! I can remember a time when a night's bad luck wouldn't have cost me five minutes of annoyance; but nowadays I have got it so hot and so heavy from fortune I begin not to know myself." Then, with a sudden change of tone, he added—"When are you coming out to us again? Shall we say Tuesday?"

"We are to be inspected on Tuesday. Trafford writes me that he is coming over with General Halkett—whom, by the way, he calls a Tartar—and says, 'If the Sewells are within hail, say a kind word to them on my part.'"

"A good sort of fellow, Trafford," said Sewell, carelessly.

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"An excellent fellow—no better living!"

"A very wide-awake one too," said Sewell, with one eye closed, and a look of intense cunning.

"I never thought so. It is, to my notion, to the want of that faculty he owes every embarrassment he has ever suffered. He is unsuspecting to a fault."

"It's not the way *I* read him; though perhaps I think as well of him as *you* do. I'd say that for his years he is one of the very shrewdest young fellows I ever met."

"You astonish me! May I ask you if you know him well?"

"Our acquaintance is not of very old date, but we saw a good deal of each other at the Cape. We rode out together, dined, played, and conversed freely together; and the impression he made upon me was that every sharp lesson the world had given him he'd pay back one day or other with a compound interest."

"I hope not—I fervently hope not!" cried Cave. "I had rather hear to-morrow that he had been duped and cheated out of half his fortune than learn he had done one act that savoured of the—the——" He stopped, unable to finish, for he could not hit upon the word that might be strong enough to express his meaning, and yet not imply an offence.

"Say blackleg. Isn't that what you want? There's my wife's pony-chaise. I'll get a seat back to the Nest. Good-bye, Cave. If Wednesday is open, give it to us, and tell Trafford I'd be glad to see him."

Cave sat down as the door closed after the other, and tried to recall his thoughts to something like order. What manner of man was that who had just left him? It was evidently a very mixed nature. Was it the good or the evil that predominated? Was the unscrupulous tone he displayed the result of a spirit of tolerance, or was it the easy indifferance of one who trusted nothing—believed nothing?

Was it possible his estimate of Trafford could be correct? and could this seemingly generous and open manner cover a nature cold, calculating, and treacherous? No, no! *That* he felt to be totally out of the question.

He thought long and intently over the matter, but to no end; and as he rose to deposit the papers left by Sewell in his writing-desk, he felt as unsettled and undecided as when he started on the inquiry.

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CHAPTER XXX.

THE RACES ON THE LAWN.

A BRIGHT October morning, with a blue sky and a slight, very slight, feeling of frost in the air, and a gay meeting on foot and horseback on the lawn before the Swan's Nest, made as pretty a picture as a painter of such scenes could desire. I say of such scenes, because in the *tableau de genre* it is the realistic element that must predominate, and the artist's skill is employed in imparting to very commonplace people and costumes whatever poetry can be lent them by light and shade, by happy groupings, and more than all these, by the insinuation of some incident in which they are the actors—a sort of storied interest pervading the whole canvas, which gives immense pleasure to those who have little taste for the fine arts.

There was plenty of colour even in the landscape. The mountains had put on their autumn suit, and displayed every tint from a pale opal to a deep and gorgeous purple, while the river ran on in those circling eddies which came to the surface of water under sunshine as naturally as smiles to the face of flattered beauty.

Colonel Sewell had invited the country-side to witness hack races in his grounds, and the country-side had heartily responded to the invitation. There were the county magnates in grand equipages—an earl with two postilions and outriders, a high sheriff with all his official splendours, squires of lower degree in more composite vehicles, and a large array of jaunting-cars, through all of which figured the red-coats of the neighbouring garrison, adding to the scene that tint of warmth in colour so dear to the painter's heart.

The wonderful beauty of the spot, combining as it did heath-clad mountain, and wood, and winding river, with a spreading lake in the distance, dotted with picturesque islands, was well seconded by a glorious autumnal day—one of those days when the very air has something of champagne in its exhilarating quality, and gives to every breath of it a sense of stimulation.

The first three races—they were on the flat—had gone off admirably. They were well contested, well ridden, and the "right horse" the winner. All was contentment, therefore, on every side, to which the interval of a pleasant moment of conviviality gave hearty assistance, for now came the hour of luncheon; and from the "swells" in the great marquee, and the favoured intimates in the dining-room, to the assembled unknown in the jaunting-cars, merry laughter issued, with clattering of plates, and popping of corks, and those commingled sounds of banter and jollity which mark such gatherings.

The great event of the day was, however, yet to come off. It was a hurdle race, to which two stiff fences were to be added, in the shape of double ditches, to test the hunting powers of the horses. The hurdles were to be four feet eight in height, so that the course was by no means a despicable one, even to good cross-country riders. To give increased interest to the race Sewell himself was to ride, and no small share of eagerness existed amongst the neighbouring gentry to see how the new-comer would distinguish himself in the saddle—some opining he was too long of leg; some, that he was too heavy; some, that men of his age—he was over five-and-thirty—begin to lose nerve; and many going so far as to imply "that he did not look like riding"—a judgment whose vagueness detracts nothing from its force.

"There he goes now, and he sits well down, too!" cried one, as a group of horsemen swept past, one of whom mounted on a "sharp" pony, led the way, a white Macintosh and loose overalls covering him from head to foot. They were off to see that the fences were all being properly put up, and in an instant were out of sight.

"I'll back Tom Westenra against Sewell for a

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twenty-pound note," cried one, standing up on the seat of his car to proclaim the challenge.

"I'll go further," shouted another—"I'll do it for fifty."

"I'll beat you both," cried out a third—"I'll take Tom even against the field."

The object of all this enthusiasm was a smart clean-shaven little fellow, with a good blue eye and a pleasant countenance, who smoked his cigar on the seat of a drag near, and nodded a friendly recognition to their confidence.

"If Joe Slater was well of his fall, I'd rather have him than any one in the county," said an old farmer, true to a man of his own class and standing.

"Here's one can beat them both!" shouted another; "here's Mr. Creagh of Lismakerry!" and a thin, ruddy-faced, keen-eyed man of about fifty rode by on a low-sized horse, with that especial look of decision in his mouth, and the peculiar puckering about the corners, that seem to belong to those who traffic in horse-flesh, and who, it would appear, however much they may know about horses, understand humanity more thoroughly still.

"Are you going to ride, Creagh?" cried a friend from a high tax-cart.

"Maybe so, if the fences are not too big for me," and a very malicious drollery twinkled in his grey eye.

"Faix, and if they are," said a farmer, "the rest may stay at home."

"I hope you'll ride, Creagh," said the first speaker, "and not let these English fellows take the shine out of us.. Yourself and Tom are the only county names on the card."

"Show it to me," said Creagh, listlessly, and he took the printed list in his hand and conned it over, as though it had all been new to him. "They're all soldiers, I see," said he. "It's Major This, and Captain That—Who is the lady?" This question was rapidly called forth by a horsewoman who rode past at an easy canter in the midst of a group of men. She was dressed in a light-grey habit and hat of the same colour, from which a long white feather encircling the hat hung on one side.

"That's Mrs. Sewell—what do you think of her riding?"

"If her husband has as neat a hand I'd rather he was out of the course. She knows well what she's about."

"They say there's not her equal in the Park in London."

"That's not Park riding; that's something very different, take my word for it. She could lead half the men here across the country."

Nor was she unworthy of the praise, as, with her hand low, her head a little forward, but her back well curved in, she sat firmly down in her saddle; giving to the action of the horse that amount of movement that assisted the animal, but never more. The horse was mettlesome enough to require all her attention. It was his first day under a side-saddle, and he chafed at it, and when the heavy skirt smote his flank, bounded with a lunge and a stroke of his head that showed anger.

"That's a four hundred guinea beast she's on. He belongs to the tall young fellow that's riding on her left."

"I like his own horse better, the liver-chestnut with the short legs. I wish I had the loan of him for the hurdle race."

"Ask him, Phil; or get the mistress there to ask him," said another, laughing. "I'm mighty mistaken or he wouldn't refuse *her*."

"Oh, is *that* it?" said Creagh, with a knowing look.

"So they tell me here, for I don't know one of them myself: but the story goes that she was to have married that young fellow when Sewell carried her off."

"I must go and get a better look at her!" said Creagh, as he spurred his horse and cantored away.

"Is any one betting?" said little Westenra, as he descended from his seat on the drag. "I have not seen a man to-day with five pounds on the race."

"Here's Sewell," muttered another; "he's coming up now, and will give or take as much as you like."

"Did you see Mrs. Sewell, any of you?" asked Sewell, cavalierly, as he rode up with an open telegram in his hand; and as the persons addressed were for the most part his equals, none responded to the insolent demand.

"Could you tell me, sir," said Sewell, quickly altering his tone, while he touched his hat to Westenra, "if Mrs. Sewell passed this way?"

"I haven't the honour to know Mrs. Sewell, but I saw a lady ride past, about ten minutes ago, on a black thoroughbred."

"Faix, and well she rode him too," broke in an old farmer. "She took the posy out of that young gentleman's button-hole, while her beast was jumping, and stuck it in her breast, as easy as I'm setting here."

Sewell's face grew purple as he darted a look of savage anger at the speaker, and turning his horse's head, he dashed out at speed and disappeared.

"Peter Delaney," said Westenra, "I thought you had more discretion than to tell such a story as that."

"Begorra, Mister Tom! I didn't know the mischief I was making till I saw the look he gave me!"

It was not till after a considerable search that Sewell came up with his wife's party, who were sauntering leisurely along the river-side, through a gorse-covered slope.

"I've had a devil of a hunt after you!" he cried, as he rode up, and the ringing tone of his voice was enough to intimate to her in what temper he spoke. "I've something to say to you," said he, as though meant for her private ear, and the others drew back, and suffered them to ride on together. "There's a telegram just come from that old beast the Chief Baron; he desires to see me to-night. The last train leaves at five, and I shall only hit it by going at once. Can't you keep your horse quiet, madam, or must you show off while I'm speaking to you?"

"It was the furze that stung him," said she, coldly, and not showing the slightest resentment at his tone.

"If the old bear means anything short of dying, and leaving me his heir, this message is a shameful swindle."

"Do you mean to go?" asked she, coldly.

"I suppose so; that is," added he, with a

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bitter grin, "if I can tear myself away from *you;*" but she only smiled.

"I'll have to pay forfeit in this match," continued he, "and my book will be all smashed besides. I say," cried he, "would Trafford ride for me?"

"Perhaps he would."

"None of your mock indifference, madam; I can't afford to lose a thousand pounds every time you've a whim. Ay, look astonished if you like; but if you hadn't gone into the billiard-room on Saturday evening and spoiled my match, I'd have escaped that infernal whist-table. Listen to me now! Tell him that I have been sent for suddenly—it might be too great a risk for me to refuse to go—and ask him to ride Crescy; if he says Yes—and he will say yes if you ask him as you *ought*"—her cheek grew crimson as he uttered the last word with a strong emphasis—"tell him to take up my book. Mind you, use the words 'take up;' *he'll* understand you."

"But why not say all this yourself?—he's riding close behind at this minute."

"Because I have a wife, madam, who can do it so much better—because I have a wife who plucks a carnation out of a man's coat, and wears it in her bosom, and this on an open race-course, where people can talk of it; and a woman with such rare tact ought to be of service to her husband, eh?" She swayed to and fro in her saddle for an instant as though about to fall, but she grasped the crutch with both hands and saved herself.

"Is that all!" muttered she, faintly.

"Not quite. Tell Trafford to come round to my dressing-room, and I'll give him a hint or two about the horse. He must come at once, for I have only time to change my clothes and start. You can make some excuse to the people for my absence; say that the old Judge has had another attack, and I only wish it may be true. Tell them I got a telegram, and *that* may mean anything. Trafford will help you to do the honours, and I'll swear him in as viceroy before I go. Isn't that all that could be asked of me?" The insolence of his look as he said this made her turn away her head as though sickened and disgusted.

"They want you at the weighing-stand, Colonel Sewell," said a gentleman, riding up.

"Oh, they do! Well, say, please, that I'm coming. Has he given you that black horse?" asked he, in a hurried whisper.

"No; he offered him, but I refused."

"You had no right to refuse; he's strong enough to carry *me;* and the ponies that I saw led round to the stable-yard, whose are they?"

"They are Mr. Trafford's."

"You told him you thought them handsome, I suppose, didn't you?"

"Yes, I think them very beautiful."

"Well, don't take them as a present. Win them if you like at picquet or ecarté—any way you please, but don't take them as a gift, for I heard Westenra say they were meant for you."

She nodded, and as she bent her head, a smile, the very strangest, crossed her features. If it were not that the pervading expression of her face was at the instant melancholy, the look she gave him would have been almost devilish.

"I have something else to say, but I can't remember it."

"You don't know when you'll be back?" asked she, carelessly.

"Of course not—how can I? I can only promise that I'll not arrive unexpectedly, madam; and I take it that's as much as any gentleman can be called on to say. By-by."

"Good-bye," said she, in the same tone.

"I see that Mr. Balfour is here. I can't tell who asked him; but mind you don't invite him to luncheon; take no notice of him whatever; he'll not bet a guinea; never plays; never risks anything—even his *affections!*"

"What a creature!"

"Isn't he! There! I'll not detain you from pleasanter company; good-bye; see you here when I come back, I suppose?"

"Most probably," said she, with a smile; and away he rode, at a tearing gallop, for his watch warned him that he was driven to the last minute.

"My husband has been sent for to town, Mr. Trafford," said she, turning her head towards him as he resumed his place at her side; "the Chief Baron desires to see him immediately, and he sets off at once."

"And his race? What's to become of his match?"

"He said I was to ask you to ride for him?"

"Me—I ride! Why, I am two stone heavier than he is."

"I suppose he knew that," said she, coldly, and as if the matter was one of complete indifference to her. "I am only delivering a message," continued she, in the same careless tone; "he said, 'Ask Mr. Trafford to ride for me, and take up my book;' I was to be particular about the phrase 'take up;' I conclude you will know what meaning to attach to it?"

"I suspect I do," said he, with a low soft laugh.

"And I was to add something about hints he was to give you, if you'd go round to his dressing-room at once; indeed, I believe you have little time to spare."

"Yes, I'll go; I'll go now; only there's one thing I'd like to ask—that is—I'd be very glad to know——"

"What is it?" said she, after a pause, in which his confusion seemed to increase every minute.

"I mean, I should like to know whether you wished me to ride this race or not?"

"Whether *I* wished it!" said she, in a tone of astonishment.

"Well, whether you cared about the matter one way or other," replied he, in still deeper embarrassment.

"How could it concern me, my dear Mr. Trafford?" said she, with an easy smile; "a race never interests me much, and I'd just as soon see Blue and Orange come in, as Yellow and Black; but you'll be late if you intend to see my husband; I think you'd better make haste."

"So I will, and I'll be back immediately," said he, not sorry to escape a scene where his confusion was now making him miserable.

"You *are* a very nice horse!" said she, patting the animal's neck, as he chafed to dash off after the other. "I'd like very much to own you; that is, if I ever was to call anything my own."

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"They're clearing the course, Mrs. Sewell," said one of her companions, riding up; "we had better turn off this way, and ride round to the stand."

"Here's a go!" cried another, coming up at speed. "Big Trafford is going to ride Crescy; he's well-nigh fourteen stone."

"Not thirteen; I'll lay a tenner on it."

"He can ride a bit," said a third.

"I'd rather he rode his own horse than mine."

"Sewell knows what he's about, depend on't."

"That's his wife," whispered another; "I'm certain she heard you."

Mrs. Sewell turned her head as she cantered along, and, in the strange smile her features wore, seemed to confirm the speaker's words; but the hurry and bustle of the moment drowned all sense of embarrassment, and the group dashed onward to the stand.

Leaving that heaving, patting, surging tide of humanity for an instant, let us turn to the house, where Sewell was already engaged in preparing for the road.

"You are going to ride for me, Trafford?" said Sewell, as the other entered his dressing-room, where, with the aid of his servant, he was busily packing up for the road.

"I'm not sure; that is, I don't like to refuse, and I don't see how to accept."

"My wife has told you; I'm sent for hurriedly."

"Yes."

"Well?" said he, looking round at him from his task.

"Just as I have told you already; I'd ride for you as well as a heavy fellow could take a light-weight's place, but I don't understand about your book—am I to stand your engagements?"

"You mean, are you to win all the money I'm sure to pocket on the match?"

"No, I don't mean that," said he, laughing; "I never thought of trading on another man's brains; I simply meant, am I to be responsible for the losses."

"If you ride Crescy as you ought to ride him, you needn't fret about the losses."

"But suppose that I do not—and the case is a very possible one—that not knowing your horse——"

"Take this portmanteau down, Bob, and the carpet-bag; I shall only lose my train," said Sewell, with a gesture of hot impatience; and, as the servant left the room, he added, "pray don't think any more about the stupid race; scratch Crescy, and tell my wife that it was a change of mind on *my* part—that I did not wish you to ride; good-bye;" and he waved a hasty adieu with his hand, as though to dismiss him at once.

"If you'll let me ride for you, I'll do my best," blundered out Trafford; "when I spoke of your engagements, it was only to prepare you for what perhaps you were not aware of, that I'm not very well off just now, and that if anything like a heavy sum——"

"You are a most cautious fellow; I only wonder how you ever did get into a difficulty; but I'm not the man to lead you astray, and wreck such splendid principles; adieu!"

"I'll ride, let it end how it may!" said Trafford, angrily, and left the room at once, and hurried down-stairs.

Sewell gave a parting look at himself in the glass; and as he set his hat jauntily on one side, said, "There's nothing like a little mock indignation to bully fellows of *his* stamp; the key-note of their natures is the dread of being thought mean, and particularly of being thought mean by a woman." He laughed pleasantly at this conceit, and went on his way.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

SEWELL ARRIVES IN DUBLIN.

It was late at night when Sewell reached town. An accidental delay to the train deferred the arrival for upwards of an hour after the usual time, and when he reached the Priory the house was all closed for the night, and not a light to be seen.

He knocked, however, and rang boldly; and after a brief delay, and considerable noise of unbolting and unbarring, was admitted. "We gave up you, sir, after twelve o'clock," said the butler, half reproachfully, "and his lordship ordered the servants to bed. Miss Lendrick, however, is in her drawing-room still."

"Is there anything to eat, my good friend? that is what I stand most in need of just now."

"There's a cold rib of beef, sir, and a grouse pie; but if you'd like something hot, I'll call the cook."

"No, no, never mind the cook; you can give me some sherry, I'm sure?"

"Any wine you please, sir. We have excellent madeira, which ain't to be had everywhere nowadays."

"Madeira be it, then; and order a fire in my room. I take it you have a room for me?"

"Yes, sir, all is ready; the bath was hot about an hour ago, and I'll have it refreshed in a minute."

"Now for the grouse pie. By the way, Fenton, what is the matter with his lordship? he wasn't ill, was he, when he sent off that despatch to me?"

"No, sir; he was in court to-day, and he dined at the Castle, and was in excellent spirits before he went out."

"Has anything gone wrong, then, that he wanted me up so hurriedly?"

"Well, sir, it ain't so easy to say, his lordship excites himself so readily; and mayhap he had words with some of the judges—mayhap with his Excellency, for they're always at him about resigning, little knowing that if they'd only let him alone he'd go of himself, but if they press him he'll stay on these twenty years."

"I don't suspect he has got so many as twenty years before him."

"If he wants to live, sir, he'll do it. Ah, you may laugh, sir, but I have known him all my life, and I never saw the man like him to do the thing he wishes to do."

"Cut me some of that beef, Fenton, and fetch

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me some draught beer. How these old tyrants make slaves of their servants," said he, aloud, as the man left the room—"a slavery that enthralls mind as well as body." A gentle tap came to the door, and before Sewell could question the summons, Miss Lendrick entered. She greeted him cordially, and said how anxiously her grandfather had waited for him till midnight. "I don't know when I saw him so eager or so impatient," she said.

"Have you any clue to his reason for sending for me?" said he, as he continued to eat, and assumed an air of perfect unconcern.

"None whatever. He came into my room about two o'clock, and told me to write his message in a good bold hand; he seemed in his usual health, and his manner displayed nothing extraordinary. He questioned me about the time it would take to transmit the message from the town to your house, and seemed satisfied when I said about half-an-hour."

"It's just as likely, perhaps, to be some caprice—some passing fancy."

She shook her head dissentingly, but made no reply.

"I believe the theory of this house is, 'he can do no wrong,'" said Sewell, with a laugh.

"He is so much more able in mind than all around him, such a theory might prevail; but I'll not go so far as to say that it does."

"It's not his mind gives him his pre-eminence, Miss Lucy—it's his temper; it's that same strong will that overcomes weaker natures by dint of sheer force. The people who assert their own way in life are not the most intellectual, they are only the best bullies."

"You know very little of grandpapa, Colonel Sewell, that's clear."

"Are you so sure of that?" asked he, with a dubious smile.

"I *am* sure of it, or in speaking of him you would never have used such a word as bully."

"You mistake me—mistake me altogether, young lady. I spoke of a class of people who employ certain defects of temper to supply the place of certain gifts of intellect; and if your grandfather, who has no occasion for it, chooses to take a weapon out of their armoury, the worse taste his."

Lucy turned fiercely round, her face flushed and her lip trembling. An angry reply darted through her mind, but she repressed it by a great effort, and in a faint voice she said, "I hope you left Mrs. Sewell well?"

"Yes, perfectly well, amusing herself vastly. When I saw her last she had about half-a-dozen young fellows cantering on either side of her, saying, doubtless, all those pleasant things that you ladies like to hear."

Lucy shrugged her shoulders, without answering.

"Telling you," continued he, in the same strain, "that if you are unmarried you are angels, and that if married you are angels and martyrs too; and it is really a subject that requires investigation, how the best of wives is not averse to hearing her husband does not half estimate her. Don't toss your head so impatiently, my dear Miss Lucy, I am giving you the wise precepts of a very thoughtful life."

"I had hoped, Colonel Sewell, that a very thoughtful life might have brought forth pleasanter reflections."

"No, that is precisely what it does not do. To live as long as I have, is to arrive at a point when all the shams have been seen through, and the world exhibits itself pretty much as a stage during a day rehearsal."

"Well, sir, I am too young to profit by such experiences, and I will wish you a very good night—that is, if I can give no orders for anything you wish."

"I have had everything. I will finish this madeira—to your health—and hope to meet you in the morning, as beautiful and as trustful as I see you now—*felice notte*." He bowed as he opened the door for her to pass out, and she went, with a slight bend of the head and a faint smile, and left him.

"How I could make you beat your wings against your cage, for all your bravery, if I had only three days here, and cared to do it," said he, as he poured the rest of the wine into his glass. "How weary I could make you of this old house and its old owner. Within one month —one short month—I'd have you repeating as wise saws every sneer and every sarcasm that you just now took fire at. And if I am to pass three days in this dreary old dungeon I don't see how I could do better. What can he possibly want with me?" All the imaginable contingencies he could conjure up now passed before his mind. That the old man was sick of solitude, and wanted him to come and live with them; that he was desirous of adopting one of the children, and which of them? formed a query; that he had some correspondence with Fossbrooke, and wanted some explanations—a bitter pang, that racked and tortured him while he revolved it; and, last of all, he came back to his first guess—it was about his will he had sent for him. He had been struck by the beauty of the children, and asked their names and ages twice or thrice over; doubtless he was bent on making some provision for them. "I wish I could tell him that I'd rather have ten thousand down, than thrice the sum settled on Guy and the girls. I wish I could explain to him that mine is a ready-money business, and that cash is the secret of success; and I wish I could show him that no profits will stand the reverses of loans raised at two hundred per cent! I wonder how the match went off today; I'd like to have the odds that there were three men down at the double rail and bank." Who got first over the brook, was his next speculation, and where was Trafford? "If he punished Crescy, I think I could tell *that*," muttered he, with a grin of malice. "I only wish I was there to see it;" and in the delight this thought afforded, he tossed off his last glass of wine, and rang for his bedroom candle.

"At what time shall I call you, sir?" asked the butler.

"When are you stirring here—I mean, at what hour does Sir William breakfast?"

"He breakfasts at eight, sir, during term; but he does not expect to see any one but Miss Lucy so early."

"I should think not. Call me at eleven, then, and bring me some coffee and a glass of rum when you come. Do you mean to tell *me*,"

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said he, in a somewhat stern tone, "that the Chief Baron gets up at seven o'clock?"

"In term time, sir, he does, every day."

"Egad! I'm well pleased that I have not a seat on the Bench. I'd not be Lord Chancellor at that price."

"It's very hard on the servants, sir—very hard indeed."

"I suppose it is," said Sewell, with a treacherous twinkle of the eye.

"If it wasn't that I'm expecting the usher's place in the court, I'd have resigned long ago."

"His lordship's pleasant temper, however, makes up for everything, Fenton, eh?"

"Yes, sir, that's true;" and they both laughed heartily at the pleasant conceit; and in this merry humour they went their several ways to bed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MORNING AT THE PRIORY.

Sewell was awoke from a sound and heavy sleep by the Chief Baron's valet asking if it was his pleasure to see his lordship before he went down to Court, in which case there was not much time to be lost.

"How soon does he go?" asked Sewell, curtly.

"He likes to be on the Bench by eleven exactly, sir, and he has always some business in Chamber first."

"All that tells me nothing, my good friend. How much time have I to catch him before he starts?"

"Half an hour, sir. Forty minutes at most."

"Well, I'll try and do it. Say I'm in my bath, and that I'll be with him immediately."

The man was not well out of the room when Sewell burst out into a torrent of abuse of the old Judge and his ways—"His inordinate vanity, his consummate conceit, to imagine that any activity of an old worn-out intellect like his could be of service to the public! If he knew but all, he is just as useful in his nightcap as in his wig, and it would be fully as dignified to sleep in his bed as in the Court of Exchequer." While he poured forth this invective, he dressed himself with all possible haste; indeed his ill-temper stimulated his alacrity, and he very soon issued from his room, trying to compose his features into a semblance of pleasure on meeting with his host.

"I hope and trust I have not disturbed you unreasonably," said the Judge, rising from the breakfast-table as Sewell entered. "I know you arrived very late, and I'd have given you a longer sleep if it were in my power."

"An old soldier, my lord, knows how to manage with very little. I am only sorry if I have kept you waiting."

"No man ever kept me waiting, sir. It is a slight I have yet to experience."

"I mean, my lord, it would have grieved me much, had I occasioned you an inconvenience."

"If you had, sir, it might have reacted injuriously upon yourself."

Sewell bowed submissively, for what, he knew not; but he surmised that as there was an opening for regret, there might also be a reason for gratitude; he waited to see if he were right.

"My telegram only told you that I wanted you; it could not say for what," continued the Judge, and his voice still retained the metallic ring the late irritation had lent it. "There has been a contested question between the Crown and myself as to the patronage to an office in my Court. I have carried my point. They have yielded. They would have me believe that they have submitted out of deference to myself personally, my age, and long services. I know better, sir. They have taken the opinion of the Solicitor-General in England, who, with no flattering sentiments to what is called 'Irish law,' has pronounced against them. The gift of the office rests with me, and it is my intention to confer it upon you."

"Oh, my lord, I have no words to express my gratitude!"

"Very well, sir, it shall be assumed to have been expressed. The salary is one thousand a year. The duties are almost nominal."

"I was going to ask, my lord, whether my education and habits are such as would enable me to discharge these duties?"

"I respect your conscientious scruple, sir. It is creditable and commendable. Your mind may, however, be at ease. Your immediate predecessor passed the last thirteen years at Tours, in France, and there was never a complaint of official irregularity till, three years ago, when he came over to afford his substitute a brief leave of absence, he forgot to sign his name to certain documents—a mistake the less pardonable that his signature formed his whole and sole official drudgery."

It was on Sewell's lips to say, "that if *he* had not signed his name a little too frequently in life, his difficulties would not have been such as they now were."

"I am afraid I did not catch what you said, sir," said the Judge.

"I did not speak, my lord," replied he, bowing.

"You will see, therefore, sir, that the details of your official life need not deter you, although I have little doubt the Ministerial press will comment sharply upon your absence, if you give them the opportunity, and will reflect severely upon your unfitness if they can detect a flaw in you. Is there anything, therefore, in your former life to which these writers can refer—I will not say disparagingly—but unpleasantly."

"I am not aware, my lord, of anything."

"Of course, sir, I could not mean what might impugn your honour or affect your fame. I spoke simply of what soldiers are, perhaps, more exposed to than civilians—the lighter scandals of society. You apprehend me?"

"I do, my lord; and I repeat that I have a very easy conscience on this score; for though I have filled some rather responsible stations at times, and been intrusted with high functions, all my tastes and habits have been so domestic and quiet—I have been so much more a man of home than a man of pleasure—that I have escaped even the common passing criticisms

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bestowed on people who are before the world."

"Is this man—this Sir Brook Fossbrooke—one likely to occasion you any trouble?"

"In the first place, my lord, he is out of the country, not very likely to return to it; and secondly, it is not in his power—not in any man's power—to make me a subject for attack."

"You are fortunate, sir; more fortunate than men who have served their country longer. It will scarcely be denied what I have contributed to the public service, and yet, sir, *I* have been arraigned before the bar of that insensate jury they call Public Opinion, and it is only in denying the jurisdiction I have deferred the trial."

Sewell responded to the vainglorious outburst by a look of admiring wonder, and the Judge smiled a gracious acceptance of the tribute.

"I gather, therefore, sir, that you can accept this place without fear of what scandal or malignity may assail you by."

"Yes, my lord, I can say as much with confidence."

"It is necessary, sir, that I should be satisfied on this head. The very essence of the struggle between the Crown and myself is in the fact that *my* responsibility is pledged, *my* reputation is in bond for the integrity and the sufficiency of this officer, and I will not leave to some future biographer of the Irish Chief Barons of the Exchequer the task of apology for one who was certainly not the least eminent of the line."

"Your lordship's high character shall not suffer through me," said Sewell, bowing respectfully.

"The matter, then, is so far settled; perhaps, however, you would like to consult your wife? She might be averse to your leaving the army."

"No, my lord. She wishes—she has long wished it. We are both domestic in our tastes, and we have always been looking to the time when we could live more for each other, and devote ourselves to the education of our children."

"Commendable and praiseworthy," said the Judge, with a half grunt, as though he had heard something of this same domesticity and home-happiness, but that his own experiences scarcely corroborated the report. "There are certain steps you will have to take before leaving the service; it may, then, be better to defer your public nomination to this post till they be taken?"

This, which was said in question, Sewell answered at once, saying, "There need be no delay on this score, my lord; by this day week I shall be free."

"On this day week, then, you shall be duly sworn in. Now, there is another point—I throw it out simply as a suggestion—you will not receive it as more if you are indisposed to it. It may be some time before you can find a suitable house or be fully satisfied where to settle down. There is ample room here; one entire wing is unoccupied. May I beg to place it at your disposal?"

"Oh, my lord, this is really too much kindness. You overwhelm me with obligations. I have never heard of such generosity."

"Sir, it is not all generosity—I reckon much on the value of your society. Your companionable qualities are gifts I would secure by a 'retainer.'"

"In your society, my lord, the benefits would be all on my side."

"There was a time, sir—I may say it without boastfulness—men thought me an agreeable companion. The three Chiefs, as we were called from our separate Courts, were reputed to be able talkers. I am the sole survivor; and it would be a gain to those who care to look back on the really great days of Ireland, if some record should remain of a time when there were giants in the land. I have myself some very curious materials—masses of letters and suchlike—which we may turn over some winter's evening together."

Sewell professed his delight at such a prospect, and the Judge then suddenly bethinking himself of the hour—it was already nigh eleven—arose. "Can I set you down anywhere? are you for town?" asked he.

"Yes, my lord; I was about to pay my mother a visit."

"I'll drop you there; perhaps you would convey a message from me, and say how grateful I should feel if she would give us her company at dinner—say seven o'clock. I will just step up to say good-bye to my granddaughter, and be with you immediately."

Sewell had not time to bethink him of all the strange events which a few minutes had grouped around him, when the Chief Baron appeared, and they drove off.

As they drove along, their converse was most agreeable. Sewell's attentive manner was an admirable stimulant, and the old Judge was actually sorry to lose his companion, as the carriage stopped at Lady Lendrick's door.

"What on earth brought you up, Dudley?" said she, as he entered the room where she sat at breakfast.

"Let me have something to eat, and I'll tell you," said he, seating himself at table, and drawing towards him a dish of cutlets. "You may imagine what an appetite I have when I tell you whose guest I am."

"Whose?"

"Your husband's."

"You! at the Priory! and how came that to pass?"

"I told you already I must eat before I talk. When I got down-stairs this morning I found the old man just finishing his breakfast, and instead of asking me to join him, he entertained me with the siege of Derry, and some choice anecdotes of Lord Bristol and 'the Volunteers.' This coffee is cold."

"Ring and they'll bring you some."

"If I am to take him as a type of Irish hospitality as well as Irish agreeability, I must say I get rid of two delusions together."

"There's the coffee. Will you have eggs?"

"Yes, and a rasher along with them. You can afford to be liberal with the larder, mother, for I bring you an invitation to dine."

"At the Priory?"

"Yes, he said seven o'clock."

"Who dines there?"

"Himself and his granddaughter and I make the company, I believe."

"Then I shall not go. I never do go when there's not a party."

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"He's safer, I suppose, before people?"

"Just so. I could not trust to his temper under the temptation of a family circle. But what brought you to town?"

"He sent for me by telegraph—just, too, when I had the whole county with me, and was booked to ride a match I had made with immense trouble. I got his message—'Come up immediately.' There was not the slightest reason for haste, nor for the telegraph at all. The whole could have been done by letter, and replied to at leisure, besides——"

"What was it, then?"

"It is a place he has given me—a registrarship of something in his Court, that he has been fighting the Castle people about for eighteen years, and to which, heaven knows if he has the right of appointment this minute."

"What's it worth?"

"A thousand a-year net. There were pickings—at least the last man made a good thing of them—but there are to be no more. We are to inaugurate, as the newspapers say, a reign of integrity and incorruptibility."

"So much the better."

"So much the worse, say I. My motto is, Full batta and plenty of loot; and it's every man's motto, only that every man is not honest enough to own it."

"And when are you to enter upon the duties of your office?"

"Immediately. I'm to be sworn in—there's an oath, it seems—this day week, and we're to take up our abode at the Priory till we find a house to suit us."

"At the Priory?"

"Yes. May I light a cigarette, mother? only one. He gave the invitation most royally. A whole wing is to be at our disposal. He said nothing about the cook or the wine-cellar, and these are the very ingredients I want to secure."

She shook her head doubiously, but made no answer.

"You don't think, then, that he meant to have us as his guests?"

"I think it unlikely."

"How shall I find out? It's quite certain I'll not go live under his roof—which means his surveillance—without an adequate compensation. I'll only consent to being bored by being fed."

"House-rent is something, however."

"Yes, mother, but not everything. That old man would be inquiring who dined with me, how late he stayed, who came to supper, and what they did afterwards. Now, if he take the whole charge of us, I'll put up with a great deal, because I could manage a little '*pied à terre*' somewhere about Kingstown or Dalkey, and 'carry on' pleasantly enough. You must find out his intentions, mother, before I commit myself to an acceptance. You must indeed."

"Take my advice, Dudley, and look out for a house at once. You'll not be in *his* three weeks."

"I can submit to a great deal when it suits me, mother," said he, with a derisive smile, and a look of intense treachery at the same time.

"I suppose you can," said she, nodding an assent. "How is she?"

"As usual," said he, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"And the children?"

"They are quite well. By the way, before I forget it, don't let the Judge know that I have already sent in my papers to sell out. I want him to believe that I do so now in consequence of his offer."

"It is not likely we shall soon meet, and I may not have an opportunity of mentioning the matter."

"You'll come to dinner to-day, won't you?"

"No."

"You ought, even out of gratitude on *my* account. It would be only commonly decent to thank him."

"I couldn't."

"Couldn't what? Couldn't come, or couldn't thank him?"

"Couldn't do either. You don't know, Dudley, that whenever our intercourse rises above the common courtesies of mere acquaintanceship, it is certain to end in a quarrel. We must never condemn or approve. We must never venture upon an opinion, lest it lead to a discussion, for discussion means a fight."

"Pleasant, certainly—pleasant and amiable too!"

"It would be better, perhaps, that I had some of that happy disposition of my son," said she, with a cutting tone, "and could submit to whatever suited me."

He started as if he had seen something, and, turning on her a look of passionate anger, began—"Is it from *you* that this should come?" Then suddenly recollecting himself, he subdued his tone, and said, "We'll not do better by losing our tempers. Can you put me in the way to raise a little money? I shall have the payment for my commission in about a fortnight; but I want a couple of hundred pounds at once."

"It's not two months since you raised five hundred."

"I know it, and there's the last of it. I left Lucy ten sovereigns when I came away, and this twenty pounds is all that I now have in the world."

"And all these fine dinners and grand entertainments that I have been told of—what was the meaning of them?"

"They were what the railway people call preliminary expenses, mother. Before one can get fellows to come to a house where there is play there must be a sort of easy style of good living established that all men like: excellent dinners and good wine are the tame elephants, and without them you'll not get the wild ones into your 'compound.'"

"And to tell me that this could pay!"

"Ay, and pay splendidly. If I had three thousand pounds in the world to carry on with, I'd see the old Judge and his rotten place at Jericho before I'd accept it. One needs a little capital, that's all. It's just like blockade running—you must be able to lose three for one you succeed with."

"I see nothing but ruin—disreputable ruin—in such a course."

"Come down and look at it, mother, and you'll change your mind. You'll own you never saw a better ordered society in your life—the *beau ideal* of a nice country house on a small scale. I admit our *chef* is not a Frenchman, and I have only one fellow out of livery· but the thing is

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well done, I promise you. As for any serious play, you'll never hear of it—never suspect it—no more than a man turning over Leech's sketches in a dentist's drawing-room suspects there's a fellow getting his eye-tooth extracted in the next room."

"I disapprove of it all, Dudley. It is sure to end ill."

"For that matter, mother, so shall I! All I have asked from Fate this many a year is, a deferred sentence—a long day, my lord—a long day!"

"Tell Sir William I am sorry I can't dine at the Priory to-day. It is one of my cruel-headache days. Say you found me looking very poorly. It puts him in good-humour to hear it; and if you can get away in the evening, come in to tea."

"You will think of this loan I want—won't you?"

"I'll think of it, but I don't know what good thinking will do." She paused, and after a few minutes' silence said, "If you really are serious about taking up your abode at the Priory, you'll have to get rid of the granddaughter."

"We could marry her off easily enough."

"You might, and you mightn't. If she marry to Sir William's satisfaction he'll leave her all he has in the world."

"Egad, he must have a rare taste in a son-in-law if he likes the fellow I'll promote to the place."

"You seem to forget, Dudley, that the young lady has a will of her own. She's a Lendrick too."

"With all my heart, mother. She'll not be a match for Lucy."

"And would *she*——"

"Ay would she," interrupted he, "if her pride as a woman—if her jealousy, was touched. I have made her do more than that when I wounded her self-love."

"You are a very amiable husband, I must say."

"We might be better, perhaps, mother; but I suspect we are pretty much like our neighbours. And it's positive you won't come to dinner?"

"No! certainly not."

"Well, I'll try and look in at tea-time. You'll not forget what I spoke of. I shall be in funds in less than three weeks."

She gave a little incredulous laugh as she said good-bye. She had heard of such pledges before, and knew well what faith to attach to them.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

EVENING AT THE PRIORY.

The Chief Baron brought his friend Haire back from Court to dine with him. The table had been laid for five, and it was only when Sewell entered the drawing-room that it was known Lady Lendrick had declined the invitation. Sir William heard the apology to the end; he even waited when Sewell concluded, to see if he desired to add anything more, but nothing came.

"In that case," said he at length, "we'll order dinner." That his irritation was extreme needed no close observation to detect, and the bell-rope came down with the pull by which he summoned the servant.

The dinner proceeded drearily enough. None liked to adventure on a remark which might lead to something unpleasant in discussion, and little was spoken on any side. Sewell praised the mutton, and the Chief Baron bowed stiffly. When Haire remarked that the pale sherry was excellent, he dryly told the butler to "fill Mr. Haire's glass;" and though Lucy, with more caution, was silent, she did not escape, for he turned towards her and said, "We have not been favoured with a word from your lips, Miss Lendrick; I hope these neuralgic headaches are not becoming a family affection."

"I am perfectly well, sir," said she, with a smile.

"It is Haire's fault, then," said the Judge, with one of his malicious twinkles of the eye—"all Haire's fault if we are dull. It is ever so with wits, Colonel Sewell; they will not perform to empty benches."

"I don't know whom you call a wit," began Haire.

"My dear friend, the men of pleasantry and happy conceits must no more deny the reputation that attaches to them than must a rich merchant dishonour his bill; nor need a man resent more being called a Wit, than being styled a Poet, a Painter, a Chief Baron, or"—here he waved his hand towards Sewell, and bowing slightly, added—"a Chief Registrar to the Court of Exchequer."

"Oh, have you got the appointment?" said Haire to the Colonel. "I'm heartily glad of it. I'm delighted to know it has been given to one of the family."

"As I said a while ago," said the Judge, with a smile of deeper malice, "these witty fellows spare nobody! At the very moment he praises the sherry he disparages the host. Why should not this place be filled by one of my family, Haire? I call upon you to show cause."

"There's no reason against it. I never said there was. Nay, I was far from satisfied with you on the day you refused my prayer on behalf of one belonging to you."

"Sir, you are travelling out of the record," said the Judge, angrily.

"I can only say," added Haire, "that I wish Colonel Sewell joy with all my heart; and if he'll allow me, I'll do it in a bumper."

"'A reason fair to drink his health again!' That's not the line. How does it go, Lucy? Don't you remember the verse?"

"No, sir; I never heard it."

"'A reason fair—a reason fair.' I declare I believe the newspapers are right. I am losing my memory. One of the scurrilous rascals t'other day said, they say saw no reason Justice should be deaf as well as blind. Haire, was that yours?"

"A thousand a-year," muttered Haire to Sewell.

"What is that, Haire?" cried the old Judge. "Do I hear you aright? You utter one thousand things just as good every year?"

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"I was speaking of the Registrar's salary," said Haire, half testily.

"A thousand a-year is a pittance—a mere pittance, sir, in a country like England. It is like the place at a window to see a procession. You may gaze on the passing tide of humanity, but must not dare to mix in it."

"And yet papa went half across the globe for it," said Lucy, with a flushed and burning cheek.

"In your father's profession the rewards are less money, Lucy, than the esteem and regard of society. I have ever thought it wise of our rulers not to bestow titles on physicians, but to leave them the unobtrusive and undistinguished comforters of every class and condition. The equal of any—the companion of all."

It was evident that the old Judge was eager for discussion on anything. He had tried in vain to provoke each of his guests, and he was almost irritable at the deference accorded him.

"Do I see you pass the decanter, Colonel Sewell? Are you not drinking any wine?"

"No, my lord."

"Perhaps you like coffee? Don't you think, Lucy, you could give him some?"

"Yes, sir. I shall be delighted."

"Very well. Haire and I will finish this magnum, and then join you in the drawing-room."

Lucy took Sewell's arm and retired. They were scarcely well out of the room when Sewell halted suddenly, and in a voice so artificial that, if Lucy had been given to suspectfulness, she would have detected at once, said, "Is the Judge always as pleasant and as witty as we saw him to-day?"

"To-day he was very far from himself; something, I'm sure, must have irritated him, for he was not in his usual mood."

"I confess I thought him charming; so full of neat reply, pleasant apropos, and happy quotation."

"He very often has days of all that you have just said, and I am delighted with them."

"What an immense gain to a young girl—I mean to one whose education and tastes have fitted her for it—to be the companion of such a mind as his! Who is this Mr. Haire?"

"A very old friend. I believe he was a school-fellow of grandpapa's."

"Not his equal, I suspect, in ability or knowledge."

"Oh, nothing like it; a most worthy man, respected by every one, and devotedly attached to grandpapa, but not clever."

"The Chief, I remarked, called him witty," said Sewell, with a faint twinkle in his eye.

"It was done in jest. He is fond of fathering on him the smart sayings of the day, and watching his attempts to disown them."

"And Haire likes that?"

"I believe he likes grandpapa in every mood he has."

"What an invaluable friend! I wish to heaven he could fine such another for me. I want,—there's nothing I want more than some one who would always approve of me."

"Perhaps you might push this fidelity further than grandpapa does," said she, with a smile.

"You mean that it might not always be so easy to applaud *me*."

She only laughed and made no effort to disclaim the assertion.

"Well," said he, with a sigh, "who knows but if I live to be old and rich I may be fortunate enough to have such an accommodating friend? Who are the other inmates here? I ask because we are going to be domesticated also."

"I heard so this morning."

"I hope with pleasure, though you haven't said as much."

"With pleasure certainly; but with more misgiving than pleasure."

"Pray explain this."

"Simply that the very quiet life we lead here would not be endurable by the people who like the world, and whom the world likes. We never see any one, we never go out, we have not even those second-hand glances at society that people have who admit gossiping acquaintances; in fact, regard what you have witnessed to-day as a dinner-party, and then fashion for yourself our ordinary life."

"And do *you* like it?"

"I know nothing else, and I am tolerably happy. If papa and Tom were here I should be perfectly happy."

"By Jove! you startle me," said he, throwing away the unlighted cigar he had held for some minutes in his fingers; "I didn't know it was so bad."

"It is possible he may relax for you and Mrs. Sewell; indeed, I think it more than likely that he will."

"Ay, but the relaxation might only be in favour of a few more like that old gent we had to-day. No, no—the thing will never work. I see it at once. My mother said we could not possibly stand it three weeks, and I perceive it is your opinion too."

"I did not say so much," said she, smiling.

"Joking apart," said he, in a tone that assuredly bespoke sincerity, "I couldn't stand such a dinner as we had to-day very often. I can bear being bullied, for I was brought up to it. I served on Rolffe's staff in Bombay for four years, and when a man has been an aide-de-camp he knows what being bullied means; but what I could not endure is that outpouring of conceit mingled with rotten recollections. Another evening of it would kill me."

"I certainly would not advise your coming here at that price," said she, with a gravity almost comical.

"The difficulty is how to get off. He appears to me to resent as an affront everything that differs from his own views."

"He is not accustomed to much contradiction."

"Not to any at all!"

The energy with which he said this made her laugh heartily, and he half smiled at the situation himself.

"They are coming up-stairs," said she; "will you ring for tea?—the bell is beside you."

"Oh, if they're coming I'm off. I promised my mother a short visit this evening. Make my excuses if I am asked for;" and with this he slipped from the room and went his way.

"Where's the Colonel, Lucy? has he gone to bed?"

"No, sir, he has gone to see his mother; he

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had made some engagement to visit her this evening."

"This new school of politeness is too liberal for my taste. When we were young men, Haire, we would not have ventured to leave the house where we had dined without saluting the host."

"I take it we must keep up with the spirit of our time."

"You mistake, Haire—it is the spirit of our time is in arrear. It is that same spirit lagging behind, and deserting the post it once occupied, makes us seem in default. Let us have the cribbage-board, Lucy. Haire has said all the smart things he means to give us this evening, and I will take my revenge at the only game at which I am his master. Haire, who reads men like a book, Lucy," continued the Chief, as he dealt the cards, "says that our gallant friend will rebel against our humdrum life here. I demur to the opinion—what say you?" But he was now deep in his game, and never heeded the answer.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

SEWELL'S TROUBLES.

"A LETTER for you by the post, sir, and his lordship's compliments to say he is waiting breakfast," were the first words which Sewell heard the next morning.

"Waiting breakfast! Tell him not to wait—I mean, make my respects to his lordship, and say I feel very poorly to-day—that I think I'll not get up just yet."

"Would you like to see Dr. Beattie, sir?—he's in the drawing-room."

"Nothing of the kind. It's a complaint I caught in India; I manage it myself. Bring me up some coffee and rum in about an hour, and mind don't disturb me on any account till then. What an infernal house!" muttered he, as the man withdrew. "A subaltern called up for morning parade has a better life than this. Nine o'clock only! What can this old ass mean by this pretended activity? Upon whom can it impose? Who will believe that it signifies a rush whether he lay abed till noon or rose by daybreak?" A gentle tap came to the door, but as he made no reply there came after a pause another a little louder. Sewell still preserved silence, and at last the sound of retiring footsteps along the corridor. "Not if I know it," muttered he to himself as he turned round and fell off asleep again.

"The coffee, sir, and a dispatch; shall I sign the receipt for you?" said the servant, as he reappeared about noon.

"Yes; open the window a little, and leave me."

Leaning on his arm he tore open the envelope and glanced at the signature—Lucy. He then read, "Send down Eccles or Beattie by next train; he is worse." He read and re-read this at least half-a-dozen times over before he bethought him of the letter that lay still unopened on the bed. He now broke the seal; it was also from his wife, dated the preceding evening, and very brief:—

"DEAR DUDLEY,—Mr. Trafford has had a severe fall. Crescy balked at the brook and fell afterwards. Trafford was struck on the head as he rose by Mr. Creagh's horse. It is feared the skull is fractured. You are much blamed for having asked him to ride a horse so much under his weight. All have refused to accept their bets but Kinshela the grocer. I have written to Sir H. Trafford, and I telegraphed to him Dr. Tobin's opinion, which is not favourable. I suppose you will come back at once: if not, telegraph what you advise to be done. Mr. Balfour is here still, but I do not find he is of much use. The veterinary decided Crescy should be shot, as the plate bone, I think he called it, was fractured; and as he was in great pain I consented. I hope I have done right.—Yours truly,

"LUCY SEWELL."

"Here's a go! a horse I refused four hundred and fifty for on Tuesday last! I *am* a lucky dog, there's no denying it. I didn't know there was a man in Europe could have made that horse balk his fence. What a rumpus to make about a fellow getting a 'cropper.' My share of the disaster is a deuced deal the worst. I'll never chance on such a horse again. How am I to find either of these men?" muttered he, as he took up the telegram. He rang the bell violently, and scarcely ceased to pull at it till the servant entered.

"Where does Dr. Eccles live?"

"Sir Gilbert, sir?"

"Ay, if he be Sir Gilbert."

"Merrion Square, sir," said the man reproachfully, for he thought it rather hard to ignore one of the great celebrities of the land.

"Take this note to him, that I'll write now, and if he be from home go to the other man—what's his name?—Beattie."

"Dr. Beattie is coming to dinner to-day, sir," said the servant, thinking to facilitate matters.

"Just do as I tell you, my good fellow, and don't interrupt. If I am to take up my quarters here, you'll all of you have to change some of your present habits." As he spoke, he dashed off a few hasty lines, addressing them to Sir Gilbert Eccles or Dr. Beattie. "Ask if it's 'all right;' that will be sufficient reply; and now, send me my bath." As he proceeded with his dressing—a very lengthy affair it always was—he canvassed with himself whether or not he ought to take the train and go down to the country with the Doctor. Possibly few men in such circumstances would have given the matter a doubt. The poor fellow who had incurred the mishap had been, at his insistance, acting for him. Had it not been for Sewell's pressing this task upon him, Trafford would at that moment have been hale and hearty. Sewell knew all this well; he read the event just as nineteen out of every twenty would have read it, but having done so, he proceeded to satisfy himself why all these reasonings should give way to weightier considerations.

First of all, it would not be quite convenient to let the old Judge know anything of these doings in the country. His strait-laced notions might revolt at races and betting rings. It might not be perhaps decorous that a registrar of a high court should be the patron of such sports. These were prudential reasons,

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which he dilated on for some time. Then came some others more sentimental. It was to a house of doctors and nurses, and gloom and sorrow, he should go back. All these were to him peculiarly distasteful. He should be tremendously "bored" by it all, and being "bored" was to him whatever was least tolerable in life. It was strange that there was one other reason stronger than all these—a reason that really touched him in what was the nearest thing in his nature to heart. He couldn't go back and look at the empty loose-box where his favourite horse once stood, and where he was never to stand more. Crescy—the animal he was so proud of—the horse he counted on for who knows what future triumphs—the first steeple-chase horse, he felt convinced, in Ireland, if not in the kingdom—such strength, such power in the loins, such square joints, such courage, should he ever see united again? If there was anything in that man's nature that represented affection, he had it for this horse. He knew well to what advantage he looked when on his back—he knew what admiration and envy it drew upon him to see him thus mounted. He had won him at billiards from a man who was half broken-hearted at parting with him, and who offered immense terms rather than lose him.

"He said, I'd have no luck with him," muttered Sewell, now in his misery—"and, confound the fellow, he was right. No, I can't go back to look at his empty stall. It would half kill me."

It was very real grief all this; he was as thoroughly heart-sore as it was possible for him to be. He sorrowed for what nothing in his future life could replace to him; and this is a very deep sorrow.

Trafford's misfortune was so much the origin and cause of his own disaster, that he actually thought of him with bitterness. The man who could make Crescy balk! What fate could be too hard for him?

Nor was he quite easy in his mind about that passage in his wife's letter stating that men would not take their bets. Was this meant as reflecting upon him? Was it a censure on him for making Trafford ride a horse beneath his weight? "They get up some stupid cry of that sort," muttered he, "as if I am not the heaviest loser of all. I lose a horse that was worth a score of Traffords."

When dressed, Sewell went down to the garden, and lit his cigar. His sorrow had grown calmer, and he began to think that in the new life before him he should have had to give up horses and sport of every kind. "I must make my book now on this old fellow, and get him to make me his heir. He cares little for his son, and he can be made to care just as little for his granddaughter. That's the only game open to me—a dreary life it promises to be, but it's better than a jail."

The great large wilderness of a garden, stretching away into an orchard at the end, was in itself a place to suggest sombre thoughts—so silent and forsaken did it all appear. The fruit lay thick on the ground uncared for—the artichokes, grown to the height of shrubs, looked monsters of uncouthness; and even in the alleys flower-seeds had fallen and given birth to flowers, which struggled up through the gravel and hung their bright petals over the footway. There was in the neglect, the silence, the uncared-for luxuriance of the place, all that could make a moody man moodier; and as he knocked off the great heads of the tall hollyhocks, he thought, and even said aloud, "This is about as much amusement as such a spot offers."

"Oh no, not so bad as that," said a laughing voice, and Lucy peeped over a laurel-hedge with a rake in her hand, and seemed immensely amused at his discomfiture.

"Where are you?—I mean, how is one to come near you?" said he, trying to laugh, but not successfully.

"Go round yonder by the fish-pond, and you'll find a wicket. This is *my* garden, and I till it myself."

"So!" said he, entering a neat little enclosure, with beds of flowers and flowering shrubs, "this is your garden?"

"Yes—what do you think of it?"

"It's very pretty—it's very nice. I should like it larger, perhaps."

"So would I; but, being my own gardener, I find it quite big enough."

"Why doesn't the Chief give you a gardener? he's rich enough surely."

"He never cared for gardening himself. Indeed, I think it is the wild confusion of foliage here that he likes. He said to me one day, 'In *my* old garden a man loses himself in thought. In this trimly kept place one is ever occupied by the melon-frame or the forcing-house.'"

"That's the dreadful thing about old people; they are ever for making the whims and crotchets of age the rules of life to others. I wonder you bear this so well."

"I didn't know that I bore anything," said she, with a smile.

"That's true slave doctrine, I must say; and when one does not feel bondage, there's no more to be said."

"I suspect I have a great deal more freedom than most girls; my time is almost all my own, to dispose of as I will. I read or play or walk or work as I feel inclined. If I wish to occupy myself with household matters, I am the mistress here."

"In other words, you are free to do everything that is not worth doing—you lead the life of a nun in a convent, only that you have not even a sister nun to talk to."

"And which are the things you say are worth doing?"

"Would you not care to go out into the world, to mix in society, to go to balls, theatres, fêtes, and suchlike? would you not like to ride? I don't mean it for flattery, but would you not like the admiration you would be sure to meet—the sort of homage people render to beauty, the only tribute the world ever paid freely,—are all these not worth something?"

"I am sure they are: they are worth a great deal to those who can enjoy them with a happy heart; but remember, Colonel Sewell, I have a father living in exile, simply to earn a livelihood, and I have a brother toiling for his bread in a strange land; is it likely I could forget these, or is it likely that I could carry such cares about with me, and enjoy the pleasures you tell of?"

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"Oh! as for that, I never met the man nor woman either that could bring into the world a mind unburdened by care. You must take life as it is. If I was to wait for a heart at ease before I went into society, I'd have to decline a few dinner-parties. Your only chance of a little respite, besides, is at your age. The misfortunes of life begin a light drizzle, but become a regular downpour when one gets to *my* time in life. Let me just tell you what this morning brought forth. A letter and then a telegram from my wife, to tell me that my favourite horse—an animal worth five hundred pounds if he was worth five shillings—the truest, bravest, best horse I ever backed—has just been killed by a stupid fellow I got to ride for me. What he did to make the horse refuse his leap, what magic he used, what conjuring trick he performed, I can't tell. With *me* it was enough to show him his fence, and if I wanted it I couldn't have held him back. But this fellow, a dragoon too, and the crack rider of his regiment, contrives to discourage my poor beast, then rushes him at the jump at half speed. I know it was a wideish brook, and they tumbled in, and my horse smashed his blade-bone—of course there was nothing for it but to shoot him."

"How sad! I am really sorry for you."

"And all this came of the old Judge's message, the stupidity of sending me five words in a telegram, instead of writing a proper note, and saying what he wanted. But for that I'd have stayed at home, ridden my horse, won my match, and spared myself the whole disaster."

"Grandpapa is often very hasty in his decisions, but I believe he seldom sees cause to revoke them."

"The old theory, 'the king can do no wrong,'" said Sewell, with a saucy laugh; "but remember he can often do a deal of mischief incidentally, as it were—as on the present occasion."

"And the rider, what of him? did he escape unhurt?" said she, eager to avoid unpleasant discussion.

"The rider! my dear young lady," said he, with affected slowness—"the rider came to grief. What he did, or how he did it, to throw my poor horse down, is his own secret, and, from what I hear, he is likely to keep it. No, no, don't look so horrified—he's not killed, but I don't suspect he's a long way off it. He got a smashing fall at a fence I'd have backed myself to ride with my hands tied. Ay, and to have my good horse back again, I'd ride in that fashion to-morrow."

"And the poor fellow, where is he now?"

"The poor fellow is receiving the very sweetest of Mrs. Sewell's attentions. He is at my house—in all likelihood in my room—not that he is very conscious of all the favours bestowed upon him."

"Oh! don't talk with that pretended indifference. You must be, you cannot help being, deeply sorry for what has happened."

"There can be very little doubt on that score. I've lost such a horse as I never shall own again."

"Pray think of something besides your horse. Who was he? what's his name?"

"A stranger—an Englishman; you never heard of him; and I wish I had never heard of him!"

"What are you smiling at?" said she, after a pause, for he stood as though reflecting, and a very strange half-smile moved his mouth.

"I was just thinking," said he, gravely, "what his younger brother ought to give me; for this fellow was an elder son, and heir to a fine estate too."

She turned an indignant glance towards him, and moved away. He was quickly after her, however, and laying his hand on her arm, said good-humouredly, "Come, don't be angry with me. I'm sorry, if you like—I'm very sorry for this poor fellow. I won't say that my own loss does not dash my sorrow with a little anger—he was such a horse! and the whole thing was such a blunder! as fair a brook—with a high bank, it's true—but as fair a fence as ever a man rode at, and ground like this we're walking over to take off from."

"Is he in danger?"

"I believe so; here's what my wife says. Oh, I haven't got the letter about me, but it comes to this, I was to send down one of the best doctors by the first train, telling him it was a case of compression or concussion, which is it? And so I have despatched Beattie, your grandfather's man. I suppose there's no better?"

"But why have you not gone back yourself? he was a friend, was he not?"

"Yes, he was what people would call a friend. I'm like the hare in the fable, I have many friends; but if I must be confidential, I'll tell you why I did *not* go. I had a notion just as likely to be wrong as right, that the Chief would take offence at his Registrar being a sporting character, and that if I were to absent myself just now, he'd find out the reason, whereas by staying here I could keep all quiet, and when Beattie came back I could square *him*."

"You could what?"

"A thousand pardons for my bit of slang; but the fact is, just as one talks French when he wants to say nothings, one takes to slang when one requires to be shifty. I meant to say, I could manage to make the Doctor hold his tongue."

"Not if grandpapa were to question him."

Sewell smiled, and shook his head in dissent.

"No, no. You're quite mistaken in Dr. Beattie; and what's more, you're quite mistaken in grandpapa too, if you imagine that he'll think the better of you for forgetting the claims of friendship."

"There was none."

"Well, of humanity, then! It was in *your* cause this man suffered, and it is in *your* house he lies ill. I think you ought to be there also."

"Do you think so?"

"I'm sure of it. You know the world a great deal better than I do, and you can tell what people will say of your absence, but I think it requires no knowledge of more than one's own nature to feel what is right and proper here."

"Indeed!" said he, reflectingly.

"Don't you agree with me?"

"Perhaps—that is, in part. I suppose what you mean about the world is, that there will be some scandal afloat, the 'young wife' story, and all that sort of balderdash?"

"I really do not understand you."

"You don't?"

"No. Certainly not. What do you mean?"

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"Possibly you did not understand me. Well, if I am to go, there's no time to be lost. It's four o'clock already, and the last train leaves at five forty. I will go."

"You are quite right."

"You'll make my excuses to the Chief. You'll tell him that my wife's message was so alarming, that I could not delay my departure. Beattie will probably be back to-morrow, and bring you news of us."

"Won't you write a few lines?"

"I'm not sure,—I'll not promise. I'm a bad penman, but my wife will write, I've no doubt. Say all sorts of affectionate and dutiful things to the Chief for me; tell him I went away in despair at not being able to say good-bye; he likes that style of thing, doesn't he?"

"I don't think he cares much for 'that style of thing,'" said she, with a saucy smile.

"What a capital mimic you are! Do you know I am just beginning to suspect that you are, for all your quiet simplicity of manner, a deuced deep one? Am I right?"

She shook her head, but made no reply.

"Not that I'd like you the less for it," said he, eagerly; "on the contrary, we'd understand each other all the better; there's nothing like people talking the same language, eh?"

"I hope you'll not lose your train," said she, looking at her watch; "I am half-past four."

"A broad hint," said he, laughing; "bye-bye —*à bientôt*."

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CHAPTER XXXV.

BEATTIE'S RETURN.

The old Chief sat alone in his dining-room over his wine. If somewhat fatigued by the labours of the day—for the Court had sat late—he showed little of exhaustion; still less was he, as his years might have excused, drowsy or heavy. He sat bolt upright in his chair, and by an occasional gesture of his hand, or motion of his head, seemed as though he were giving assent to some statement he was listening to, or making his comments on it as it proceeded.

The post had brought a letter to Lucy just as dinner was over. It bore the post-mark "Cagliari," and was in her brother's hand, and the old man, with considerate kindness, told her to go to her room and read it. "No, my dear child," said he as she arose to leave the room; "no! I shall not be lonely—where there is memory, there are troops of friends. Come back and tell me your news when you have read your letter."

More than an hour passed over, and he sat there heedless of time. A whole long life was passing in review before him, not connectedly, or in due sequence of events, but in detached scenes and incidents. Now it was some stormy night in the old Irish House, when Flood and Grattan exchanged their terrific denunciations and insults—now it was a brilliant dinner at Ponsonby's, with all the wits of the day—now he was leading the famous Kitty O'Dwyer, the beauty of the Irish Court, to her carriage, amid such a murmur of admiration as made the progress a triumph—or again it was a raw morning of November, and he was driving across the Park to be present at Curran's meeting with Egan.

A violent ring of the hall bell started him, and before he could inquire the cause a servant had announced Dr. Beattie.

"I thought I might be fortunate enough to catch you before bed-hour," said the Doctor, "and I knew you would like to hear some tidings of my mission."

"You have been to—— Where have you been?" said the old Judge, embarrassed between the late flood of his recollections and the sudden start of his arrival.

"To Killaloe, to see that poor fellow who had the severe fall in the hurdle race."

"Ay—to be sure—yes. I remember all now. Give me a moment, however." He nodded his head twice or thrice, as if concurring with some statement, and then said, "Go on, sir; the Court is with you."

Beattie proceeded to detail the accident and the state of the sufferer—of whom he pronounced favourably—saying that there was no fracture, nor anything worse than severe concussion. "In fact," said he, "were it an hospital case, I'd say there was very little danger."

"And do you mean to tell me, sir," said the Judge, who had followed the narrative with extreme attention, "that the man of birth and blood must succumb in any conflict more readily than the low-born?"

"It's not the individual I was thinking of, so much as his belongings here. What I fear for in the present case is what the patient must confront every day of his convalescence."

Seeing that the Judge waited for some explanation, Beattie began to relate that, as he had started from Dublin the day before, he found himself in the same carriage with the young man's mother, who had been summoned by telegraph to her son's bedside.

"I have met," said he, "in my time, nearly all sorts and conditions of people. Indeed, a doctor's life brings him into contact with more maladies of nature and temperament than diseases of material origin; but anything like this woman I never saw before. To begin: she combined within herself two qualities that seem opposed to each other—a most lavish candour on the score of herself and her family, and an intense distrust of all the rest of mankind. She told me she was a baronet's wife—how she had married him—where they lived—what his estate was worth—how this young fellow had become, by the death of a brother, the heir to the property—and how his father, indignant at his extravagance, had disentailed the estate, to leave it to a younger son if so disposed. She showed at times the very greatest anxiety about her son's state; but at other moments just as intense an eagerness to learn what schemes and intrigues were being formed against him—who were the people in whose house he then was—what they were—and how he came there. To all my assurances that they were persons in every respect her son's equals, she answered by a toss of the head or a saucy half laugh. "Irish?" asked she. 'Yes, Irish.' 'I thought so,' rejoined she; 'I told Sir Hugh I was sure of it, though he said there were English Sewells.'

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From this instant her distrust broke forth. All Ireland had been in a conspiracy against her family for years. She had a brother, she said it with a shiver of horror, who was cruelly beaten by an attorney in Cork for a little passing pleasantry to the man's sister; he had kissed her, or something of the kind, in a railroad carriage; and her cousin—poor dear Cornwallis Merivale—it was in Ireland he found that creature that got the divorce against him two years ago. She went on to say that there had been a plot against her son, in the very neighbourhood where he now lay ill, only a year ago—some intrigue to involve him in a marriage, the whole details of which she threatened me with the first time we should be alone.

"Though at some moments expressing herself in terms of real affection and anxiety about her poor son, she would suddenly break off to speculate on what might happen from his death. 'You know, Doctor, there is only one more boy, and if his life lapsed, Holt and the Holt estate goes to the Carringtons.'"

"An odious woman, sir—a most odious woman; I only wonder why you continued to travel in the same carriage with her."

"My profession teaches great tolerance," said the Doctor, mildly.

"Don't call tolerance, sir, what there is the better word for, subserviency. I am amazed how you endured this woman."

"Remember—it is to be remembered—that in my version of her I have condensed the conversation of some hours, and given you, as it were, the substance of much talking; and also, that I have not attempted to convey what certainly was a very perfect manner. She had no small share of good looks, a very sweet voice, and considerable attraction in point of breeding."

"I will accept none of these as alleviations, sir; her blandishments cannot blind the Court."

"I will not deny their influence upon myself," said Beattie, gently.

"I can understand you, sir," said the Judge, pompously. "The habits of your profession teach you to swallow so much that is nauseous in a sweet vehicle, that you carry the same custom into morals."

Beattie laughed so heartily at the analogy that the old man's good-humour returned to him, and he bade him continue his narrative.

"I have not much more to tell. We reached the house by eleven o'clock at night, and my fellow-traveller sat in the carriage till I announced her to Mrs. Sewell. My own cares called me to the sick-room, and I saw no more of the ladies till this morning, just before I came away."

"She is then domesticated there. She has taken up her quarters at the Sewells' house?"

"Yes. I found her maid, too, had taken possession of Colonel Sewell's dressing-room, and dispossessed a number of his chattels to make room for her own."

"It is a happy thing, a very happy thing for me, that I have not been tried by these ordeals," said the Judge, with a long-drawn breath. "I wonder how Colonel Sewell will endure it."

"I have no means of knowing; he arrived late at night, and was still in bed and asleep when I left."

"You have not told me these people's name?"

"Trafford—Sir Hugh Beecham Trafford of Holt-Trafford, Staffordshire."

"I have met the man, or rather his father, for it was nigh fifty years ago—an old family, and of Saxon origin; and his wife—who was she?"

"Her name was Merivale: her father, I think, was Governor of Madras."

"If so, sir, she has hereditary claims for impertinence and presumption. Sir Ulysses Merivale enjoyed the proud distinction of being the most insolent man in England. It is well that you have told me who she was, Beattie, for I might have made a very fatal blunder. I was going to write to Sewell to say, 'As this is a great issue, I would advise you to bring down your mother, "special,"' but I recall my intention. Lady Lendrick would have no chance against Lady Trafford. Irish insolence has not the finish of the English article, and we put an alloy of feeling in it that destroys it altogether. Will the young man recover?"

"He is going on favourably, and I see nothing to apprehend, except, indeed, that the indiscretions of his mother may prejudice his case. She is very likely to insist on removing him; she hinted it to me as I took my leave."

"I will write to the Sewells to come up here at once. They shall evacuate the territory, and leave her in possession. As persons closely connected with my family, they must not have this outrage put upon them." He rang the bell violently, and desired the servant to request Miss Lendrick to come to him.

"She is not very well, my lord, and has gone to her room. She told Mrs. Beales to serve your lordship's tea when you were ready for it."

"What is this? What does all this mean?" said the old Judge, eagerly; for the idea of any one presuming to be ill without duly apprising him—without the preliminary step of ascertaining that it could not inconvenience him—was more than he was fully prepared for.

"Tell Mrs. Beales I want her," said he, as he rose and left the room. Muttering angrily as he went, he ascended the stairs and traversed the long corridor which led to Lucy's room; but before he had reached the door the housekeeper was at his side.

"Miss Lucy said she'd like to see your lordship, if it wasn't too much trouble, my lord."

"I am going to see her. Ask her if I may come in."

"Yes, my lord," said Mrs. Beales from the open door. "She is awake."

"My own dear grandpapa," said Lucy, stretching out her arms to him from her bed, "how good and kind of you to come here!"

"My dear, dear child," said he, fondly; "tell me you are not ill; tell me that it is a mere passing indisposition."

"Not even so much, grandpapa. It is simply a headache. I was crying, and I was ashamed that you should see it; and I walked out into the air; and I came back again, trying to look at ease; and my head began to throb and to pain me so, that I thought it best to go to bed. It was a letter I got—a letter from Cagliari. Poor Tom has had the terrible fever of the island. He said nothing about it at first, but now he has relapsed. There are only three lines in his own hand—the rest is from his friend. You

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shall see what he says. It is very short, and not very hard to read."

The old man put on his spectacles and read—

"'My very dear Lucy.'

"Who presumes to address you in this way? Brook Fossbrooke! What! is this the man who is called Sir Brook Fossbrooke? By what means have you become so intimate with a person of his character?"

"I know nothing better, nothing more truly noble and generous, than his character," said she, holding her temples as she spoke, for the pain of her head was almost agony. "Do read on—read on, dearest grandpapa."

He turned again to the letter, and read it over in silence till he came to the few words in Tom's hand, which he read aloud:—"Darling Lu—I shall be all right in a week. Don't fret, but write me a long— — long"—he had forgotten the word "letter," "and love me always."

She burst into tears as the old man read the words, for by some strange magic, the syllables of deep affection, uttered by one unmoved, smite the heart with a pang that is actual torture. "I will take this letter down to Beattie, Lucy, and hear what he says of it," said the old man, and left the room.

"Read this, Beattie, and tell me what you say to it," said the Chief Baron, as he handed the Doctor Sir Brook's letter. "I'll tell you of the writer when you have read it."

Beattie read the note in silence, and as he laid it on the table said, "I know the man, and his strange old-fashioned writing would have recalled him without his name."

"And what do you know of him, sir?" asked the Judge, sternly.

"I can tell you the story in three words: He came to consult me one morning, about six or eight months ago. It was about an insurance on his life—a very small sum he wanted to raise, to go out to this very place he writes from. He got to talk about the project, and I don't exactly know how it came about—I forget the details now—but it ended by my lending him the money myself."

"What, sir! do you combine usury with physic?"

"On that occasion I appear to have done so," said Beattie, laughing.

"And you advanced a sum of money to a man whom you saw for the first time, simply on his showing that his life was too insecure to guarantee repayment?"

"That puts the matter a little too nakedly."

"It puts it truthfully, sir, I apprehend."

"If you mean that the man impressed me so favourably that I was disposed to do him a small service, you are right."

"You and I, Beattie, are too old for this impulsive generosity—too old by thirty years! After forty, philanthropy should take a chronic form, and never have paroxysms. I think I am correct in my medical language."

"Your medicine pleases me more than your morality," said Beattie, laughing; "but to come back to this Sir Brook—I wish you had seen him."

"Sir, I have seen him, and I have heard of him, and if not at liberty to say what I have heard of him, it is quite enough to state that *my* information cannot corroborate *your* opinion."

"Well, my lord, the possibility of what I might hear will not shake the stability of what I have seen. Remember that we doctors imagine we read human nature by stronger spectacles than the laity generally."

"You imagine it, I am aware, sir; but I have met with no such instances of acuteness amongst your co-professionals as would sustain the claim; but why are we wandering from the record? I gave you that letter to read that you might tell me, is this boy's case a dangerous one?"

"It is a very grave case, no doubt; this is the malaria fever of Sardinia—bad enough with the natives, but worse with strangers. He should be removed to better air at once if he could bear removal."

"So it is ever with your art," said the Judge, in a loud declamatory voice. "You know nothing in your difficulties but a piteous entreaty to the unknown resources of nature to assist you. No, sir; I will not hear your defence; there is no issue before the Court. What sort of practitioners have they in this island?"

"Rude enough, I can believe."

"Could a man of eminence be found to go out there and see him?"

"A man in large practice could not spare the time; but there are men of ability who are not yet in high repute; one of these might be possibly induced."

"And what might the expense be?"

"A couple of hundred—say three hundred pounds, would perhaps suffice."

"Go up-stairs and see my granddaughter. She is very nervous and feverish; calm her mind so far as you are able; say that we are concerting measures for her brother's benefit; and by the time you shall come down again I will have made up my mind what to do."

Beattie was a valued friend of Lucy's, and she was glad to see him enter her room, but she would not suffer him to speak of herself; it was of poor Tom alone she would talk. She heard with delight the generous intentions of her grandfather, and exclaimed with rapture,

"This is his real nature, and yet it is only by the little foibles of his temper that the world knows him; but we, Doctor, we, who see him as he is, know how noble-hearted and affectionate he can be!"

"I must hasten back to him," said Beattie, after a short space; "for should he decide on sending out a doctor, I must lose no time, as I must return to see this young fellow at Killaloe to-morrow."

"Oh, in my greater anxieties I forgot him. How is he?—will he recover?"

"Yes, I regard him as out of danger—that is, if Lady Trafford can be persuaded not to talk him into a relapse."

"Lady Trafford! who is she?"

"His mother; she arrived last night."

"And his name is Trafford, and his Christian name Lionel!"

"Lionel Wentworth Trafford. I took it from his dressing-case when I prescribed for him."

Lucy had been leaning on her arm as she spoke, but she now sank slowly backwards and fainted.

It was a long time before consciousness came back, and even then she lay voiceless and motionless; and though she heard what Beattie

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said to her, unable to speak to him, or intimate by a gesture that she heard him.

The Doctor needed no confidences—he read the whole story. There are expressions in the human face which have no reference to physical ills; nor are they indications of bodily suffering. He who asked, "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased?" knew how hopeless was his question; and this very despair it is—this sense of an affliction beyond the reach of art—gives a character to the expression which the doctor's eye never fails to discriminate from the look worn by malady.

As she lay there motionless, her large eyes looking at him with that expression in which eagerness struggles against debility, he saw how he had become her confidant.

"Come, my dear child," said he, taking her hand between both his own, "you have no occasion for fears on this score—so far, I assure you, on my honour."

She gave his hand a slight, a very slight, pressure, and tried to say something, but could not.

"I will go down now, and see what is to be done about your brother;" she nodded, and he continued, "I will pay you another visit to-morrow early, before I leave town, and let me find you strong and hearty; and remember, that though I force no confidences, Lucy, I will not refuse them if you offer."

"I have none, sir—none," said she in a voice of deep melancholy

"So that I know all that is to be known?" asked he.

"All, sir," said she, with a trembling lip.

"Well, accept me as a friend whom you may trust, my dear Lucy. If you want me I will not fail you; and if you have no need of me, there is nothing that has passed to-day between us ever to be remembered—you understand me?"

"I do, sir. You will come to-morrow—won't you?"

He nodded assent, and left her.

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN EXIT.

Colonel Sewell stood at the window of a small drawing-room he called "his own," watching the details of loading a very cumbrous travelling carriage which was drawn up before the door. Though the postilions were in the saddle, and all ready for a start, the process of putting up the luggage went on but slowly—now, a heavy imperial would be carried out, and after a while taken in again; dressing-boxes carefully stowed away would be disinterred to be searched for some missing article; bags, baskets, and boxes of every shape and sort came and went and came again: and although the two footmen who assisted these operations showed in various ways what length of training had taught them to submit to in worry and caprice, the smart "maid," who now and then appeared to give some order, displayed most unmistakable signs of ill-humour on her face. "Drat those dogs! I wish they were down the river!" cried she, to two yelping, barking Maltese terriers, which, with small bells jingling on their collars, made an uproar that was perfectly deafening.

"Well, Miss Morris, if it would oblige—— *you*" said one of the tall footmen as he caressed his whisker, and gave a very languishing look, more than enough, he thought, to supply the words wanting to his sentence.

"It would oblige *me* very much, Mr. George, to get away out of this horrid place. I never did—no, never—in all my life, pass such a ten days."

"We ain't a-going just yet, after all," said footman number two, with a faint yawn.

"It's so like you, Mr. Breggis, to say something disagreeable," said she, with a toss of her head.

"It's because it's true I say it, not because it's onpleasant, Miss Caroline."

"I'm not Miss Caroline, at least from you, Mr. Breggis."

"Ain't she haughty—ain't she fierce?" But his colleague would not assent to this judgment, and looked at her with a longing admiration.

"There's her bell again," cried the girl; "as sure as I live she's rung forty times this morning," and she hurried back to the house.

"Why do you think we're not off yet?" asked George.

"It's the way I heerd her talking that shows me," replied the other. "Whenever she's really about to leave a place she goes into them fits of laughing and crying and screaming one minute, and a-whimpering the next; and then she tells the people—as it were, unknownst to her—how she hated them all—how stingy they was—the shameful way they starved the servants, and suchlike. There's some as won't let her into their houses by reason of them fits, for she'll plump out everything she knows of a family—who ran away with the Missis, and why the second daughter went over to France."

"You know her better than me, Breggis."

"I do think I does; it's eight years I've had of it. Eh, what's that—wasn't that a screech?" and as he spoke a wild shrill scream resounded through the house, followed by a rapid succession of notes that might either have been laughter or crying.

Sewell drew the curtain; and wheeling an arm-chair to the fireside, lit his cigar and began to smoke.

The house was so small that the noises could be heard easily in every part of it; and for a time the rapid passage of persons overhead, and the voices of many speaking together, could be detected, and, above these, a wild shriek would now and then rise above all, and ring through the house. Sewell smoked on undisturbed; it was not easy to say that he so much as heard these sounds. His indolent attitude, and his seeming enjoyment of his cigar, indicated perfect composure; nor even when the door opened, and his wife entered the room, did he turn his head to see who it was.

"Can William have the pony to go into town?" asked she, in a half submissive voice.

"For what?"

"To tell Dr. Tobin to come out; Lady Trafford is taken ill."

"He can go on foot; I may want the pony."

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"She is alarmingly ill, I fear—very violent spasms; and I don't think there is any time to be lost."

"Nobody that makes such a row as that can be in any real danger."

"She is in great pain at all events."

"Send one of her own people—despatch one of the postboys—do what you like, only don't bore *me*."

She was turning to leave the room, when he called out—"I say, when the attack came on did she take the opportunity to tell you any pleasant little facts about yourself or your family?" She smiled faintly, and moved towards the door. "Can't you tell me, ma'am? has this woman been condoling with you over your hard fate and your bad husband? or has she discovered how that 'dear boy' up-stairs broke his head as well as his heart in your service?"

"She did ask me certainly if there wasn't a great friendship between you and her son," said she, with a tone of quiet disdain.

"And what did you reply?" said he, throwing one leg over the arm of the chair as he swung round to face her.

"I don't well remember. I may have said *you* liked *him*, or that *he* liked *you*. It was such a commonplace reply I made I forget it."

"And was that all that passed on the subject?"

"I think I'd better send for the doctor," said she, and left the room before he could stop her, though that such was his intention was evident from the way he arose from his chair with a sudden spring.

"You shall hear more of this, madam—by Heaven you shall!" muttered he, as he paced the room with rapid steps. "Who's that? come in," cried he, as a knock came to the door. "Oh, Balfour! is it you?"

"Yes; what the deuce is going on up-stairs? Lady Trafford appears to have gone mad."

"Indeed! how unpleasant!"

"Very unpleasant for your wife, I take it. She has been saying all sorts of unmannerly things to her this last hour—things that, if she weren't out of her reason, she ought to be thrown out of the window for."

"And why didn't you do so?"

"It was a liberty I couldn't think of taking in another man's house."

"Lord love you, I'd have thought nothing of it! I'm the best-natured fellow breathing. What was it she said?"

"I don't know how I can repeat them."

"Oh, I see, they reflect on *me*. My dear young friend, when you live to my age you will learn that anything can be said to anybody, provided it only be done by the 'third party.' Whatever the law rejects as evidence assumes in social life the value of friendly admonition. Go on and tell me who it is is in love with my wife."

Cool as Mr. Cholmondeley Balfour was, the tone of this demand staggered him.

"Art thou the man, Balfour?" said Sewell at last, staring at him with a mock frown.

"No, by Jove! I never presumed that far."

"It's the sick fellow, then, is the culprit?"

"So his mother opines. She is an awful woman! I was sitting with your wife in the small drawing-room when she burst into the room and cried out, 'Mrs. Sewell, is your name Lucy? for, if so, my son has been rambling on about you this last hour in a wonderful way: he has told me about fifty times that he wants to see you before he dies; and now that the doctor says he is out of danger he never ceases talking of dying. I suppose you have no objection to the interview; at least they tell me you were constantly in his room before my arrival.'"

"How did my wife take this?—what did she say?" asked Sewell, with an easy smile as he spoke.

"She said something about agitation or anxiety serving to excuse conduct which otherwise would be unpardonable; and she asked me to send her maid to her, as I think to get me away."

"Of course you rang the bell and sat down again."

"No: she gave me a look that said, I don't want you here, and I went; but the storm broke out again as I closed the door, and I heard Lady Trafford's voice raised to a scream as I came down-stairs."

"It all shows what I have said over and over again," said Sewell, slowly, "that whenever a man has a grudge or a grievance against a woman, he ought always to get another woman to torture her. I'll lay you fifty pounds Lady Trafford cut deeper into my wife's flesh by her two or three impertinences than if I had stormed myself into an apoplexy."

"And don't you mean to turn her out of the house?"

"Turn whom out?"

"Lady Trafford, of course."

"It's not so easily done, I suspect. I'll take to the long-boat myself one of these days, and leave her in command of the ship."

"I tell you she's a dangerous, a very dangerous woman; she has been ransacking her son's desk, and has come upon all sorts of ugly memoranda—sums lost at play, and reminders to meet bills, and suchlike."

"Yes; he was very unlucky of late," said Sewell, coldly.

"And there was something like a will, too; at least there was a packet of trinkets tied up in a paper, which purported to be a will, but only bore the name Lucy."

"How delicate! there's something touching in that, Balfour; isn't there?" said Sewell, with a grin. "How wonderfully you seem to have got up the case. You know the whole story How did you manage it?"

"My fellow Paxley had it from Lady Trafford's maid. She told him that her mistress was determined to show all her son's papers to the Chief Baron, and blow you sky high."

"That's awkward, certainly," said Sewell, in deep thought. "It would be a devil of a conflagration if two such combustibles came together. I'd rather she'd fight it out with my mother."

"Have you sent in your papers to the Horse Guards?"

"Yes; it's all finished. I am gazetted out, or I shall be on Tuesday."

"I'm sorry for it. Not that it signifies much as to this registrarship. We never intended to relinquish our right to it; we mean to throw

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the case into Chancery, and we have one issue already to submit to trial at bar."

"Who are *we* that are going to do all this?"

"The Crown," said Balfour, haughtily.

"*Ego et rex meus;* that's the style, is it? Come now, Balfy, if you're for a bet, I'll back my horse, the Chief Baron, against the field. Give me sporting odds, for he's aged, and must run in bandages besides."

"That woman's coming here at this moment was most unlucky."

"Of course it was; it wouldn't be *my* lot if it were anything else. I say," cried he, starting up, and approaching the window, "what's up now?"

"She's going at last, I really believe."

The sound of many and heavy footsteps was now heard descending the stair slowly, and immediately after two men issued from the door, carrying young Trafford on a chair; his arms hung listlessly at his side, and his head was supported by his servant.

"I wonder whose doing is this? has the doctor given his concurrence to it? how are they to get him into the coach? and what are they to do with him when he is there?" Such was the running commentary Balfour kept up all the time they were engaged in depositing the sick man in the carriage. Again a long pause of inaction ensued, and at last a tap came to the door of the room, and a servant enquired for Mr. Balfour.

"There!" cried Sewell, "it's *your* turn now. I only hope she'll insist on your accompanying her to town."

Balfour hurried out, and was seen soon afterwards escorting Lady Trafford to the carriage. Whether it was that she was not yet decided as to her departure, or that she had so many injunctions to give before going, the eventful moment was long delayed. She twice tried the seat in the carriage, once with cushions and then without. She next made Balfour try whether it might not be possible to have a sort of inclined plane to lie upon. At length she seemed overcome with her exertions, sent for a chair, and had a glass of water given her, to which her maid added certain drops from a phial.

"You will tell Colonel Sewell all I have said, Mr. Balfour," said she, aloud, as she prepared to enter the carriage. "It would have been more agreeable to me had he given me the opportunity of saying it to himself, but his peculiar notions on the duties of a host have prevented this. As to Mrs. Sewell, I hope and believe I have sufficiently explained myself. She at least knows my sentiments as to what goes on in this house. Of course, sir, it is very agreeable to *you*. Men of pleasure are not persons to be overburdened with scruples—least of all such scruples as interfere with self-indulgence. This sort of life is therefore charming; I leave you to all its delights, sir, and do not even warn you against its danger. I will not promise the same discretion, however, when I go hence. I owe it to all mothers who have sons, Mr. Balfour—I owe it to every family in which there is a name to be transmitted, and a fortune to be handed down, to declare what I have witnessed under this roof. No, Lionel; no, my dear boy; nothing shall prevent my speaking out." This was addressed to her son, who by a deep sigh seemed to protest against the sentiments he was not able to oppose. "It may suit Mr. Balfour's habits or his taste, to remain here—with these I have nothing to do. The Duke of Bayswater might, possibly, think his heir could keep better company—with that I have no concern; though when the matter comes to be discussed before me—as it one day will, I have no doubt—I shall hold myself free to state my opinon. Good-bye, sir; you will, perhaps, do me the favour to call at the Bilton; I shall remain till Saturday there; I have resolved not to leave Ireland till I see the Viceroy; and also have a meeting with this Judge, I forget his name, Lam—Lem —what is it? He is the chief something, and easily found."

A few very energetic words, uttered so low as to be inaudible to all but Balfour himself, closed this address.

"On my word of honour—on my sacred word of honour—Mr. Balfour," said she aloud, as she placed one foot on the step, "Caroline saw it—saw it with her own eyes. Don't forget all I have said; don't drop that envelope; be sure you come to see me." And she was gone.

"Give me five minutes to recover myself," said Balfour, as he entered Sewell's room, and threw himself on a sofa; "such a 'breather' as that I have not had for many a day."

"I heard a good deal of it," said Sewell, coolly. "She screams, particularly when she means to be confidential; and all that about my wife must have reached the gardener in the shrubbery. Where is she off to?"

"To Dublin. She means to see his Excellency and the Chief Baron; she says she can't leave Ireland till she has unmasked all your wickedness."

"She had better take a house on a lease then; did you tell her so?"

"I did nothing but listen—I never interposed a word. Indeed, she won't let one speak."

"I'd give ten pounds to see her with the Chief Baron. It would be such a 'close thing.' All his neat sparring would go for nothing against her: for though she hits wide, she can stand a deal of punishment without feeling it."

"She'll do you mischief there."

"She might," said he, more thoughtfully. "I think I'll set my mother at her; not that she'll have a chance, but just for the fun of the thing. What's the letter in your hand?"

"Oh, a commission she gave me. I was to distribute this amongst your household," and he drew forth a bank note. "Twenty pounds! you have no objection to it, have you?"

"I know nothing about it; of course you never hinted such a thing to me;" and with this he arose and left the room.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A STORMY MOMENT.

WITHIN a week after the first letter came a second from Cagliari. It was but half-a-dozen lines from Tom himself. "They are sending me off to a place called Maddalena, dearest Lucy, for change of air. The priest has given me his

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house, and I am to be Robinson Crusoe there, with an old hag for Friday—how I wish for you! Sir Brook can only come over to me occasionally, Look out for three rocks—they call them islands —off the N.E. of Sardinia; one of them is mine. —Ever your own, TOM L."

Lucy hastened down with this letter in her hand to her grandfather's room; but met Mr. Haire on the stairs, who whispered in her ear, "Don't go in just yet, my dear; he is out of sorts this morning; Lady Lendrick has been here, and a number of unpleasant letters have arrived, and it is better not to disturb him further."

"Will you take this note," said she, "and give it to him at any fitting moment? I want to know what I shall reply—I mean, I'd like to hear if grandpapa has any kind message to send the poor fellow."

"Leave it with me. I'll take charge of it, and come up to tell you when you can see the Judge." Thus saying, he passed on, and entered the room where the Chief Baron was sitting. The curtains were closely drawn, and in one of the windows the shutters were closed—so sensitive to light was the old man in his periods of excitement. He lay back in a deep chair, his eyes closed, his face slightly flushed, breathing heavily, and the fingers of one hand twitching slightly at moments; the other was held by Beattie, as he counted the pulse. "Dip that handkerchief in the cold lotion, and lay it over his forehead," whispered Beattie to Haire.

"Speak out, sir; that muttering jars on my nerves, and irritates me," said the Judge, in a slow firm tone.

"Come," said Beattie, cheerfully, "you are better now; the weakness has passed off."

"There is no weakness in the case, sir," said the old man, sitting bolt upright in the chair, as he grasped and supported himself by the arms. "It is the ignoble feature of your art to be materialist. You can see nothing in humanity but a nervous cord and a circulation."

"The doctor's ministry goes no further," said Beattie, gently.

"Your art is then but left-handed, sir. Where's Haire?"

"Here, at your side," replied Haire.

"I must finish my story, Haire. Where was it that I left off? Yes; to be sure—I remember now. This boy of Sewell's—Reginald Victor Sewell—was with my permission to take the name of Lendrick, and be called Reginald Victor Sewell Lendrick."

"And become the head of your house?"

"The head of my house and my heir. She did not say so, but she could not mean anything short of it."

"What has your son done to deserve this?" asked Haire, bluntly.

"My son's rights, sir, extend but to the modest fortune I inherited from my father. Whatever other property I possess has been acquired by my own ability and labour, and is mine to dispose of."

"I suppose there are other rights as well as those of the statute-book?"

"Listen to this, Beattie," cried the old Judge, with a sparkle of the eye—"listen to this dialectician, who discourses to me on the import of a word. It is not generous, I must say, to come down with all the vigour of his bright, unburdened faculties upon a poor weak and suffering object like myself. You might have waited, Haire, till I had at least the semblance of power to resist you."

"What answer did you give her?" asked Haire, bluntly.

"I said—what it is always safe to say—'Le roi s'avisera.' Eh, Beattie? this is the grand principle of your own craft. Medicine is very little else than 'the wisdom of waiting.' I told her," continued he, "I would think of it—that I would see the child. 'He is here,' said she, rising and leaving the room, and in a few moments returned, leading a little boy by the hand —a very noble-looking child, I will say, with a lofty head and a bold brow. He met me as might a prince, and gave his hand as though it were an honour he bestowed. What a conscious power there is in youth! Ay, sirs, that is the real source of all the much-boasted vigour and high-heartedness. Beattie will tell us some story of arterial action or nervous expansion; but the mystery lies deeper. The conscious force of a future development imparts a vigour that all the triumphs of after life pale before."

"'Fiat justitia ruat cœlum,'" said Haire— "I'd not provide for people out of my own family."

"It is a very neat though literal translation, sir, and, like all that comes from you, pointed and forcible."

"I'd rather be fair and honest than either," said Haire, bluntly.

"I appeal to you, Beattie, and I ask if I have deserved this;" and the old Judge spoke with an air of such apparent sincerity as actually to impose upon the Doctor. "The sarcasms of this man push my regard for him to the last intrenchment."

"Haire never meant it; he never intended to reflect upon you," said Beattie, in a low tone.

"He knows well enough that I did not," said Haire, half sulkily; for he thought the Chief was pushing his raillery too far.

"I'm satisfied," said the Judge, with a sigh.

"I suppose he can't help it. There are fencers who never believe they have touched you till they see the blood. Be it so; and now to go back. She went away and left the child with me, promising to take him up after paying a visit she had to make in the neighbourhood. I was not sorry to have the little fellow's company. He was most agreeable, and, unlike Haire, he never made me his butt. Well, I have done; I will say no more on that head. I was actually sorry when she came to fetch him, and I believe I said so. What does that grunt mean, Haire?"

"I did not speak."

"No, sir, but you uttered what implied an ironical assent—a *nisi prius* trick—like the leer I have seen you bestow upon the jury-box. How hard it is for the cunning man to divest himself of the subtlety of his calling!"

"I want to hear how it all ended," muttered Haire.

"You shall hear, sir, if you will vouchsafe me a little patience. When men are in the full vigour of their faculties, they should be tolerant to those foot-sore and weary travellers, who, like myself, halt behind and delay the march. But bear in mind, Haire, I was not always thus.

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There was a time when I walked in the van. Ay, sir, and bore myself bravely too. I was talking with that child when they announced Mr. Balfour, the private secretary, a man most distasteful to me; but I told them to show him in, curious indeed to hear what new form of compromise they were about to propose to me. He had come with a secret and confidential message from the Viceroy, and really seemed distressed at having to speak before a child of six years old, so mysterious and reserved was he. He made a very long story of it—full an hour; but the substance was this: The Crown had been advised to dispute my right of appointment to the registrarship, and to make a case for a jury; but—mark the 'but'—in consideration for my high name and great services, and in deference to what I might be supposed to feel from an open collision with the Government, they were still willing for an accommodation, and would consent to ratify any appointment I should make, other than that of the gentleman I had already named —Colonel Sewell.

"Self-control is not exactly the quality for which my friends give me most credit. Haire, there, will tell you I am a man of ungovernable temper, and who never even tried to curb his passion; but I would hope there is some injustice in this award. I became a perfect dove in gentleness, as I asked Balfour for the reasons which compelled his Excellency to make my stepson's exclusion from office a condition. 'I am not at liberty to state them,' was the cool reply. 'They are personal, and of course delicate?' asked I, in a tone of submission, and he gave a half assent in silence. I concurred—that is, I yielded the point. I went even further. I hinted, vaguely of course, at the courteous reserve by which his Excellency was willing to spare me such pain as an unpleasant disclosure —if there were such—might occasion me. I added, that old men are not good subjects for shocks; and I will say, sirs, that he looked at me as I spoke with a compassionate pity which won all my gratitude! Ay, Beattie, and though my veins swelled at the temples, and I felt a strange rushing sound in my ears, I had no fit, and in a moment or two was as calm as I am this instant.

"'Let me be clear upon this point,' said I to him. 'I am to nominate to the office any one except Sewell, and you will confirm such nomination?' 'Precisely,' replied he. 'Such act on my part in no way to prejudice whatever claim I lay to the appointment in perpetuity, or jeopardise any rights I now assert?' 'Certainly not,' said he. 'Write it,' said I, pushing towards him a pen and paper; and so overjoyed was he with his victorious negotiation, that he wrote, word for word, as I dictated. When I came to the name Sewell, I added, 'To whose nomination his Excellency demurs, on grounds of character and conduct sufficient in his Excellency's estimation to warrant such exclusion; but which, out of deference to the Chief Baron's feelings, are not set forth in this negotiation.' 'Is this necessary?' asked he, as he finished writing. 'It is,' was my reply; 'put your name at foot and the date,' and he did so.

"I now read over the whole aloud; he winced at the concluding lines, and said, 'I had rather, with your permission, erase these last words, for though I know the whole story, and believe it too, there's no occasion for entering on it here;'

"As he spoke, I folded the paper and placed it in my pocket. 'Now, sir,' said I, 'let *me* hear the story you speak of.' 'I cannot. I told you before I was not at liberty to repeat it.' I insisted, and he refused. There was a positive altercation between us, and he raised his voice in anger, and demanded back from me the paper, which he said I had tricked him into writing. I will not say that he meant to use force, but he sprang from his chair and came towards me with such an air of menace, that the boy, who was playing in the corner, rushed at him, and struck him with his drumstick, saying, 'You shan't beat grandpa!' I believe I rang the bell; yes, I rang the bell sharply. The child was crying when they came. I was confused and flurried. Balfour was gone."

"And the paper?" asked Haire.

"The paper is here, sir," said he, touching his breast-pocket. "The country shall ring with it, or such submission shall I exact as will bring that Viceroy and his minions to my feet in abject contrition. Were you to ask me now, I know not what terms I would accept of."

"I would rather you said no more at present," said Beattie. "You need rest and quietness."

"I need reparation and satisfaction, sir; that is what I need."

"Of course—of course; but you must be strong and well to enforce it," said Beattie.

"I told Lady Lendrick to leave the child with me. She said she would bring him back tomorrow. I like the boy. What does my pulse say, Beattie?"

"It says that all this talking and agitation are injurious to you—that you must be left alone."

The old man sighed faintly, but did not speak;

"Haire and I will take a turn in the garden, and be within call if you want us," said Beattie.

"Wait a moment—what was it I had to say? You are too abrupt, Beattie: you snap the cords of thought by such rough handling, and we old men lose our dexterous knack of catching the loose ends, as we once did. There, there—leave me now; the skein is all tangled in hopeless confusion." He waved his hand in farewell, and they left him.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A LADY'S LETTER.

"LUCY asked me to show him this note from her brother," said Haire, as he strolled with Beattie down the lawn. "It was no time to do so. Look over it and say what you advise."

"The boy wants a nurse, not a doctor," said Beattie. "A little care and generous diet would soon bring him round; but they are a strange race these Lendricks. They have all the stern qualities that brave danger, and they are terribly sensitive to some small wound to their self-love. Let that young fellow, for instance, only begin to feel that he is forgotten or an outcast, and he'll droop at once. A few kind words

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and a voice he loved, *now*, will do more than all my art could replace a little later"

"You mean that we ought to have him back here?" asked Haire, bluntly.

"I mean that he ought to be where he can be carefully and kindly treated."

"I'll tell the Chief you think so. I'll say that you dropped the remark to myself, of course—never meaning to dictate anything to *him*."

Beattie shook his head in sign of doubt.

"I know him well, better perhaps than any one, and I know there's no more generous man breathing; but he must not be coerced—he must not be even influenced, where the question be one for a decision. As he said to me one day—'I want the evidence, sir. I don't want your speech to it.'"

"There's the evidence, then," said Beattie—"that note with its wavering letters, weak and uncertain as the fingers that traced them—show him that. Say, if you like, that I read it, and thought the lad's case critical. If, after that, he wishes to talk to me on the subject, I'm ready to state my opinion. If the boy be like his father, a few tender words and a little show of interest for him will be worth all the tonics that ever were brewed."

"It's the grandfather's nature too; but the world has never known it—probably never will know it," said Haire.

"In that I agree with you," said Beattie, dryly.

"He regards it as a sort of weakness when people discover any act of generosity or any trait of kindliness about him; and do you know," added he, confidentially, "I have often thought that what the world regarded as irritability and sharpness was nothing more nor less than shyness—just shyness."

"I certainly never suspected that he was the victim of that quality."

"No, I imagine not. A man must know him as I do to understand it. I remember one day, long, long ago, I went so far as to throw out a half hint that I thought he laboured under this defect—he only smiled, and said, 'You suspect me of diffidence. I am diffident—no man more so, sir; but it is of the good or great qualities in other men.' Wasn't that a strange reply? I never very clearly understood it—do you?"

"I suspect I do; but here comes a message to us."

Haire spoke a word with the servant, and then turning to Beattie, said—"He wants to see me. I'll just step in, and be back in a moment."

Beattie promised not to leave till he returned, and strolled along by the side of a little brook which meandered tastefully through the greensward. He had fallen into a reverie—a curious inquiry within himself whether it were a boon or an evil for a man to have acquired that sort of influence over another mind which makes his every act and word seem praiseworthy and excellent. "I wonder is the Chief the better or the worse for this indiscriminating attachment? Does it suggest a standard to attain to? or does it merely minister to self-love and conceit? Which is it? which is it?" cried he aloud, as he stood and gazed on the rippling rivulet beside him.

"Shall *I* tell you?" said a low, sweet voice, and Lucy Lendrick slipped her arm within his as she spoke—"shall I tell you, Doctor?"

"Do, by all means."

"A little of both, I opine. Mind," said she, laughing, "I have not the vaguest notion of what you were balancing in your mind, but somehow I suspect unmixed good or evil is very rare, and I take my stand on a compromise. Am I right?"

"I scarcely know, but I can't submit the case to you. I have an old-fashioned prejudice against letting young people judge their seniors. Let us talk of something else. What shall it be?"

"I want to talk to you of Tom."

"I have just been speaking to Haire about him. We must get him back here, Lucy—we really must."

"Do you mean here, in this house, Doctor?"

"Here, in this house. Come, don't shake your head, Lucy. I see the necessity for it on grounds you know nothing of. Lady Lendrick is surrounding your grandfather with her family, and I want Tom back here just that the Chief should see what a thorough Lendrick he is. If your grandfather only knew the stuff that's in him, he'd be prouder of him than of all his own successes."

"No, no, no,—a thousand times no, Doctor! It would never do—believe me, it would never do. There are things which a girl may submit to in quiet obedience, which in a man would require subserviency. The Sewells, too, are to be here on Saturday, and who is to say what that may bring forth?"

"She wrote to you," said the Doctor, with a peculiar significance in his voice.

"Yes, a strange sort of note too. I almost wish I could show it to you,—I'd so like to hear what you'd say of the spirit of the writer."

"She told me she would write," said he again, with a more marked meaning in his manner.

"You shall see it," said she, resolutely; "here it is," and she drew forth the letter and handed it to him. For an instant she seemed as if about to speak, but suddenly, as if changing her mind, she merely murmured, "Read it, and tell me what you think of it."

The note ran thus:—

"MY DEAREST LUCY,—We are to meet to-morrow, and I hope and trust to meet like sisters who love each other. Let me make one brief explanation before that moment arrives. I cannot tell what rumours may have reached you of all that has happened here. I know nothing of what people say, nor have I the faintest idea how our life may have been represented. If you knew me longer and better, you would know that I neither make this ignorance matter of complaint nor regret. I have lived just long enough to take the world at its just value, and not to make its judgments of such importance as can impair my self-esteem and my comfort. It would, however, have been agreeable to me to have known what you may have heard of me—of us—as it is not impossible I might have felt the necessity to add something—to correct something—perhaps to deny something. I am now in the dark, and pray forgive me if I stumble rudely against you, where I only meant to salute you courteously.

"You at least know the great disaster which

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befell here. Dr. Beattie has told you the story —what more he may have said I cannot guess. If I were to wait for our meeting, I would not have to ask you. I should read it in your face, and hear it in every accent of your voice; but I write these few lines that you may know me at once in all frankness and openness, and know that if *you* be innocent of *my* secret, *I*, at least, have *yours* in my keeping. Yes, Lucy, I know all; and when I say all, I mean far more than you yourself know.

"If I were treacherous, I would not make this avowal to you. I should be satisfied with the advantages I possessed, and employ it to my benefit. Perhaps with any other woman than yourself I should play this part,—with you I neither can nor will. I will declare to you frankly and at once, you have lost the game and I have won it. That I say this thus briefly, is because in amplifying I should seem to be attempting to explain what there is no explaining. That I say it in no triumph, my own conscious inferiority to you is the best guarantee. I never would have dreamed of a rivalry had I been a girl. It is because I cannot claim the prize I have won it. It is because my victory is my misery I have gained it. I think I know your nature well enough to know that you will bear me no ill-will. I even go so far as to believe I shall have your compassion and your sympathy. I need them more, far more, than you know of. I could tell you that had matters fallen out differently it would not have been to *your* advantage, for there were obstacles—family obstacles—perfectly insurmountable. This is no pretence: on my honour I pledge to the truth of what I say. So long as I believed they might be overcome, I was in *your* interest, Lucy. You will not believe me, will you, if I swear it? Will you if I declare it on my knees before you?

"If I have not waited till we met to say these things, it is that we may meet with open hearts, in sorrow, but in sincerity. When I have told you everything, you will see that I have not been to blame. There may be much to grieve over, but there is nothing to reprehend—anywhere. And now, how is our future to be? it is for you to decide. I have not wronged you, and yet I am asking for forgiveness. Can you give me your love, and what I need as much, your pity? Can you forget your smaller affliction for the sake of my heavier one, for it is heavier?

"I plead guilty to one only treachery; and this I stooped to, to avoid the shame and disgrace of an open scandal. I told his mother that, though Lucy was my name, it was yours also; and that you were the Lucy of all his feverish wanderings. Your woman's heart will pardon me this one perfidy.

"She is a very dangerous woman in one sense. She has a certain position in the world, from which she could and would open a fire of slander on any one. She desires to injure me. She has already threatened, and she is capable of more than threatening. She says she will see Sir William. This she may not be able to do; but she can write to him. You know better than I do what might ensue from two such tempers meeting; for myself I cannot think of it.

"I have written you a long letter, dear Lucy when I only meant to have written five or six lines. I have not courage to read it over; were I to do so, I am sure I would never send it. Perhaps you will not thank me for my candour. Perhaps you will laugh at all my scrupulous honesty. Perhaps you will—no, that you never will—I mean, employ my trustfulness against myself.

"Who knows if I have not given to this incident an importance which you will only smile at? There are people so rich that they never are aware if they be robbed. Are you one of these, Lucy? and, if so, will you forgive the thief who signs herself your ever loving sister,

"LUCY SEWELL.

"I have told Dr. Beattie I would write to you; he looked as if he knew that I might, or that I ought—which is it? Doctors see a great deal more than they ought to see. The great security against them is, that they acquire an indifference to the sight of suffering, which, in rendering them callous, destroys curiosity, and then all ills that can neither be bled nor blistered they treat as trifles, and end by ignoring altogether. Were it otherwise—that is, had they any touch of humanity in their nature—they would be charming confidants, for they know everything, and can go everywhere. If Beattie should be one of your pets, I ask pardon for this impertinence; but don't forget it altogether, as one day or other, you will be certain to acknowledge its truth.

"We arrive by the four-forty train on Saturday afternoon. If I see you at the door when we drive up, I will take it as a sign I am forgiven."

Beattie folded the letter slowly, and handed it to Lucy without a word. "Tell me," said he, after they had walked on several seconds in silence—"tell me, do you mean to be at the door as she arrives?"

"I think not," said she, in a very low voice.

"She has a humble estimate of doctors; but there is one touch of nature she must not deny them—they are very sensitive about contagion. Now, Lucy, I wish with all my heart that you were not to be the intimate associate of this woman."

"So do I, Doctor; but how is it to be helped?"

He walked along silent and in deep thought.

"Shall I tell you, Doctor, how it can can be managed, but only by your help and assistance? I must leave this."

"Leave the Priory! but for where?"

"I shall go and nurse Tom: he needs *me*, Doctor, and I believe I need *him*; that is, I yearn after that old companionship which made all my life till I came here—— Come now, don't oppose this plan; it is only by your hearty aid it can ever be carried out. When you have told grandpapa that the thought is a good one, the battle will be more than half won. You see yourself I ought not to be here."

"Certainly not here with Mrs. Sewell; but there comes the grave difficulty of how you are

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to be lodged and cared for in that wild country where your brother lives?"

"My dear Doctor, I have never known pampering till I came here. Our life at home—and was it not happy!—was of the very simplest. To go back again to the same humble ways will be like a renewal of the happy past; and then Tom and I suit each other so well—our very capacities are kindred. Do say you like this notion, and tell me you will forward it."

"The very journey is an immense difficulty."

"Not a bit, Doctor; I have planned it all. From this to Marseilles is easy enough—only forty hours; once there, I either go direct to Cagliari, or catch the Sardinian steamer at Genoa——"

"You talk of these places as if they were all old acquaintances; but, my dear child, only fancy yourself alone in a foreign city. I don't speak of the difficulties of a new language."

"You might, though, my dear Doctor. My French and Italian, which carry me on pleasantly enough with Racine and Ariosto, will expose me sadly with my 'commissionnaire.'"

"But quite alone you cannot go—that's certain."

"I must not take a maid, that's as certain; Tom would only send us both back again. If you insist, and if grandpapa insists upon it, I will take old Nicholas; he thinks it a great hardship that he has not been carried away over seas to see the great world; and all his whims and tempers that tortured us as children will only amuse us now; his very tyranny will be good fun."

"I declare frankly," said the Doctor, laughing, "I do not see how the difficulties of foreign travel are to be lessened by the presence of old Nicholas; but are you serious in all this?"

"Perfectly serious, and fully determined on it, if I be permitted."

"When would you go?"

"At once; I mean as soon as possible. The Sewells are to be here on Saturday. I would leave on Friday evening by the mail-train for London. I would telegraph to Tom to say on what day he might expect me."

"To-day is Tuesday; is it possible you could be ready?"

"I would start to-night, Doctor, if you only obtain my leave."

"It is all a matter of the merest chance how your grandfather will take it," said Beattie, musing.

"But *you* approve? tell me you approve of it."

"There is certainly much in the project that I like. I cannot bear to think of your living here with these Sewells; my experience of them is very brief, but it has taught me to know there could be no worse companionship for you; but as these are things that cannot be spoken of to the Chief, let us see by what arguments we should approach him. I will go at once. Haire is with him, and he is sure to see that what I suggest has come from you. If it should be the difficulty of the journey your grandfather objects to, Lucy, I will go as far as Marseilles with you myself, and see you safely embarked before I leave you." She took his hand and kissed it twice, but was not able to utter a word.

"There, now, my dear child, don't agitate yourself; you need all your calm and all your courage. Loiter about here till I come to you, and I shall not be long."

"What a true kind friend you are!" said she, as her eyes grew dim with tears. "I am more anxious about this than I like to own, perhaps. Will you, if you bring me good tidings, make me a signal with your handkerchief?"

He promised this, and left her.

Lucy sat down under a large elm tree, resolving to wait there patiently for his return; but her fevered anxiety was such that she could not rest in one place, and was forced to rise and walk rapidly up and down. She imagined to herself the interview, and fancied she heard her grandfather's stern question—whether she were not satisfied with her home? What could he do more for her comfort or happiness than he had done? Oh, if he were to accuse her of ingratitude, how should she bear it? Whatever irritability he might display towards others, to herself he had always been kind, and thoughtful, and courteous.

She really loved him, and liked his companionship, and she felt that, if in leaving him she should consign him to solitude and loneliness, she could scarcely bring herself to go; but he was now to be surrounded with others, and if they were not altogether suited to him by taste or habit, they would, even for their own sakes, try to conform to his ways and likings.

Once more she bethought her of the discussion, and how it was faring. Had her grandfather suffered Beattie to state the case fully, and say all that he might in its favour? or had he, as was sometimes his wont, stopped him short with a peremptory command to desist? And then what part had Haire taken? Haire, for whose intelligence the old Judge entertained the lowest possible estimate, had somehow an immense influence over him, just as instincts are seen too strong for reason. Some traces of boyish intercourse yet survived and swayed his mind with consciousness of its power.

"How long it seems," murmured she. "Does this delay augur ill for success, or is it that they are talking over the details of the plan? Oh, if I could be sure of that! My poor dear Tom, how I long to be near you—to care for you—and watch you!" and as she said this, a cold sickness came over her, and she muttered aloud—"What perfidy it all is! as if I was not thinking of myself, and my own sorrows, while I try to believe I am but thinking of my brother." And now her tears streamed fast down her cheeks, and her heart felt as if it would burst. "It must be an hour since he left this," said she, looking towards the house, where all was still and motionless. "It is not possible that they are yet deliberating. Grandpapa is never long in coming to a decision. Surely all has been determined on before this, and why does he not come and relieve me from my miserable uncertainty?"

At last the hall door opened, and Haire appeared; he beckoned to her with his hand to come, and then re-entered the house. Lucy knew not what to think of this, and she could scarcely drag her steps along as she tried to hasten back. As she entered the hall, Haire met her, and, taking her hand cordially, said,

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"It is all right; only be calm, and don't agitate him. Come in now," and with this she found herself in the room where the old Judge was sitting, his eyes closed and his whole attitude betokening sleep. Beattie sat at his side and held one hand in his own. Lucy knelt down and pressed her lips to the other hand, which hung over the arm of the chair. Gently drawing away the hand, the old man laid it on her head, and in a low faint voice, said, "I must not look at you, Lucy, or I shall recall my pledge. You are going away!"

The young girl turned her tearful eyes towards him, and held her lips firmly closed to repress a sob, while her cheeks trembled with emotion.

"Beattie tells me you are right," continued he, with a sigh; and then, with a sort of aroused energy, he added, "But old age, amongst its other infirmities, fancies that right should yield to years. 'Ces sont les droits de la décrépitude,' as La Rochefoucauld calls them. I will not insist upon my 'royalties,' Lucy, this time. You shall go to your brother." His hand trembled as it lay on her head, and then fell heavily to his side. Lucy clasped it eagerly, and pressed it to her cheek. and all was silent for some seconds in the room.

At last the old man spoke, and it was now in a clear distinct voice, though weak. "Beattie will tell you everything, Lucy; he has all my instructions. Let him now have yours. To-morrow we shall, both of us, be calmer, and can talk over all together. To-morrow will be Thursday?"

"Wednesday, grandpapa."

"Wednesday—all the better, my dear child, another day gained. I say, beattie," cried he in a louder tone, "I cannot have fallen into the pitiable condition the newspapers describe, or I could never have gained this victory over my selfishness. Come, sir, be frank enough to own, that where a man combats himself, he asserts his identity. Haire will go out and give that as his own," muttered he; and as he smiled, he lay back, his breathing grew heavier and longer, and he sank into a quiet sleep.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

SOME CONJUGAL COURTESIES.

"You have not told me what she wrote to you," said Sewell to his wife, as he smoked his cigar at one side of the fire, while she read a novel at the other. It was to be their last evening at "The Nest;" on the morrow they were to leave for the Priory. "Were there any secrets in it, or were there allusions that I ought not to see?"

"Not that I remember," said she, carelessly.

"What about our coming? Does the old man seem to wish for it?—how does she herself take it?"

"She says nothing on the subject, beyond her regret at not being there to meet us."

"And why can't she? where will she be?"

"At sea, probably, by that time. She goes off to Sardinia to her brother."

"What! do you mean to that fellow who is living with Fossbrooke? Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I don't think I remembered it, or if I did, it's possible I thought it could not have much interest for you."

"Indeed, madam! do you imagine that the only things I care for are the movements of *your* admirers? Where's this letter? I'd like to see it."

"I tore it up. She begged me to do so when I had read it."

"How honourable! I declare you ladies conduct your intercourse with an integrity that would be positively charming to think of, if only your male friends were admitted to any share of the fair dealing. Tell me so much as you can remember of this letter."

"She spoke of her brother having had a fever, and being now better, but so weak and reduced as to require great care and attention, and obliged to remove for change of air to a small island off the coast."

"And Fossbrooke—does she mention *him*?"

"Only that he is not with her brother, except occasionally: his business detains him near Cagliari."

"I hope it may continue to detain him there! Has this young woman gone off all alone on this journey?"

"She has taken no maid. She said it might prove inconvenient to her brother; and has only an old family servant she calls Nicholas with her.

"So, then, we have the house to ourselves, so far. She'll not be in a hurry back, I take it. Anything would be better than the life she led with her grandfather."

"She seems sorry to part with him, and recurs three or four times to his kindness and affection."

"His kindness and affection! His vanity and self-love are nearer the mark. I thought I had seen something of conceit and affectation, but that old fellow leaves everything in that line miles behind. He is, without exception, the greatest bore and the most insupportable bully I ever encountered."

"Lucy liked him."

"She did not—she could not. It suits you women to say these things, because you cultivate hypocrisy so carefully that you carry on the game with each other! How could any one, let her be ever so abject, like that incessant homage this old man exacted—to be obliged to be alive to his vapid jokes and his dreary stories—to his twaddling reminiscences of college success, or House of Commons—Irish House too—triumphs? Do you think if I wasn't a beggar I'd go and submit myself to such a discipline?"

To this she made no reply, and for a while there was a silence in the room. At last he said, "*You'll* have to take up that line of character that *she* acted. *You'll* have to 'swing the incense' now. I'll be shot if *I* do."

She gave no answer, and he went on—"You'll have to train the brats too to salute him, and kiss his hand, and call him—what are they to call him—grandpapa? Yes, they must say

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grandpapa. How I wish I had not sent in my papers! If I had only imagined I could have planted you all here, I could have gone back to my regiment and served out my time."

"It might have been better," said she, in a low voice.

"Of course it would have been better; each of us would have been free, and there are few people, be it said, take more out of their freedom—eh, madam?"

She shrugged her shoulders carelessly, but a slight, a very slight, flush coloured her cheek.

"By the way, now we're on that subject, have you answered Lady Trafford's letter?"

"Yes," said she; and now her cheek grew crimson.

"And what answer did you send?"

"I sent back everything."

"What do you mean?—your rings and trinkets—the bracelet with the hair—mine, of course—it could be no one's but mine."

"All, everything," said she with a gulp.

"I must read the old woman's letter over again. You haven't burned *that*, I hope?"

"No; it's up-stairs in my writing-desk."

"I declare," said he, rising and standing with his back to the fire, "you women, and especially fine ladies, say things to each other that men never would dare to utter to other men. That old dame, for instance, charged you with what we male creatures have no equivalent for—cheating at play would be mild in comparison."

"I don't think that *you* escaped scot-free," said she, with an intense bitterness, though her tone was studiously subdued and low.

"No," said he, with a jeering laugh. "I figured as the accessory or accomplice, or whatever the law calls it. I was what polite French ladies call *le mari complaisant*—a part I am so perfect in, madam, that I almost think I ought to play it for 'my Benefit.' What do you say?"

"Oh, sir, it is not for me to pass an opinion on your abilities."

"I have less bashfulness," said he, fiercely. "I'll venture to say a word on *yours*. I've told you scores of times—I told you in India, I told you at the Cape, I told you when we were quarantined at Trieste, and I tell you now—that you never really captivated any man much under seventy. When they are tottering on to the grave, bald, blear-eyed, and deaf, you are perfectly irresistible; and I wish—really I say it in all good faith—you would limit the sphere of your fascinations to such very frail humanities. Trafford only became spoony after that smash on the skull; as he grew better, he threw off his delusions—didn't he?"

"So he told me," said she, with perfect calm.

"By Jove! that was a great fluke of mine," cried he aloud. "That was a hazard I never so much as tried. So that this fellow had made some sort of a declaration to you?"

"I never said so."

"What was it then that you *did* say, madam? let us understand each other clearly."

"Oh, I am sure we need no explanations for that," said she, rising, and moving towards the door.

"I want to hear about this before you go," said he, standing between her and the door.

"You are not going to pretend jealousy, are you?" said she, with an easy laugh.

"I should think not," said he, insolently. "That is about one of the last cares will ever rob me of my rest at night. I'd like to know, however, what pretext I have to send a ball through your young friend."

"Oh, as to that peril, it will not rob *me* of a night's rest!" said she, with such a look of scorn and contempt as seemed actually to sicken him, for he staggered back as though about to fall, and she passed out ere he could recover himself.

"It is to be no quarter between us then! Well, be it so," cried he, as he sank heavily into a seat. "She's playing a bold game when she goes thus far." He leaned his head on the table, and sat thus so long that he appeared to have fallen asleep; indeed, the servant who came to tell him that tea was served feared to disturb him, and retired without speaking. Far from sleeping, however, his head was racked with a maddening pain, and he kept on muttering to himself, "This is the second time—the second time she has taunted me with cowardice. Let her beware! Is there no one will warn her against what she is doing?"

"Missis says, please, sir, won't you have a cup of tea?" said the maid timidly at the door.

"No; I'll not take any."

"Missis says too, sir, that Miss Cary is tuk poorly, and has a shiverin' over her, and a bad headache, and she hopes you'll send in for Dr. Tobin."

"Is she in bed?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"I'll go up and see her;" and with this he arose and passed up the little stair that led to the nursery. In one bed a little dark-haired girl of about three years old lay fast asleep; in the adjoining bed a bright blue-eyed child of two years or less lay wide awake, her cheeks crimson, and the expression of her features anxious and excited. Her mother was bathing her temples with cold water as Sewell entered, and was talking in a voice of kind and gentle meaning to the child.

"That stupid woman of yours said it was Cary," said Sewell pettishly, as he gazed at the little girl.

"I told her it was Blanche; she has been heavy all day, and eaten nothing. No, pet—no, darling," said she, stooping over the sick child, "pa is not angry, he is only sorry that little Blanche is ill."

"I suppose you'd better have Tobin to see her," said he, coldly.

"I'll tell George to take the tax-cart and fetch him out. It's well it wasn't Cary," muttered he, as he sauntered out of the room. His wife's eyes followed him as he went, and never did a human face exhibit a stronger show of repressed passion than hers, as with closely-compressed lips and staring eyes, she watched him as he passed out.

"The fool frightened me—she said it was Cary," were the words he continued to mutter as he went down the stairs.

Tobin arrived in due time, and pronounced the case not serious—a mere feverish attack that

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only required a day or two of care and treatment.

"Have you seen Colonel Sewell?" said Mrs. Sewell, as she accompanied the doctor downstairs.

"Yes; I told him just what I've said to you."

"And what reply did he make?"

"He said, 'All right! I have business in town, and must start to-morrow. My wife and the chicks can follow by the end of the week.'"

"It's so like him!—so like him!" said she, as though the pent-up passion could no longer be restrained.

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CHAPTER XL.

MR. BALFOUR'S OFFICE.

On arriving in Dublin Sewell repaired at once to Balfour's office in the Castle-yard; he wanted to "hear the news," and it was here that every one went who wanted to "hear the news." There are in all cities, but more especially in cities of the second order, certain haunts where the men about town repair; where, like the changing-houses of bankers, people exchange their "credits"—take up their own notes, and give up those of their neighbours.

Sewell arrived before the usual time when people dropped in, and found Balfour alone and at breakfast. The Under-Secretary's manner was dry, so much Sewell saw as he entered; he met him as though he had seen him the day before, and this, when men have not seen each other for some time, has a certain significance. Nor did he ask when he had come up, nor in any way recognise that his appearance was matter of surprise or pleasure.

"Well, what's going on here?" said Sewell, as he flung himself into an easy-chair, and turned towards the fire. "Anything new?"

"Nothing particular. I don't suppose you care for the Cattle Show, or the Royal Irish Academy?"

"Not much—at least I can postpone my inquiries about them. How about my place here? are you going to give me trouble about it?"

"Your place—your place?" muttered the other once or twice; and then, standing up with his back to the fire, and his skirts over his arms, he went on. "Do you want to hear the truth about this affair? or are we only to go on sparring with the gloves—eh?"

"The truth, of course, if such a novel proceeding should not be too much of a shock to you."

"No, I suspect not. I do a little of everything every day just to keep my hand in."

"Well, go on now—out with this truth."

"Well, the truth is—I am now speaking confidentially—if I were you I'd not press my claim to that appointment—do you perceive?"

"I do not; but perhaps I may when you have explained yourself a little more fully."

"And," continued he in the same tone, and as though no interruption had occurred, "that's the opinion of Halkett, and Doyle, and Jocelyn, and the rest."

"Confidentially, of course," said Sewell, with a sneer so slight as not to be detected.

"I may say confidentially, because it was at dinner we talked it over, and we were only the household—no guest but Byam Herries and Barrington."

"And you all agreed?"

"Yes, there was not a dissentient voice but Jocelyn's, who said, if he were in your place, he'd insist on having all the papers and letters given up to him. His view is this. 'What security have I that the same charges are not to be renewed again and again? I submit now, but am I always to submit? Are my Indian'—(what shall I call them? I forget what he called them; I believe it was escapades)—'my Indian escapades to declare me unfit to hold anything under the Crown?' He said a good deal in that strain, but we did not see it. It was hard, to be sure, but we did not see it. As Halkett said, 'Sewell has had his innings already in India. If, with a pretty wife and a neat turn for billiards, he did not lay by enough to make his declining years comfortable, I must say that he was not provident.' Doyle, however, remarked that after that affair with Loftus up at Agra—wasn't it Agra?"—Sewell nodded—'It wasn't so easy for you to get along as many might think, and that you were a devilish clever fellow to do what you had done. Doyle likes you, I think." Sewell nodded again, and, after a slight pause, Balfour proceeded—"And it was Doyle, too, said, 'Why not try for something in the colonies? There are lots of places a man can go and nothing be ever heard of him. If I was Sewell, I'd say, Make me a barrack-master in the Sandwich Islands, or a consul in the Caraccas.'

"They all concurred in one thing, that you never did so weak a thing in your whole life as to have any dealings with Trafford. It was his mother went to the Duke—ay, into the private office at the Horse Guards—and got Clifford's appointment cancelled, just for a miserable five hundred pounds Jack won off the elder brother,—that fellow who died last year at Madeira. She's the most dangerous woman in Europe. She does not care what she says, nor to whom she says it. She'd go up to the Queen at a drawing-room and make a complaint as soon as she'd speak to you or me. As it is, she told their Excellencies here all that went on in your house, and I suppose scores of things that did not go on either, and said, 'And are you going to permit this man to be'—she did not remember what, but she said 'a high official under the Crown—and are you going to receive his wife amongst your intimates?' What a woman she is! To hear her you'd think her 'dear child,' instead of being a strapping fellow of six feet two, was a brat in knickerbockers, with a hat and feather. The fellow himself must be a consummate muff to be bullied by her; but then the estate is not entailed, they say, and there's a younger brother may come into it all. His chances look well just now, for Lionel has got a relapse, and the doctors think very ill of him."

"I had not heard that," said Sewell, calmly.

"Oh, he was getting on most favourably—was able to sit up at the window, and move a little about the room—when, one morning Lady Trafford had driven over to the Lodge to luncheon, he stepped down stairs, in his dress-

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ing-gown as he was, got into a cab, and drove off into the country. All the cabman could tell was that he ordered him to take the road to Rathfarnham, and said, 'I'll tell you by-and-by where to;' and at last he said, 'Where does Sir William Lendrick live?' and though the man knew the Priory, he had taken a wrong turn and got down to ask the road. Just at this moment a carriage drove by with two greys and a postilion. A young lady was inside with an elderly gentleman, and the moment Trafford saw her he cried out, 'There she is—that is she!' As hard as they could they hastened after; but they smashed a trace, and lost several minutes in repairing it, and as many more in finding out which way the carriage had taken. It was to Kingstown, and, as the cabman suspected, to catch the packet for Holyhead; for just as they drove up, the steamer edged away from the pier, and the carriage with the greys drove off with only the old man. Trafford fell back in a faint, and appeared to have continued so, for when they took him out of the cab at Bilton's he was insensible.

"Beattie says he'll come through it, but Maclin thinks he'll never be the same man again; he'll have a hardening or a softening—which is it?—of the brain, and that he'll be fit for nothing."

"But a place in the viceregal household, perhaps. I don't imagine you want gold-medallists for your gentlemen-in-waiting?"

"We have some monstrous clever fellows, let me tell you. Halkett made a famous examination at Sandhurst, and Jocelyn wrote that article in *Bell's Life*, 'The Badger Drawn at last.'"

"To come back to where we were, how are you to square matters with the Chief Baron? Are you going to law with him about this appointment, or are you about to say that *I* am the objection? Let me have a definite answer to this question."

"We have not fully decided; we think of doing either; and we sometimes incline to do both. At all events, you are not to have it; that's the only thing certain."

"Have you got a cigar? No, not these things; I mean something that can be smoked?"

"Try this," said Balfour, offering his case.

"They're the same as those on the chimney. I must say, Balfour, the traditional hospitalities of the Castle are suffering in their present hands. When I dined here the last time I was in town they gave me two glasses of bad sherry and one glass of a corked Gladstone; and I came to dinner that day after reading in Barrington all about the glorious festivities of the Irish Court in the olden days of Richmond and Bedford."

"Lady Trafford insists that your names—your wife's as well as your own—are to be scratched from the dinner-list. Sir Hugh has three votes in the House, and she bullies us to some purpose, I can tell you. I can't think how you could have made this woman so much your enemy. It is not dislike—it is hatred."

"Bad luck, I suppose," said Sewell, carelessly.

"She seems so inveterate, too; she'll not give you up very probably."

"Women generally don't weary in this sort of pursuit."

"Couldn't you come to some kind of terms? Couldn't you contrive to let her know that you have no designs on her boy? You've won money of him, haven't you?"

"I have some bills of his—not for a very large amount, though; you shall have them a bargain."

"I seldom speculate," was the dry rejoinder.

"You are right; nor is this the case to tempt you."

"They'll be paid, I take it?"

"Paid! I'll swear they shall!" said Sewell, fiercely. "I'll stand a deal of humbug about dinner invitations, and cold salutations, and suchlike; but none, sir, not one, about what touches a material interest."

"It's not worth being angry about," said Balfour, who was really glad to see the other's imperturbability give way.

"I'm not angry. I was only a little impatient, as a man may be when he hears a fellow utter a truism as a measure of encouragement. Tell your friends—I suppose I must call them your friends—that they make an egregious mistake when they push a man like me to the wall. It is intelligible enough in a woman to do it; women don't measure their malignity, nor their means of gratifying it; but *men* ought to know better."

"I incline to think I'll tell my 'friends' nothing whatever on the subject."

"That's as you please; but remember this—if the day should come that I need any of these details you have given me this morning, I'll quote them, and you too, as their author; and if I bring an old house about your ears, look out sharp for a falling chimney-pot!

"You gave me a piece of advice a while ago," continued he, as he put on his hat before the glass, and arranged his necktie. "Let me repay you with two, which you will find useful in their several ways: Don't show your hand when you play with as shrewd men as myself; and, Dont' offer a friend such execrable tobacco as that on the chimney;" and with this he nodded and strolled out, humming an air as he crossed the Castle-yard, and entered the city.

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CHAPTER XLI.

THE PRIORY IN ITS DESERTION.

THE old Judge was very sad after Lucy's departure from the Priory. While she lived there they had not seen much of each other, it is true. They met at meal times, and now and then Sir William would send up the housekeeper to announce a visit from him; but there is a sense of companionship in the consciousness that under the same roof with you dwells one upon whose affection you can draw—whose sympathy will be with you in your hour of need; and this the old man now felt to be wanting; and he wandered restlessly about the house and the garden, tenacious to see that nothing she liked or loved was threatened with any change, and repeating to all that she must find everything as she left it, when she came back again.

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Sewell had been recalled to the country by the illness of his child, and they were not expected at the Priory for at least a week or two longer. Haire had gone on circuit, and even Beattie the Judge only saw hurriedly, and at long intervals. With Lady Lendrick he had just had a most angry correspondence, ending in one of those estrangements which, had they been nations instead of individuals, would have been marked by the recall of their several envoys, but which they were satisfied to signalize by an order at the Priory gate-lodge not to admit her ladyship's carriage, and an equally determined command at Merrion Square for the porter to take in no letters that came from the Chief Baron.

Lest the world should connect this breach with any interest in my story, I may as well declare at once the incident had no possible bearing upon it. It was a little episode entirely self-contained, and consisted in Lady Lendrick having taken advantage of Sir William's illness and confinement to house, to send for and use his carriage-horses—a liberty which he resented by a most furious letter, to which the rejoinder begat another infinitely more sarcastic—the correspondence ending by a printed notice which her ladyship received in an envelope, that the Chief Baron's horses would be sold on the ensuing Saturday at Dycer's to the highest bidder, his lordship having no further use for them.

Let me own that the old Judge was sincerely sorry when this incident was concluded. So long as the contest lasted, while he was penning his epistle or waiting for the reply, his excitement rallied and sustained him. He used to sit after the despatch of one of his cutting letters calculating with himself the terror and consternation it produced, just as the captain of a frigate might have waited with eager expectancy that the smoke might drift away and show him the shattered spars or the yawning bulwarks of his enemy. But when his last missive was returned unopened, and the messenger reported that the doctor's carriage was at her ladyship's door as he came away, the Judge collapsed at once, and all the dreariness of his deserted condition closed in upon him.

Till Sewell returned to town, Sir William resolved not to proceed farther with respect to the registrarship. His plan, long determined upon, was to induct him into the office, administer the oaths, and leave him to the discharge of the duties. The scandal of displacing an official would, he deemed, be too great a hazard for any Government to risk. At all events, if such a conflict came, it would be a great battle, and with the nation for spectators.

"The country shall ring with it," was the phrase he kept repeating over and over as he strolled through his neglected garden or his leafy shrubberies; but as he plodded along, alone and in silence, the dreary conviction would sometimes shoot across his mind that he had run his race, and that the world had well-nigh forgotten him. "In a few days more," sighed he out, "it will be over, and I shall be chronicled as the last of them." And for a moment it would rally him to recall the glorious names with which he claimed companionship, and compare them—with what disparagement!—with the celebrities of the time.

It was strange how bright the lamp of intellect would shine out as the wick was fast sinking in the socket. His memory would revive some stormy scene in the House, some violent altercation at the Bar, and all the fiery eloquence of passion would recur to him, stirring his heart and warming his blood, till he half forgot his years, and stood forth, with head erect and swelling chest, strong with a sense of power and a whole soulful of ambition.

"Beattie would not let me take my Circuit," would he say. "I wish he saw me to-day. Decaying powers! I would tell them that the Coliseum is grander in its ruin than all their stuccoed plastering in its trim propriety. Had he suffered me to go, the grand jury would have heard a charge such as men's ears have not listened to since Avonmore! Avonmore! what am I saying?—Yelverton had not half my law, nor a tenth part of my eloquence."

In his self-exaltation he began to investigate whether he was greater as an advocate or as prosecutor. How difficult to decide! After all, it was in the balance of the powers thus displayed that he was great as a judge. He recalled the opinions of the press when he was raised to the bench, and triumphantly asked aloud, had he not justified every hope and contradicted every fear that was entertained of him? "Has my learning made me intolerant, or my brilliancy led me into impatience? Has the sense of superiority that I possess rendered me less conciliatory? Has my 'impetuous genius'—how fond they were of that phrase!—carried me away into boundless indiscretions? and have I, as one critic said, so concentrated the attention of the jury on myself that the evidence went for nothing and the charge was everything."

It was strange how these bursts of inordinate vanity and self-esteem appeared to rally and invigorate the old man—redressing, as it were, the balance of the world's injustice—such he felt it—towards him. They were like a miser's hoard, to be counted and recounted in secret with that abiding assurance that he had wealth and riches, however others might deem him poor.

It was out of these promptings of self-love that he drew the energetic powers that sustained him, broken and failing and old as he was.

Carried on by his excited thoughts, he strayed away to a little mound, on which, under a large weeping ash, a small bench was placed, from which a wide view extended over the surrounding country. There was a tradition of a summer-house on the spot in Curran's day, and it was referred to more than once in the diaries and letters of his friends, and the old Chief loved the place, as sacred to great memories.

He had just toiled up the ascent, and gained the top, when a servant came to present him with a card and a letter, saying that the gentleman who gave them was then at the house. The card bore the name—"Captain Trafford, —th Regiment." The letter was of a few lines, and ran thus:—

"My dear Sir William,—I had promised my friend and late patient Captain Trafford to take him over to the Priory this morning and present him to you. A sudden call has now

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ever, frustrated the arrangement, and as his time is very brief, I have given him this as a credential to your acquaintance, and I hope you will permit him to stroll through the garden and the shrubberies, which he will accept as a great favour. I especially beg that you will lay no burthen on your own strength to become his entertainer: he will be amply gratified by a sight of your belongings, of which he desires to carry the memory beyond seas.—Believe me very sincerely yours,

"J. Beattie."

"If the gentleman who brought this will do me the favour to come up here, say I shall be happy to see him."

As the servant went on his message, the old man lay back on his seat, and, closing his eyes, muttered some few dropping words, implying his satisfaction at this act of reverential homage. "A young soldier too; it speaks well for the service when the men of action revere the men of thought. I am glad it is a good day with me; he shall carry away other memories than of woods and streams. Ah! here he comes."

Slowly, and somewhat feebly, Trafford ascended the hill, and with a most respectful greeting approached the Judge.

"I thank you for your courtesy in coming here, sir," said the Chief, "and when we have rested a little I will be your *Cicerone* back to the house." The conversation flowed on pleasantly between them, Sir William asking where Trafford had served, and what length of time he had been in Ireland—his inquiries evidently indicating that he had not heard of him before, or if he had, had forgotten him.

"And now you are going to Malta?"

"Yes, my lord; we sail on the 12th."

"Well, sir, Valetta has no view to rival that. See what a noble sweep the bay takes here, and mark how well the bold headlands define the limits! Look at that stretch of yellow beach, like a golden fillet round the sea; and then mark the rich woods waving in leafy luxuriance to the shore! Those massive shadows are to landscape what times of silent thought are to our moral natures. Do you like your service, sir?"

"Yes, my lord, there is much in it that I like. I would like it all if it were in 'activity.'"

"I have much of the soldier in myself, and the qualities by which I have gained any distinction I have won are such as make generals—quick decision, rapid intelligence, prompt action."

Trafford bowed to this pretentious summary, but did not speak.

The old Judge went on to describe what he called the military mind, reviewing in turn the generals of note from Hannibal down to Marlborough. "What have they left us by way of legacy, sir? The game, lost or won, teaches us as much! Is not a letter of Cicero, is not an ode of Horace, worth it all? And as for battle-fields, it is the painter, not the warrior, has made them celebrated. Wouvermans has done more for war than Turenne!"

"But, my lord, there must be a large number of men like myself, who make very tolerable soldiers, but who would turn out sorry poets or poor advocates."

"Give me your arm now, and I will take you round by the fish-pond, and show you where the 'Monks of the Screw' held their first meeting. You have heard of that convivial club?" Trafford bowed; and the Judge went on to tell of the strange doings of those grave and thoughtful men, who deemed no absurdity too great in their hours of distraction and levity. When they reached the house the old man was so fatigued that he had to sit down in the porch to rest. "You have seen all, sir; all I have of memorable. You say you'd like to see the garden, but there is not a memory connected with it See it, however, by all means; saunter about it till I have rallied a little, and then join me at my early dinner. I'll send to tell you when it is ready. I am sorry it will be such a lonely meal; but she who could have thrown sunshine over it is gone—gone!" And he held his hands over his face, and said no more. Trafford moved silently away, and went in search of the garden. He soon found the little wicket, and ere many minutes was deep in the leafy solitude of the neglected spot. At last he came upon the small gate in the laurel hedge, passing through which he entered the little flower-garden. Yes, yes; there was no doubting it! This was hers! Here were the flowers she tended; here the heavy bells from which she emptied the rain-drops; here the tendrils her own hands had trailed! Oh, force of love, that makes the very ground holy, and gives to every leaf and bud an abiding value! He threw himself upon the sward and kissed it. There was a little seat under a large ilex—how often had she sat there thinking!—could it be thinking over the days beside the Shannon—that delicious night they came back from Holy Island, the happiest of all his life? Oh, if he could believe that she loved him; if he could only know that she did not think of him with anger and resentment!—for she might; who could tell what might have been said of his life at the Sewells'? He had made a confidant of one who assumed to misunderstand him, and who overwhelmed him with a confession of her own misery, and declared she loved him; and this while he lay in a burning fever, his head racked with pain, and his mind on the verge of wandering. Was there ever a harder fate than his? That he had forfeited the affection of his family, that he had wrecked his worldly fortunes, seemed little in his eyes to the danger of being thought ill of by her he loved.

His father's last letter to him had been a command to leave the army and return home, to live there as became the expectant head of the house. "I will have your word of honour to abandon this ignoble passion"—so he called his love; "and, in addition, your solemn pledge never to marry an Irishwoman." These words were, he well knew, supplied by his mother. It had been the incessant burthen of her harangues to him during the tedious days of his recovery, and even when on the morning of this very day, she had been suddenly recalled to England by a severe attack of illness of her husband, her last act before departure was to write a brief note to Lionel, declaring that if he should not follow her within a week, she would no longer conceive herself bound to maintain his interests against those of his more obedient and more affectionate brother.

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"Won't that help my recovery, Doctor?" said he, showing the kind and generous epistle to Beattie. "Are not these the sort of tonic stimulants your art envies?"

Beattie shook his head in silence, and, after a long pause, said, "Well, what was your reply to this?"

"Can you doubt it? Don't you know it; or don't you know *me?*"

"Perhaps I guess."

"No, but you're certain of it, Doctor. The regiment is ordered to Malta, and sails on the 12th. I go with them! Holt is a grand old place, and the estate is a fine one; I wish George every luck with both. Will you do me a favour—a great favour?"

"If in my power, you may be certain I will. What is it?"

"Take me over to the Priory; I want to see it. You can find some pretext to present me to the Chief Baron, and obtain his leave to wander through the grounds."

"I perceive—I apprehend," said Beattie, slyly. "There is no difficulty in this. The old Judge cherishes the belief that the spot is little short of sacred; he only wonders why men do not come as pilgrims to visit it. There is a tradition of Addison having lived there, while Secretary in Ireland; Curran certainly did; and a greater than either now illustrates the locality."

It was thus that Trafford came to be there; with what veneration for the haunts of genius let the reader picture to himself!

"His lordship is waiting dinner, sir," said a servant, abruptly, as he sat there—thinking, thinking—and he arose and followed the man to the house.

The Chief Baron had spent the interval since they parted in preparing for the evening's display. To have for his guest a youth so imbued with reverence for Irish genius and ability, was no common event. Young Englishmen, and soldiers, too, were not usually of this stuff; and the occasion to make a favourable impression was not to be lost.

When he entered the dinner-room, Trafford was struck by seeing that the table was laid for three, though they were but two; and that on the napkin opposite to where he sat a small bouquet of fresh flowers was placed.

"My granddaughter's place, sir," said the old Judge, as he caught his eye. "It is reserved for her return. May it be soon!"

How gentle the old man's voice sounded as he said this, and how kindly his eyes beamed! Trafford thought there was something actually attractive in his features, and wondered he had not remarked it before.

Perhaps on that day, when the old Judge well knew how agreeable he was, what stores of wit and pleasantry he was pouring forth, his convictions assured him that his guest was charmed. It was a very pardonable delusion—he talked with great brilliancy and vigour. He possessed the gift—which would really seem to be the especial gift—of Irishmen of that day, to be a perfect relater. To a story he imparted that slight dash of dramatic situation and dialogue that made it life-like; and yet never retarded the interest nor prolonged the catastrophe. Acute as was his wit, his taste was fully as conspicuous, never betraying him for an instant, so long as his personal vanity could be kept out of view.

Trafford's eager and animated attention showed with what pleasure he listened; and the Chief, like all men who love to talk, and know they talk well, talked all the better for the success vouchsafed to him. He even arrived at that stage of triumph in which he felt that his guest was no common man, and wondered if England really turned out many young fellows of this stamp—so well read, so just, so sensible, so keenly alive to nice distinction, and so unerring in matters of taste?

"You were schooled at Rugby, sir, you told me; and Rugby has reason to be proud if she can turn out such young men. I am only sorry Oxford should not have put the fine edge on so keen an intellect."

Trafford blushed at a compliment he felt to be so unmerited, but the old man saw nothing of his confusion—he was once again amongst the great scenes and actors of his early memories.

"I hope you will spare me another day before you leave Ireland. Do you think you could give me Saturday?" said the Chief, as his guest arose to take leave.

"I am afraid not, my lord; we shall be on the march by that day."

"Old men have no claim to use the future tense, or I should ask you to come and see me when you come back again."

"Indeed will I. I cannot thank you enough for having asked me."

"Why are there not more young men of that stamp?" said the old Judge, as he looked after him as he went. "Why are they not more generally cultivated and endowed as he is? It is long since I have found one more congenial to me in every way. I must tell Beattie I like his friend. I regret not to see more of him."

It was in this strain Sir William ruminated and reflected; pretty much like many of us, who never think our critics so just or so appreciative as when they applaud ourselves.

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CHAPTER XLII.

NECESSITIES OF STATE.

It is, as regards views of life and the world, a somewhat narrowing process to live amongst sympathisers, and it may be assumed as an axiom, that no people so much minister to a man's littleness as those who pity him.

Now, when Lady Lendrick separated from Sir William, she carried away with her a large following of sympathisers. The Chief Baron was well known; his haughty overbearing temper at the bar, his assuming attitude in public life, his turn for sarcasm and epigram, had all contributed to raise up for him a crowd of enemies; and these, if not individually well-disposed to Lady Lendrick, could at least look compassionately on one whose conjugal fate had been so unfortunate. All *her* shortcomings were lost sight of in presence of *his* enormities, for

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the Chief Baron's temper was an Aaron's rod of irascibility, which devoured every other; and when the verdict was once passed, that "no woman could live with him," very few women offered a word in his defence.

It is just possible, that if it had not been for this weight in the opposite scale, Lady Lendrick herself would not have stood so high. Sir William's faults, however, were accounted to her for righteousness, and she traded on a very pretty capital in consequence. Surrounded by a large circle of female friends, she lived in a round of those charitable dissipations by which some people amuse themselves; and just as dull children learn their English history through a game, and acquire their geography through a puzzle, these grown-up children take in their Christianity by means of deaf and dumb bazaars, balls for blind institutions, and private theatricals for an orphan asylum. This Devotion made easy to the Lightest Disposition, is not, perhaps, a bad theory—at least it does not come amiss to an age which likes to attack its gravest ills in a playful spirit, to treat consumption with cough lozenges, and even moderate the excesses of insanity by soft music. There is another good feature, too, in the practice: it furnishes occupation and employment to a large floating class which, for the interests and comforts of society, it is far better should be engaged in some pursuit, than left free to the indulgence of censorious tastes and critical habits. Lady Lendrick lived a sort of monarch amongst these. She was the patroness of this, the secretary of that, and the corresponding member of some other society. Never was an active intelligence more actively occupied; but she liked it all, for she liked power, and, strange as it may seem, there is in a small way an exercise of power even in these petty administrations. Loud, bustling, overbearing, and meddlesome, she went everywhere, and did everything. The only sustaining hope of those she interfered with was, that she was too capricious to persist in any system of annoyance, and was prone to forget to-day the eternal truths she had propounded for reverence yesterday.

I am not sure that she conciliated—I am not sure that she would have cared for—much personal attachment; but she had what certainly she did like, a large following of very devoted supporters. All her little social triumphs—and occasionally she had such—were blazoned abroad by those people who loved to dwell on the courtly attentions bestowed upon their favourite, what distinguished person had taken her "down" to dinner, and the neat compliment that the Viceroy paid her on the taste of her "tabinet."

It need scarcely be remarked, that the backwater of all this admiration for Lady Lendrick was a swamping tide of ill-favour for her husband. It would have been hard to deny him ability and talent. But what had he made of his ability and talent. The best lawyer of the bar was not even Chief-Justice of the Queen's Bench. The greatest speaker and scholar of his day was unknown, except in the reminiscences of a few men almost as old as himself. Was the fault in himself, or was the disqualifying element of his nature the fact of being an Irishman? For a number of years the former theory satisfied all the phenomena of the case, and the restless, impatient disposition—irritable, uncertain, and almost irresponsible—seemed reason enough to deter the various English officials who came over from either seeking the counsels or following the suggestions of the Bold Baron of the Exchequer. A change, however, had come, in part induced by certain disparaging articles of the English press, as to the comparative ability of the two countries; and now it became the fashion to say, that had Sir William been born on the sunnier side of St. George's Channel, and had his triumphs been displayed at Westminster instead of the Four Courts, there would have been no limit to the praise of his ability as a lawyer, nor any delay in according him the highest honours the Crown could bestow.

Men shook their heads—recalled the memorable "curse" recorded by Swift, and said, "Of course there is no favour for an Irishman." It is not the place nor the time to discuss this matter here. I would only say that a good deal of the misconception which prevails upon it is owing to the fact, that the qualities which win all the suffrages of one country are held cheaply enough in the other. Plodding unadorned ability, even of a high order, meets little favour in Ireland, while on the other side of the Channel Irish quickness is accounted as levity, and the rapid appreciation of a question without the detail of long labour and thought, is set down as the lucky hit of a lively but very idle intelligence. I will not let myself wander away further in this digression, but come back to my story. Connected with this theory of Irish depreciation, was the position, that but for the land of his birth, Sir William would have been elevated to the peerage.

Of course it was a subject to admit of various modes of telling, according to the tastes, the opportunities, and the prejudices of the tellers. The popular version of the story, however, was this: that Sir William declined to press a claim that could not have been resisted, on account of the peculiarly retiring, unambitious character of him who should be his immediate successor. His very profession—adopted and persisted in, in despite of his father's wish—was a palpable renunciation of all desire for hereditary honour. As the old Judge said, "The *Libro d' Oro* of nobility is not the Pharmacopœia;" and the thought of a doctor in the peerage might have cost "Garter" a fit of apoplexy.

Sir William knew this well—no man better; but the very difficulties gave all the zest and all the flavour to the pursuit. He lived, too, in the hope that some Government official might have bethought him of this objection, that he might spring on him, tiger-like, and tear him in fragments.

"Let them but tell me this," muttered he, "and I will rip up the whole woof, thread by thread, and trace them! The noble Duke, whose ancestor was a Dutch pedlar, the illustrious Marquess whose great-grandfather was a smuggler, will have to look to it. Before this cause be called on I would say to them, Better to retain me for the Crown! Ay, sirs, such is my advice to you."

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While these thoughts agitated Sir William's mind, the matter of them was giving grave and deep preoccupation to the Viceroy. The Cabinet had repeatedly pressed upon him the necessity of obtaining the Chief Baron's retirement from the bench—a measure the more imperative, that while they wanted to provide for an old adherent, they were equally anxious to replace him in the House by an abler and readier debater; for so is it, when dulness stops the way, dulness must be promoted; just as the most tumble-down old hackney coach must pass on before my Lord's carriage can draw up.

"Pemberton must go up," said the Viceroy. He made a horrid mess of that explanation t'other night in the House. His law was laughed at, and his logic was worse; he really must go on the bench. Can't you hit upon something, Balfour? Can you devise nothing respecting the Chief Baron?"

"He'll take nothing but what you won't give him; he insists on the peerage."

"I'd give it, I declare—I'd give it to-morrow. As I told the Premier t'other day, Providence always takes care that these Law Lords have rarely successors. They are life peerages and no more; besides, what does it matter a man more or less in 'the Lords'? The Peer without hereditary rank and fortune is like the officer who has been raised from the ranks—he does not dine at mess oftener than he can help it."

Balfour applauded the illustration, and resolved to use it as his own.

"I say again," continued his Excellency, "I'd give it, but they won't agree with me; they are afraid of the English Bar—they dread what the benchers of Lincoln's Inn would say."

"They'd only say it for a week or two," mumbled Balfour.

"So I remarked: you'll have discontent, but it will be passing. Some newspaper letters will appear, but Themis and Aristides will soon tire, and if they should not, the world who reads them will tire; and probably the only man who will remember the event three months after will be the silversmith who is cresting the covered dishes of the new creation. You think you can't go and see him, Balfour?"

"Impossible, my lord, after what occurred between us the last time."

"I don't take it in that way. I suspect he'll not bear any malice. Lawyers are not thin-skinned people; they give and take such hard knocks that they lose that nice sense of injury other folks are endowed with. I think you might go."

"I'd rather not, my lord," said he, shaking his head.

"Try his wife, then."

"They don't live together. I don't know if they are on speaking terms."

"So much the better—she'll know every chink of his armour, and perhaps tell us where he is vulnerable. Wait a moment. There has been some talk of a picnic on Dalkey Island. It was to be a mere household affair. What if you were to invite her?—making of course the explanation that it was a family party, that no cards had been sent out; in fact, that it was to be so close a thing the world was never to hear of it."

"I think the bait would be irresistible, particularly when she found out that all her own set and dear friends had been passed over."

"Charge her to secresy—of course she'll not keep her word."

"May I say we'll come for her?—the great mystery will be so perfectly in keeping with one of the household carriages and your Excellency's liveries."

"Won't that be too strong, Balfour?" said the Viceroy, laughing.

"Nothing is too strong, my lord, in this country. They take their blunders neat as they do their sherry, and I am sure that this part of the arrangement will, in the gossip it will give rise to, be about the best of the whole exploit."

"Take your own way, then; only make no such mistake as you made with the husband. No documents, Balfour—no documents, I beg;" and with this warning laughingly given, but by no means so pleasantly taken, his Excellency went off and left him.

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CHAPTER XLIII.

MR. BALFOUR'S MISSION.

LADY LENDRICK was dictating to her secretary, Miss Morse, the Annual Report of the Benevolent Ballad-singers' Aid Society, when her servant announced the arrival of Mr. Cholmondeley Balfour. She stopped abruptly short at a pathetic bit of description—"The aged minstrel, too old for erotic poetry, and yet debarred by the stern rules of a repressive policy from the strains of patriotic song,"—for, be it said parenthetically, Lady Lendrick affected "Irishry" to a large extent—and dismissing Miss Morse to an adjoining room, she desired the servant to introduce Mr. Balfour.

Is it fancy, or am I right in supposing that English officials have a manner especially assumed for Ireland and the Irish—a thing like the fur cloak a man wears in Russia, or the snow-shoes he puts on in Lapland, not intended for other latitudes, but admirably adapted for the locality it is made for? I will not insist that this theory of mine is faultless, but I appeal to a candid public of my own countrymen if they have not in their experience seen what may support it. I do not say it is a bad manner—a presuming manner—a manner of depreciation towards those it is used to, or a manner indicative of indifference in him who uses it. I simply say that they who employ it keep it as especially for Ireland as they keep their Mackintosh capes for wet weather, and would no more think of displaying it in England than they would go to her Majesty's levee in a shooting-jacket. Mr. Balfour was not wanting in this manner. Indeed, the Administration, of which he formed a humble part, were all proficients in it. It was a something between a mock homage and a very jocular familiarity, so that when he arose after a bow, deep and reverential enough for the presence of majesty, he lounged over to a chair, and threw himself

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down with the ease and unconcern of one perfectly at home.

"And how is my lady? and how are the fourscore and one associations for turnkeys' widows and dog-stealers' orphans doing? What's the last new thing in benevolence? Do tell me, for I've won five shillings at loo, and want to invest it."

"You mean you have drawn your quarter's salary, Mr. Balfour."

"No, by Jove; they don't pay us so liberally. We have the run of our teeth, and no more."

"You forget your tongue, sir; you are unjust."

"Why, my lady, you are as quick as Sir William himself; living with that great wit has made you positively dangerous."

"I have not enjoyed over much of the opportunity you speak of."

"Yes, I know that; no fault of yours though. The world is agreed on that point. I take it he's about the most impossible man to live with the age has yet produced. Sewell has told me such things of him! things that would be incredible if I had not seen him."

"I beg pardon for interrupting, but of course you have not come to dilate on the Chief Baron's defects of temper to his wife."

"No, only incidentally—parenthetically, as one may say—just as one knocks over a hare when he's out partridge-shooting."

"Never mind the hare then, sir; keep to your partridges."

"My partridges! my partridges! which are my partridges? Oh, to be sure! I want to talk to you about Sewell. He has told you, perhaps, how ill we have behaved to him—grossly, shamefully ill, I call it."

"He has told me that the Government object to his having this appointment, but he has not explained on what ground."

"Neither can I. Official life has its mysteries, and, hate them as one may, they must be respected; he oughtn't to have sold out—it was rank folly to sell out. What could he have in the world better than a continued succession of young fellows fresh from home, and knowing positively nothing of horse-flesh or billiards!"

"I don't understand you, sir—that is, I hope I misunderstand you," said she, haughtily.

"I mean simply this, that I'd rather be a lieutenant-colonel, with such opportunities, than I'd be Chairman of the Great Overland."

"Opportunities—and for what?"

"For everything—for everything; for game off the balls, on every race in the kingdom, and as snug a thing every night over a devilled kidney as any man could wish for. Don't look shocked—it's all on the square; that old hag that was here last week would have given her diamond ear-rings to find out something against Sewell, and she couldn't."

"You mean Lady Trafford?"

"I do. She stayed a week here just to blacken his character, and she never could get beyond that story of her son and Mrs. Sewell."

"What story? I never heard of it."

"A lie, of course, from beginning to end; and it's hard to imagine that she herself believed it."

"But what was it?"

"Oh, a trumpery tale of young Trafford having made love to Mrs. Sewell, and proposed to run off with her, and Sewell having played a game at *ecarté* on it, and lost—the whole thing being knocked up by Trafford's fall. Sure you must have heard it. The town talked of nothing else for a fortnight."

"The town never had the insolence to talk of it to *me*."

"What a stupid town! If there be anything really that can be said to be established in the code of society, it is that you may say anything to anybody about their relations. But for such a rule, how could conversation go on?—who travels about with his friend's family tree in his pocket? And as to Sewell—I suppose I may say it—he has not a truer friend in the world than myself."

She bowed a very stiff acknowledgment of the speech, and he went on. "I'm not going to say he gets on well with his wife—but who does? Did you ever hear of him who did? The fact I take to be this, that every one has a certain capital of good-nature and kindliness to trade on, and he who expends this abroad can't have so much of it for home consumption; that's how your insufferable husbands are such charming fellows for the world! Don't you agree with me?"

A very chilling smile, that might mean anything, was all her reply.

"I was there all the time," continued he, with unabated fluency. "I saw everything that went on. Sewell's policy was what our people call non-intervention; he saw nothing, heard nothing, believed nothing; and I will say there's a great deal of dignity in that line; and when your servant comes to wake you in the morning, with the tidings that your wife has run away, you have established your right before the world to be distracted, injured, overwhelmed, and outraged to any extent you may feel disposed to appear."

"Your thoughts upon morals are, I must say, very edifying, sir."

"They're always practical, so much I will say. This world is a composite sort of thing, with such currents of mixed motives running through it, if a man tries to be logical, he is sure to make an ass of himself, and one learns at last to become as flexible in his opinions and as compliant as the great British constitution."

"I am delighted with your liberality, sir, and charmed with your candour; and as you have expressed your opinion so freely upon my husband and my son, would it appear too great a favour if I were to ask what you would say of myself?"

"That you are charming, Lady Lendrick—positively charming," replied he, rapturously. "That there is not a grace of manner, nor a captivation, of which you are not mistress; that you possess that attraction which excels all others; in its influence you render all who come within the sphere of your fascination so much your slaves, that the cold grow enthusiastic, the distrustful become credulous, and even the cautious reserve of office gives way, and the well-trained private secretary of a Viceroy betrays himself into indiscretions that would half ruin an aide-de-camp."

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"I assure you, sir, I never so much as suspected my own powers."

"True as I am here; the simple fact is, I have come to say so."

"You have come to say so! What do you mean?"

With this he proceeded to explain that her Excellency had deputed him to invite Lady Lendrick to join the picnic on the island. "It was so completely a home party, that except himself and a few of the household, none had even heard of it. None but those really intimate will be there," said he; "and for once in our lives we shall be able to discuss our absent friends with that charming candour that gives conversation its salt. When we had written down all the names, it was her Excellency said, 'I'd call this perfect if I could add one more to the list.' 'I'll swear I know whom you mean,' said his Excellency, and he took his pencil and wrote a line on a card. 'Am I right?' asked he. She nodded, and said, 'Balfour, go and ask her to come. Be sure you explain what the whole thing is, how it was got up, and that it must not be talked of.' Of course, do what one will, these things do get about. Servants will talk of them, and tradespeople talk of them, and we must expect a fair share of ill-nature and malice from that outer world which was not included in the civility; but it can't be helped. I believe it's one of the conditions of humanity, that to make one man happy you may always calculate on making ten others miserable."

This time Lady Lendrick had something else to think of besides Mr. Balfour's ethics, and so she only smiled and said nothing.

"I hope I'm to bring back a favourable answer," said he, rising to take leave. "Won't you let me say that we are to call for you?"

"I really am much flattered. I don't know how to express my grateful sense of their Excellencies' recollection of me. It is for Wednesday, you say?"

"Yes, Wednesday. We mean to leave town by two o'clock, and there will be a carriage here for you by that hour. Will that suit you?"

"Perfectly."

"I am overjoyed at my success. Good-bye till Wednesday, then." He moved towards the door, and then stopped, "What was it? I surely had something else to say. Oh, to be sure, I remember. Tell me, if you can, what are Sir William's views about retirement: he is not quite pleased with us just now, and we can't well approach him; but we really would wish to meet his wishes, if we could manage to come at them." All this he said in a sort of careless easy way, as though it were a matter of little moment, or one calling for very slight exercise of skill to set right.

"And do you imagine he has taken me into his confidence, Mr. Balfour?" asked she, with a smile.

"Not formally, perhaps—not what we call officially; but he may have done so in that more effective way termed 'officiously.'"

"Not even that. I could probably make as good a guess about your own future intentions as those of the Chief Baron."

"You have heard him talk of them?"

"Scores of times."

"And in what tone—with what drift?"

"Always as that of one very ill used, hardly treated, undervalued, and the like."

"And the remedy? What was the remedy?'

"To make him a Peer."

"But taking that to be impossible, what next?"

"He becomes 'impossible' also," said she, laughing.

"Are we to imagine that a man of such intelligence as he possesses cannot concede something to circumstances—cannot make allowances for the exigencies of a party—cannot, in fact, take any other view of a difficulty but the one that must respond to his own will?"

"Yes; I think that is exactly what you are called on to imagine. You are to persuade yourself to regard this earth as inhabited by the Chief Baron, and some other people not mentioned specifically in the census."

"He is most unreasonable, then."

"Of course he is; but I wouldn't have you tell him so. You see, Mr. Balfour, the Chief imagines all this while that he is maintaining and upholding the privileges of the Irish Bar. The burden of his song is, There would have been no objection to my claim had I been the Chief Baron of the English Court."

"Possibly," murmured Balfour; and then, lower again, "Fleas are not——"

"Quite true," said she, for her quick ear caught his words—"quite true. Fleas are not lobsters—bless their souls! But, as I said before, I'd not remind them of that fact. 'The Fleas' are just sore enough upon it already."

Balfour for once felt some confusion. He saw what a slip he had made, and how it had damaged his whole negotiation. Nothing but boldness would avail now, and he resolved to be bold.

"There is a thing has been done in England, and I don't see why we might not attempt it in the present case. A great lawyer there obtained a peerage for his wife——"

She burst out into a fit of laughter at this, at once so hearty and so natural, that at last he could not help joining, and laughing too.

"I must say, Mr. Balfour," said she, as soon as she could speak—"I must say there is ingenuity in your suggestion. The relations that subsist between Sir William and myself are precisely such as to recommend your project."

"I am not so sure that they are obstacles to it. I have always heard that he had a poor opinion of his son, who was a commonplace sort of man that studied medicine. It could be no part of the Chief Baron's plan to make such a person the head of a house. Now, he likes Sewell, and he dotes on that boy—the little fellow I saw at the Priory. These are all elements in the scheme. Don't you think so?"

"Let me ask you one question before I answer yours. Does this thought come from yourself alone, or has it any origin in another quarter?"

"Am I to be candid?"

"You are."

"And are *you* to be confidential?"

"Certainly."

"In that case," said he, drawing a long breath, as though about to remove a perilous

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weight off his mind, "I will tell you frankly it comes from authority. Now, don't ask me more—not another question. I have already avowed what my instructions most imperatively forbid me to own—what, in fact, would be ruin to me if it were known that I revealed. What his Excellency—I mean what the other person said was, 'Ascertain Lady Lendrick's wishes on this subject; learn, if you can—but above all, without compromising yourself—whether she really cares for a step in rank; find out, if so, what aid she can or will lend us.' But what am I saying? Here am I, entering upon the whole detail? What would become of me if I did not know I might rely upon you?"

"It's worth thinking over," said she, after a pause.

"I should think it is. It is not every day of our lives such a brilliant offer presents itself. All I ask, all I stipulate for, is that you make no confidences, ask no advice from any quarter. Think it well over in your own mind, but impart it to none, least of all to Sewell."

"Of course not to *him*," said she, resolutely, for she knew well to what purposes he would apply the knowledge.

"Remember that we want to have the resignation before Parliament meets—bear that in mind. Time is all-important with us; the rest will follow in due course." With this he said Good-bye, and was gone.

"The rest will follow in due course," said she to herself, repeating his last words as he went. "With your good leave, Mr. Balfour, the 'rest' shall precede the beginning."

Wasn't it Bolingbroke that said constitutional government never could go on without lying?—audacious lying, too. If the old Judge will only consent to go, her ladyship's peerage will admit of a compromise. Such was Mr. Balfour's meditation as he stepped into his cab.

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CHAPTER XLIV.

AFTER-DINNER THOUGHTS.

Her Majesty's —th had got their orders for Malta, and some surmised for India, though it was not known; but all agreed it was hard, "confoundedly hard," they called it. "Hadn't they had their turn of Indian service?—how many years had that grim old major passed in the Deccan—what weary winters had the bronzed, bald captain there spent at Rangoon?"

How they inveighed against the national niggardliness that insisted on making a small army do the work of a large one. How they scouted the popular idea that regiments were treated alike, and without favouritism. *They* knew better. They knew that if they had been the Nine Hundred and Ninth or Three Thousand and First, there would have been no thought of sending them back to cholera and jungle fever. Some, with a little sly flattery, ascribed the order to their efficiency, and declared that they had done their work so well at Gonurshabad, the Government selected them at once when fresh troubles were threatening; and a few old grumblers, tired of service, sick of the Horse Guards—not over enamoured of even life—agreed that it was rank folly to join a regiment where the lieutenant-colonel was not a man of high connections; as they said, "If old Cave there had been a Lord George or even an Honourable, we'd have had ten years more of home service."

With the exception of two or three raw subalterns who had never been out of England, and who wanted the glory of pig-sticking and the brevet to tell tiger stories, there were gloom and depression everywhere. The financially gifted complained that as they had all or nearly all bought their commissions, there was no comparison between the treatment administered to them and to officers in any foreign army; and such as knew geography asked triumphantly whether a Frenchman, who could be only sent to Africa, or an Austrian, whose most remote banishment was the "Banat," was in the same position as an unfortunate Briton, who could be despatched to patrol the North Pole to-day, and to-morrow relieve guard at New Zealand? By a unanimous vote it was carried that the English army was the worst paid, hardest worked, and most ill-treated service in Europe; but the roast-beef played just at the moment, and they went in to dinner.

As the last bars of that prandial melody were dying away, two men crossed the barrack-yard towards the mess-house. They were in close confabulation, and although evidently on their way to dinner, showed by their loitering pace how much more engrossed they were by the subject that engaged them than by any desire for the pleasures of the table. They were Colonel Cave and Sewell.

"I can scarcely picture to my mind as great a fool as that," said Sewell, angrily. "Can you?"

"I don't know," said Cave, slowly and doubtingly. "First of all, I never was heir to a large estate; and secondly, I was never, that I remember, in love."

"In love!—in fiddlestick. Why, he has not seen the girl this year and a half; he scarcely knows her. I doubt greatly if she cares a straw for him; and for a caprice—a mere caprice—to surrender his right to a fine fortune and a good position is absolute idiocy· but I tell you more, Cave, though worse—far worse." Here his voice grew harsh and grating, as he continued, "When I and other men like me played with Trafford, we betted with the man who was to inherit Holt. When I asked the fellow to my house, and suffered a certain intimacy—for I never liked him—it was because he represented twelve thousand a-year in broad acres.—I'd stand a good deal from a man like that, that I'd soon pull another up for—eh?"

The interrogative here puzzled Cave, who certainly was not a concurring party to the sentiment, and yet did not want to make it matter of discussion.

"We shall be late—we've lost our soup already," said he, moving more briskly forward.

"I'd no more have let that fellow take on him, as he did under my roof, than I'd suffer him to kennel his dogs in my dressing-room. You don't know—you can't know—how he behaved." These words were spoken in passionate warmth, and still there was that in the speaker's manner

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that showed a want of real earnestness: so it certainly seemed to Cave, who secretly determined to give no encouragement to further disclosures.

"There are things," resumed Sewell, "that a man can't speak on—at least he can only speak of them when they become the talk of the town."

"Come along, I want my dinner. I'm not sure I have not a guest besides, who does not know any of our fellows. I only remembered him this instant. Isn't this Saturday?"

"One thing I'll swear—he shall pay me every shilling he owes me, or he does not sail with the regiment. I'll stand no nonsense of renewals; if he has to sell out for it, he shall book up. You have told him, I hope, he has nothing to expect from my forbearance?"

"We can talk this all over another time. Come along now, we're very late."

"Go on, then, and eat your dinner; leave me to my cigar—I've no appetite. I'll drop in when you have dined."

"No, no; you shall come too—your absence will only make fellows talk; they are talking already."

"Are they? and in what way?" asked he, sternly.

"Nothing seriously, of course," mumbled Cave, for he saw how he had fallen into an indiscretion; "but you must come, and you must be yourself too. It's the only way to meet flying rumours."

"Come along, then," said Sewell, passing his arm within the other's, and they hurried forward without another word being spoken by either.

It was evident that Sewell's appearance caused some surprise. There was a certain awkward significance in the way men looked at him, and at each other, that implied astonishment at his presence.

"I didn't know you were down here," said the old Major, making an involuntary explanation of his look of wonderment.

"Nothing very remarkable, I take it, that a man is stopping at his own house," said Sewell, testily. "No—no fish. Get me some mutton," added he to the mess-waiter.

"You have heard that we've got our orders," said a captain opposite him.

"Yes; Cave told me."

"I rather like it—that is, if it means India," said a very young-looking ensign.

Sewell put up his eyeglass and looked at the speaker, and then, letting it drop, went on with his dinner without a word.

"There's no man can tell you more about Bengal than Colonel Sewell there," said Cave to some one near him. "He served on the Staff there, and knows every corner of it."

"I wish I didn't, with all my heart. It's a sort of knowledge that costs a man pretty dearly."

"I've always been told India was a capital place," said a gay, frank-looking young lieutenant, "and that if a man didn't drink, or take to high play, he could get on admirably."

"Nor entangle himself with a pretty woman," added another.

"Nor raise a smashing loan from the Agra Bank," cried a third.

"You are the very wisest young gentlemen it has ever been my privilege to sit down with," said Sewell, with a grin. "Whence could you have gleaned all these prudent maxims?"

"I got mine," said the lieutenant, "from a cousin. Such a good fellow as he was! he always tipped me when I was at Sandhurst, but he's past tipping any one now."

"Dead?"

"No; I believe it would be better he were; but he was ruined in India—'let in' on a race, and lost everything, even to his commission."

"Was his name Stanley?"

"No, Stapyleton—Frank Stapyleton—he was in the Greys."

"Sewell, what are you drinking?" cried Cave, with a loudness that overbore the talk around him. "I can't see you down there. You've got amongst the youngsters."

"I am in the midst of all that is agreeable and entertaining," said Sewell, with a smile of most malicious meaning. "Talk of youngsters indeed! I'd like to hear where you could match them for knowledge of life and mankind."

There was certainly nothing in his look or manner as he spoke these words that suggested distrust or suspicion to those around him, for they seemed overjoyed at his praise, and delighted to hear themselves called men of the world. The grim old Major at the opposite side of the table shook his head thoughtfully, and muttered some words to himself.

"They're a shady lot, I take it," said a young captain to his neighbour, "those fellows who remain in India, and never come home; either they have done something they can't meet in England, or they want to do things in India they couldn't do here."

"There's great truth in that remark," said Sewell. "Captain Neeves, let us have a glass of wine together. I have myself seen a great deal to bear out your observation."

Neeves coloured with pleasure at this approval, and went on. "I heard of one fellow—I forget his name—I never remember names; but he had a very pretty wife, and all the fellows used to make up to her, and pay her immense attention, and the husband rooked them all at *ecarté*, every man of them."

"What a scoundrel!" said Sewell, with energy. "You ought to have preserved the name, if only for a warning."

"I think I can get it, Colonel. I'll try and obtain it for you."

"Was it Moorcroft?" cried one.

"Or Massingbred?" asked another.

"I'll wager a sovereign it was Dudgeon; wasn't it Dudgeon?"

But no; it was none of the three. Still the suggestions opened a whole chapter of biographical details, in which each of these worthies vied with the other. No man ever listened to the various anecdotes narrated with a more eager interest than Sewell. Now and then, indeed, a slight incredulity—a sort of puzzled astonishment that the world could be so very wicked—that there really were such fellows—would seem to distract him; but he listened on, and even occasionally asked an explanation of this or of that, to show the extreme attention he vouchsafed to the theme.

To be sure, their attempts to describe the way

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some trick was played with the cards or the dice, how the horse was "nobbled" or the match "squared," were neither very remarkable for accuracy nor clearness. They had not been well "briefed," as lawyers say, or they had not mastered their instructions. Sewell, however, was no captious critic; he took what he got, and was thankful.

When they arose from the table, the old Major, dropping behind the line of those who lounged into the adjoining room, caught a young officer by the arm, and whispered some few words in his ear.

"What a scrape I'm in!" cried the young fellow, as he listened.

"I think not, this time; but let it be a caution to you how you talk of rumours in presence of men who are strangers to you."

"I say, Major," asked a young captain, coming up hurriedly, "isn't that Sewell the man of the Agra affair?"

"I don't think I'd ask him about it, that's all," said the Major slyly, and moved away.

"I got amongst a capital lot of young fellows at my end of the table—second battalion men, I think—who were all new to me; but very agreeable," said Sewell to Cave, as he sipped his coffee.

"You'd like your rubber, Sewell, I know," said Cave; "let us see if we haven't got some good players."

"Not to-night—thanks—I promised my wife to be home early; one of the chicks is poorly."

"I want so much to have a game with Colonel Sewell," said a young fellow. "They told me up at Delhi that you hadn't your equal at whist or billiards."

Sewell's pale face grew flushed; but though he smiled and bowed, it was not difficult to see that his manner evinced more irritation than pleasure.

"I say," said another, who sat shuffling the cards by himself at a table, "who knows that trick about the double ace in picquet? That was the way Beresford was rooked at Madras."

"I must say good-night," said Sewell; "it's a long drive to The Nest. You'll come over to breakfast some morning before you leave—won't you?"

"I'll do my best. At all events I'll pay my respects to Mrs. Sewell;" and with a good deal of hand-shaking and some cordial speeches Sewell took his leave and retired.

Had any one marked the pace at which Sewell drove home that night, black and dark as it was, he would have said, "There goes one on some errand of life or death." There was something of recklessness in the way he pushed his strong-boned thoroughbred, urging him up hill and down without check or relief, nor slackening rein till he drew up at his own door, the panting beast making the buggy tremble with the violent action of his respiration. Low muttering to himself, the groom led the beast to the stable, and Sewell passed up the stairs to the small drawing-room where his wife usually sat.

She was reading as he entered; a little table with a tea equipage at her side. She did not raise her eyes from her book when he came in; but whether his footstep on the stair had its meaning to her quick ears or not, a slight flush quivered on her cheek, and her mouth trembled faintly.

"Shall I give you some tea?" asked she, as he threw himself into a seat. He made no answer, and she laid down her book, and sat still and silent.

"Was your dinner pleasant?" said she, after a pause.

"How could it be other than pleasant, madam," said he, fiercely, "when they talked so much of *you*?"

"Of *me*?—talked of *me*?"

"Just so; there were a set of young fellows who had just joined from another battalion, and who discoursed of you, of your life in India, of your voyage home, and lastly of some incidents that were attributed to your sojourn here. To me it was perfectly delightful. I had my opinion asked over and over again, if I thought that such a levity was so perfectly harmless, and such another liberty was the soul of innocence? In a word, madam, I enjoyed the privilege, very rarely accorded to a husband I fancy, to sit in judgment over his own wife, and say what he thought of her conduct."

"Was there no one to tell these gentlemen to whom they were speaking?" said she, with a subdued quiet tone.

"No; I came in late and took my place amongst men all strangers to me. I assure you I profited largely by the incident. It is so seldom one gets public opinion in its undiluted form, it's quite refreshing to taste it neat. Of course they were not always correct. I could have set them right on many points. They had got a totally wrong version of what they called the 'Agra row,' though one of the party said he was Beresford's cousin."

She grasped the table convulsively to steady herself, and in so doing threw it down and the whole tea equipage with it.

"Yes," continued he, as though responding to this evidence of emotion on her part—"yes; it pushed one's patience pretty hard to be obliged to sit under such criticism."

"And what obliged you, sir? was it fear?"

"Yes, madam, you have guessed it. I was afraid—terribly afraid to own I was your husband."

A low faint groan was all she uttered, as she covered her face with her hands. "I had next," continued he, "to listen to a dispute as to whether Trafford had ever seriously offered to run away with you or not. It was almost put to the vote. Faith, I believe my casting voice might have carried it either way, if I had only known how to give it." She murmured something too low to be heard correctly, but he caught at part of it and said, "Well, that was pretty much what I suspected. The debate was, however, adjourned; and as Cave called me by my name at the moment, the confidences came to an abrupt conclusion. As I foresaw that these youngsters, ignorant of life and manners as they were, would be at once for making apologetic speeches and suchlike, I stole away and came home, *more domestico*, to ruminate over my enjoyments at my own fireside."

"I trust, sir, they were strangers to your own delinquencies. I hope they had no unpleasant reminders to give you of yourself."

"Pardon, madam. They related several of

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what you pleasantly call my delinquencies, but they only came in on the by-play of the scene where you were the great character. We figured as brigands. It was you always who stunned the victim; I only rifled his pockets—fact, I assure you. I'm sorry that china is smashed. It was Saxe—wasn't it?"

She nodded.

"And a present of Trafford's, too! What a pity! I declare I believe we shall not have a single relic of the dear fellow, except it be a protested bill or two." He paused a moment or so, and then said, "Do you know it just strikes me that if they saw how ill—how shamefully you played your cards in this Trafford affair, they'd actually absolve you of all the Circe gifts the world ascribes to you."

She fixed her eyes steadfastly on him, and as her clasped hands dropped on her knees, she leaned forward and said, "What do you mean by it? What do you want by this? If these men, whose insolent taunts you had not courage to arrest or resent, say truly, whose the fault? Ay, sir, whose the fault? Answer me, if you dare, and say, was not my shame incurred to cover and conceal *yours?*"

"Your tragedy-queen airs have no effect upon *me.* I've been too long behind the scenes to be frightened by stage thunder. What is past is past. You married a gambler; and if you shared his good-luck, you oughtn't to grumble at partaking his bad fortune. If you had been tired of the yoke, I take it you'd have thrown it behind you many a day ago."

"If I have not done so, you know well why," said she, fiercely.

"The old story, I suppose—the dear darlings up-stairs. Well, I can't discuss what I know nothing about. I can only promise you that such ties would never bind *me.*"

"I ask you once again what you mean by this?" cried she, as her lips trembled and her pale cheeks shook with agitation. "What does it point to? What am I to do? What am I to be?"

"That's the puzzle," said he, with an insolent levity; "and I'll be shot if I can solve it! Sometimes I think we'd do better to renounce the partnership, and try what we could do alone; and sometimes I suspect—it sounds odd, doesn't it?—but I suspect that we need each other."

She had by this time buried her face between her hands, and by the convulsive motion of her shoulders showed she was weeping bitterly.

"One thing is certainly clear," said he, rising, and standing with his back to the fire—"if we decide to part company, we haven't the means. If either of us would desert the ship, there's no boat left to do it with."

She arose feebly from her chair, but sank down again, weak and overcome.

"Shall I give you my arm?" asked he.

"No, send Jane to me," said she, in a voice barely above a whisper.

He rang the bell, and said, "Tell Jane her mistress wants her;" and with this he searched for a book on the table, found it, and strolled off to his room, humming an air as he went.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE TIDELESS SHORES.

They who only know the shores of the Mediterranean in the winter months, and have but enjoyed the contrast—and what a contrast!—between our inky skies and rain-charged atmosphere with that glorious expanse of blue heaven and that air of exciting elasticity—they, I say, can still have no conception of the real ecstasy of life in a southern climate till they have experienced a summer beside the tideless sea.

Nothing is more striking in these regions than the completeness of the change from day to night. It is not alone the rapidity with which darkness succeeds—and in this our delicious twilight is ever to be regretted; what I speak of is the marvellous transition from the world of sights and sounds to the world of unbroken silence and dimness. In the day the whole air rings with life. The flowers flaunt out their gorgeous petals, not timidly or reluctantly, but with the bold confidence of admitted beauty. The buds unfold beneath your very eyes, the rivulets sing in the clear air, and myriads of insects chirp till the atmosphere seems to be charged with vitality. This intense vitality is the striking characteristic of the scene; and it is to this that night succeeds, grand, solemn, and silent, at first to all seeming in unrelieved blackness, but soon to be displayed in a glorious expanse of darkest, deepest blue, with stars of surpassing size. To make this change more effective, too, it is instantaneous. It was but a moment back, and you were gazing on the mountain peaks bathed in an opal lustre, the cicala making the air vibrate with his song; a soft sea-breeze was blowing, and stirring the oranges amongst the leaves: and now all is dim and silent and breathless, as suddenly as though an enchanter's wand had waved and worked the miracle.

In a little bay—rather a cleft in the shore than a bay—bounded by rocks and backed by a steep mountain overgrown with stunted olives, stood a small cottage—so very small that it looked rather like a toy house than a human dwelling, a resemblance added to now as the windows lay wide open, and all the interior was a blaze of light from two lamps. All was still and silent within; no human being was to be seen, nor was there a sign of life about the place: for it was the only dwelling on the eastern shore of the island, and that island was Madalena, off Sardinia.

In a little nook among the rocks, close to the sea, sat Tom and Lucy Lendrick. They held hands, but were silent; for they had come down into the darkness to muse and ponder, and drink in the delicious tranquillity of that calm hour. Lucy had now been above a week on the island, and every day Tom made progress towards recovery. She knew exactly, and as none other knew, what amount of care and nursing he would accept of without resistance—where companionship would gratify and where oppress him; she knew, besides, when to leave him to the full swing of his own wild discursive talk, and never to break in upon his moods of silent reflection.

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For upwards of half an hour they had sat thus without a word, when Tom, suddenly turning round, and looking towards the cottage, said,

"Isn't this the very sort of thing we used to imagine and wish for long ago, Lucy?"

"It was just what was passing through my mind. I was thinking how often we longed to have one of the islands on Lough Dergh, and to go and live there all by ourselves."

"We never dreamed of anything so luxurious as this, though. We knew nothing of limes and oranges, Lucy. We never fancied such a starry sky, or an air so loaded with perfume. I declare," cried he, with more energy, "it repays one for all the disappointment, to come and taste the luxury of such a night as this."

"And what is the disappointment you speak of, Tom?"

"I mean about our project—that blessed mine, by which we were to have amassed a fortune, and which has only yielded lead enough to shoot ourselves with."

"I never suspected that," said she, with a sigh.

"Of course you never did; nor am I in a great hurry to tell it even now. I'd not whisper it if Sir Brook were on the same island with us. Do you know, girl, that he resents a word against the mine as if it was a stain upon his own honour? For a while I used to catch up his enthusiasm, and think if we only go on steadily, if we simply persist, we are sure to succeed in the end. But when week after week rolled over, and not a trace of a mineral appeared—when the very workmen said we were toiling in vain—when I felt half ashamed to meet the jeering questions of the neighbours, and used to skulk up to the shaft by a backway,—he remarked it, and said to me one morning, 'I am afraid, Tom, it is your sense of loyalty to me that keeps you here, and not your hope of success. Be frank, and tell me if this be so.' I blundered out something about my determination to share his fate, whatever it might be, and it would have been lucky if I had stopped there; but I went on to say that I thought the mine was an arrant delusion, and that the sooner we turned our backs on it, and addressed our energies to another quarter, the better. 'You think so?' said he, looking almost fiercely at me. 'I am certain of it,' said I, decisively; for I thought the moment had come when a word of truth could do him good service. He went out without speaking, and instead of going to Lavanna, where the mine is, he went over to Cagliari, and only came home late at night. The next morning, while we were taking our coffee before setting out, he said to me, 'Don't strap on your knapsack to-day. I don't mean you should come down into the shaft again.' 'How so?' asked I; 'what have I said or done that could offend you?' 'Nothing, my dear boy,' said he, laying his hand on my shoulder; 'but I cannot bear you should meet this dreary life of toil without the one thing that can lighten its gloom—Hope. I have managed, therefore, to raise a small sum on the mine; for,' said he, with a sly laugh, 'there are men in Cagliari who don't take the despondent view you have taken of it; and I have written to my old friend at the Horse Guards to give you a commission, and you shall go and be a soldier.' 'And leave you here, sir, all alone?' 'Far from alone, lad. I have that companion which you tell me never joined *you*. I have Hope with *me*.' 'Then I'll stay too, sir, and try if he'll not give me his company yet. At all events, I shall have *yours;* and there is nothing I know that could recompense me for the loss of it.' It was not very easy to turn him from his plan, but I insisted so heartily—for I'd have stayed on now, if it were to have entailed a whole life of poverty—that he gave in at last; and from that hour to this, not a word of other than agreement has passed between us. For my own part, I began to work with a will, and a determination that I never felt before; and perhaps I overtaxed my strength, for I caught this fever by remaining till the heavy dews began to fall, and in this climate it is always a danger."

"And the mine, Tom—did it grow better?"

"Not a bit. I verily believe we never saw ore from that day. We got upon yellow clay, and lower down upon limestone rock, and then upon water; and we are pumping away yet, and old Sir Brook is just as much interested by the decrease of the water as if he saw a silver floor beneath it. 'We've got eight inches less this morning, Tom; we are doing famously now.' I declare to you, Lucy, when I saw his fine cheery look and bright honest eye, I thought how far better this man's fancies are than the hard facts of other people; and I'd rather have his great nature than all the wealth success could bring us."

"My own dear brother!" was all she could say, as she grasped his hand, and held it with both her own.

"The worst of all is, that in the infatuation he feels about this mining project, he forgets everything else. Letters come to him from agents and men of business asking for speedy answers; some occasionally come to tell that funds upon which he had reckoned to meet certain payments had been withdrawn from his banker long since. When he reads these, he ponders a moment, and mutters, 'The old story, I suppose. It is so easy to write Brook Fossbrooke;' and then the whole seems to pass out of his mind, and he'll say, 'Come along, Tom, we must push matters a little; I'll want some coin by the end of the month.'

"When I grew so weak that I couldn't go to the mine, the accounts he used to give me daily made me think we must be prospering. He would come back every night so cheery, so hopeful, and his eyes would sparkle as he'd tell of a bright vein that they'd just 'struck.' He owned that the men were less sanguine, but what could they know? they had no other teaching than the poor experiences of daily labour. If they saw lead or silver, they believed in it. To him, however, the signs of the coming ore were enough; and then he would open a paper full of dark earth in which a few shining particles might be detected, and point them out to me as the germs of untold riches. 'These are silver, Tom, every one of them; they are oxydized, but still perfectly pure. I've seen the natives in Ceylon washing earth not richer than this;' and the poor fellow would make this hopeful tidings the reason for treating me to champagne, which in an unlucky moment the Doctor said would be good for me, and which

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Sir Brook declared always disagreed with him. But I don't believe it, Lucy—I don't believe it! I am certain that he suffered many a privation to give me luxuries that he wouldn't share. Shall I tell you the breakfast I saw him eating one morning? I had gone to his room to speak to him before he started to the mine, and opening the door gently I surprised him at his breakfast—a piece of brown bread and a cup of coffee without milk was his meal, to support him till he came home at nightfall. I knew if he were aware that I had seen him that it would have given him great distress, so I crept quietly back to my bed, and lay down to think of this once pampered, flattered gentleman, and how grand the nature must be that could hold up uncomplaining and unshaken under such poverty as this. Nor is it that he ignores the past, Lucy, or strives to forget it—far from that. He is full of memories of bygone events and people, but he talks of his own part in the grand world he once lived in, as one might talk of another individual; nor is there the semblance of a regret that all this splendour has passed away never to return. He will be here on Sunday to pay us a visit, Lucy; and though perhaps you'll find him sadly changed in appearance, you'll see that his fine nature is the same as ever."

"And will he persist in this project, Tom, in spite of all failure, and in defiance of hope?"

"That's the very point I'm puzzled about. If he decide to go on, so must I. I'll not leave him, whatever come of it."

"No, no, Tom; that I know you will not do."

"His confidence of success is unshaken. It was only t'other night, as we sat at a very frugal supper, he said, 'You'll remember all this, Tom, one of these days; and as you sip your burgundy, you'll tell your friends how jolly we thought ourselves over our little acid wine and an onion.' I did not dare to say what was uppermost in my thoughts, that I disbelieved in the burgundy era."

"It would have been cruel to have done it."

"He had the habit, he tells me, in his days of palmiest prosperity, of going off by himself on foot, and wandering about for weeks, roughing it amongst all sorts of people—gipsies, miners, charcoal-burners in the German forests, and suchlike. He said, without something of this sort, he would have grown to believe that all the luxuries he lived amongst were *bona fide* necessities of life. He was afraid, too, he said, they would become part of him; for his theory is, never let your belongings master your own nature."

"There is great romance in such a man."

"Ah! there you have it, Lucy; that's the key to his whole temperament; and I'd not be surprised if he had been crossed in some early love."

"Would that account for all his capricious ways?" said she, smiling.

"My own experiences can tell me nothing; but I have a sister who could perhaps help me to an explanation. Eh, Lucy! What think you?"

She tried to laugh off the theme, but the attempt only half succeeded, and she turned away her head to hide her confusion.

Tom took her hand between his own, and patted it affectionately.

"I want no confessions, my own dear Lucy," said he, gently; "but if there is anything which, for your own happiness or for my honour, I ought to know, you will tell me of it, I am certain."

"There is nothing," said she, with a faint gasp.

"And you would tell me if there had been?"

She nodded her head, but did not trust herself to speak.

"And grandpapa, Lucy?" said he, trying to divert her thoughts from what he saw was oppressing her; "has he forgiven me yet? or does he still harp on about my presumption and self-sufficiency?"

"He is more forgiving than you think, Tom," said she, smiling.

"I am not so sure of that. He wrote me a long letter some time back—a sort of lecture on the faults and shortcomings of my disposition, in which he clearly showed, that if I had all the gifts which my own self-confidence ascribed to me, and a score more that I never dreamed of, they would go for nothing—absolutely nothing, so long as they were allied with my unparalleled—no, he didn't call it impudence, but something very near it. He told me that men of my stamp were like the people who traded on credit, and always cut a sorry figure when their accounts came to be audited, and, perhaps to stave off the hour of my bankruptcy, he enclosed me fifty pounds."

"So like him!" said she, proudly.

"I suppose it was. Indeed, as I read his note, I thought I heard him talking it. There was an acrid flippancy about it that smacked of his very voice."

"Oh, Tom, I will not let you say that."

"I'll think it all the same, Lucy. His letter brought him back to my mind so palpably, that I thought I stood there before him on that morning when he delivered that memorable discourse on my character after luncheon."

"Did you reply to him?"

"Yes, I replied," said he, with a dry sententiousness that sounded as though he wished the subject to drop.

"Do tell me what you said. I hope you took it in good part. I am sure you could not have shown any resentment at his remarks."

"No; I rather think I showed great forbearance. I simply said, 'My dear Lord Chief Baron, I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter, of which I accept everything but the enclosure.—I am, faithfully yours.'"

"And refused his gift?"

"Of course I did. The good counsel without the money, or the last without the counsel, would have been all very well; but coming together, in what a false position the offer placed me! I remember that same day we happened to have an unusually meagre dinner, but I drank the old man's health after it in some precious bad wine; and Sir Brook, who knew nothing about the letter, joined in the toast, and pronounced a very pretty little eulogium on his vigour and energy; and thus ended the whole incident."

"If you only knew him better, Tom! if you knew him as I know him!"

Tom shrugged his shoulders, and merely said, "It was nicely done, though, not to tell *you* about this. There was delicacy in *that*."

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Lucy went on now to relate all his kind intentions towards Tom when the news of his illness arrived—how he had conferred with Beattie about sending out a doctor, and how, at such a sacrifice to his own daily habits, he had agreed that she should come out to Cagliari. "And you don't know how much this cost him, Master Tom," said she, laughing; "for however little store you may lay by my company, he prizes it, and prizes it highly, too, I promise you; and then there was another reason which weighed against his letting me come out here—he has got some absurd prejudice against Sir Brook. I call it absurd, because I have tried to find out to what to trace it, and could not; but a chance expression or two that fell from Mrs. Sewell leads me to suppose the impression was derived from them."

"I don't believe he knows the Sewells. I never heard him speak of them. I'll ask when he comes over here. By the way, how do you like them yourself?"

"I scarcely know. I liked her at first; that is, I thought I should like her, and I fancied, too, it was her wish that I might—but——"

"But what? What does this 'but' mean?"

"It means that she has puzzled me, and my hope of liking her depends on my discovering that I have misunderstood her."

"That's a riddle, if ever there was one! but I suppose it comes to this, that if you have read her aright you do not like her."

"I wish I could show you a letter she wrote me."

"And why can't you?"

"I don't think I can tell you even that, Tom."

"What a mysterious damsel you have grown! Does this come of your living with that great law lord, Lucy? If so, tell him from me he has spoiled you sadly. How frank you were long ago!"

"That is true," said she, sighing.

"How I wish we could go back to that time, with all its dreaminess and all its castle-building. Do you remember, Lu, when we used to set off of a morning in the boat on a voyage of discovery as we called it, and find out new islands and new creeks, and give them names?"

"Do I not! Oh, Tom, were we not a thousand times happier then than we knew we were?"

"That's a bit of a bull, Lucy, but it's true all the same. I know all you mean, and I agree with you."

"If we had troubles, what light ones they were!"

"Ay, that's true. We were not grubbing for lead in those days, and finding only quartz; and our poor hearts, Lucy, were whole enough then." He gave a half malicious laugh as he said this; but correcting himself quickly, he drew her towards him and said, "Don't be angry with me, dear Lu; you know of old what a reckless tongue I've got."

"Was that thunder, Tom? There it is again. What is it?"

"That's a storm getting up. It's coming from the south'ard. See how the drift is flying overhead, and all the while the sea beneath is like a mill pond! Watch the stars now, and you'll see how, one by one, they will drop out, as if extinguished; and mark the little plash—it is barely audible—that begins upon the beach. There! did you hear that—that rushing sound like wind through the trees? That's the sea getting up. How I wish I was strong enough to stay out here. I'd like to show you a 'Levanter,' girl—a regular bit of Southern passion, not increasing slowly, like our Northern wrath, but bursting out in its full fury in an instant. Here it comes!" and as he spoke, two claps of thunder shook the air, followed by a long, clattering roll like musketry, and the sea upheaving, surged heavily hither and thither, while the air was still and calm; and then, as though let loose from their caverns, the winds swept past with a wild, shrill whistle that swelled into a perfect roar. The whole surface of the sea became at once white, and the wind, sweeping across the crest of the waves, carried away a blinding drift that added to the darkness. The thunder, too, rolled on unceasingly, and great flashes of lightning broke through the blackness, and displayed tall masts and spars of ships far out to sea, rocking fearfully, and in the next instant lost to sight in the dense darkness.

"Here comes the rain, and we must run for it," said Tom, as a few heavy drops fell. A solemn pause in the storm ensued, and then, as though the very sky was rent, the water poured down in cataracts. Laughing merrily, they made for the cottage, and though but a few yards off, were drenched thoroughly ere they reached it.

"It's going to be a terrific night," said Tom, as he passed from window to window, looking to the bars and fastenings. "The great heat always brings one of the Levant storms, and the fishermen here know it so well, that on seeing certain signs at sunset they draw up all their boats on shore, and even secure the roofs of their cabins with strong spars and stones."

"I hope poor old Nicholas is safe by this time. Could he have reached Cagliari by this?" said Lucy.

"Yes, he is snug enough. The old rogue is sitting at his supper this minute, cursing the climate, and the wine, and the place, and the day he came to it."

"Come, Tom! I think he bears everything better than I expected."

"Bears everything better! Why, child, what has he to bear that you and I have not to bear? Is there one privation here that falls to his share without coming to us?"

"And what would be the value of that good blood you are so proud of, Tom, if it would not make us as proof against petty annoyances as against big dangers?"

"I declare, time and place make no change on you. You are the same disputatious damsel here that you used to be beside the Shannon. Have I not told you scores of times you must never quote what one has once said, when it comes in opposition to a present opinion?"

"But if I cease to quote you, Tom, whence am I to derive those maxims of wisdom I rely upon so implicitly?"

"Take care, young lady—take care," said he, shaking his finger at her. "Every fort has its weak side. If you assail me by the brain, I may attack you at the heart! How will it be then, eh?" Colouring till her face and neck were

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crimson, she tried to laugh; but though her lips parted, no sound came forth, and after a second or two of struggle, she said "Good-night!" and rushed away.

"Good-night, Lu," cried he after her. "Look well to your window-fastening, or you'll be blown away before morning."

CHAPTER XLVI.

A LEVANTER.

The storm raged fearfully during the night, and the sea rose to a height that made many believe some earthquake had occurred in one of the islands near. Old trees that resisted the gales of former hurricanes were uprooted, and the swollen streams tore down amongst the fallen timber, adding to the clamour of the elements and increasing the signs of desolation and ruin that abounded.

It was, as Tom called it, a "regular Levanter," one of those storms which in a brief twenty-four hours can do the work of years in destruction and change.

Amongst the group of fishermen who crouched under a rock on the shore, sad predictions were uttered as to the fate of such as were at sea that night, and the disasters of bygone years were recalled, and the story of a Russian liner that was lost off Spartivento, and the Spanish admiral who was wrecked on the rocks of Melissa, were told with all the details eye-witnesses could impart to them.

"Those fellows have driven me half distracted, Lucy," said Tom, as he came in wet and dripping, "with their tales of shipwreck; and one of them declares that he saw a large paddle-wheel steamer under English colours drifting to the south'ard this morning, perfectly helpless and unmanageable. I wish I could get over to Cagliari, and hear tidings of her."

"Of course that is impossible," said she, with a shudder.

"So they tell me. They say there's not a boat in the island would live five minutes in that sea."

"And the gale seems increasing, too."

"So it does. They say, just before the storm ends it blows its very hardest at the finish, and then stops as suddenly as it burst forth."

By noon the gale began to decline, the sun burst out, and the sea gradually subsided, and in a few hours the swollen torrents changed to tiny rivulets, clear as crystal. The birds were singing in the trees, and the whole landscape, like a newly-washed picture, came out in fresher and brighter colour than ever. Nor was it easy to believe that the late hurricane had ever existed, so little trace of it could be seen on that rocky island.

A little before sunset a small "latiner" rounded the point, and stood in towards the little bay. She had barely wind enough to carry her along, and was fully an hour in sight before she anchored. As it was evident she was a Cagliari boat, Tom was all impatient for her news, and went on board of her at once. The skipper handed him a letter from Sir Brook, saying, "I was to give you this, sir, and say I was at your orders." Tom broke the seal, but before he had read half-a-dozen lines, he cried out, "All right! shove me on shore, and come to me in an hour. By that time I'll tell you what I decide on."

"Here's great news, Lucy," cried he. "The Cadmus troop-ship has put into Cagliari disabled, foremast lost, and one paddle-wheel carried away, all the boats smashed, but her Majesty's —th safe and sound. Colonel Cave very jolly, and Major Trafford, if you have heard of such a person, wild with joy at the disaster of being shipwrecked."

"Oh, Tom, do be serious. What is it at all?" said she, as, pale with anxiety, she caught his arm to steady herself.

"Here's the dispatch—read it yourself if you won't believe me. This part here is all about the storm and the other wrecks; but here, this is the important part, in your eyes at least."

"Cave is now with me up here, and Trafford is to join us to-night. The ship cannot possibly be fit for sea before ten days to come, and the question is, Shall we go over and visit you, or will you and Lucy come here? One or other of these courses it must be, and it is for you to decide which suits you best. You know as well as myself what a sorry place this is to ask dear Lucy to come to, but on the other hand, I know nothing as to the accommodation your cottage offers. For my own part it does not signify; I can sleep on board any craft that takes me over; but have you room for the soldiers?—I mean, Cave and Trafford. I have no doubt they will be easily put up; and if they could be consulted, would rather bivouac under the olives than not come. At all events, let the boat bring yourselves, or the invitation for us, —and at once, for the impatience of one here (I am too discreet to particularize) is pushing my own endurance to its limits."

"Now, Lucy, what's it to be? Decide quickly, for the skipper will be here soon for his answer."

"I declare I don't know, Tom," said she, faltering at every word; "the cottage is very small, the way we live here very simple: I scarcely think it possible we can ask any one to be a guest——"

"So that you opine we ought to go over to Cagliari?" burst he in.

"I think *you* ought, Tom, certainly," said she, still more faintly.

"I see," said he, dryly, "you'll not be afraid of being left alone here?"

"No, not in the least," said she, and her voice was now a mere whisper, and she swayed slightly back aud forward like one about to faint.

"Such being the case," resumed Tom, "what you advise strikes me as admirable. I can make your apologies to old Sir Brook. I can tell him, besides, that you had scruples on the propriety —there may be Mrs. Grundys at Cagliari, who would be shocked, you know; and then, if you should get on here comfortably, and not feel it too lonely, why, perhaps I might be able to stay with them till they sail."

She tried to mutter a Yes, but her lips moved without a sound.

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"So that is settled, eh?" cried he, looking full at her.

She nodded, and then turned away her head.

"What an arrant little hypocrite it is!" said he, drawing his arm around her waist; "and with all the will in the world to deceive, what a poor actress! My child, I know your heart is breaking this very moment at my cruelty, my utter barbarity, and if you had only the courage you'd tell me I was a beast!"

"Oh! Tom—oh! Dear Tom," said she, hiding her face on his shoulder.

"Dear Tom, of course, when there's no help for it. And this is a specimen of the candour and frankness you promised me!"

"But, Tom," said she, faltering at every word, "it is not—as you think; it is not as you believe."

"What is not as I believe?" said he, quickly.

"I mean," added she, trembling with shame and confusion, "there is no more—that it's over—all over!" And unable to endure longer, she burst into tears, and buried her face between her hands.

"My own dear, dear sister," said he, pressing her to his side, "why have you not told me of this before?"

"I could not, I could not," sobbed she.

"One word more, Lu, and only one. Who was in fault? I mean, darling, was this *your* doing or *his*?"

"Neither, Tom; at least I think so. I believe that some deceit was practised—some treachery; but I don't know what, nor how. In fact, it is all a mystery to me; and my misery makes it none the clearer."

"Tell me, at least, whatever you know."

"I will bring you the letter," said she, disengaging herself from him.

"And did he write to you?" asked he, fiercely.

"No; *he* did not write—from *him* I have heard nothing."

She rushed out of the room as she spoke, leaving Tom in a state of wild bewilderment. Few as were the minutes of her absence, the interval to him seemed like an age of torture and doubt. Weak, and broken by illness, his fierce spirit was nothing the less bold and defiant; and over and over, as he waited there, he swore to himself to bring Trafford to a severe reckoning if he found that he had wronged his sister.

"How noble of her to hide all this sorrow from me, because she saw my suffering! What a fine nature! And it is with hearts like these fellows trifle and tamper, till they end by breaking them! Poor thing! might it not be better to leave her in the delusion of thinking him not a scoundrel, than to denounce and brand him?"

As he thus doubted and debated with himself, she entered the room. Her look was now calm and composed, but her face was lividly pale, and her very lips bloodless. "Tom," said she, gravely, "I don't think I would let you see this letter but for one reason, which is, that it will convince you that you have no cause of quarrel whatever with *him*."

"Give it to me—let me read it," burst he in impatiently; "I have neither taste nor temper for any more riddles—leave me to find my own road through this labyrinth."

"Shall I leave you alone, Tom?" said she, timidly, as she handed him the letter.

"Yes, do so. I think all the quicker when there's none by me." He turned his back to the light as he sat down, and began the letter.

"I believe I ought to tell you first," said she, as she stood with her hand on the lock of the door, "the circumstances under which that was written."

"Tell me nothing whatever—let me grope out my own road;" and now she moved away and left him.

He read the letter from beginning to end, and then re-read it. He saw there were many allusions to which he had no clue; but there was a tone in it which there was no mistaking, and that tone was treachery. The way in which the writer deprecated all possible criticism of her life at the outset, showed how sensitive she was to such remark, and how conscious of being open to it. Tom knew enough of life to be aware that the people who affect to brave the world are those who are past defying it. So far at least he felt he had read her truly; but he had to confess to himself that beyond this it was not easy to advance.

On the second reading, however, all appeared more clear and simple. It was the perfidious apology of a treacherous woman for a wrong which she had hoped, but had not been able, to inflict. "I see it all," cried Tom: "her jealousy has been stimulated by discovering Trafford's love for Lucy, and this is her revenge. It is just possible, too, she may have entangled him. There are meshes that men can scarcely keep free of. Trafford may have witnessed the hardship of her daily life—seen the indignities to which she submits—and possibly pitied her; if he has gone no further than this, there is no great mischief. What a clever creature she must be!" thought he again—"how easy it ought to be for a woman like that to make a husband adore her, and yet these women will not be content with that. Like the cheats at cards, they don't care to win by fair play" He went to the door, and called out "Lucy!"

The tone of his voice sounded cheerily, and she came on the instant.

"How did you meet after this?" asked he, as she entered.

"We have not met since that. I left the Priory, and came abroad three days after I received it."

"So then that was the secret of the zeal to come out and nurse poor brother Tom, eh?" said he, laughing.

"You know well if it was," said she, as her eyes swam in tears.

"No, no, my poor dear Lu, I never thought so; and right glad am I to know that you are not to live in companionship with the woman who wrote that letter."

"You think ill of her?"

"I will not tell you half how badly I think of her; but Trafford is as much wronged here as any one, or else I am but a sorry decipherer of mysterious signs."

"Oh, Tom!" cried she, clasping his hand and

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looking at him as though she yearned for one gleam of hope.

"It is so that I read it; but I do not like to rely upon my own sole judgment in such a case. Will you trust me with this letter, and will you let me show it to Sir Brook? He is wonderfully acute in tracing people's real meaning through all the misty surroundings of expression. I will go over to Cagliari at once, and see him. If all be as I suspect, I will bring them back with me. If Sir Brook's opinion be against mine, I will believe him to be the wiser man, and come back alone."

"I consent to everything, Tom, if you will give me but one pledge—you must give it seriously, solemnly."

"I guess what you mean, Lucy; your anxious face has told the story without words. You are afraid of my hot temper. You think I will force a quarrel on Trafford—yes, I knew what was in your thoughts. Well, on my honour, I will not. This I promise you faithfully."

She threw herself into his arms and kissed him, muttering in a low voice, "My own dear brother," in his ear.

"It is just as likely you may see me back again to-morrow, Lucy, and alone too. Mind that, girl! The version I have taken of this letter may turn out to be all wrong. Sir Brook may show me how, and where, and why I have mistaken it; and if so, Lu, I must have a pledge from you—you know what I mean."

"You need none, Tom," said she, proudly; "you shall not be ashamed of your sister."

"That was said like yourself, and I have no fears about you now. You will be anxious—you can't help being anxious, my poor child—about all this; but your uncertainty shall be as short as I can make it. Look out for me, at all events, with the evening breeze. I'll try and catch the land wind to take me up. If I fly no ensign, Lucy, I am alone; if you see the 'Jack,' it will mean I have company with me. Do you understand me?"

She nodded, but did not speak.

"Now, Lu, I'll just get my traps together, and be off; that light Tra-montana wind will last till daybreak, and by that time the sea-breeze will carry me along pleasantly. How I'd like to have you with me!"

"It is best as it is, Tom," said she, trying to smile.

"And if all wrong—I mean if all does not go right, Lucy, I have got a plan, and I am sure Sir Brook won't oppose it. We'll just pack up, wish the lead and the cobalt and the rest of it good-bye, and start for the Cape and join father. There's a project after your own heart, girl."

"Oh, Tom, dearest, if we could do that!"

"Think over it till we meet again, and it will at least keep away darker thoughts."

CHAPTER XLVII.

BY THE MINE AT LAVANNA.

The mine of Lavanna, on which Sir Brook had placed all his hopes of future fortune, was distant from the town of Cagliari about eighteen miles. It was an old, a very old shaft; Livy had mentioned it, and Pliny, in one of his letters, compares people of sanguine and hopeful temperament with men who believe in the silver ore of Lavanna. There had therefore been a traditionary character of failure attached to the spot, and not impossibly this very circumstance had given it a greater value in Fossbrooke's estimation; for he loved a tough contest with fortune, and his experiences had given him many such.

Popular opinion certainly set down the mine as a disastrous enterprise, and the list of those who had been ruined by the speculation was a long one. Nothing daunted by all he had heard, and fully convinced in his own mind that his predecessors had earned their failures by their own mistakes, Fossbrooke had purchased the property many years before, and there it had remained, like many of his other acquisitions, uncared for and unthought of, till the sudden idea had struck him that he wanted to be rich, and to be rich instantaneously.

He had coffee-plantations somewhere in Ceylon, and he had purchased largely of land in Canada; but to utilize either of these would be a work of time, whereas the mine would yield its metal bright and ready for the market. It was so much actual available money at once.

His first care was to restore so far as to make it habitable a dreary old ruinous barrack of a house, which a former speculator had built to hold all his officials and dependents. A few rooms that opened on a tumble-down terrace—of which some marble urns yet remained to bear witness of former splendour—were all that Sir Brook could manage to make habitable, and even these would have seemed miserable and uncomfortable to any one less bent on "roughing it" than himself.

Some guns and fishing-gear covered one wall of the room that served as dinner-room; and a few rude shelves on the opposite side contained such specimens of ore as were yet discovered, and the three or four books which formed their library; the space over the chimney displaying a sort of trophy of pipes of every sort and shape, from the well-browned meerschaum to the ignoble "dudeen" of Irish origin.

These were the only attempts at decoration they had made, but it was astonishing with what pleasure the old man regarded them, and with what pride he showed the place to such as accidentally came to see him.

"I'll have a room yet, just arrayed in this fashion, Tom," would he say, "when we have made our fortune, and go back to live in Egnland. I'll have a sort of snuggery, a correct copy of this; all the old beams in the ceiling, and those great massive architraves round the doors, shall be exactly followed, and the massive stone mantelpiece; and it will remind us, as we sit there of a winter's night, of the jolly evenings we have had here after a hard day's work in the shaft. Won't I have the laugh at you, Tom, too, as I tell you of the wry face you used to make over our prospects, the hang-dog look you'd give when the water was gaining on us, and our new pump got choked!"

Tom would smile at all this, though secretly nourishing no such thoughts for the future.

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Indeed, he had for many a day given up all hope of making his fortune as a miner, and merely worked on with the dogged determination not to desert his friend.

On one of the large white walls of their sitting-room, Sir Brook had sketched in charcoal a picture of the mine, in all the dreariest aspect of its poverty, and two sad-looking men, Tom and himself, working at the windlass over the shaft; and at the other extremity of the space there stood a picturesque mansion, surrounded with great forest trees, under which deer were grouped, and two men—the same—were riding up the approach on mettlesome horses, the elder of the two, with outstretched arm and hand, evidently directing his companion's attention to the rich scenes through which they passed. These were the "now" and "then" of the old man's vision, and he believed in them, as only those believe who draw belief from their own hearts, unshaken by all without.

It was at the close of a summer day, just in that brief moment when the last flicker of light tinges the earth at first with crimson and then with deep blue, to give way a moment later to black night, that Sir Brook sat with Colonel Cave after dinner, explaining to his visitor the fresco on the wall, and giving, so far as he might, his reasons to believe it a truthful foreshadowing of the future.

"But you tell me," said Cave, "that the speculation has proved the ruin of a score of fellows."

"So it has. Did you ever hear of the enterprise, at least of one worth the name, that had not its failures? or is success anything more in reality than the power of reasoning out how and why others have succumbed, and how to avoid the errors that have beset them? The men who embarked in this scheme were alike deficient in knowledge and in capital."

"Ah, indeed!" muttered Cave, who did not exactly say what his looks implied. "Are you their superior in these requirements?"

Sir Brook was quick enough to note the expression, and hastily said, "I have not much to boast of myself in these respects, but I possess that which they never had—that without which men accomplish nothing in life, going through the world mere desultory ramblers, and not like sturdy pilgrims, ever footing onward to the goal of their ambition. I have Faith!"

"And young Lendrick, what says he to it?"

"He scarcely shares my hopes, but he shows no signs of backwardness."

"He is not sanguine, then?"

"Nature did not make him so, and a man can no more alter his temperament than his stature. I began life with such a capital of confidence that, though I have been an arrant spendthrift, I have still a strong store by me. The cunning fellows laugh at us and call us dupes; but let me tell you, Cave, if accounts were squared, it might turn out that even as a matter of policy incredulity has not much to boast of, and were it not so, this world would be simply intolerable."

"I'd like, however, to hear that your mine was not all outlay," said Cave, bringing back the theme to its starting-point.

"So should I," said Fossbrooke, dryly.

"And I'd like to learn that some one more conversant—more professional in these matters——"

"Less ignorant than myself, in a word," said Fossbrooke, laughing. "You mean you'd like to hear a more trustworthy prophet predict as favourably; and with all that I agree heartily."

"There's no one would be better pleased to be certain that the fine palace on the wall there was not a castle in Spain. I think you know that."

"I do, Cave—I know it well; but bear in mind, your best runs in the hunting-field have not always been when you have killed your fox. The pursuit, when it is well sustained, with its fair share of perils met, dared, and overcome—this is success. Whatever keeps a man's heart up and his courage high to the end, is no mean thing. I own to you I hope to win, and I don't know that there is any such failure possible as would quench this hope."

"Just what Trafford said of you when he came back from that fishing excursion," cried Cave, as though carried away by a sudden burst of thought.

"What a good fellow he is! Shall we have him up here to-night?"

"No; some of our men have been getting into scrapes at Cagliari, and I have been obliged to ask him to stay there and keep things in order."

"Is his quarrel with his family final, or is there still an opening to reconciliation?"

"I'm afraid not. Some old preference of his mother's for the youngest son has helped on the difference; and then certain stories she brought back from Ireland of Lionel's doings there, or, at least, imputed doings, have, I suspect, steeled his father's heart completely against him."

"I'll stake my life on it there is nothing dishonourable to attach to him. What do they allege?"

"I have but a garbled version of the story, for from Trafford himself I have heard nothing; but I know, for I have seen the bills, he has lost largely at play to a very dangerous creditor, who also accuses him of designs on his wife; and the worst of this is, that the latter suspicion originated with Lady Trafford."

"I could have sworn it. It was a woman's quarrel, and she would sacrifice her own son for vengeance. I'll be able to pay her a very refined compliment when I next see her, Cave, and tell her that she is not in the least altered from the day I first met her. And has Lionel been passed over in the entail?"

"So he believes, and I think with too good reason."

"And all because he loved a girl whose alliance would confer honour on the proudest house in the land. I think I'll go over and pay Holt a visit. It is upwards of forty years since I saw Sir Hugh, and I have a notion I could bring him to reason."

Cave shook his head doubtingly.

"Ay, to be sure," sighed Fossbrooke, "it does make a precious difference whether one remonstrates at the head of a fine fortune or pleads for justice in a miner's jacket. I was

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forgetting that, Cave. Indeed, I am always forgetting it. And have they made no sort of settlement on Lionel? nothing to compensate him for the loss of his just expectations?"

"I suspect not. He has told me nothing beyond the fact that he is to have the purchase-money for the lieutenant-colonelcy, which I was ready and willing to vacate in his favour, but which we are unable to negotiate, because he owes a heavy sum, to the payment of which this must go."

"Can nothing be done with his creditor?—can we not manage to secure the debt, and pay the interest?"

"This same creditor is one not easily dealt with," said Cave, slowly.

"A money-lender?"

"No. He's the man I just told you wanted to involve Trafford with his own wife. As dangerous a fellow as ever lived. I take shame to myself to own that, though acquainted with him for years, I never really knew his character till lately."

"Don't think the worse of yourself for that, Cave. The faculty to read bad men at sight argues too much familiarity with badness. I like to hear a fellow say, 'I never so much as suspected it.' Is this man's name a secret?"

"No. Nothing of the kind. I don't suppose you ever met him; but he is well known in the service—better perhaps in India than at home—he served on Rolffe's staff in Bengal. His name is Sewell."

"What! Walter Sewell?"

"Yes; that's his name. Do you know him?"

"Do I know him!" muttered the old man, as he bent down and supported his head upon his hand.

"And do I wrong him in thinking him a dangerous fellow?" asked Cave. But Fossbrooke made no answer; indeed, he never heard the question, so absorbed was he in his own thoughts.

"What do you know of him?" asked Cave, in a louder voice.

"Everything—everything! I know all that he has done, and scores of things he would have done if he could. By what ill-luck was it that Trafford came to know this man?"

"They met at the Cape, and Trafford went to visit him. When they came over to Ireland—I suspect—I do not know it—but I suspect that there was some flirtation in the case. She is extremely pretty, and a coquette."

"I declare," said Fossbrooke, as he arose and paced the room, totally inattentive to all the other said—"I declare I begin sometimes to think that the only real activity in life is on the part of the scoundrels. Half the honest people in the world pass their lives in forming good intentions, while the rogues go straight at their work and do it. Do you think, Cave, that Trafford would tell me frankly what has passed between this man and himself?"

"I'm not sure. I mean, he might have some reserve on one point, and that is the very point on which his candour would be most important. There have been letters, it would seem, that Sewell has got hold of, and threatens exposure, if some enormous demand be not complied with."

"What! Is the scoundrel so devoid of devices that he has to go back on an old exploded villany? Why, he played that game at Rangoon, and got five thousand pounds out of Kit Beresford."

"I have heard something of that."

"Have heard of it! Who that ever served in India is not familiar with the story? What does Trafford mean by not coming up here, and telling me the whole story?"

"I'll tell you what he means, Fossbrooke: he is heartily ashamed of himself; he is in love with another, and he knows that you know it; but he believes you may have heard stories to his detriment, and, tied as he is—or fancies he is—by a certain delicate reserve, he cannot go into his exculpation. There, in one word, is the reason that he is not here to-night; he asked me to put him on special duty, and save him from all the awkwardness of meeting you with a half-confidence."

"And I, meanwhile, have written over to Tom Lendrick to come over here with his sister, or to let us go and pay them a visit at the island."

"You never told me of this."

"Why should I? I was using the rights I possess over you as my guests, doing for you what I deemed best for your amusement."

"What answer have they given you?"

"None up to this; indeed, there has been scarcely time; and now, from what you tell, I do not well know what answer I'd like to have from them."

For several minutes neither uttered a word; at last Fossbrooke said, "Trafford was right not to meet me. It has saved him some prevarication, and me some passion; write, and tell him I said so."

"I can scarcely do that, without avowing that I have revealed to you more than I am willing to own."

"When you told me in whose hands he was you told me more than all the rest. Few men can live in Wat Sewell's intimacy, and come unscathed out of the companionship."

"That would tell ill for myself, for I have been of late on terms of much intimacy with him."

"You haven't played with him?"

"Ay, but I have; and what's more, won of him," said Cave, laughing.

"You profited little by that turn of fortune," said Fossbrooke, sarcastically.

"You imply that he did not pay his debts; but you are wrong; he came to me the morning after we had played, and acquitted the sum lost."

"Why, I am entangling myself in the miracles I hear! That Sewell should lose is strange enough: that he should pay his losses is simply incredible."

"Your opinion of him would seem to be a very indifferent one."

"Far from it, Cave. It is without any qualification whatever. I deem him the worst fellow I ever knew; nor am I aware of any greater misfortune to a young fellow entering on life than to have become his associate."

"You astonish me! I was prepared to hear things of him that one could not justify, nor would have willingly done themselves, but not to learn that he was beyond the pale of honour."

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"It is exactly where he stands, sir—beyond the pale of honour. I wish we had not spoken of him," said the old man, rising, and pacing the room. "The memory of that fellow is the bitterest draught I ever put to my lips; he has dashed my mind with more unworthy doubts and mean suspicions of other men than all my experience of life has ever taught me. I declare, I believe if I had never known him my heart would have been as hopeful to-day as it was fifty years ago."

"How came it that I never heard you speak of him?"

"Is it my wont, Cave, to talk of my disasters to my friends? You surely have known me long enough to say whether I dwell upon the reverses and disappointments of my life. It is a sorry choice of topics, perhaps, that is left to men old as myself when they must either be croakers or boasters. At all events, I have chosen the latter; and people bear with it better, because they can smile at it."

"I wish with all my heart I had never played with Sewell, and still more that I had not won of him."

"Was it a heavy sum?"

"For a man like myself, a very heavy sum. I was led on—giving him his revenge, as it is called—till I found myself playing for a stake which, had I lost, would have cost me the selling my commission."

Fossbrooke nodded, as though to say he had known of such incidents in the course of his life.

"When he appeared at my quarters the next morning to settle the debt, I was so overcome with shame, that I pledge you my word of honour, I believe I'd rather have been the loser, and taken all the ruin the loss would have brought down upon me."

"How your friend must have appreciated your difficulty!" said Fossbrooke, sarcastically.

"He was frank enough, at all events, to own that he could not share my sense of embarrassment. He jeered a little at my pretension to be an example to my young officers, as well he might. I had selected an unlucky moment to advance such a claim; and then he handed me over my winnings with all the ease and indifference in life."

"I declare, Cave, I was expecting, to the very last moment, a different ending to your story. I waited to hear that he had handed you a bond of his wife's guardian, which, for prudential reasons, should not be pressed for prompt payment."

"Good heavens! what do you mean?" cried Cave, leaning over the table in intense eagerness. "Who could have told you this?"

"Beresford told me: he brought me the very document once to my house, with my own signature annexed to it—an admirable forgery as ever was done. My seal too was there. By bad luck, however, the paper was stolen from me that very night—taken out of a locked portfolio. And when Beresford charged the fellow with the fraud, Sewell called him out, and shot him."

Cave sat for several minutes like one stunned and overcome. He looked vacantly before him, but gave no sign of hearing or marking what was said to him. At last he arose, and walking over to a table, unlocked his writing-desk, and took out a large packet, of which he broke the seal, and, without examining the contents, handed it to Fossbrooke, saying—

"Is that like it?"

"It is the very bond itself: there's my signature. I wish I wrote as good a hand now," said he, laughing. "It is as I always said, Cave," cried he in a louder, fuller voice. "The world persists in calling this swindler a clever fellow, and there never was a greater mistake. The devices of the scoundrel are the very fewest imaginable; and he repeats his three or four tricks, with scarcely a change, throughout a lifelong."

"And this is a forgery!" muttered Cave, as he bent over the document and scanned it closely.

"You shall see me prove it such. You'll intrust me with it. I'll promise to take better care of it this time."

"Of course. What do you mean to do?"

"Nothing by course of law, Cave. So far I promise you, and I know it is of that you are most afraid. No, my good friend. If you never figure in a witness-box till brought there by *me*, you may snap your fingers for many a day at cross-examinations."

"This cannot be made the subject of a personal altercation," said Cave, hesitatingly.

"If you mean a challenge, certainly not; but it may be made the means of extricating Trafford from his difficulties with this man, and I can already see where and what these difficulties are."

"You allude to the wife?"

"We will not speak of that, Cave," said Fossbrooke, colouring deeply. "Mrs. Sewell has claims on my regard, that nothing her husband could do, nothing that he might become, could efface. She was the daughter of the best and truest friend, and the most noble-hearted fellow I ever knew. I have long ceased to occupy any place in her affections, but I shall never cease to remember whose child she was—how he loved her, and how in the last words he ever spoke, he asked me to befriend her. In those days I was a rich man, and had the influence that wealth confers. I had access to great people too, and wanting nothing for myself, could easily be of use to others; but where am I wandering to? I only intended to say that *her* name is not to be involved in any discussion those things may occasion. What are these voices I hear outside in the court? Surely that must be Tom Lendrick I hear." He arose and flung open the window, and at the same instant a merry voice cried out, "Here we are, Sir Brook; Trafford and myself. I met him in the Piazza at Cagliari, and carried him off with me."

"Have you brought anything to eat with you?" asked Fossbrooke.

"That I have—half a sheep and a turkey," said Tom.

"Then you are thrice welcome," said Fossbrooke, laughing; "for Cave and I are reduced to fluids. Come up at once; the fellows will take care of your horses. We'll make a night of it, Cave," said the old man, as he proceeded to cover the table with bottles. "We'll drink success to the Mine! We'll drink to the day when, as lieutenant-general, you come and pay me a visit in that great house yonder; and here come the boys to help us."

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CHAPTER XLVIII.

UP AT THE MINE.

THOUGH they carried their convivialities into a late hour of the night, Sir Brook was stirring early on the next morning, and was at Tom Lendrick's bedside ere he was awake.

"We had no time for much talk together, Tom, when you came up last night," said he; "nor is there much now, for I am off to England within an hour."

"Off to England! and the mine?"

"The mine must take care of itself, Tom, till you are stronger and able to look after it. My care at present is to know if Trafford be going back with you."

"I meant that he should; in fact, I came over here expressly to ask you what was best to be done. You can guess what I allude to; and I had brought with me a letter which Lucy thought you ought to read; and indeed I intended to be as cautious and circumspect as might be, but I was scarcely on shore when Trafford rushed across a street and threw his arm over my shoulder, and almost sobbed out his joy at seeing me. So overcome was I that I forgot all my prudence—all indeed that I came for. I asked him to come up with me—ay, and to come back too with me to the island and stay a week there."

"I scarcely think that can be done," said the old man, gravely. "I like Trafford well, and would be heartily glad I could like him still better; but I must learn more about him ere I consent to his going over to Madalena. What is this letter you speak of?"

"You'll find it in the pocket of my dressing-case there. Yes, that's it."

"It's a longish epistle, but in a hand I well know—at least I knew it well long ago." There was an indescribable sadness in the tone in which he said this, and he turned away that his face should not be seen. He seated himself in a recess of the window and read the letter from end to end. With a heavy sigh he laid it on the table, and muttered below his breath, "What a long long way to have journeyed from what I first saw her, to *that!*"

Tom did not venture to speak, nor show by any sign that he had heard him, and the old man went on in broken sentences—"And to think that these are the fine natures—the graceful—the beautiful, that are thus wrecked! It is hard to believe it. In the very same characters of that letter I have read such things, so beautiful, so touching, so tender, as made the eyes overflow to follow them. You see I was right, Tom," cried he aloud, in a strong stern voice, "when I said that she should not be your sister's companion. I told Sewell I would not permit it. I was in a position to dictate my own terms to him, and I did so. I must see Trafford about this;" and as he spoke he arose and left the room.

While Tom proceeded to dress himself, he was not altogether pleased with the turn of events. If he had made any mistake in inviting Trafford to return with him, there would be no small awkwardness in recalling the invitation. He saw plainly enough he had been precipitate, but precipitation is one of those errors which, in their own cases, men are prone to ascribe to warm-heartedness. "Had I been as distrustful or suspicious as that publican yonder," is the burden of their self-gratulation; and in all that moral surgery where men operate on themselves, they cut very gingerly.

"Of course," muttered Tom, "I can't expect Sir Brook will take the same view of these things. Age and suspicion are simply convertible terms, and, thank heaven, I have not arrived at either."

"What are you thanking heaven for?" said Sir Brook, entering. "In nine cases out of ten men use that formula as a measure of their own vanity. For which of your shortcomings were you professing your gratitude, Tom?"

"Have you seen Trafford, sir?" asked Tom, trying to hide his confusion by the question.

"Yes, we have had some talk together."

Tom waited to hear further, and showed by his air of expectation how eager he felt; but the old man made no sign of any disclosure, but sat there silent and wrapped in thought. "I asked him this," said the old man fiercely, "'If you had got but one thousand pounds in all the world, would it have occurred to you to go down and stake it on a match of billiards against Jonathan?' 'Unquestionably not,' he replied; 'I never could have dreamed of such presumption.'

"'And on what pretext, by what impulse of vanity,' said I, 'were you prompted to enter the lists with one every way your superior in tact, in craft, and in coquetry? If she accepted your clumsy addresses, did you never suspect that there was a deeper game at issue than your pretensions?' 'You are all mistaken,' said he, growing crimson with shame as he spoke; 'I made no advances whatever. I made her certain confidences, it is true, and I asked her advice; and then as we grew to be more intimate we wrote to each other, and Sewell came upon my letters, and affected to think I was trying to steal his wife's affection. She could have dispelled the suspicion at once. She could have given the key to the whole mystery, and why she did not is more than I can say. My unlucky accident just then occurred, and I only issued from my illness to hear that I had lost largely at play, and was so seriously compromised besides, that it was a question whether he would shoot me, or sue for a divorce.'

"It was clear enough that so long as he represented the heir to the Holt property, Sewell treated him with a certain deference; but when Trafford declared to his family that he would accept no dictation, but go his own road, whatever the cost, from that moment Sewell pressed his claims, and showed little mercy in his exactions.

"'And what's your way out of this mess?' asked I. 'What do you propose to do?'

"'I have written to my father, begging he will pay off this debt for me—the last I shall ever ask him to acquit. I have requested my brother to back my petition; and I have told Sewell the steps I have taken, and promised him if they should fail that I will sell out, and acquit my debt at the price of my commission.'

"'And at the price of your whole career in life?'

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"'Just so. If you'll not employ me in the mine, I must turn navvy.'

"'And how, under such circumstances as these, can you accept Tom Lendrick's invitation, and go over to Madalena?'

"'I could not well say no when he asked me, but I determined not to go. I only saw the greater misery I should bring on myself. Cave can send me off in haste to Gibraltar or to Malta. In fact, I pass off the stage and never turn up again during the rest of the performance.'"

"Poor fellow!" said Tom, with deep feeling.

"He was so manly throughout it all," said Fossbrooke, "so straightforward and so simple. Had there been a grain of coxcomb in his nature, the fellow would have thought the woman in love with him, and made an arrant fool of himself in consequence, but his very humility saved him. I'm not sure, Master Tom, you'd have escaped so safely—eh?"

"I don't see why you think so."

"Now for action," said Fossbrooke. "I must get to England at once. I shall go over to Holt, and see if I can do anything with Sir Hugh. I expect little, for when men are under the frown of fortune they plead with small influence. I shall then pass over to Ireland. With Sewell I can promise myself more success. I may be away three or four weeks. Do you think yourself strong enough to come back here and take my place till I return?"

"Quite so. I'll write and tell Lucy to join me."

"I'd wait till Saturday," said Fossbrooke, in a low voice. "Cave says they can sail by Saturday morning, and it would be as well Lucy did not arrive till they are gone."

"You are right," said Tom, thoughtfully.

"It's not his poverty I'm thinking of," cried Fossbrooke. "With health, and strength, and vigour, a man can fight poverty. I want to learn that he is as clean-handed in this affair with the Sewells as he thinks himself. If I once were sure of that, I'd care little for his loss of fortune. I'd associate him with us in the mine, Tom. There will always be more wealth here than we can need. That new shaft promises splendidly. Such fat ore I have not seen for many a day."

Tom's mouth puckered, and his expression caught a strange sort of half-quizzical look, but he did not venture to speak.

"I know well," added the old man, cautiously, "that it's no good service to a young fellow to plunge him at once into ample means without making him feel the fatigues and trials of honest labour. He must be taught to believe that there is work before him—hard work too. He must be made to suppose that it is only by persistence and industry, and steady devotion to the pursuit, that it will yield its great results."

"I don't suspect our success will turn his head," said Tom, dryly.

"That's the very thing I want to guard against, Tom. Don't you see it is there all my anxiety lies?"

"Let him take a turn of our life here, and I'll warrant him against the growth of an over-sanguine disposition."

"Just so," said Fossbrooke, too intensely immersed in his own thought either to notice the words or the accents of the other—"just so; a hard winter up here in the snows, with all tho tackle frozen, ice on the cranks, ice on the chains, ice everywhere, a dense steam from the heated air below, and a cutting sleet above, try a man's chest smartly; and then that lead colic, of which you can tell him something. These give a zest and a difficulty that prove what a man's nature is like."

"They have proved mine pretty well," said Tom, with a bitter laugh.

"And there's nothing like it in all the world for forming a man!" cried Fossbrooke, in a voice of triumph. "Your fair-weather fellows go through life with half their natures unexplored. They know no more of the interior country of their hearts than we do of Central Africa. Beyond the fact that there is something there—something—they know nothing. A man must have conflict, struggle, peril, to feel what stuff there's in him. He must be baffled, thwarted, ay, and even defeated. He must see himself amongst other men as an unlucky dog that fellows will not willingly associate with. He must, on poor rations and tattered clothing, keep up a high heart—not always an easy thing to do; and, hardest of all, he must train himself never in all his poverty to condescend to a meanness that when his better day comes he would have to blush for."

"If you weight poverty with all those fine responsibilities, I suspect you'll break its back at once," said Tom, laughing.

"Far from it. It is out of these selfsame responsibilities that poverty has a backbone at all;" and the old man stood bolt upright, and threw back his head as though he were emblematising what he had spoken of.

"Now, Tom, for business. Are you strong enough to come back here and look after the shaft?"

"Yes. I think so. I hope so."

"I shall probably be some weeks away. I'll have to go over to Holt; and I mean to run down amongst the Cornwall fellows and show them some of our ore. I'll make their mouths water when they see it."

Tom bit off the end of his cigar, but did not speak.

"I mean to make Beattie a present of ten shares in that new shaft, too. I declare it's like a renewal of youth to me to feel I can do this sort of thing again. I'll have to write to your father to come back also. Why should he live in exile while we could all be together again in affluence and comfort?"

Tom's eyes ranged round the bare walls and tho shattered windows, and he raised his eyebrows in astonishment at the other's illusions.

"We had a stiff 'heat' before we weathered the point, that's certain, Tom," said the old man. "There were days when the sky looked dark enough, and it needed all our pluck and all our resolution to push on; but I never lost heart—I never wavered about our certainty of success—did I?"

"No; that you did not. And if you had, I certainly should not have wondered at it."

"I'll ask you to bear this testimony to me one of these days, and to tell how I bore up at times that you yourself were not over hopeful."

"Oh, that you may. I'll be honest enough

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to own that the sanguine humour was a rare one with me."

"And it's your worst fault. It is better for a young fellow to be disappointed every hour of the twenty-four than to let incredulity gain on him. Believe everything that it would be well to believe, and never grow soured with fortune if the dice don't turn up as you want them. I declare I'm sorry to leave this spot just now, when all looks so bright and cheery about it. You're a lucky dog, Tom, to come in when the battle is won, and nothing more to do than announce the victory." And so saying he hurried off to prepare for the road, leaving Tom Lendrick in a state of doubt whether he should be annoyed or amused at the opinions he had heard from him.

CHAPTER XLIX.

PARTING COUNSELS.

Quick and decided in all his movements, Fossbrooke set out almost immediately after this scene with Tom, and it was only as they gathered together at breakfast that it was discovered he had gone.

"He left Bermuda in the very same fashion," said Cave. "He had bought a coffee-plantation in the morning, and he set out the same night; and I don't believe he ever saw his purchase after. I asked him about it, and he said he thought—he wasn't quite sure—he made it a present to Dick Molyneux on his marriage. 'I only know,' said he, 'it's not mine now.'"

As they sat over their breakfast, or smoked after it, they exchanged stories about Fossbrooke, all full of his strange eccentric ways, but all equally abounding in traits of kind-heartedness and generosity. Comparing him with other men of liberal mould, the great and essential difference seemed to be that Fossbrooke never measured his generosity. When he gave, he gave all that he had; he had no notion of aiding or assisting. His idea was to establish a man at once—easy, affluent, and independent. He abounded in precepts of prudence, maxims of thrift, and suchlike; but in practice he was recklessly lavish.

"Why an't there more like him?" cried Trafford, enthusiastically.

"I'm not sure it would be better," said Cave. "The race of idle, cringing, do-nothing fellows is large enough already. I suspect men like Fossbrooke—at least what he was in his days of prosperity—give a large influence to the spread of dependants."

"The fault I find with him," said Tom, "is his credulity. He believes everything, and, what's worse, every one. There are fellows here who persuade him this mine is to make his fortune, and if he had thousands to-morrow he would embark them all in this speculation, the only result of which is to enrich these people, and ruin ourselves."

"Is that your view of it?" asked Cave, in some alarm.

"Of course it is; and if you doubt it, come down with me into the gallery, as they call it, and judge for yourself."

"But I have already joined the enterprise."

"What! invested money in it?"

"Ay. Two thousand pounds—a large sum for me, I promise you. It was with immense persuasion, too, I got Fossbrooke to let me have these shares. He offered me scores of other things as a free gift in preference—salmon-fisheries in St John's—a saw-mill on Lake Huron—a large tract of land at the Cape; I don't know what else; but I was firm to the copper, and would have nothing but this."

"I went in for lead," said Trafford, laughingly.

"*You!* and are *you* involved in this also?" asked Tom.

"Yes; so far as I have promised to sell out, and devote whatever remains after paying my debts to the mine."

"Why, this beats all the infatuation I ever heard of! You have not the excuse of men at a distance, who have only read or listened to plausible reports, but you have come here; you have been on the spot; you have seen with your own eyes the poverty-stricken air of the whole concern, the broken machinery, the ruined scaffoldings, the mounds of worthless dross that hide the very approach to the shaft; and you have seen us, too, and where, and how we live!"

"Very true," broke in Cave, "but I have heard *him* talk, and I could no more resist the force of his words than I could stand in a current and not be carried down by it."

"Exactly so," chimed in Trafford; "he was all the more irresistible that he did not seek to persuade. Nay, he tried his utmost to put me off the project, and, as with the Colonel, he offered me dozens of other ways to push my fortune, without costing me a farthing."

"Might not we," said Cave, "ask how it comes that you, taking this dispiriting view of all here, still continue to embark your fortunes in its success?"

"It is just because they are my fortunes; had it been my fortune, I had been more careful. There is all the difference in life between a man's hopes and his bank-stock. But if you ask me why I hang on here, after I have long ceased to think anything can come of it, my answer is, I do so just as I would refuse to quit the wreck, when he declared he would not leave it. It might be I should save my life by deserting him; but it would be little worth having afterwards; and I'd rather live with him in daily companionship, watching his manly courageous temper and his high-hearted way of dealing with difficulties, than I would go down the stream prosperously with many another; and over and over have I said to myself, if that fine nature of his can make defeat so endurable, what splendour of triumph would it not throw over a real success!"

"And this is exactly what we want to share," said Trafford, smiling.

"But what do either of you know of the man, beyond the eccentricity, or the general kindliness with which he meets you? You have not seen him as I have, rising to his daily toil with a racking head and a fevered frame, without a

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word of complaint, or anything beyond a passing syllable of discomfort; never flinching, never yielding; as full of kind thought for others, as full of hopeful counsel, as in his best days; lightening labour with proverb and adage, and stimulating zeal with many a story. You can't picture to yourselves this man, once at the head of a princely fortune, which he dispensed with more than princely liberality, sharing a poor miner's meal of beans and oil with pleasant humour, and drinking a toast in wine that would set the teeth on edge, to that good time when they would have more generous fare, and as happy hearts to enjoy it.

"Nor have you seen him, as I have, the nurse beside the sick-bed, so gentle, so thoughtful—a very woman in tenderness; and all that after a day of labour that would have borne down the strongest and the stoutest. And who is he that takes the world in such good part, and thinks so hopefully of his fellow men? The man of all his time who has been most betrayed, most cheated, whose trust has been most often abused, whose benefits have been oftenest paid back in ingratitude. It is possible enough he may not be the man to guide one to wealth and fortune; but to whatever condition of life he leads, of one thing I am certain, there will be no better teacher of the spirit and temper to enjoy it; there will be none who will grace any rank—the highest or the humblest—with a more manly dignity."

"It was knowing all this of him," said Cave, "that impelled me to associate myself with any enterprise he belonged to. I felt that if success were to be won by persistent industry and determination, his would do it, and that his noble character gave a guarantee for fair dealing better than all the parchments lawyers could engross."

"From what I have seen of life, I'd not say that success attends such men as he is," said Tom. "The world would be perhaps too good if it were so."

Silence now fell upon the party, and the three men smoked on for some time without a word. At last Tom, rising from the bench where he had been seated, said, "Take my advice, keep to your soldiering, and have nothing to do with this concern here. You sail on Saturday next, and by Sunday evening, if you can forget that there is such an island as Sardinia, and such poor devils on it as ourselves, it will be all the better for you."

"I am sorry to see you so depressed, Lendrick," said Cave.

"I'm not so low as you suspect; but I'd be far lower if I thought that others were going to share our ill-fortunes."

Though the speech had no direct reference to Trafford, it chanced that their eyes met as he spoke, and Trafford's face flushed to a deep crimson as he felt the application of the words.

"Come here, Tom," said he, passing his arm within Lendrick's, and leading him off the terrace into a little copse of wild hollies at the foot of it. "Let me have one word with you." They walked on some seconds without a word, and when Trafford spoke his voice trembled with agitation. "I don't know," muttered he, "if Sir Brook has told you of the change in my fortunes—that I am passed over in the entail by my father, and am, so to say, a beggar."

Lendrick nodded, but said nothing.

"I have got debts, too, which, if not paid by my family, will compel me to sell out—has he told you this?"

"Yes; I think he said so."

"Like the kind, good fellow he is," continued Trafford, "he thinks he can do something with my people—talk my father over, and induce my mother to take my side. I'm afraid I know them better, and that they're not sorry to be rid of me at last. It is, however, just possible—I will not say more, but just possible—that he may succeed in making some sort of terms for me before they cut me off altogether. I have no claim whatever, for I have spent already the portion that should have come to me as a younger son. I must be frank with you, Tom. There's no use in trying to make my case seem better than it is." He paused, and appeared to expect that the other would say something; but Tom smoked on, and made no sign whatever.

"And it comes to this," said Trafford, drawing a long breath and making a mighty effort, "I shall either have some small pittance or other—and small it must be—or be regularly cleaned out without a shilling."

A slight, very slight, motion of Tom's shoulders showed that he had heard him.

"If the worst is to befall me," said Trafford, with more energy than he had shown before, "I'll no more be a burthen to you than to any other of my friends. You shall hear little more of me; but if Fortune is going to give me her last chance, will *you* give me one also?"

"What do you mean?" said Tom, curtly.

"I mean," stammered out Trafford, whose colour came and went with agitation as he spoke—"I mean, shall I have your leave—that is, may I go over to Madalena?—may I—oh, Tom," burst he out at last, "you know well what hope my heart clings to."

"If there was nothing but a question of money in the way," broke in Tom, boldly, "I don't see how beggars like ourselves could start very strong objections. That a man's poverty should separate him from us would be a little too absurd; but there's more than that in it. You have got into some scrape or other. I don't want to force a confidence—I don't want to hear about it. It's enough for me that you are not a free man."

"If I can satisfy you that this is not the case——"

"It won't do to satisfy *me*," said Tom, with a strong emphasis on the last word.

"I mean, if I can show that nothing unworthy, nothing dishonourable, attaches to me."

"I don't suspect all that would suffice. It's not a question of your integrity or your honour. It's the simple matter whether, when professing to care for one woman, you made love to another?"

"If I can disprove that. It's a long story——"

"Then for heaven's sake, don't tell it to me."

"Let me, at least, show that it is not fair to shun me."

There was such a tone of sorrow in his voice as he spoke that Tom turned at once to-

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wards him, and said, "If you can make all this affair straight—I mean, if it be clear that there was no more in it than such a passing levity that better men than either of us have now and then fallen into—I don't see why you may not come back with me."

"Oh, Tom, if you really will let me!"

"Remember, however, you come at your own peril. I tell you frankly, if your explanation should fail to satisfy the one who has to hear it, it fails with me too—do you understand me?"

"I think I do," said Trafford, with dignity.

"It's as well that we should make no mistake; and now you are free to accept my invitation or to refuse it. What do you say?"

"I say, Yes. I go back with you."

"I'll go and see, then, if Cave will join us," said Tom, turning hastily away, and very eager to conceal the agitation he was suffering, and of which he was heartily ashamed.

Cave accepted the project with delight—he wanted to see the island—but, more still, he wanted to see that Lucy Lendrick of whom Sir Brook had spoken so rapturously. "I suppose," whispered he in Tom's ear, "you know all about Trafford. You've heard that he has been cut out of the estate, and been left with nothing but his pay?"

Tom nodded assent.

"He's not a fellow to sail under false colours, but he might still have some delicacy in telling about it——"

"He has told me all," said Tom, dryly.

"There was a scrape too—not very serious, I hope—in Ireland."

"He has told me of that also," said Tom. "When shall you be ready? Will four o'clock suit you?"

"Perfectly."

And they parted.

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CHAPTER L.

ON THE ISLAND.

When, shortly after daybreak, the felucca rounded the point of the island, and stood in for the little bay of Madalena, Lucy was roused from sleep by her maid with the tidings. "Give me the glass, quickly," cried she, as she rushed to the window, and after one rapid glance, which showed her the little craft gaily decked with the flag of England, she threw herself upon her bed, and sobbed in very happiness. In truth, there was in the long previous day's expectancy—in the conflict of her hope and fear—a tension that could only be relieved by tears.

How delightful it was to rally from that momentary gush of emotion, and feel so happy! To think so well of the world as to believe that all goes for the best in it, is a pleasant frame of mind to begin one's day with. To feel that, though we have suffered anxiety, and all the tortures of deferred hope, it was good for us to know that everything was happening better for us than we could have planned it for ourselves, and that positively it was not so much by events we had been persecuted, as by our own impatient reading of them. Something of all these sensations passed through Lucy's mind as she hurried here and there to prepare for her guests, stopping at intervals to look out towards the sea, and wonder how little way the felucca made, and how persistently she seemed to cling to the selfsame spot.

Nor was she altogether unjust in this. The breeze had died away at sunrise; and in the interval before the land-wind should spring up, there was almost a dead calm.

"Is she moving at all?" cried Lucy, to one of the sailors who lounged on the rocks beneath the window.

The man thought not. They had kept their course too far from shore, and were becalmed in consequence.

How could they have done so?—surely sailors ought to have known better! and Tom, who was always boasting how he knew every current, and every eddy of wind, what was he about? It was a rude shock to that sweet optimism of a few moments back to have to own that here at least was something that might have been better. "And what ought they to do? what can they do?" asked she, impatiently, of the sailor.

"Wait till towards noon, when the land-breeze freshens up, and beat."

"Beat means, go back and forward, scarcely gaining a mile an hour?"

The sailor smiled, and owned she was not far wrong.

"Which means that they may pass the day there," cried she, fretfully.

"They're not going to do it, anyhow," said the man; "they are lowering a boat, and going to row ashore."

"Oh, how much better! and how long will it take them?"

"Two hours, if they're good rowers; three, or even four, if they're not."

"Come in and have a glass of wine," said she; "and you shall look through the telescope, and tell me how they row, and who are in the boat—I mean, how many are in it."

"What a fine glass! I can see them as if they were only a cable's length off. There's the Signorino Maso, your brother, at the bow oar; and then there's a sailor, and another sailor; and there's a Signore, a large man—per Bacco, he's the size of three—at the stroke; and an old man, with white hair, and a cap with gold lace round it, steering; he has bright buttons down his coat."

"Never mind *him*. What of the large man—is he young?"

"He pulls like a young fellow! There now, he has thrown off his coat, and is going at it in earnest! Ah, he's no Signore after all."

"How no Signore?" asked she, hastily.

"None but a sailor could row as he does! A man must be bred to it to handle an oar in that fashion."

She took the glass impatiently from him, and tried to see the boat; but whether it was the unsteadiness of her hand, or that some dimness clouded her eyes, she could not catch the object, and turned away and left the room.

The land-wind freshened, and sent a strong sea against the boat, and it was not until late

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in the afternoon that the party landed, and, led by Tom, ascended the path to the cottage. At his loud shout of "Lucy," she came to the door, looking very happy indeed, but more agitated than she well liked. "My sister, Colonel Cave," said Tom, as they came up; "and here's an old acquaintance, Lucy; but he's a major now. Sir Brook is away to England, and sent you all manner of loving messages."

"I have been watching your progress since early morning," said Lucy, "and, in truth, I scarcely thought you seemed to come nearer. It was a hard pull."

"All Trafford's fault," said Tom, laughing; "he would do more than his share, and kept the boat always dead against her rudder."

"That's not the judgment one of our boatmen here passed on him," said Lucy; "he said it must be a sailor, and no Signore, who was at the stroke oar."

"See what it is to have been educated at Eton," said Cave, slyly; "and yet there are people assail our public schools!"

Thus chatting and laughing, they entered the cottage, and were soon seated at table at a most comfortable little dinner.

"I will say," said Tom, in return for some compliment from the Colonel, "she is a capital housekeeper. I never had anything but limpets and sea-urchins to eat till she came, and now I feed like an alderman."

"When men assign us the humble office of providing for them, I remark they are never chary of their compliments," said Lucy, laughingly. "Master Tom is willing to praise my cookery, though he says nothing of my companionship."

"It was such a brotherly speech," chimed in Cave.

"Well, it's jolly, certainly," said Tom, as he leaned back in his chair, "to sit here with that noble sea-view at our feet, and those grand old cliffs over us."

While Cave concurred, and strained his eyes to catch some object out seaward, Trafford, for almost the first time, found courage to address Lucy. He had asked something about whether she liked the island as well as that sweet cottage where first he saw her, and by this they were led to talk of that meeting, and of the long happy day they had passed at Holy Island.

"How I'd like to go back to it!" said Lucy, earnestly.

"To the time, or to the place? to which would you wish to go back!"

"To The Nest," said Lucy, blushing slightly; "they were about the happiest days I ever knew, and dear papa was with us then."

"And is it not possible that you may all meet together there one of these days? he'll not remain at the Cape, will he?"

"I was forgetting that you knew him," said she, warmly; "you met papa since I saw you last; he wrote about you, and told how kindly and tenderly you had nursed him on his voyage."

"Oh, did he? did he indeed speak of me?" cried Trafford, with intense emotion.

"He not only spoke warmly about his affection for you, but he showed pain and jealousy when he thought that some newer friends had robbed him of you—but perhaps you forget the Cape and all about it."

Trafford's face became crimson, and what answer he might have made to this speech there is no knowing, when Tom cried out, "We are going to have our coffee and cigar on the rocks, Lucy, but you will come with us."

"Of course; I have had three long days of my own company, and am quite wearied of it."

In the little cleft to which they repaired, a small stream divided the space, leaving only room for two people on the rocks at either side; and after some little jesting as to who was to have the coffee-pot, and who the brandy-flask, Tom and Cave nestled in one corner, while Lucy and Trafford, with more caution as to proximity, seated themselves on the rock opposite.

"We were talking about the Cape, Major Trafford, I think," said Lucy, determined to bring him back to the dreaded theme.

"Were we? I think not; I think we were remembering all the pleasant days beside the Shannon."

"If you please, more sugar and no brandy; and now for the Cape."

"I'll just hand them the coffee," said he, rising and crossing over to the others.

"Won't she let you smoke, Trafford?" said Tom, seeing the unlighted cigar in the other's fingers; "come over here, then, and escape the tyranny."

"I was just saying," cried Cave, "I wish our Government would establish a protectorate, as they call it, over these islands, and send us out here to garrison them; I call this downright paradise."

"You may smoke, Major Trafford," said Lucy, as he returned; "I am very tolerant about tobacco."

"I don't care for it—at least not now."

"You'd rather tell me about the Cape," said she, with a sly laugh. "Well, I'm all attention."

"There's really nothing to tell," said he, in confusion. "Your father will have told you already what a routine sort of thing life is—always meeting the same people—made ever more uniform by their official stations. It's always the Governor, and the Chief-Justice, and the Bishop, and the Attorney-General."

"But they have wives and daughters?"

"Yes; but official people's wives and daughters are always of the same pattern. They are only females of the species."

"So that you were terribly bored?"

"Just so—terribly bored."

"What a boon from heaven it must have been then to have met the Sewells," said she, with a well-put-on carelessness.

"Oh, your father mentioned the Sewells, did he?" asked Trafford, eagerly.

"I should think he did mention them! Why, they were the people he was so jealous of. He said that you were constantly with him till they came—his companion, in fact—and that he grieved heavily over your desertion of him."

"There was nothing like desertion; besides," added he, after a moment, "I never suspected he attached any value to my society."

"Very modest, certainly; and probably, as the Sewells did attach this value, you gave it where it was fully appreciated."

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"I wish I had never met them," muttered Trafford; and though the words were mumbled beneath his breath, she heard them.

"That sounds very ungratefully," said she with a smile, "if but one-half of what we hear be true."

"What is it you have heard?"

"I'm keeping Major Trafford from his cigar, Tom; he's too punctilious to smoke in my company, and so I shall leave him to you;" and so saying she arose, and turned towards the cottage.

Trafford followed her on the instant, and overtook her at the porch.

"One word—only one," cried he, eagerly. "I see how I have been misrepresented to you. I see what you must think of me; but will you only hear me?"

"I have no right to hear you," said she, coldly.

"Oh, do not say so, Lucy," cried he, trying to take her hand, but which she quickly withdrew from him. "Do not say that you withdraw from me the only interest that attaches me to life. If you knew how friendless I am, you would not leave me."

"He upon whom fortune smiles so pleasantly very seldom wants for any blandishments the world has to give; at least, I have always heard that people are invariably courteous to the prosperous."

"And do you talk of me as prosperous?"

"Why, you are my brother's type of all that is luckiest in life. Only hear Tom on the subject! Hear him talk of his friend Trafford, and you will hear of one on whom all the good fairies showered their fairest gifts."

"The fairies have grown capricious then. Has Tom told you nothing—I mean since he came back?"

"No; nothing."

"Then let me tell it."

In very few words, and with wonderfully little emotion, Trafford told the tale of his altered fortunes. Of course he did not reveal the reasons for which he had been disinherited, but loosely implied that his conduct had displeased his father, and with his mother he had never been a favourite. "Mine," said he, "is the vulgar story that almost every family has its instance of—the younger son, who goes into the world with the pretensions of a good house, and forgets that he himself is as poor as the neediest man in the regiment. They grew weary of my extravagance, and, indeed, they began to get weary of myself, and I am not surprised at it! and the end has come at last. They have cast me off, and, except my commission, I have now nothing in the world. I told Tom all this, and his generous reply, was 'Your poverty only draws you nearer to us.' Yes, Lucy, these were his words. Do you think that his sister could have spoken them?"

"Before she could do so, she certainly should be satisfied on other grounds than those that touch your fortune," said Lucy, gravely.

"And it was to give her that same satisfaction I came here," cried he, eagerly. "I accepted Tom's invitation on the sole pledge that I could vindicate myself to you. I know what is laid to my charge, and I know too how hard it will be to clear myself without appearing like a coxcomb." He grew crimson as he said this, and the shame that overwhelmed him was a better advocate than all his words. "But," added he, "you shall think me vain, conceited—a puppy if you will—but you shall not believe me false. Will you listen to me?"

"On one condition I will," said she, calmly.

"Name your condition. What is it?"

"My condition is this: that when I have heard you out—heard all that you care to tell me—if it should turn out that I am not satisfied—I mean, if it appear to me a case in which I ought not to be satisfied—you will pledge your word that this conversation will be our last together."

"But, Lucy, in what spirit will you judge me? If you can approach the theme thus coldly, it gives me little hope that you will wish to acquit me."

A deep blush covered her face as she turned away her head but made no answer.

"Be only fair, however," cried he, eagerly. "I ask for nothing more." He drew her arm within his as he spoke, and they turned towards the beach where a little sweep of the bay lay hemmed in between lofty rocks. "Here goes my last throw for fortune," said Trafford, after they had strolled along some minutes in silence. "And oh, Lucy, if you knew how I would like to prolong these minutes before, as it may be, they are lost to me for ever! If you knew how I would like to give this day to happiness and hope!"

She said nothing, but walked along with her head down, her face slightly averted from him.

"I have not told you of my visit to the Priory," said he, suddenly.

"No; how came you to go there?"

"I went to see the place where you had lived, to see the garden you had tended, and the flowers you loved, Lucy. I took away this bit of jasmine from a tree that overhung a little rustic seat. It may be, for aught I know, all that may remain to me of you ere this day closes."

"My dear little garden! I was so fond of it!" she said, concealing her emotion as well as she could.

"I am such a coward," said he, angrily; "I declare I grow ashamed of myself. If any one had told me I would have skulked danger in this wise, I'd have scouted the idea! Take this, Lucy," said he, giving her the sprig of withered jasmine; "if what I shall tell you exculpate me—if you are satisfied that I am not unworthy of your love—you will give it back to me; if I fail——" He could not go on, and another silence of some seconds ensued.

"You know the compact now?" asked he, after a moment. She nodded assent.

For full five minutes they walked along without a word, and then Trafford, at first timidly, but by degrees more boldly, began a narrative of his visit to the Sewells' house. It is not—nor need it be—our task to follow him through a long narrative, broken, irregular, and unconnected as it was. Hampered by the difficulties which on each side beset him of disparaging those of whom he desired to say no word of blame, and of still vindicating himself from all charge of dishonour, he was often, it must be owned, entangled, and sometimes scarcely intel-

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ligible. He owned to having been led into high play against his will, and equally against his will induced to form an intimacy with Mrs. Sewell, which, beginning in a confidence, wandered away into heaven knows what of sentimentality, and the like. Trafford talked of Lucy Lendrick and his love, and Mrs. Sewell talked of her cruel husband and her misery; and they ended by making a little stock-fund of affection, where they came in common to make their deposits and draw their cheques on fortune.

All this intercourse was the more dangerous that he never knew its danger; and though, on looking back, he was astonished to think what intimate relations subsisted between them, yet, at the time, these had not seemed in the least strange to him. To her sad complaints of neglect, ill-usage, and insult, he offered such consolations as occurred to him; nor did it seem to him that there was any peril in his path, till his mother burst forth with that atrocious charge against Mrs. Sewell for having seduced her son, and which, so far from repelling with the indignation it might have evoked, she appeared rather to bend under, and actually seek his protection to shelter her. Weak and broken by his accident at the race, these difficulties almost overcame his reason; never was there, to his thinking, such a web of entanglement. The hospitality of the house he was enjoying outraged and violated by the outbreaks of his mother's temper; Sewell's confidence in him betrayed by the confessions he daily listened to from his wife; her sorrows and griefs all tending to a dependence on his counsels which gave him a partnership in her conduct. "With all these upon me," said he, "I don't think I was actually mad, but very often I felt terribly close to it. A dozen times a-day I would willingly have fought Sewell; as willingly would I have given all I ever hoped to possess in the world to enable his wife to fly his tyranny, and live apart from him. I so far resented my mother's outrageous conduct, that I left her without a good-bye."

I can no more trace him through this wandering explanation than I dare ask my reader to follow. It was wild, broken, and discursive. Now interrupted by protestations of innocence, now dashed by acknowledgments of sorrow, who knows if his unartistic story did not serve him better than a more connected narrative—there was such palpable truth in it!

Nor was Lucy less disposed to leniency that he who pleaded before her was no longer the rich heir of a great estate, with a fair future before him, but one poor and portionless as herself. In the reserve with which he shrouded his quarrel with his family, she fancied she could see the original cause—his love for her; and if this were so, what more had she need of to prove his truth and fidelity? Who knows if her woman's instinct had not revealed this to her? Who knows if in that finer intelligence of the female mind she had not traced out the secret of the reserve that hampered him, of the delicate forbearance with which he avoided the theme of his estrangement from his family! And if so, what a plea was it for him! Poor fellow, thought she, what has he not given up for me!

Rich men make love with great advantages on their side. There is no doubt that he who can confer demesnes and diamonds has much in his favour. The power that abides in wealth adds marvellous force to the suitor's tale; but there is, be it owned, that in poverty which, when allied with a sturdy self-dependence, appeals wonderfully to a woman's mind. She feels all the devotion that is offered her, and she will not be outdone in generosity. It is so fine of him, when others care nothing but for wealth and riches, to be satisfied with humble fortune, and with *me!* There is the summing up, and none need be more conclusive.

How long Trafford might have gone on strengthening his case, and calling up fresh evidence to his credit—by what force of words he might still have sustained his character for fidelity—there is no saying; but his eloquence was suddenly arrested by the sight of Cave and Tom coming to meet them.

"Oh, Lucy," cried he, "do not quit my arm till you tell me my fate. For very pity's sake, do not leave me in the misery of this anxiety," said he, as she disengaged herself, affecting to arrange her shawl.

"I have a word to say to my brother," said she, hurriedly; "keep this sprig of jasmine for me. I mean to plant it somewhere;" and without another word she hastened away and made for the house.

"So we shall have to sail at once, Trafford," said Cave. "The Admiral has sent over the Gondomar to fetch us; and here's a lieutenant with a despatch waiting for us at the cottage."

"The service may go—no, I don't mean that; but, if you sail to-morrow, you sail without me."

"Have you made it all right?" whispered Tom in his ear.

"I'm the happiest fellow in Europe," said he, throwing his arm round the other's shoulder. "Come here, Tom, and let me tell you all—all."

CHAPTER LI.

HOW CHANGED!

We are once more at the Priory—but how changed is it all! Billy Hare himself scarcely recognises the old spot, and, indeed, comes now but seldom to visit it; for the Chief has launched out into the gay world, and entertains largely at dinner, and even gives *déjeûners dansantes*—foreign innovations at which he was wont to inveigh with vehemence.

The old elm under whose shade Avonmore and the wits used to sit of an evening, beneath whose leafy canopy Curran had jested and Moore had sung, was cut down, and a large *marquée* of gaudy blue and white spread its vulgar wings over innumerable breakfast-tables, set forth with what the newspapers call every delicacy of the season.

The Horatian garden, and the Roman house—conceits of an old Lord Chancellor in former times, and once objects of almost veneration in Sir William's eyes—have been swept away, with all their attendant details of good or bad taste,

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and in their place a fountain has been erected, for whose aquatic displays, be it noted in parenthesis, two horses and as many men are kept in full employ. Of the wild old woodland walks—shady and cool, redolent of sweet-brier and honeysuckle—not a trace remains; driving-roads, wide enough for a pony-carriage, have been substituted for these, and ruthless gaps in the dense wood open long vistas to the eye, in a spot where once it was the sense of enclosure and seclusion that imparted the chief charm. For so is it, coming out of the din and bustle of a great city, there is no attraction which can vie with whatever breathes of tranquillity, and seems to impart peace by an air of unbroken quiet. It was for this very quality the Priory had gained its fame. Within doors the change was as great as without. New, and, be it admitted, more comfortable furniture had replaced the old ponderous objects which, in every form of ugliness, had made the former decorations of the rooms. All was now light, tasteful, elegant. All invited to ease of intercourse, and suggested that pleasant union of social enjoyment with self-indulgence which our age seems to cultivate. But of all the changes and mutations which a short time had effected, none could compete with that in the old Chief himself. Through life he had been studiously attentive to neatness and care in his dress; it was with something of pride that he exhibited little traits of costume that revived bygone memories; and his long white hair, brushed rigidly back, and worn as a queue behind, and his lace ruffles, recalled a time when these were distinctive signs of class and condition.

His sharply cut and handsome features were well served by the well-marked temples and lofty head that surmounted them, and which the drawn-back hair displayed to full advantage; and what a terrible contrast did the expression present when a light-brown wig covered his head, and a lock of childlike innocence graced his forehead! The large massive eyebrows, so impressive in their venerable whiteness, were now dyed of a dark hue; and to prevent the semblance of ghastliness which this strong colour might impart to the rest of the face, a faint tinge of rouge was given to the cheek, thus lending to the whole features an expression of mingled smirk and severity as little like the former look of dignified intelligence as might be.

A tightly-fitting frock-coat and a coloured cravat, fastened with a massive jewelled pin, completed a travestie which, strange to say, imparted its character to his gait, and made itself evident in his carriage.

His manner, too—that admirable courtesy of a bygone day, of which, when unprovoked by a personal encounter, he was a master—was now replaced by an assumed softness—an ill-put-on submission that seemed to require all his watchfulness never to forget.

If his friends deplored and his enemies exulted over this unbecoming change in one who, whatever his defects, had ever displayed the force and power of a commanding intellect, the secret was known to few. A violent and unseemly attack had been made in the "House" against him by some political partisan, who alleged that his advanced age and failing faculties urgently demanded his retirement from the Bench, and calling loudly on the Government to enforce a step which nothing but the tenacity and obstinacy of age would have refused to accept voluntarily and even gratefully.

In the discussion—it was not debate—that the subject gave rise to, the year of his birth was quoted, the time he had been first called, and the long period he had served on the Bench; and if his friends were strong in their evidences of his unfailing powers and unclouded faculties, his assailants adduced instances in which he had mistaken the suitors and misstated the case. His temper, too, imperious even to insult, had, it was said, driven many barristers from his court, where few liked to plead except such as were his abject and devoted followers.

When the attack appeared in the morning papers, Beattie drove out in all haste to the Priory to entreat that the newspapers should be withheld from him, and all mention of the offensive subject be carefully avoided. The Doctor was shown into the room where the Sewells were at breakfast, and at once eagerly announced the reason for his early visit.

"You are too late, Doctor," said Sewell; "he had read every line of it before we came downstairs. He made me listen to it, too, before I could go to breakfast."

"And how did he bear it?"

"On the whole, I think well. He said they were incorrect about the year he was called, and also as to the time he entered Parliament. With regard to the man who made the attack, he said, 'It is my turn to be biographer now; let us see if the honourable member will call the victory his.'"

"He must do nothing of the kind. I will not answer for his life if he gives way to these bursts of temper."

"I declare I think I'd not interfere with him," drawled out Sewell, as he broke an egg. "I suspect it's better to let those high-pressure people blow off their steam."

"I'm sure Dr. Beattie is right," interposed Mrs. Sewell, who saw in the Doctor's face an unmistakable look of disgust at the Colonel's speech.

"I repeat, sir," said Beattie, gravely, "that it is a question of Sir William's life; he cannot survive another attack like his last one."

"It has always been a matter of wonder to me how he has lived so long. To go on existing, and be so sensitive to public opinion, is something quite beyond my comprehension."

"You would not mind such attacks, then?" said Beattie, with a very slight sneer.

"I should think not! A man must be a fool if he doesn't know there are scores of fellows who don't like him; and he must be an unlucky dog if there are not others who envy him for something or other, though it only be his horse or his dog, his waistcoat or his wife."

In the look of malevolence he threw across the table as he spoke this, might be read the concentrated hate of one who loved to insult his victim. The Doctor saw it, and rose to leave, disgusted and angry. "I suppose Sir William knows I am here?" said he, coldly.

"I suspect not," said Sewell. "If you'll talk to my wife, or look over the 'Times,' I'll go and tell him."

The Chief Baron was seated at his writing-

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table when Sewell entered, and angrily cried out, "Who is there?"

"Sewell, my lord. May I come in?"

"Sir, you have taken that liberty in anticipation of the request What do you want?"

"I came to say, my lord, that Dr. Beattie is here."

"Who sent for him, sir?"

"Not I, my lord, certainly."

"I repeat my question, sir, and expect a direct answer."

"I can only repeat my answer, my lord. He was not sent for by me or with my knowledge."

"So that I am to understand that his presence here is not the result of any active solicitude of my family for the consequences of this new outrage upon my feelings," and he clutched the newspaper as he spoke, and shook it with passion.

"I assure you, my lord, Beattie has come here of his own accord."

"But on account of this!" and the words came from him with a hissing sound that denoted intense anger. Sewell made a gesture to imply that it might be so, but that he himself knew nothing of it. "Tell him, then, sir, that the Chief Baron regrets he cannot see him; that he is at this moment engaged with a reply to a late attack in the House of Commons, which he desires to finish before post hour; and add, sir, that he is in the best of health and in excellent spirits—facts which will afford him increased enjoyment, if Dr. Beattie will only be kind enough to mention them widely in the course of his visits."

"I'm delighted, my lord, to be charged with such a message," said Sewell, with a well-assumed joy.

"I am glad, sir, to have pleased you, at the same time that I have gained your approbation."

There was a haughty tone in the way these words were delivered that for an instant made Sewell doubt whether they meant approval or reprimand, but he thought he saw a look of self-satisfied vanity in the old man's face, and he merely bowed his thanks for the speech.

"What do you think, sir, they have had the hardihood to say in the House of Commons?" cried the Chief, while his cheek grew crimson and his eye flashed fire. "They say that, looking to the perilous condition of Ireland, with a widespread conspiracy through the land, and rebellion in most daring form bearding the authorities of the Crown, it is no time to see one of the chief seats of justice occupied by one whose achievements in crown prosecutions date from the state trials of '98! In which capacity, sir, am I assailed?—is it as patriarch or a patriot? Am I held up to obloquy because I came into the world at a certain year, or because I was one of the counsel for Wolfe Tone? From whom, too, come these slanderous assaults? do these puny slanderers not yet know that it is with men as with plants, and that though the dockweed is rotten within a few weeks, the oak takes centuries to reach maturity?

"There were men in the Administration once, sir, in whom I had that confidence I could have placed my office in their hands with the full conviction it would have been worthily conferred—men above the passions of party, and who saw in public life other ambitions than the struggles for place. I see these men no longer. They who now compose the Cabinet inspire no trust; with them I will not treat."

Exhausted by this outburst of passion, he lay back in his chair, breathing heavily, and to all seeming overcome.

"Shall I get you anything, my lord?" whispered Sewell.

The old man smiled faintly, and whispered, "Nothing."

"I wish, my lord," said Sewell, as he bent over his chair—"I wish I could dare to speak what is passing in my mind; and that I had that place in your lordship's esteem which might give my words any weight."

"Speak—say on," said he, faintly.

"What I would say is this, my lord," said Sewell, with increased force, "that these attacks on your lordship are in a great measure provoked by yourself."

"Provoked by me! and how, sir?" cried the Chief, angrily.

"In this wise, my lord. You have always held your libellers so cheap that you actually encourage their assaults. You, in the full vigour of your faculties, alive to the latest events, interested in all that science discovers or invention develops, persist in maintaining, both in your mode of living and your companionship, a continued reference to the past. With a wit that could keep pace with the brightest, and an imagination more alive than the youngest men can boast, you vote yourself old, and live with the old. Why, my lord, is it any wonder that they try you on the indictment you have yourself drawn up? I have only to ask you to look across the Channel and see the men—your own contemporaries, your colleagues too—who escape these slanders, simply because they keep up with the modes and habits of the day. Their equipages, their retinues, their dress, are all such as fashion sanctions. Nothing in their appearance reminds the world that they lived with the grandfathers of those around them; and I say, my lord, if these men can do this, how much easier would it be for you to do it? You, whose quick intellect the youngest in vain try to cope with; you who are readier in repartee—younger, in fact, in all the freshness of originality and in all the play of fancy, than the smartest wits of the day.

"My lord, it has not been without a great effort of courage I have dared to speak thus boldly; but I have so often talked the subject over with my wife, and she, with a woman's wit, has so thoroughly entered into the theme, that I felt, even at the hazard of your displeasure, I ought to risk the telling you." After a pause he added, "It was but yesterday my wife said, 'If papa'—you know, my lord, it is so she calls you in secret—'If papa will only cease to dress like a church dignitary, he will not look above fifty—fifty-four or five at most.'"

"I own," said the Judge, slowly, "it has often struck me as strange how little animadversion the Press bestowed upon my English colleagues for their advanced years, and how persistently they commented on mine; and yet the history of Ireland does not point to the early decline of intellectual power. They are fond of showing the characteristics that separate us, but they have never adduced this one."

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"I hope I have your lordship's forgiveness for my boldness," said Sewell, with humility.

"You have more, sir; you have my gratitude for an affectionate solicitude. I will think over what you have said when I am alone."

"It will make me a very proud man if I find that my words have had weight with you. I am to tell Beattie, my lord, that you are engaged and cannot see him?" said he, moving towards the door.

"Yes. Say that I am occupied with my reply to this slander. Tell him if he likes to dine with me at six——"

"I beg pardon, my lord—but my wife hoped you would dine with us to-day. We have a few young soldiers, and two or three pretty women coming to us——"

"Make my compliments to Mrs. Sewell, and say I am charmed to accept her invitation."

Sewell took his leave with every token of respectful gratitude. But no sooner had he reached the stairs than he burst into a fit of laughter. "Would any one have believed that the old fool would have swallowed the bait? I was so terrified at my own temerity, I'd have given the world to be out of the scrape! I declare if my mother could be got rid of, we'd have him leading something of sixteen to the altar. Well, if this acute attack of youth doesn't finish him, he must have the constitution of an elephant."

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CHAPTER LII.

HOW TO MEET A SCANDAL.

When the Government of the day had found that all their efforts to induce the Chief Baron to retire from the bench were failures—when they saw him firmly decided to accept nothing less than that price which they would not pay—with a littleness which, it is but fair to own, took its origin from Mr. Cholmondely Balfour, they determined to pass upon him a slight which he could not but feel most painfully.

It happened in this wise. At the time I speak of Ireland was suffering from one of those spasmodic attacks of rebellion which every now and then occur through the chronic disaffection of the country, just as certain eruptions are thrown out over the body to relieve, as is supposed, some feverish tendencies of the system.

Now, although the native thinks no more of these passing troubles than would an old Indian of an attack of the "prickly heat," to the English mind they always suggest danger, tend to increase the military force of the kingdom, and bring on in Parliament one of those Irish debates—a political sham-fight—where, though there is a good deal of smoke, bustle, and confusion, nobody is hurt, nor, if the truth be told, is any one the better when it is over.

Through such a paroxysm was Ireland now passing. It matters little to our purpose to give it a specific name, for the Whiteboy or the Rockite, the Terry-Alt, the Ribbonman, or the Fenian are the same; there being only one character in this dreary drama, however acute Viceroys and energetic Secretaries may affect to think they are "assisting" at the representation of a perfectly new piece, with new scenery, dresses, and decorations.

In ordinary disturbances in Ireland, whenever they rose above the dignity of local mischief, the assistance and sympathy of France was always used as a sort of menace to England. It was a threat very certain to irritate, if it did no more. As, however, by course of time, we grew to form closer relations with France—to believe, or affect to believe—I am not very sure which—that we had outlived old grudges, and had become rather ashamed of old rivalries, France could not be employed as the bugbear it had once been. Fortunately for Irish rebellion, America was quite prepared to take the vacant post, and with this immense additional gain, that the use of our own language enabled our disaffected in the States to revile us with a freedom and a vigour which, if there be that benefit which is said to exist in "seeing ourselves as others see us," ought unquestionably to redound to our future good.

The present movement had gone so far as to fill the public mind with terror, and our jails with suspected traitors. To try these men, a special commission had been named by the Government, from which, contrary to custom, the Chief Baron had been omitted. Nor was this all. The various newspapers supposed to be organs, or at least advocates, of the Ministry, kept up a continuous stream of comment on the grave injury to a country, at a crisis like that then present, to have one of its chief judicial seats occupied by one whose age and infirmities totally disabled him from rendering those services which the crown and the nation alike had a right to expect from him.

Stories, for the most part untrue, of the Chief Baron's mistakes on the bench appeared daily. Imaginary suitors, angry solicitors, and suchlike—the Bar was too dignified to join in the cry—wrote letters averring this, that, or the other cruel wrong inflicted upon them through the "senile incapacity of this obstructive and vain old man."

Never was there a less adroit tactic. Every insult they hurled at him only suggested a fresh resolve to hold his ground. To attack such a man was to evoke every spark of vigorous resistance in his nature, to stimulate energies which nothing short of outrage could awaken, and to call into activity powers which, in the ordinary course of events, would have fallen into decline and decay. As he expressed it, "In trying to extinguish the lamp they have only trimmed the wick." When, through Sewell's pernicious counsels, the old Judge determined to convince the world of his judicial fitness by coming out a young man, dressed in the latest fashion, and affecting in his gait and manner the last fopperies of the day, all the reserve which respect for his great abilities had imposed was thrown aside, and the papers now assailed him with a ridicule that was downright indecent. The print-shops, too, took up the theme, and the windows were filled with caricatures of every imaginable degree of absurdity.

There was one man to whom these offensive attacks gave pain only inferior to what

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they inflicted on the Chief himself—this was "Billy Haire." To have lived to see the great object of all his homage thus treated by an ungrateful country seemed to him the direst of all calamities. Over and over did he ponder with himself whether such depravity of public feeling portended the coming decline of the nation, and whether such gross forgetfulness of great services was not to be taken as a sign of approaching dissolution.

It was true that since the Sewells had taken up their residence at the Priory he had seen but little of his distinguished friend. All the habits, the hours, and the associations of the house had been changed. The old butler, who used to receive Haire when he arrived on terms of humble friendship, telling him in confidence, before he went in, the temper in which he should find the Judge, what crosses or worries had recently befallen him, and what themes it might be discreet to avoid—he was pensioned off, and in his place a smart Englishman, Mr. Cheetor, now figured—a gentleman whose very accent, not to speak of his dress, would have awed poor Haire into downright subjection. The large back hall, through which you passed into the garden—a favourite stroll of Haire's in olden times—was now a billiard-room, and generally filled with fine ladies and gentlemen engaged in playing; the very sight of a lady with a billiard-cue, and not impossibly a cigarette, being shocks to the old man's notions only short of seeing the fair delinquent led off to the watchhouse. The drowsy quietude of the place, so grateful after the crush and tumult of a city, was gone; and there was the clang of a pianoforte, the rattle of the billiard-balls, the loud talk and loud laughter of morning visitors, in its stead. The quaint, old, grey liveries were changed for coats of brilliant claret-colour. Even to the time-honoured glass of brandy-and-water which welcomed Haire as he walked out from town there was revolution; and the measure of the old man's discomfiture was complete as the silvery-tongued butler offered him his choice of hock and seltzer or claret-cup!

"Does the Chief like all this? is it possible that at his age these changes can please him?" muttered Haire, as he sauntered one day homeward sad and dispirited; and it would not have been easy to resolve the question.

There was so much that flattered the old Judge's vanity—so much that addressed itself to that consciousness that his years were no barrier to his sentiments, that into all that went on in life, whatever of new that men introduced into their ways or habits, he was just as capable of entering as the youngest amongst them; and this avidity to be behind in nothing showed itself in the way he would read the sporting papers, and make himself up in the odds at Newmarket and the last news of the Cambridge Eleven. It is true, never was there a more ready-money payment than the admiration he reaped from all this; and enthusiastic cornets went so far as to lament how the genius that might have done great things at Doncaster had been buried in a Court of Exchequer. "I wish he'd tell us who'll win the Rigglesworth"—"I'd give a fifty to know what he thinks of Polly Perkins for the cup," were the dropping utterances of mustachioed youths who would have turned away inattentive on any mention of his triumphs in the Senate or at the Bar.

"I declare, mother," said Sewell, in one of those morning calls at Merrion Square in which he kept her alive to the events of the Priory—"I declare, mother, if we could get *you* out of the way, I think he'd marry again. He's uncommonly tender towards one of those Lascelles girls, nieces of the Viceroy, and I am certain he would propose for her."

"I'm sure I'm very sorry I should be an obstacle to him, especially as it prevents him from crowning the whole folly of his life."

"She's a great horsewoman, and he has given me a commission to get him a saddle-horse to ride with her."

"Which of course you will not."

"Which of course I will, though. I'm going about it now. He has been very intractable about stable matters hitherto; the utmost we could do was to exchange the old long-tailed coach-horses, and get rid of that vile old chariot; but if we get him once launched into riding hacks, we'll have something to mount us."

"And when his granddaughter returns, will not all go back to the former state?"

"First of all, she's not coming. There's a split in that quarter, and in all likelihood an irremediable one."

"How so? What has she done?"

"She has fallen in love with a young fellow as poor as herself; and her brother Tom has written to the Chief to know if he sees any reason why they should not marry. The very idea of an act of such insubordination as falling in love of course outraged him. He took my wife into his counsels besides, and she, it would appear, gave a most unfavourable character of the suitor,—said he was a gambler—and we all know what a hopeless thing that is! that his family had thrown him off; that he had gone through the whole of his patrimony, and was, in short, just as bad 'a lot' as could well be found."

"She was quite right to say so," burst in Lady Lendrick. "I really do not see how she could have done otherwise."

"Perhaps not; the only possible objection was, that there was no truth in it all."

"Not true!"

"Not a word of it, except what relates to his quarrel with his family. As for the rest, he is pretty much like other fellows of his age and time of life. He has done the sort of things they all do, and hitherto has come fairly enough out of them."

"But what motive could she have had for blackening him?"

"Ask her, mother," said he, with a grin of devilish spitefulness—"just ask her; and even if she won't tell you, your woman's wit will find out the reason without her aid."

"I declare, Dudley, you are too bad—too bad," said she, colouring with anger as she spoke.

"I should say,—too good—too good by half, mother; at least, if endurance be any virtue. The world is beautifully generous towards us husbands. We are either monsters of cruelty, or we come into that category the French call 'complaisant.' I can't say I have any fancy for either class; but if I am driven to a choice, I

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accept the part which meets the natural easiness of my disposition, the general kindliness of my character."

For an instant Lady Lendrick's eyes flashed with a fiery indignation, and she seemed about to reply with anger; but with an effort she controlled her passion, and took a turn or two in the room without speaking. At last, having recovered her calm, she said, "Is the marriage project then broken off?"

"So far as the Chief is concerned, it is. He has written a furious letter to his granddaughter—dwelt forcibly on the ingratitude of her conduct. There is nothing old people so constantly refer to ingratitude as young folks falling in love. It is strange what a close tie would seem to connect this sin of ingratitude with the tender passion. He has reminded her of all the good precepts and wise examples that were placed before her at the Priory, and how shamefully she would seem to have forgotten them. He asks her, Did she ever see him fall in love? did she ever see any weakness of this kind in Mrs. Brennan the housekeeper, or Joe the gardener?"

"What stuff and nonsense!" said Lady Lendrick, turning angrily away from him. "Sir William is not an angel, but as certainly he is not a fool."

"There I differ from you altogether. He may be the craftiest lawyer, the wisest judge, the neatest scholar, and the best talker of his day—these are all claims I cannot adjudicate on—they are far and away above me. But I *do* pretend to know something about life and the world we live in, and I tell you that your all-accomplished Chief Baron is, in whatever relates to these, as consummate an ass as ever I met with. It is not that he is sometimes wrong. It is that he is never right."

"I can imagine he is not very clever at billiards, and it is possible that there may be persons more conversant than he with the odds at Tattersall's," said she with a sneer.

"Not bad things to know something about, either of them," said he, quietly; "but not exactly what I was alluding to. It is, however, somewhat amusing, mother, to see you come out as his defender. I assure you, honestly, when I counselled him on that new wig, and advised him to the choice of that dark velvet paletot, I never contemplated his making a conquest of *you*."

"He *has* done some unwise things in life," said she, with a fierce energy; "but I do not know if he has ever done so foolish a one as inviting you to come to live under his roof."

"No, mother; the mistake was his not having done it earlier—done it when he might have fallen in more readily with the wise changes I have introduced into his household, and when—most important element—he had a better balance at his banker's. You can't imagine what sums of money he has gone through."

"I know nothing—I do not desire to know anything—of Sir William's money matters."

Not heeding in the slightest degree the tone of reproof she spoke in, he went on, in the train of his own thoughts—"Yes! it would have made a considerable difference to each of us had we met somewhat earlier. It was the sort of backing I always wanted in life."

"There was something else that you needed far more," said she with a sarcastic sternness.

"I know what you mean, mother—I know what it is. Your politeness will not permit you to mention it. You would hint that I might not have been the worse of a little honesty—isn't that it? I was certain of it. Well, do you know, mother, there's nothing in it—positively nothing. I've met fellows who have tried it—clever fellows too, some of them—and they have universally admitted it was as great a sham as the other thing. As St. John said, Honesty is a sort of balloon jib, that will bowl you along splendidly with fair weather; but when it comes on to blow you'll soon find it better to shift your canvass and bend a very different sail. Now, men like myself are out in all kinds of weather; we want a handy rig and light tackle."

"Is Lucy coming to luncheon?" said Lady Lendrick, most unmistakably showing how little palatable to her was his discourse.

"Not she. She's performing devoted mother up at the Priory, teaching Règy his catechism, or Clara her scales, or, what has an infinitely finer effect on the surrounders, dining with the children. Only dine with the children, and you may run a-muck through the Decalogue all the evening after."

And with this profound piece of morality he adjusted his hat before the glass, trimmed his whiskers, gave himself a friendly nod, and walked away.

CHAPTER LIII.

TWO MEN WELL MET.

Sewell had long coveted the suite of rooms known at the Priory as "Miss Lucy's." They were on the ground floor; they opened on a small enclosed garden of their own; they had a delicious aspect; and it was a thousand pities they should be consigned to darkness and spiders while he wanted so much a snuggery of his own—a little territory which could be approached without coming through the great entrance; and where he could receive his familiars, and a variety of other creatures whose externals alone would have denied them admittance to any decent household.

Now, although Sir William's letter to Lucy was the sort of document which, admitting no species of reply, usually closes a correspondence, Sewell had not courage to ask the Chief for the rooms in question. It would be too like peremptory action to be prudent. It might lead the old man to reconsider his judgment. Who knows what tender memories the thought might call up? Indeed, as Sewell himself remembered, he had seen fellows in India show great emotion at the sale of a comrade's kit, though they had read the news of his death with comparative composure. "If the old fellow were to toddle in here, and see her chair, and her writing-table, and her easel, it might undo everything," said he; so that he wisely resolved it would be better to occupy the premises without a title than endeavour to obtain them legitimately.

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By a slight effort of diplomacy with Mrs. Brennan, he obtained possession of the key, and as speedily installed himself in occupancy. Indeed, when the venerable housekeeper came round to see what the Colonel could possibly want to do with the rooms, she scarcely recognised them. A pipe-rack covered one wall, furnished with every imaginable engine for smoke; a stand for rifles and fowling-pieces occupied a corner; some select prints of Derby winners and ballet celebrities were scattered about; while a small African monkey, of that colour they call green, sat in a small arm-chair of his own, near the window, apparently sunk in deep reflection. This creature, whom his master called Dundas—I am unable to say after what other representative of the name—was gifted with an instinctive appreciation of duns, and flew at the man who presented a bill as unerringly as ever a bull rushed at the bearer of a red rag.

How he learned to know tailors, shoemakers, and tobacconists, and distinguish them from the rest of mankind, and how he recognised them as natural enemies, I cannot say. As for Sewell, he always spoke of the gift as the very strongest evidence in favour of the Darwinian theory, and declared it was the prospective sense of troubles to come that suggested the instinct. The chalk head, the portrait Lucy had made of Sir Brook, still hung over the fireplace. It would be a curious subject of inquiry to know why Sewell suffered it still to hold its place there. If there was a man in the world whom he thoroughly hated, it was Fossbrooke. If there was one to injure whom he would have bartered fortune and benefit to himself, it was he. And how came it that he could bear to have this reminder of him so perpetually before his eyes?—that the stern features should be ever bent upon him—darkly, reproachfully lowering, as he had often seen them in life? If it were simply that his tenure of the place was insecure, what so easy as to replace the picture, and why should he endure the insult of its presence there? No, there was some other reason—some sentiment stronger than a reason—some sense of danger in meddling with that man in any shape. Over and over again he vowed to himself he would hang it against a tree, and make a pistol-mark of it. Again and again he swore that he would destroy it; he even drew out his penknife to sever the head from the neck, significant sign of how he would like to treat the original; but yet he had replaced his knife, and repressed his resolve, and sat down again to brood over his anger inoperative.

To frown at the "old rascal," as he loved to call him—to menace him with his fist as he passed—to scowl at him as he sat before the fire, were, after all, the limits of his wrath; but still the picture exerted a certain influence over him, and actually inspired a sense of fear as well as a sense of hatred.

Am I imposing too much on my reader's memory by asking him to recall a certain Mr O'Reardon, in whose humble dwelling at Cullen's Wood Sir Brook Fossbrooke was at one time a lodger? Mr. O'Reardon, though an official of one of the law courts, and a patriot by profession, may not have made that amount of impression necessary to retain a place in the reader's recollection, nor indeed is it my desire to be exacting on this head. He is not the very best of company, and we shall not see much of him.

When Sewell succeeded to the office of Registrar, which the old Judge carried against the Castle with a high hand, he found Mr. O'Reardon there; he had just been promoted to the rank of keeper of the waiting-room. In the same quick glance with which the shrewd Colonel was wont to single out a horse, and knew the exact sort of quality he possessed, he read this man, and saw, with rapid intelligence, the stuff he was made of, and the sort of service he could render.

He called him into his office, and, closing the door, asked him a few questions about his former life. O'Reardon, long accustomed to regard the man who spoke with an English accent as an easy dupe, launched out on his devoted loyalty, the perils it had cost him, the hate to which his English attachment exposed him from his countrymen, and the little reward all his long-proved fidelity had ever won him; but Sewell cut him suddenly short with—"Don't try any of this sort of balderdash upon *me*, old fellow—it's only lost time; I've been dealing with blackguards of your stamp all my life, and I read them like print."

"Oh! your honour, them's hard words—blackguard, blackguard! to a decent man that always had a good name and a good character."

"What I want you to understand is this," said Sewell, scanning him keenly while he spoke, "and to understand it well: that if you intend to serve me, and make yourself useful in whatever way I see fit to employ you, there must be no humbug about it. The first lesson you have to learn is, never to imagine you can take me in. As I have just told you, I have had my education amongst fellows more than your masters in craft—so don't lose your time in trying to out-rogue me."

"Your honour's practical—I always like to serve a gentleman that's practical," said the fellow, with a totally changed voice.

"That will do—speak that way—drop your infernal whine—turn out your patriotic sentiments to grass, and we'll get on comfortably."

"Be gorra! that's practical—practical, every word of it."

"Now the first thing I want is to know who are the people who come here. I shall require to be able to distinguish those who are accustomed to frequent the office from strangers; I suppose you know the attorneys and solicitors, all of them?"

"Every man of them, sir; there's not a man in Dublin with a pair of black trousers that I couldn't give you the history of."

"That's practical, certainly," said Sewell, adopting his phrase; and the other laughed pleasantly at the employment of it. "Whenever you have to announce persons that are strangers to you, and whose business you can't find out, mention that I am most busily engaged—that persons of consequence are with me—delay them, in short, and put them off for another day——"

"Till I can find out all about them!" broke in O'Reardon.

"Exactly."

"And that's what I can do as well as any

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man in Ireland," said the fellow, overjoyed at the thought of such congenial labour.

"I suppose you know a dun by the look of him?" asked Sewell, with a low, quiet laugh.

"Don't I then?" was the reply.

"I'll have none of them hanging about here —mind that; you may tell them what you please, but take care that my orders are obeyed."

"I will, sir."

"I shall probably not come down every day to the office; it may chance that I may be absent a week at a time; but remember, I am always here—you understand—I am here, or I am at the Chief Baron's chambers—somewhere, in short, about the Court."

"Up in one of the arbitration rooms, maybe," added O'Reardon, to show he perfectly comprehended his instructions.

"But whether I come to the office or not, I shall expect you every morning at the Priory, to report to me whatever I ought to know—who has called—what rumours are afloat—and mind you tell everything as it reaches you. If you put on any embroidery of your own I'll detect it at once, and out you go, Master O'Reardon, notwithstanding all your long services and all your loyalty."

"Practical, upon my conscience—always practical," said the fellow, with a grin of keen approval.

"One caution more; I'm a tolerably good friend to the man who serves me faithfully. When things go well I reward liberally; but if a fellow doubles on me, if he plays me false, I'll back myself to be the worst enemy he ever met with. That's practical, isn't it?"

"It is indeed, sir—nothing more so."

"I'll expect you to begin your visits on Thursday, then. Don't come to the hall door, but pass round by the end of the house, and into the little garden. I'll leave the gate open, and you'll find my room easily. It opens on the garden. Be with me by eleven."

Colonel Sewell was not more than just to himself when he affirmed that he read men very quickly. As the practised cashier never hesitates about the genuineness of a note, but detects the forgery at a glance, this man had an instinctive appreciation of a scoundrel. Who knows if there be not some magnetic affinity between such natures, that saves them the process of thought and reason? He was right in the present case. O'Reardon was the very man he wanted. The fellow liked the life of a spy and an informer. To track, trace, connect this with that, and seek out the missing link which gave connection to the chain, had for him the fascination of a game, and until now his qualities had never been fairly appreciated. It was with pride too that he showed his patron that his gifts could be more widely exercised than within the narrow limits of an antechamber, for he brought him the name of the man who wrote in 'The Starlight' the last abusive article on the Chief Baron, and had date and place for the visit of the same man to the under-secretary, Mr. Cholmondely Balfour. He gave him the latest news of the Curragh, and how Faunus had cut his frog in a training gallop, and that it was totally impossible he could be "placed" for his race. There were various delicate little scandals in the life of society too, which, however piquant to Sewell's ears, could have no interest for us; while of the sums lost at play, and the costly devices to raise the payments, even Sewell himself was amazed at the accuracy and extent of his information.

Mr. O'Reardon was one of a small knot of choice spirits who met every night and exchanged notes. Doubtless each had certain "reserves" which he kept strictly to himself; but otherwise they dealt very frankly and loyally with each other, well aware that it was only on such a foundation their system could be built; and the training-groom, and the butler, and the club waiter, the office messenger, and the penny-postman, became very active and potent agents in that strange drama we call life.

Now, though Mr. O'Reardon had presented himself each morning with due punctuality at the little garden in which he was wont to make his report while Sewell smoked his morning cigar, for some days back the Colonel had not appeared. He had gone down to the country to a pigeon match, from which he returned vexed and disappointed. He had shot badly, lost his money, lost his time, and lost his temper—even to the extent of quarrelling with a young fellow whom he had long been speculating on "rooking," and from whom he had now parted on terms that excluded further acquaintance.

Although it was a lovely morning, and the garden looking its very brightest and best—the birds singing sweetly on the trees, and the air balmy with the jessamine and the sweetbriar—Sewell strolled out upon the velvety sward in anything but a mood of kindred enjoyment. His bills were flying about on all sides, renewals upon renewals swelling up to formidable sums, for which he had not made any provision. Though his residence at the Priory, and his confident assurance to his creditors that the old Judge had made him his heir, obtained a certain credit for him, there were "small-minded scoundrels," as he called them, who wouldn't wait for their fifty per cent. In his desperation to stave off the demands he could not satisfy, he had been driven to very ruinous expedients. He sold timber off the lawn without the old Judge's knowledge, and only hesitated about forging Sir William's name through the conviction that the document to which he would have to append it would itself suggest suspicion of the fraud. His increasing necessities had so far impaired his temper that men began to decline to play with him. Nobody was sure of him, and this cause augmented the difficulties of his position. Formerly his two or three hours at the club before dinner, or his evening at mess, were certain to keep him in current cash. He could hold out his handful of sovereigns and offer to bet them in that reckless carelessness which, amongst very young men, is accepted as something akin to generosity. Now his supply was almost stopped, not to say that he found, what many have found, the rising generation endowed with an amount of acuteness that formerly none attained to without sore experiences and sharp lessons.

"Confound them," he would say, "there are curs without fluff on their chins that know the odds at Newmarket as well as John Day! What

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chance has a man with youngsters that understand the 'call for trumps'?"

It was thus moralizing over a world in decline that he strolled through the garden, his unlit cigar held firm between his teeth, and his hands deep sunk in his trousers pockets. As he turned an angle of a walk, he was arrested by a very silky voice saying, "Your honour's welcome home. I hope your honour's well, and enjoyed yourself when you were away."

"Ah, O'Reardon, that you! pretty well, thank you; quite well, I believe; at least, as well as any man can be who is in want of money, and does not know where to find it."

Mr. O'Reardon grinned, as if *that*, at least, was one of the contingencies his affluent chief could never have had any experience of. "Moses is to run after all, sir," said he, after a pause; "the bandages was all a sham—he never broke down."

"So much the worse for me. I took the heavy odds against him on your fine information," said Sewell, savagely.

"You'll not be hurt this time. He'll have a tongue as big as three on the day of the race; and there will be no putting a bridle on him."

"I don't believe in that trick, O'Reardon."

"I do, sir; and I'm laying the only ten-pound note I have on it," said the other, calmly.

"What about Mary Draper? is she coughing still?"

"She is, sir, and won't feed besides; but Mr. Harman is in such trouble about his wife going off with Captain Peters, that he never thinks of the mare. Any one goes into the stable that likes."

"Confounded fool he must be. He stood heavily on that mare. When did Lady Jane bolt?"

"On Tuesday night, sir. She was here at the Priory at luncheon with Captain Peters that morning. She and Mrs. Sewell were walking more than an hour together in the back garden."

"Did you overhear anything they said?"

"Only once, sir, for they spoke low; but one time your lady said aloud, 'If any one blames you, dear, it won't be me.' I think the other was crying when she said it."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Sewell, angrily.

"She's gone away at all events, sir; and Mr. Harman's out of his mind about it. Cross told me this morning that he wouldn't be surprised if his master cut his throat or went to live on the Continent."

"Do you happen to know anybody would lend me a thousand pounds on no particular security, O'Reardon?"

"Not just at the minute—perhaps if I'd a day or two to think of it."

"I could give you a week—a fortnight if it was any use, but it is not; and you know it's not, Master O'Reardon, as well as any man breathing."

There was a silence of some minutes now between them; and while Sewell brooded over his hard fortune, O'Reardon seemed to be reviewing in his mind the state of the share market, and taking a sweeping view of the course of the exchanges.

"Well, indeed, sir, money is tight,—mighty tight, at this time. Old M'Cabe of the lottery office wouldn't advance three hundred to Lord Arthur St. Aubin without the family plate, and I saw the covered dishes going in myself."

"I wish *I* had family plate," sighed Sewell.

"So you will yet, please God," said the other, piously. "His lordship can't live for ever! But jewels is as good," resumed he, after a slight pause.

"I have just as much of the one as the other, O'Reardon. They were a sort of scrip I never invested in."

"It isn't a bad thing to do, after all. I remember poor Mr. Giles Morony saying one day —'I dined yesterday, Tom,' says he, 'off one of my wife's earrings, and I never ate a better dinner in my life; and with the blessing of Providence I'll go drunk to bed off the other tonight.'"

"Wasn't he hanged afterwards for a murder?"

"No, sir—sentenced, but never hanged. Mr. Wallace got him off on a writ of error. He was a most agreeable man. Has Mrs. Sewell any trinkets of value, sir?"

"I believe not—I don't know—I don't care," said he, angrily; for the subject, as an apropos, was scarcely pleasant. "Any one at the office since I left?" asked he, with a twang of irritation still in his tone.

"That ould man I tould your honour about called three times."

"You told me nothing of any old man."

"I wrote it twice to your honour since I saw you, and left the letters here myself."

"You don't think I break open letters in such handwriting as yours, do you? Why, man, my table is covered with them. Who is the old man you speak of?"

"Well, sir, that's more than I know yet; but I'll be well acquainted with all about him before a week ends, for I knew him before, and he puzzled me too."

"What's his business with me?"

"He would not tell. Indeed, he's not much given to talk. He just says, 'Is Colonel Sewell here?' and when I answer, 'No, sir,' he goes on, 'Can you tell the day or the hour when I may find him here?' Of course I say that your honour might come at any moment—that your time is uncertain, and suchlike—that you're greatly occupied with the Chief Baron."

"What is he like? is he a gentleman?"

"I think he is—at least he was once; for though his clothes is not new and his boots are patched, there's a look about him that common people never have."

"Is he short or tall? What is he like?" Just as Sewell had put this question they had gained the door of the little sitting-room, which lay wide open, admitting a full view of the interior. "Give me some notion of his appearance, if you can."

"There he is, then," cried O'Reardon, pointing to the chalk head over the chimney. "That's himself, and as like as life."

"What? that!" exclaimed Sewell, clutching the man's arm, and actually shaking him in his eagerness. "Do you mean that he is the same man you see here?"

"I do indeed, sir. There's no mistaking him. His beard's a little longer than the picture, and he's thinner, perhaps; but that's the man."

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Sewell sat down on the chair nearest him, sick and faint; a cold clammy sweat broke over his face and temples, and he felt the horrible nausea of intense weakness. "Tell me," said he at last, with a great effort to seem calm, "just the words he said, as nearly as you can recall them."

"It was what I told your honour. 'Is Colonel Sewell here? Is there no means of knowing when he may be found here?' And then when I'd say, 'What name am I to give? who is it I'm to say called?' his answer would be, 'That is no concern of yours. It is for me to leave my name or not, as it pleases me.' I was going to remind him that he once lodged in my house at Cullen's Wood, but I thought better of it, and said nothing."

"Did he speak of calling again?"

"No, but he came yesterday; and whether he thought I was denying your honour or not I don't know, but he sat down in the waiting-room and smoked a cigar there, and heard two or three come in and ask for you and got the same answer."

Sewell groaned heavily, and covered his face with his hands.

"I think," said O'Reardon, with a half-hesitating, timid manner, as though it was a case where any blunder would be very awkward, "that if it was how that this man was any trouble—I mean any sort of an inconvenience to your honour—and that it was displeasing to your honour to have any dealings with him, I think I could find a way to make him cut his stick and leave the country; or, if he wouldn't do that, come to worse luck here."

"What do you mean—have you anything against him?" cried Sewell, with a wild eagerness.

"If I'm not much mistaken, I can soon have against him as much as his life's worth."

"If you could," said Sewell, clutching both his arms, and staring him fixedly in the face—"if you could! I mean if you could rid me of him, now and for ever—I don't care how, and I'll not ask how—only do it; and I'll swear to you there's nothing in my power to serve you I'll refuse doing—nothing!"

"What's between your honour and him?" said O'Reardon, with an assurance that his present power suggested.

"How dare you ask me, sir? Do you imagine that when I take such a fellow as you into my service, I make him my confidant and my friend?"

"That's true, sir," said the other, whose face only grew paler under this insult, while his manner regained all its former subserviency—"that's true, sir. My interest about your honour made me forget myself; and I was thinking how I could be most use to you. But as your honour says, it's no business of mine at all."

"None whatever," said Sewell, sternly; for a sudden suspicion had crossed him of what such a fellow as this might become if once intrusted with the power of a secret.

"Then it's better, your honour," said he, with a slavish whine, "that I'd keep to what I'm fit for—sweeping out the office, and taking the messages, and the like, and not try things that's above me."

"You'll just do whatever my service requires, and whenever *I* find that you do it ill, do it unfaithfully, or even unwillingly, we part company, Master O'Reardon. Is that intelligible?"

"Then, sir, the sooner you fill up my place the better. I'll give notice now, and your honour has fifteen days to get one that will suit him better."

Sewell turned on him a look of savage hatred. He read, through all the assumed humility of the fellow's manner, the determined insolence of his stand.

"Go now, and go to the devil, if you like, so that I never see your hang-dog face again; that's all I bargain for."

"Good morning, sir; there's the key of the office, and that's the key of the small safe; Mr. Simmes has the other. There's a little account I have—it's only a few shillings is coming to me. I'll leave it here to-morrow: and if your honour would like me to tell the new man about the people that come after your honour—who's to be let in, and who's not——"

Sewell made a haughty gesture with his arm as though to say that he need not trouble himself on that head.

"Here's them cigars your honour gave me last week. I suppose I ought to hand them back now that I'm discharged and turned away."

"You have discharged yourself, my good friend. With a civil tongue in your head, and ordinary prudence, you might have held on to your place till it was time to pension you out of it."

"Then I crave your honour's pardon, and you'll never have to find the same fault with me again. It was just breaking my heart it was—the thought of leaving your honour."

"That's enough about it—go back to your duty. Mind *your* business; and take good care you never meddle with mine."

"Has your honour any orders?" said O'Reardon, with his ordinary tone of respectful attention.

"Find out if Hughes is well enough to ride; they tell me he was worse yesterday. Don't bother me any more about that fellow that writes the attacks on the Chief Baron. They do the thing better now in the English papers, and ask nothing for it. Look out for some one who will advance me a little money—even a couple of hundreds; and above all, track the old fellow who called at the office; find out what he's in Ireland for, and how long he stays. I intend to go to the country this evening, so that you'll have to write your report—the post-town is Killaloe."

"And if the ould man presses me hard," said O'Reardon, with one eye knowingly closed "your honour's gone over to England, and won't be back till the cock-shooting."

Sewell nodded, and with a gesture dismissed the fellow, half ashamed at the familiarity that not only seemed to read his thoughts, but to follow them out to their conclusions.

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CHAPTER LIV.

A SURPRISE.

In a little cabin, standing on the extreme point of the promontory of Howth, which its fisherman owner usually let to lodgers in the bathing season, Sir Brook Fossbrooke had taken up his abode. The view was glorious from the window where he generally sat, and took in the whole sweep of the bay, from Killiney, with the background of the Wicklow Mountains, to the very cliffs at his feet; and when the weather was favourable—an event, I grieve to say, not of everyday occurrence—leading him often to doubt, whether in its graceful outline and varied colour he did not prefer it to Cagliari, with its waving orange groves and vine-clad slopes.

He made a little water-colour drawing to enclose in a letter to Lucy; and now as he sat gazing on the scene, he saw some effect of light on the landscape which made him half-disposed to destroy his sketch and begin another. Tell your sister, Tom," wrote he, "that if my letter to her goes without the picture I promised her, it is because the sun has just got behind a sort of tattered broken cloud, and is streaming down long slips of light over the Wicklow Hills and the woods at their feet, which are driving me crazy with envy; but if I look on it any longer I shall only lose another post, so now to my task:

"Although I remained a day in the neighbourhood, I was not received at Holt. Sir Hugh was ill, and most probably never heard of my vicinity. Lady Trafford sent me a polite—a very polite note of regrets, &c., for not being able to ask me to the house, which she called a veritable hospital, the younger son having just returned from Madeira dangerously ill. She expressed a hope, more courteous possibly than sincere, that my stay in England would allow my returning and passing some days there, to which I sent a civil answer and went my way. The young fellow, I hear, cannot recover, so that Lionel will be the heir after all; that is, if Sir Hugh's temper should not carry him to the extent of disinheriting his son for a stranger. I was spared my trip to Cornwall; spared it by meeting in London with a knot of mining people, 'Craig, Pears, and Denk,' who examined our ore, and pronounced it the finest ever brought to England. As the material for the white lead of commerce, they say it is unrivalled; and when I told them that our supply might be called inexhaustible, they began to regard me as a sort of Crœsus. I dined with them at a City club, called, I think, the Gresham, a very grand entertainment—turtle and blackcock in abundance, and a deal of talk—very bumptious talk of all the money we were all going to make, and how our shares, for we are to be a company, must run up within a week to eight or ten premium. They are, I doubt not, very honest fine fellows, but they are vulgar dogs, Tom, I may say it to you in confidence, and use freedoms with each other in intercourse that are scarcely pleasing. To myself personally there was no lack of courtesy, nor can I complain that there was any forgetfulness of due respect. I could not accept their invitation to a second dinner at Greenwich, but deferred it till my return from Ireland.

"I came on here on Wednesday last, and if you ask me what I have done, my answer is, Nothing—absolutely nothing. I have been four several times at the office where Sewell presides, but always to meet the same reply 'Not in town to-day;' and now I learn that he is hunting somewhere in Cheshire. I am averse to going after him to the Chief Baron's house, where he resides, and am yet uncertain how to act. It is just possible he may have learned that I am in Ireland, and is keeping out of my way, though I have neglected no precaution of secrecy, have taken a humble lodging some miles from town, and have my letters addressed to the post-office to be called for. Up to this I have not met one who knows me. The Viceroy is away in England, and in broken health indeed—so ill that his return to Ireland is more than doubtful; and Balfour, who might have recognised me, is happily so much occupied with the 'Celts,' as the latest rebels call themselves, that he has no time to go much abroad.

"The papers which I have sent you regularly since my arrival will inform you about this absurd movement. You will also see the debate on your grandfather. He will not retire, do all that they may, and now, as a measure of insult, they have named a special commission and omitted his name.

"They went so far as to accuse him of senile weakness and incapacity; but a letter which has been published with his name is one of the most terrific pieces of invective I ever read: I will try and get a copy to send you.

"I am anxious to call and see Beattie; but until I have met Sewell, and got this troublesome task off my mind, I have no heart for anything. From chance travellers in the train, as I go up to town, I hear that the Chief Baron is living at a most expensive rate—large dinners every week, and costly morning parties, of a style Dublin has not seen before. They say, too, that he dresses now like a man of five-and-thirty, rides a blood horse, and is seen joining in all the festivities of the capital. Of myself, of course, I can confirm none of these stories. There comes the rain again! It is now dashing like hail against the windows; and of the beautiful bay, and the rocky islands, the leafy shore, and the indented coast-line, I can see nothing—nothing but the dense downpour that, thickening at every moment, shuts out all view, so that even the spars of the little pinnace in the bay beneath are now lost to me. A few minutes ago I was ready to declare that Europe had nothing to compare with this island, and now I'd rather take rocky Ischia, with its scraggy cliffs, sunlit and scorching, than live here, watery and bloated, like a slug on a garden-wall. Perhaps my temper is not improved by the reflection that I'll have to walk to the post, about two miles off, with this letter, and then come back to my own sad company for the rest of the evening.

"I had half a mind to run down and look at 'The Nest,' but I am told I should not know it again, it has been so changed in every way. I have spared myself therefore the pain the sight would have given me, and kept my memory of it as I saw it on my first visit, when Lucy met me at the door. Tell her from me, that when——"

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The letter broke off here, and was continued lower down the page in a more hurried hand, thus:—

"In their ardour to suppress the insurrection here, some one has denounced *me;* and my pistols, and my packet of lead, and my bullet-mould, have so far confirmed suspicion against me, that I am to go forthwith before a magistrate. It is so far provoking that my name will probably figure in the newspapers, and I have no fancy to furnish a laugh to the town on such grounds. The chief of the party (there are three of them, and evidently came prepared to expect resistance) is very polite, and permits me to add these few lines to explain my abrupt conclusion. Tell Lucy I shall keep back my letter to her, and finish it to-morrow. I do not know well whether to laugh or be angry at this incident. If a mere mistake, it is of course absurd, but the warrant seems correct in every respect. The officer assures me that any respectable bail will be at once accepted by the magistrate; and I have not the courage to tell him that I do not possess a single friend or acquaintance in this city whom I could ask to be my surety.

"After all, I take it, the best way is to laugh at the incident. It was only last night as I walked home here in the dark, I was thinking I had grown too old for adventures, and here comes one—at least it may prove so—to contradict me.

"The car to convey me to town has arrived; and with loves to dear Lu and yourself, I am, as ever, yours, "BK. FOSSBROOKE.

"It is a great relief to me—it will be also to you—to learn that the magistrate can, if he please, examine me in private."

CHAPTER LV.

THE CHIEF AND HIS FRIEND.

A FEW days after the conversation just related in the chapter before the last, while the Chief Baron was undergoing the somewhat protracted process of a morning toilet—for it needed a nice hand and a critical eye to give the curls of that wig their fitting wave, and not to "charge" those shrunken cheeks with any redundant colour—Mr. Haire was announced.

"Say I shall be down immediately. I am in my bath," said the Chief, who had hitherto admitted his old friend at all times and seasons.

While Haire was pacing the long dinner-room with solemn steps, wondering at the change from those days when the Chief would never have thought of making him wait for an interview, Sir William, attired in a long dark-blue silk dressing-gown, and with a gold-tasselled cap to match, entered the room, bringing with him a perfumed atmosphere, so loaded with *bergamot* that his old friend almost sneezed at it. "I hurried my dressing, Haire, when they told me you were here. It is a rare event to have a visit from you of late," said the old man as he sat down and disposed with graceful care the folds of his rich drapery.

"No," muttered the other in some confusion. "I have grown lazy—getting old, I suppose, and the walk is not so easy as it used to be five-and-twenty years ago."

"Then drive, sir, and don't walk. The querulous tone men employ about their age is the measure of their obstinate refusal to accommodate themselves to inevitable change. As for me, I accept the altered condition, but I defy it to crush me."

"Every one has not your pluck and your stamina," said Haire, with a half-suppressed sigh.

"My example, sir, might encourage many who are weaker."

"Any news of Lucy lately?" asked Haire, after a pause.

"Miss Lendrick, sir, has, through her brother, communicated to me her attachment to a young fellow in some marching regiment, and asked my permission to marry him. No, I am incorrect. Had she done this, there had been deference and respect; she asked me to forward a letter to her father, with this prayer, and to support it by my influence."

"And why not, if he's a good fellow, and likely to be worthy of her?"

"A good fellow! Why, sir, you are a good fellow—an excellent fellow; but it would never occur to me to recommend you for a position of high responsibility or commanding power."

"Heaven forbid!—or, if you should, Heaven forbid I might be fool enough to accept it. But what has all this to do with the marriage?"

"Explain yourself more fully, sir; you have assumed to call in question the parallelism I would establish between the tie of marriage and the obligation of a solemn trust; state your plea."

"I'll do nothing of the kind. I came here this morning to—to——I'll be shot if I remember what I came about; but I know I had something to tell you; let me try and collect myself."

"Do, sir, if that be the name you give the painful process."

"There, there; you'll not make me better by ridiculing me. What could it have been that I wanted to tell you?"

"Not impossibly some recent impertinence of the press towards myself."

"I think not—I think not," said the other, musingly. "I suppose you've seen that squib in the 'Banner.'"

"It is a paper, sir, I would not condescend to touch."

"The fellow says that a Chief Baron without a court—he means this in allusion to the Crown not bringing those cases of treason-felony into the Exchequer—a Chief without a court is like one of those bishops *in partibus*, and that it wouldn't be an unwise thing to make the resemblance complete, and stop the salary. And then another observes——"

"Sir, I do not know which most to deplore—your forgetfulness or your memory; try to guide your conversation without any demand upon either."

"And it was about those Celts, as they call these rascals, that I wanted to say something What could it have been?"

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"Perhaps you may have joined them. Are you a head-centre, or only empowered to administer oaths and affirmations?"

"Oh! I have it now," cried Haire, triumphantly. "You remember one day we were in the shrubbery after breakfast you remarked that this insurrection was especially characterised by the fact, that no man of education, nor indeed of any rank above the lowest, had joined it. You said something about the French Revolution, too; and how, in the Reign of Terror, the principles of the Girondists had filtered down, and were to be seen glittering like——"

"Spare me, Haire—spare me, and do not ask me to recognise the bruised and battered coinage, without effigy or legend, as the medal of my own mint."

"At all events, you remember what I'm referring to."

"With all your efforts to efface my handwriting I can detect something of my signature—go on."

"Well, they have at last caught a man of some mark and station. I saw Spencer, of the head office, this morning, and he told me that he had just committed to Newgate a man of title and consideration. He would not mention his name; indeed, the investigation was as private as possible, as it was felt that the importance of such a person being involved in the project would give a very dangerous impulse to the movement."

"They are wrong, sir. The insurrection that is guided by men of condition will, however dangerous, be a game with recognised rules and laws. The rebellion of the ignorant masses will be a chaos to defy calculation. You may discuss measures, but there is no arguing with murder!"

"That's not the way Spencer regarded it. He says the whole thing must be kept dark; and as they have refused to accept his bail, it's clear enough they think the case a very important one."

"If I was not on the bench, I would defend these men! Ay, sir, defend them! They have not the shadow of a case to show for this rebellion. It is the most causeless attempt to subvert a country that ever was conceived; but there is that amount of stupidity—of ignorance, not alone of statecraft, but of actual human nature, on the part of those who rule us, that it would have been the triumph of my life to assail and expose them. Why, sir, it was the very plebeian character of this insurrection that should have warned them against their plan of nursing and encouraging it. Had the movement been guided by gentlemen, it might have been politic to have affected ignorance of their intentions till they had committed themselves beyond retreat; but with this rabble—this rebellion in rags—to tamper was to foster. You had no need to dig pitfalls for such people; they never emerged from the depths of their own ignominious condition. You should have suppressed them at once—stopped them before the rebel press had disseminated a catechism of treason, and instilled the notion through the land that the first duty of patriotism was assassination."

"And you would have defended these men?"

"I would have arraigned their accusers, and charge them as accomplices. I would have told those Castle officials to come down and stand in the dock with their confederates. What, sir! will you tell me that it was just or moral, or even politic, to treat these unlettered men as though they were crafty lawyers, skilled in all the arts to evade the provisions of a statute? This policy was not unfitted towards *him* who boasted he could drive a coach-and-six through any Act of Parliament; but how could it apply to creatures more ready to commit themselves than even you were to entrap them? who wanted no seduction to sedition, and who were far more eager to play traitor than you yourself to play prosecutor? I say again, I wish I had my youth and my stuff-gown, and they should have a defender."

"I am just as well pleased it is as we see it," muttered Haire.

"Of course you are, sir. There are men who imagine it to be loyal to be always on the side that is strongest." He took a few turns up and down the room, his nostrils dilated, and his lips trembling with excitement. "Do me a favour, Haire," said he at last, as he approached and laid his hand on the other's arm. "Go and learn who this gentleman they have just arrested is. Ascertain whatever you can of the charge against him—the refusal of bail implies it is a grave case; and inquire if you might be permitted to see and speak with him."

"But I don't want to speak with him. I'd infinitely rather not meet him at all."

"Sir, if you go, you go as an emissary from *me*," said the Chief, haughtily, and by a look recalling Haire to all his habitual deference.

"But only imagine if it got abroad—if the papers got a hold of it; think of what a scandal it would be, that the Chief Baron of the Exchequer was actually in direct communication with a man charged with treason-felony. I wouldn't take a thousand pounds, and be accessory to such an allegation."

"You shall do it for less, sir. Yes, I repeat it, Haire, for less. Five shillings' car-hire will amply cover the cost. You shall drive over to the head-office and ask Mr. Spencer if—of course with the prisoner's permission—you may be permitted to see him. When I have the reply I will give you your instructions."

"I protest I don't see—I mean, I cannot imagine—it's not possible—in fact, I know that when you reflect a little over it, you will be satisfied that this would be a most improper thing to do."

"And what is this improper thing I am about to do? Let us hear, sir, what you condemn so decidedly. I declare my libellers must have more reason than I ever conceded to them. I am growing very, very old! There must be the blight of age upon my faculties, or you would not have ventured to administer this lesson to me! this lesson on discretion and propriety. I would, however, warn you to be cautious. The wounded tiger is dangerous, though the ball should have penetrated his vitals. I would counsel you to keep out of reach of his spring, even in his dying moments."

He actually shook with passion as he said this, and his hands closed and opened with a convulsive movement that showed the anger that possessed him.

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"I have never lectured any one, least of all would it occur to me to lecture you," said Haire, with much dignity. "In all our intercourse I have never forgotten the difference between us —I mean intellectually; for I hope, as to birth and condition, there is no inequality."

Though he spoke this slowly and impressively, the Chief Baron heard nothing of it. He was so overwhelmed by the strong passions of his own mind that he could not attend to another. "I shall soon be called incorrigible as well as incompetent," muttered he, "if the wise counsels of my ablest friends are powerless to admonish me."

"I must be moving," said Haire, rising and taking his hat. "I promised to dine with Beattie at the Rock."

"Say nothing of what has taken place here to-day; or if you mention me at all, say you found me in my usual health." Haire nodded.

"My usual health and spirits," continued the Chief. "I was going to say temper, but it would seem an epigram. Tell Beattie to look in here as he goes home—there's one of the children slightly ailing. And so, Haire," cried he, suddenly, in a louder voice, "you would insinuate that my power of judgment is impaired, and that, neither in the case of my granddaughter, nor in that larger field of opinion—the state of Ireland—am I displaying that wisdom or that acuteness on which it was one time the habit to compliment me."

"You may be quite right. I won't presume to say you're not. I only declare that I don't agree with you."

"In either case?"

"No; not in either case."

"I think I shall ride to-day," said the Chief; for they had now reached the hall-door, and were looking out over the grassy lawn and the swelling woods that enclosed it. "You lose much, Haire, in not being a horseman. What would my critics say if they saw me following the hounds, eh?"

"I'll be shot if it would surprise me to see it," muttered Haire to himself. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Haire. Come out and see me soon again. I'll be better tempered when you come next. You're not angry with me, I know."

Haire grasped the hand that was held out to him, and shook it cordially. "Of course I'm not. I know well you have scores of things to vex and irritate you that never touch fellows like myself. I shall never feel annoyed at anything you may *say* to *me*. What would really distress me, would be that you should do anything to lower your own reputation."

The old Judge stood at the door-step pondering over these last words of his friend long after his departure. "A good creature—a truehearted fellow," muttered he to himself; "but how limited in intelligence. It is the law of compensation carried out. Where nature gives integrity she often grudges intellect. The finer, subtler minds play with right and wrong till they detect their affinities. Who are you, my good fellow? What brings you here?" cried he to a fellow who was lounging in the copse at the end of the house.

"I'm a carman, your honour. I'm going to drive the Colonel to the railway at Stoneybatter."

"I never heard that he was about to leave town," muttered the old Judge. "I thought he had been confined to bed with a cold these days back. Cheetor, go and tell Colonel Sewell that I should be much obliged if he would come over to my study at his earliest convenience."

"The Colonel will be with you, my lord, in five minutes," was the prompt reply.

CHAPTER LVI.

A LEAP IN THE DARK.

Colonel Sewell received the Chief Baron's message with a smothered expression of no benevolent meaning.

"Who said I was here? How did he know I had arrived?" cried he, angrily.

"He saw the carman, sir, and asked for whom he was waiting."

Another and not less energetic benediction was now invoked on the rascally car-driver, whom he had enjoined to avoid venturing in front of the house.

"Say I'm coming—I'll be with him in an instant," said he, as he hurriedly pitched some clothes into his portmanteau.

Now it is but fair to own that this demand upon his time came at an inconvenient moment: he had run up to town by an early train, and was bent on going back by the next departure. During his absence, no letter of any kind from his agent O'Reardon had reached him, and, grown uneasy and impatient at this silence, he had come up to learn the reason. At the office he heard that O'Reardon had not been there for the last few days. It was supposed he was ill, but there was no means of ascertaining the fact, as none knew his address, as, they said, he was seldom in the same place for more than a week or two. Sewell had a profound distrust of his friend; indeed the only reason for confiding in him at all was, that it was less O'Reardon's interest to be false than true. Since Fossbrooke's arrival, however, matters might have changed. They might have met and talked together. Had Sir Brook seduced the fellow to take service under him? Had he wormed out of him certain secrets of his, Sewell's, life, and thus shown how useful he might be in running him to earth? This was far from unlikely. It seemed the easiest and most natural way of explaining the fellow's absence. At the same time, if such were the case, would he not have taken care to write to him? Would not his letters, calling for some sort of reply, some answer to this or that query have given him a better standing-ground with his new master, showing how far he possessed Sewell's confidence, and how able he was to make his treason to him effective? Harassed by these doubts, and fearing he knew not what of fresh troubles, he had passed a miserable week in the country. Debt and all its wretched consequences were familiar enough to him. His whole life had been one long struggle with nar-

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row means, and with the expedients to meet expenses he should never have indulged in. He had acquired, together with a recklessness, a sort of self-reliance in these emergencies which positively seemed to afford him a species of pleasure, and made him a hero to himself by his successes; but there were graver troubles than those on his heart, and with the memory of these Fossbrooke was so interwoven that to recall them was to bring him up before him.

Besides these terrors, he had learned during his short stay at the Nest a most unwelcome piece of intelligence. The Vicar, Mr. Mills, had shown him a letter from Dr. Lendrick, in which he said that the climate disagreed with him, and his isolation and loneliness preyed upon him so heavily that he had all but determined to resign his place and return home. He added that he had given no intimation of this to his children, lest by any change of plan he might inflict disappointment upon them; nor had he spoken of it to his father, in the fear that if the Chief Baron should offer any strenuous objection, he might be unable to carry out his project; while to his old friend the Vicar he owned that his heart yearned after a home, and if it could only be that home where he had lived so contentedly, the 'Nest!' "If I could promise myself to get back there again," he wrote, "nothing would keep me here a month longer." Now, as Sewell had advertised the place to be let, Mills at once showed him this letter, believing that the arrangement was such as would suit each of them.

It needed all Sewell's habitual self-command not to show the uneasiness this tidings occasioned him. Lendrick's return to Ireland might undo—it was almost certain to undo—all the influence he had obtained over the Chief Baron. The old Judge was never to be relied upon from one day to the next. Now it was some impulse of vindictive passion, now of benevolence. Who was to say when some parental paroxysm might not seize him, and he might begin to care for his son?

Here was a new peril—one he had never so much as imagined might befall him. "I'll have to consult my wife," said he, hastily, in reply to Mills's question. "She is not at all pleased at the notion of giving up the place; the children were healthier here; in fact," added he, in some confusion, "I suspect we shall be back here one of these days."

"I told him I'd have to consult *you*," said Sewell, with an insolent sneer, as he told his wife this piece of news. "I said you were so fond of the country, so domestic, and so devoted to your children, that I scarcely thought you'd like to give up a place so suited to all your tastes;—wasn't I right?"

She continued to look steadily at the book she had been reading, and made no reply.

"I didn't say, though I might, that the spot was endeared to you by a softer, more tender reminiscence; because, being a parson, there's no saying how he'd have taken it."

She raised her book higher so as to conceal her face, but still said nothing.

"At all events," said he, in a more careless tone, "we are not going to add to the inducements which attract this gentleman to return home, and we must not forget that our host here may turn us out at any moment."

"I think it will be our fault whenever he does so," said she, quietly.

"Fault and misfortune are pretty much alike to my thinking. There's one thing, however, I have made up my mind on—I'll bolt. When he gives notice to quit, he shall be obliged to provide for you and the brats out of sheer necessity. He cannot turn you out on the streets, he can't send you to the Union; you have no friends to whom he can pack you off; so let him storm as he likes—something he must do."

To this speech she seemed to give no attention whatever. Whether the threat was an oft-repeated one, or that she was inured to coarseness of this nature, or that silence was the best line to take in these emergencies, she never appeared to notice his words.

"What about that money he promised you? has he given it?" said he suddenly, when about to leave the room.

"No; he said something about selling out some mining shares—scrip he called it. I forget exactly what he said, but the purport was that he was pressed just now."

"I take it he is. My mother's allowance is in arrear, and she is not one to bear the delay very patiently. So you've got nothing?"

"Nothing, except ten pounds he gave Cary yesterday for her birthday."

"Where is it?"

"In that work-box—no, in the upper part. Do you want it?"

"What a question! Of course I want it, somewhat more than Cary does, I promise you. I was going off to-day with just five sovereigns in my pocket. Bye-bye. I shall be late if I don't hurry myself." As he reached the door he turned round—"What was it I had to tell you—some piece of news or other—what could it have been?"

"Nothing pleasant, I'm sure, so it's as well unremembered."

"Polite, certainly," said he, walking slowly back while he seemed trying to recall something. "Oh, I have it. The transport that took out the —th has been wrecked somewhere off Sardinia. Engine broken down, paddle-wheels carried away, quarter-boats smashed, and, in fact, total wreck. I have no time to tell you more;" and so saying he hurried away, but opening the door noiselessly he peeped in and saw her with her head buried in her hands leaning on the table; and, stealing stealthily down the corridor, he hastened to his room to pack up for his journey, and it was while thus occupied the Chief's message reached him.

When the Chief Baron asked Haire to call at the Police Office and inquire if he might not be permitted to see the person who had been arrested that morning at Howth, he had not the very vaguest idea what step he should next take, nor what proceedings institute, if his demand might be acceded to. The indignant anger he felt at the slight put upon him by the Government in passing him over on the Commission, had got such entire possession of him that he only thought of a reprisal without considering how it was to be effected. "I am not one to be insulted with impunity. Are these

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men such ignorant naturalists as not to know that there is one species of whale that the boldest never harpoons? Swift was a Dean, but he never suffered his cassock to impede the free use of his limbs. I am a Judge, but they shall see that the ermine embarrasses me just as little. They have provoked the conflict, and it is not for me to decline it. They are doing scores of things every day in Ireland that, if there was one man of ability and courage opposed to them, would shake the Cabinet to its centre. I will make Pemberton's law a proverb and a by-word. The public will soon come to suspect that the reason I am not on the bench at these trials is not to be looked for in the spiteful malignity of the Castle, but in the conscientious scruples of one who warned the Crown against these prosecutions. The Act is a new one. It would give me scant labour to show that it cannot be made law, that its clauses are contradictory, its provisions erroneous, its penalties evasive. What is to prevent me introducing, as a digression, into my next charge to a grand jury, my regrets or sorrows over such bungling legislation? Who is to convict me for arraigning the wisdom of Parliament, or telling the country, you are legislated for by ignorance! your statutes are made by incompetence! The public press is always open, and it will soon be bruited about that the letter signed Lycurgus was written by William Lendrick. I will take Barnewell or Perrin, or some other promising young fellow of the junior bar, and instruct him for the defence. I will give him law enough to confute, and he shall furnish the insolence to confront, this Attorney-General. There never was a case better suited to carry the issue out of the Queen's Bench and arraign the Queen's advisers. Let them turn upon me if they dare: I was a citizen before I was a lawyer, I was an Irishman before I became a judge. There was a bishop who braved the Government in the days of the volunteers. They shall find that high station in Ireland is but another guarantee for patriotism." By such bursts of angry denunciation had he excited himself to such a degree, that when Sewell entered the room the old man's face was flushed, his eye flashing, and his lip quivering with passion.

"I was not aware of your absence, sir!" said he, sternly; "and a mere accident informed me that you were going away again."

"A sudden call required my presence at Killaloe, my lord; and I found when I had got there I had left some papers behind here."

"The explanation would be unexceptionable, sir, if this house were an inn to which a man comes and returns as he pleases; but if I err not you are my guest here, and I hope if a host has duties he has rights."

"My lord, I attached so very little importance to my presence that I never flattered myself by thinking I should be missed."

"I seldom flatter, sir, and I never do so where I intend to censure!" Sewell bowed submissively, but the effort to control his temper cost him a sharp pang, and a terrible struggle. "Enough of this, at least for the present; though I may mention, passingly, that we must take an early opportunity of placing our relations towards each other on some basis that may be easily understood by each of us. The law of contracts will guide us to the right course. My object in sending for you now is to ask a service at your hands, if your other engagements will leave you at liberty to render it."

"I am entirely at your lordship's orders."

"Well, sir, I will be very brief. I must needs be so, for I have fatigued myself by much talking already. The papers will have informed you that I am not to sit on this Commission. The Ministers who cannot persuade me by their blandishments are endeavouring to disgust me by insult. They have read the fable of the sun and the wind backwards, and inverted the moral. It had been whispered abroad that if I tried these men there would have been no convictions. They raked up some early speeches of mine—youthful triumphs they were, in defence of Wolfe Tone, and Jackson, and others; and they argued—no, I am wrong—they did not argue, they imagined, that the enthusiasm of the advocate might have twined itself around the wisdom of the judge. They have quoted, too, in capital letters—it is there on the table—the peroration of my speech in Neilson's case, where I implored the jury to be cautious and circumspect, for so deeply had the Crown advisers compromised themselves in the pursuit of rebellion, it needed the most careful sifting not to include the law officers of the Castle, and to avoid placing the Attorney-General side by side with his victim."

"How sarcastic! how cutting!" muttered Sewell in praise.

"It was more than sarcastic, sir. It stung the Orange jury to the quick; and though they convicted my client, they trembled at the daring of his defender.

"But I turn from the past to the present," said he, after a pause. "They have arrested this morning at Howth a man who is said to be of rank and station. The examination, conducted in secret, has concealed his name; and all that we know is that bail has not been accepted, if offered, for him. So long as these arrests concerned the vulgar fellows who take to rebellion for its robberies, no case can be made. With the creatures of rusty pikes and ruffian natures I have no sympathy. It matters little whether they be transported for treason or for theft. With the gentleman it is otherwise. Some speculative hope, some imaginative aspiration of serving his country, some wild dream begotten of the great Revolution of France, dashed not impossibly with some personal wrong, drives men from their ordinary course in life, and makes them felons where they meant to be philanthropists. I have often thought if this movement now at work should throw up to the surface one of this stamp, what a fine occasion it might afford to test the wisdom of those who rule us, to examine the machinery by which they govern, and to consider the advantage of that system—such a favourite system in Ireland—by which rebellion is fostered as a means of subsequent concession, as though it were necessary to manure the loyalty of the land by the blood of traitors.

"I weary you, sir, and I am sorry for it. No, no, make no protestations. It is a theme cannot have the same interest for *you* as for *me*. What I would ask of you is, to go down to the head-office and see Mr. Spencer, and learn from

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him if you might have an order to see the prisoner—your pretext being, the suspicion that he is personally known to you. If you succeed in getting the order, you will proceed to the Richmond Bridewell and have an interview with him. You are a man of the world, sir, and I need not give you any instructions how to ascertain his condition, his belongings, and his means of defence. If he be a gentleman, in the sense we use that term when applying its best attributes to it, you will be frank and outspoken, and will tell him candidly that your object is to make his case the groundwork of an attack on the Government, and the means by which all the snares that have led men to rebellion may be thoroughly exposed, and the craft of the Crown lawyer be arraigned beside the less cold-blooded cruelty of the traitor. Do you fully comprehend me, sir?"

"I think so, my lord. Your intention is, if I take you correctly, to make the case, if it be suitable, the groundwork for an attack on the Government of Ireland."

"In which I am not to appear."

"Of course, my lord; though possibly with no objection that it should be known how far your sympathy is with a free discussion of the whole state of Ireland."

"You apprehend me aright, sir—a free discussion of the whole state of Ireland."

"I go, therefore, without any concert with your lordship at present. I take this step entirely at my own instance?"

"You do, sir. If matters eventually should take the turn which admits of any intervention on my part—any expression of opinion—any elucidation of sentiments attributed to me—I will be free to make such in a manner I deem suitable."

"In case this person should prove one, either from his character or the degree in which he has implicated himself, unfitted for your lordship's object, I am to drop the negotiation?"

"Rather, I should say, sir, you are not to open it."

"I meant as much," said Sewell, with some irritation.

"It is an occasion, sir, for careful action and precise expression. I have no doubt you will acquit yourself creditably in each of these respects. Are you already acquainted with Mr. Spencer?"

"We have met at the club, my lord; he at least knows who I am."

"That will be quite sufficient. One point more—I have no need to caution you as to secresy—this is a matter which cannot be talked of."

"That you may rely on, my lord; reserve is so natural to me, that I have to put no strain upon my manner to remember it."

"I shall be curious to hear the result of your visit—that is, if you be permitted to visit the Bridewell. Will you do me the favour to come to me at once?"

Sewell promised this faithfully, and withdrew.

"If ever an old fool wanted to run his head into a noose," muttered he, "here is one; the slightest blunder on my part, intentional or not, and this great Baron of the Exchequer might be shown up as abetting treason. To be sure, he has given me nothing under his hand—nothing in writing—I wonder was that designedly or not; he is so crafty in the middle of all his passion." Thus meditating, he went on his mission.

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CHAPTER LVII.

SOME OF SEWELL'S OPINIONS.

SEWELL was well received by the magistrate, and promised that he should be admitted to see the prisoner on the next morning; having communicated which tidings to the Chief Baron, he went off to dine with his mother in Merrion Square.

"Isn't Lucy coming?" said Lady Lendrick, as he entered the drawing-room alone.

"No. I told her I wanted a long confidential talk with you; I hinted that she might find it awkward if one of the subjects discussed should happen to be herself, and advised her to stay at home, and she concurred with me."

"You are a great fool, Dudley, to treat her in that fashion. I tell you there never was a woman in the world who could forgive it."

"I don't want her to forgive it, mother; there's the mistake you are always making. The way she baffles me is by non-resistance. If I could once get her to resent something—anything—I could win the game."

"Perhaps some one might resent for her," said she, dryly.

"I ask nothing better. I have tried to bring it to that scores of times, but men have grown very cautious latterly. In the old days of duelling a fellow knew the cost of what he was doing: now that we have got juries and damages, a man thinks twice about an entanglement, without he be a very young fellow."

"It is no wonder that she hates you," said she, fiercely.

"Perhaps not," said he, languidly; "but here comes dinner."

For a while the duties of the table occupied them, and they chatted away about indifferent matters; but when the servants left the room, Sewell took up the theme where they had left it, and said, "It's no use to either of us, mother, to get what is called judicial separation. It's the chain still, only that the links are a little longer, and it's the chain we *hate!* We began to hate it before we were a month tied to each other, and time, somehow, does not smoothe down these asperities. As to any other separation, the lawyers tell me it is hopeless. There's a functionary called the 'Queen's' something or other who always intervenes in the interests of morality, and compels people who have proved their incompatibility by years of dissension to go back and quarrel more."

"I think if it were only for the children's sake——"

"For the children's sake!" broke he in. "What can it possibly matter whether they be brought up by their mother alone, or in a house where their father and mother are always quarrelling? At all events, they form no element in the question so far as *I* am concerned."

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"I think your best hold on the Chief Baron is his liking for the children; he is very fond of Reginald."

"What's the use of a hold on an old man who has more caprices than he has years? He has made eight wills to my own knowledge since May last. You may fancy how far afield he strays in his testamentary dispositions when in one of them he makes *you* residuary legatee."

"*Me! Me!*"

"You; and what's more, calls you his faithful and devoted wife, 'who—for five-and-twenty years that we lived apart—contributed mainly to the happiness of my life.'"

"The parenthesis, at least, is like him," said she, smiling.

"To the children he has bequeathed I don't know what, sometimes with Lucy as their guardian, sometimes myself. The Lendrick girl was always handsomely provided for till lately, when he scratched her out completely; and in the last document which I saw there were the words, 'To my immediate family I bequeath my forgiveness for their desertion of me, and this free of all legacy duty and other charges.' I am sure, mother, he's a little mad."

"Nothing of the kind—no more than you are."

"I don't know that. I always suspect that 'the marvellous vigour' of old age gets its prime stimulus from an over-excited brain. He sat up a whole night last week—I know it to my cost, for I had to copy it out—writing a letter to the 'Times' on the Land Tenure Bill, and he nearly went out of his mind on seeing it in small type."

"He is vain, if you like; but not mad certainly."

"For a while I thought one of his fits of passion would do for him—he gets crimson, and then lividly pale, and then flushed again, and his nails are driven into his palms, and he froths at the mouth; but somehow the whole subsides at last, and his voice grows gentle, and his manner courteous—you'd think him a lamb, if you had never seen him as a tiger. In these moods he becomes actually humble, so that the other night he sat down and wrote his resignation to the Home Office, stating that the increasing burden of years and infirmity left him no other choice than that of descending from the Bench he had occupied so long and so unworthily, and begging her Majesty would graciously accord a retreat to one 'who had outlived everything but his loyalty.'"

"What became of this?"

"He asked me about it next morning, but I said I had burned it by his orders; but I have it this moment in my desk."

"You have no right to keep it. I insist on your destroying it."

"Pardon me, mother. I'd be a rich man today if I hadn't given way to that foolish habit of making away with papers supposed to be worthless. The three lines of a man's writing, that the old Judge said he could hang any man on, might, it strikes me, be often used to better purpose."

"I wish you would keep your sharp practices for others and spare *him*," said she, severely.

"It's very generous of you to say so, mother, considering the way he treats you and talks of you."

"Sir William and I were ill met and ill matched, but that is not any reason that I should like to see him treacherously dealt with."

"There's no talk of treachery here. I was merely uttering an abstract truth about the value of old papers, and regretting how late I came to the knowledge. There's that bundle of letters of that fool Trafford, for instance, to Lucy. I can't get a divorce on them, it's true; but I hope to squeeze a thousand pounds out of him before he has them back again."

"I hope in my heart that the world does not know you!" said she, bitterly.

"Do you know, mother, I rather suspect it does? The world is aware that a great many men, some of whom it could ill spare, live by what is called their Wits—that is to say, that they play the game entitled 'Life' with what Yankees call 'the advantages;' and the world no more resents *my* living by the sharp practice long experience has taught me, than it is angry with this man for being a lawyer, and that one for being a doctor."

"You know in your heart that Trafford never thought of stealing Lucy's affections."

"Perhaps I do; but I don't know what were Lucy's intentions towards Trafford."

"Oh, fie, fie!"

"Be shocked if you like. It's very proper, perhaps, that you should be shocked; but nature has endowed me with strong nerves or coarse feelings, whichever you like to call them, and consequently I can talk of these things with as little intermixture of sentiment as I would employ in discussing a protested bill. Lucy herself is not deficient in this cool quality, and we have discussed the social contract styled Marriage with a charming unanimity of opinion. Indeed, when I have thought over the marvellous agreement of our sentiments, I have been actually amazed why we could not live together without hating each other."

"I pity her—from the bottom of my heart I pity her."

"So do I, mother. I pity her, because I pity myself. It was a stupid bargain for each of us. I thought I was marrying an angel with sixty thousand pounds. She fancied she was getting a hero, with a peerage in the distance. Each made a 'bad book.' It is deuced hard, however," continued he, in a fiercer strain, "if one must go on backing the horse that you know will lose, staking your money where you see you cannot win. My wife and myself awoke from our illusions years ago; but to please the world, to gratify that amiable thing called Society, we must go on still, just as if we believed all that we know and have proved to be rotten falsehoods. Now I ask you, mother, is not this rather hard? Wouldn't it be hard for a good-tempered, easy-going fellow? And is it not more than hard for a hasty, peevish, irritable dog like myself? We know and see that we are bad company for each other, but you—I mean the world—you insist that we should go on quarrelling to the end, as if there was anything edifying in the spectacle of our mutual dislike."

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"Too much of this. I beseech you, drop the subject, and talk of something else."

"I declare, mother, if there was any one I could be frank and out-spoken with on this theme, I believed it to be yourself. You have had 'your losses' too, and know what it is to be unhappily mated."

"Whatever I may have suffered, I have not lost self-respect," said she, haughtily.

"Heigho!" cried he, wearily, "I always find that my opinions place me in a minority, and so it must ever be while the world is the hypocritical thing we see it. Oh dear, if people could only vote by ballot, I'd like to see marriage put to the test."

"What did Sir William say about my going to the picnic?" asked she, suddenly.

"He said you were quite right to obtain as many attentions as you could from the Castle, on the same principle that the vicar's wife stipulated for the sheep in the picture—'as many as the painter would put in for nothing.'"

"So that he is firmly determined not to resign?"

"Most firmly; nor will he be warned by the example of the well-bred dog, for he sees, or he might see, all the preparations on foot for kicking him out."

"You don't think they would compel him to resign?"

"No; but they'll compel him to go, which amounts to the same. Balfour says they mean to move an address to the Queen praying her Majesty to superannuate him."

"It would kill him—he'd not survive it."

"So it is generally believed—all the more because it is a course he has ever declared to be impossible—I mean constitutionally impossible."

"I hope he may be spared this insult."

"He might escape it by dying first, mother; and really, under the circumstances, it would be more dignified."

"Your morals were not, at any time, to boast of, but your manners used to be those of a gentleman," said she, in a voice thick with passion.

"I am afraid, mother, that both morals and manners, like this hat of mine, are a little the worse for wear; but as in the case of the hat too, use has made them pleasanter to me than spick and span new ones, with all the gloss on. At all events, I never dreamed of offending when I suggested the possibility of your being a widow. Indeed, I fancied it was feminine for widower, which I imagined to be no such bad thing."

"If the Chief Baron should be compelled to leave the Bench, will it affect your tenure of the Registrarship?"

"That is what nobody seems to know. Some opine one way, some another; and though all ask me what does the Chief himself say on the matter, I have never had the courage to ask the question."

"You are quite right. It would be most indiscreet to do so."

"Indeed, if I were rash enough to risk the step, it would redound to nothing, since I am quite persuaded that he believes that whenever he retires from public life or quits this world altogether, a general chaos will ensue, and that all sorts of ignorant and incompetent people will jostle the clever fellows out of the way, just because the one great directing mind of the age has left the scene and departed."

"All his favours to you have certainly not bought your gratitude, Dudley."

"I don't suspect it is a quality I ever laid up a large stock of, mother—not to say that I have always deemed it a somewhat unworthy thing to swallow the bad qualities of a man simply because he was civil to you personally."

"His kindness might at least secure your silence."

"Then it would be a very craven silence. But I'll join issue with you on the other counts. What is this great kindness for which I am not to speak my mind about him? He has housed and fed me; very good things in their way, but benefits which never cost him anything but his money. Now, what have I repaid him with? My society, my time, my temper, I might say my health, for he has worried me to that degree some days that I have been actually on the verge of a fever. And if his overbearing insolence was hard to endure, still harder was it to stand his inordinate vanity without laughter. I ask you frankly, isn't he the vainest man, not that you ever met, but that you ever heard of?"

"Vain he is, but not without some reason. He has had great triumphs, great distinctions in life."

"So he has told me. I have listened for hours long to descriptions of the sensation he created in the House—it was the Irish House, by the way—by his speech on the Regency Bill, or some other obsolete question; and how Flood had asked the House to adjourn and recover their calm and composure, after the overwhelming power of the speech they had just listened to; and how, at the Bar, Plunkett once said to a jury, 'Short of actual guilt, there is no such misfortune can befall a man as to have Sergeant Lendrick against him.' I wish I was independent—I mean, rich enough, to tell him what I think of him; that I had just five minutes—I'd not ask more—to convey my impression of his great and brilliant qualities! and to show him that, between the impulses of his temper and his vanity together, he is, in matters of the world, little better than a fool! What do you think he is going to do at this very moment? I had not intended speaking of it, but you have pushed me to it. In revenge for the Government having passed him over on the Commission, he is going to supply some of these 'Celt' rascals with means to employ counsel, and raise certain questions of legality, which he thinks will puzzle Pemberton to meet. Of course, rash and indiscreet as he is, this is not to be done openly. It is to be accomplished in secret, and through *me!* I am to go to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock to the Richmond Gaol. I have the order for my admission in my pocket. I am there to visit heaven knows whom; some scoundrel or other—just as likely a Government spy as a rebel, who will publish the whole scheme to the world. At all events, I am to see and have speech of the fellow, and ascertain on what evidence he was committed to prison, and what kind of case he can make as to his innocence. He is said to be a gentleman—the very last reason, to my thinking, for taking him up; for whenever a gentleman is found in any predica-

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ment beneath him, the presumption is that he ought to be lower still. The wise Judge, however, thinks otherwise, and says, 'Here is the very opportunity I wanted.'"

"It is a most disagreeable mission, Dudley. I wish sincerely you could have declined it."

"Not at all. I stand to win, no matter how it comes off; if all goes right, the Chief must make me some acknowledgment on my success; if it be a failure, I'll take care to be so compromised that I must get away out of the country, and I leave to yourself to say what recompense will be enough to repay a man for the loss of his home, and of his wife, and his children."

The laugh with which he concluded this speech rang out with something so devilish in its cadence, that she turned away sickened and disgusted.

"If I thought you as base as your words bespeak you, I'd never see you again," said she, rising and moving towards the door.

"I'll have one cigar, mother, before I join you in the drawing-room," said he, taking it out as he spoke. "I'd not have indulged if you had not left me. May I order a little more sherry?"

"Ring for whatever you want," said she, coldly, and quitted the room.

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CHAPTER LVIII.

THE VISIT TO THE GAOL.

Colonel Sewell was well known in the city, and when he presented himself at the Gaol, was received by the deputy-governor with all fitting courtesy. "Your house is pretty full, I believe, Mr. Bland," said Sewell, jocularly.

"Yes, sir; I never remember to have had so many prisoners in charge; and the Mountjoy Prison has sent off two drafts this morning to England, to make room for the new committals. The order is all right, sir," said he, looking at the paper Sewell extended towards him. "The governor has given him a small room in his own house. It would have been hard to put him with the others, who are so inferior to him."

"A man of station and rank, then?" asked Sewell.

"So they say, sir."

"And his name?"

"You must excuse me, Colonel. It is a case for great caution; and we have been strictly enjoined not to let his name get abroad at present. Mr. Spencer's note—for he wrote to us last night—said, 'If it should turn out that Colonel Sewell is acquainted with the prisoner, as he opines, you will repeat the caution I already impressed upon him, not to divulge his name.' The fact is, sir," said he, lowering his voice to a confidential tone, "I may venture to tell you that his diary contains so many names of men in high position, that it is all-important we should proceed with great secresy, for we find persons involved whom nobody could possibly have suspected could be engaged in such a scheme."

"It is not easy to believe men could be such asses," said Sewell, contemptuously. "Is this gentleman Irish?"

"Not at liberty to say, sir. My orders are peremptory on the subject of his personality."

"You are a miracle of discretion, Mr. Bland."

"Charmed to hear you say so, Colonel Sewell. There's no one whose good word I'd be more proud of."

"And why isn't he bailed?" said Sewell, returning to the charge. "Had he no one to be his surety?"

"That's strange enough, sir. Mr. Spencer put it to him that he'd better have some legal adviser; and though he wouldn't go so far as to say they'd take bail for him, he hinted that probably he would like to confer with some friend, and all the answer he got was, 'It's all a mistake from beginning to end. I'm not the man you're looking for; but if it gives the poor devil time to make his escape, perhaps he'll live to learn better; and so I'm at your orders.'"

"I suppose that pretext did not impose upon the magistrate?"

"Not for a moment, sir. Mr. Spencer is an old bird, and not to be caught by such chaff. He sent him off here at once. He tried the same dodge, though, when he came in. 'If I could have a quiet room for the few days I shall be here, it would be a great comfort to me,' said he to the governor. 'I have a number of letters to write; and if you could manage to give me one with a north light, it would oblige me immensely, for I'm fond of painting.' Not bad that, sir, for a man suspected of treason-felony—a north light to paint by!"

"You need not announce me by name, Mr. Bland, for it's just as likely I shall discover that this gentleman and I are strangers to each other; but simply say, a gentleman who wishes to see you."

"Take Colonel Sewell up to the governor's corridor," said he to a turnkey, "and show him to the small room next the chapel."

Musing over what Mr. Bland had told him, Sewell ascended the stairs. His mission had not been much to his taste from the beginning. If it at first seemed to offer the probability of placing the old Judge in his power by some act of indiscretion, by some rash step or other, a little reflection showed that to employ the pressure such a weakness might expose him to would necessitate the taking of other people into confidence. "I will have no accomplices!" muttered Sewell; "no fellows to dictate the terms on which they will not betray me! If I cannot get this old man into my power by myself alone, I'll not do it by the help of another."

"I shall have to lock you in, sir," said the man, apologetically, as he proceeded to open the door.

"I suppose you will let me out again," said Sewell, laughing.

"Certainly, sir. I'll return in half an hour."

"I think you'd better wait and see if five minutes will not suffice."

"Very well, sir. You'll knock whenever you wish me to open the door."

When Sewell entered the room, the stranger was seated at the window, with his back towards the door, and apparently so absorbed in

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his thoughts that he had not heard his approach. The noise of the door being slammed to and locked, however, aroused him, and he turned suddenly round, and almost as suddenly sprang to his feet. "What! Sir Brook Fossbrooke!" cried Sewell, falling back towards the door.

"Your surprise is not greater than mine, sir, at this meeting. I have no need to be told, however, that you did not come here to see *me*."

"No; it was a mistake. The man brought me to the wrong room. My visit was intended for another," muttered Sewell, hastily.

"Pray, sir, be seated," said Fossbrooke, presenting a chair. "Chance will occasionally do more for us than our best endeavours. Since I have arrived in Ireland I have made many attempts to meet you, but without success. Accident, however, has favoured me, and I rejoice to profit by my good luck."

"I have explained, Sir Brook, that I was on my way to see a gentleman to whom my visit is of great consequence. I hope you will allow me to take another opportunity of conferring with you."

"I think my condition as a prisoner ought to be the best answer to your request. No, sir. The few words we need say to each other must be said now. Sit there, if you please;" and as he placed a chair for Sewell towards the window, he took his own place with his back to the door.

"This is very like imprisonment," said Sewell, with an attempt at a laugh.

"Perhaps, sir, if each of us had his due, you have as good a right to be here as myself; but let us not lose time in an exchange of compliments. My visit to this country was made entirely on your account."

"On mine! how upon mine?"

"On yours, Colonel Sewell. You may remember at our last conversation—it was at the Chief Baron's country-house—you made me a promise with regard to Miss Lendrick——"

"I remember," broke in Sewell hastily, for he saw in the flush of the other's cheek how the difficulty of what he had to say was already giving him a most painful emotion. "You stipulated something about keeping my wife apart from that young lady. You expressed certain fears about contamination——"

"Oh, sir, you wrong me deeply," said the old man, with broken utterance.

"I'd be happy to think I had misunderstood you," said Sewell, still pursuing his advantage. "Of course, it was very painful to me at the time. My wife, too, felt it bitterly."

Fossbrooke started at this as if stung, and his brow darkened and his eyes flashed as he said, "Enough of this, sir. It is not the first time I have been calumniated in the same quarter. Let us talk of something else. You hold in your hand certain letters of Major Trafford—Lionel Trafford—and you make them the ground of a threat against him. Is it not so?"

"I declare, Sir Brook, the interest you take in what relates to my wife somewhat passes the bounds of delicacy."

"I know what you mean. I know the advantage you would take of me, and which you took a while ago; but I will not suffer it. I want these letters—what's their price?"

"They are in the hands of my solicitors, Kane & Kincaid; and I think it very unlikely they will stay the proceedings they have taken on them by any demand of yours."

"I want them, and must have them."

Sewell shrugged his shoulders, and made a gesture to imply that he had already given him his answer.

"And what suit would you pretend——. But why do I ask you? What is it to me by what schemes you prosecute your plans? Look here, sir; I was once on a time possessed of a document which would have subjected you to the fate of a felon; it was the forgery of my name——"

"My dear Sir Brook, if your memory were a little better you would remember that you had once to apologize for that charge, and avow it was totally unfounded."

"It is untrue, sir; and you know it is untrue. I declared I would produce a document before three or four of your brother officers, and it was stolen from me on the night before the meeting."

"I remember that explanation, and the painful impression your position excited at the time; but really I have no taste for going back over a long past period. I'm not old enough, I suppose, to care for these reminiscences. Will you allow me to take my leave of you?"

"No, sir; you shall hear me out. It may possibly be to your own advantage to bestow a little time upon me. You are fond of compromises—as you ought to be, for your life has been a series of them; now I have one to propose to you. Let Trafford have back his letters, and you shall hear of this charge no more."

"Really, sir, you must form a very low estimate of my intelligence, or you would not have made such a proposition; or probably," added he, with a sneer, "you have been led away by the eminence of the position you occupy at this moment to make this demand."

Fossbrooke started at the boldness of this speech, and looked about him, and probably remembered for the first time since the interview began that he was a prisoner. "A few days—a few hours, perhaps—will see me free," said the old man, haughtily. "I know too well the difficulties that surround men in times like these to be angry or impatient at a mistake whose worst consequences are a little inconvenience."

"I own, sir, I was grieved to think you could have involved yourself in such a scheme."

"Nothing of the kind, sir; you were only grieved to think that there could be no solid foundation for the charge against me. It would be the best tidings you could hear to learn that I was to leave this for the dock, with the convict hulk in the distance;—but I forget I had promised myself not to discuss my own affairs with you. What say you to what I have proposed?"

"You have proposed nothing, Sir Brook—at least nothing serious, since I can scarcely regard as a proposition the offer not to renew a

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charge which broke down once before for want of evidence."

"What if I have that evidence? What if I am prepared to produce it? Ay, sir, you may look incredulous if you like. It is not to a man of *your* stamp I appeal to be believed on my word; but you shall see the document—you shall see it on the same day that a jury shall see it."

"I perceive, Sir Brook, that it is useless to prolong this conversation. Your old grudge against me is too much even for your good sense. Your dislike surmounts your reason. Yes, open the door at once. I am tired waiting for you," cried he, impatiently, as the turnkey's voice was heard without.

"Once more I make you this offer," said Fossbrooke, rising from his seat. "Think well ere you refuse it."

"You have no such document as you say."

"If I have not, the failure is mine."

The door was now open, and the turnkey standing at it.

"They will accept bail, won't they?" said Sewell, adroitly turning the conversation. "I think," continued he, "this matter can be easily arranged. I will go at once to the Head Office, and return here at once."

"We are agreed, then?" said Fossbrooke, in a low voice.

"Yes," said Sewell, hastily, as he passed out and left him.

The turnkey closed and locked the door, and overtook Sewell as he walked along the corridor. "They are taking information this moment, sir, about the prisoner. The informer is in the room."

"Who is he? What's his name?"

"O'Reardon, sir; a fellow of great 'cuteness. He's in the pay of the Castle these thirty years."

"Might I be present at the examination? Would you ask if I might hear the case?"

The man assured him that this was impossible, and Sewell stood with his hand on the balustrade, deeply revolving what he had just heard.

"And is O'Reardon a prisoner here?"

"Not exactly, sir; but partly for his own safety, partly to be sure he's not tampered with, we often keep the men in confinement till a case is finished."

"How long will this morning's examination last? At what hour will it probably be over?"

"By four, sir, or half-past, they'll be coming out."

"I'll return by that time. I'd like to speak to him."

CHAPTER LIX.

A GRAND DINNER AT THE PRIORY.

The examination was still proceeding when Sewell returned at five o'clock; and although he waited about an hour in the hope of its being concluded, the case was still under consideration; and as the Chief Baron had a large dinner-party on that day, from which the Colonel could not absent himself, he was obliged to hasten back in all speed to dress.

"His lordship has sent three times to know if you had come in, sir," said his servant as he entered his room.

And while he was yet speaking came another messenger to say that the Chief Baron wanted to see the Colonel immediately. With a gesture of impatience Sewell put on again the coat he had just thrown off, and followed the man to the Chief's dressing-room.

"I have been expecting you since three o'clock, sir," said the old man, after motioning to his valet to leave the room.

"I feared I was late, my lord, and was going to dress when I got your message."

"But you have been away seven hours, sir."

The tone and manner of this speech, and the words themselves, calling him to account in a way a servant would scarcely have brooked, so overcame Sewell that only by an immense effort of self-control could he restrain his temper, and avoid bursting forth with the long-pent-up passion that was consuming him.

"I was detained, my lord—unavoidably detained," said he, with a voice thick and husky with anger. What added to his passion was the confusion he felt; for he had not determined, when he entered the room, whether to avow that the prisoner was Fossbrooke or not, resolving to be guided by the Chief's manner and temper as to the line he should take. Now this outburst completely routed his judgment and left him uncertain and vacillating.

"And now, sir, for your report," said the old man, seating himself and folding his arms on his chest.

"I have little to report, my lord. They affect a degree of mystery about this person, both at the Head Office and at the Gaol, which is perfectly absurd; and will neither give his name nor his belongings. The pretence is, of course, to enable them to ensnare others with whom he is in correspondence. I believe, however, the truth to be, he is a very vulgar criminal—a gauger, it is said, from Loughrea, and no such prize as the Castle people fancied. His passion for notoriety, it seems, has involved him in scores of things of this kind; and his ambition is always to be his own lawyer and defend himself."

"Enough, sir; a gauger and self-confident prating rascal combine the two things which I most heartily detest. Pemberton may take his will of him for me; he may make him illustrate every blunder of his bad law, and I'll not say him nay. You will take Lady Ecclesfield in to dinner to-day, and place her opposite me at table. Your wife speaks French well—let her sit next Count de Lanoy, but give her arm to the Bishop of Down. Let us have no politics over our wine; I cannot trust myself with the law officers before me, and at my own table they must not be sacrificed."

"Is Pemberton coming, my lord?"

"He is, sir—he is coming on a tour of inspection—he wants to see from my dietary how soon he may calculate on my demise; and the Attorney-General will be here on the like errand. My hearse, sir, it is, that stops the way, and I have not ordered it up yet. Can you tell me is

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Lady Lendrick coming to dinner, for she has not favoured me with a reply to my invitation?"

"I am unable to say, my lord; I have not seen her; she has, however, been slightly indisposed of late."

"I am distressed to hear it. At all events I have kept her place for her, as well as one for Mr. Balfour, who is expected from England to-day. If Lady Lendrick should come, Lord Kilgobbin will take her in."

"I think I hear an arrival. I'd better finish my dressing. I scarcely thought it was so late."

"Take care that the topic of India be avoided, or we shall have Colonel Kimberley and his tiger stories."

"I'll look to it," said Sewell, moving towards the door.

"You have given orders about decanting the champagne?"

"About everything, my lord. There comes another carriage. I must make haste;" and so saying, he fled from the room before the Chief could add another question.

Sewell had but little time to think over the step he had just taken, but in that little time he satisfied himself that he had acted wisely. It was a rare thing for the Chief to return to any theme he had once dismissed. Indeed, it would have implied a doubt of his former judgment, which was the very last thing that could occur to him. "My decisions are not reversed," was his favourite expression; so that nothing was less probable than that he would again revert to the prisoner or his case. As for Fossbrooke himself and how to deal with him, that was a weightier question, and demanded more thought than he could now give it.

As he descended to the drawing-room the last of the company had just entered, and dinner was announced. Lady Lendrick and Mr. Balfour were both absent. It was a grand dinner on that day, in the fullest sense of that formidable expression. It was very tedious, very splendid, very costly, and intolerably wearisome and stupid. The guests were overlaid by the endless round of dishes and the variety of wines; and such as had not sunk into a drowsy repletion occupied themselves in criticising the taste of a banquet which was, after all, a travestie of a foreign dinner without that perfection of cookery and graceful lightness in the detail which gives all the elegance and charm to such entertainments. The more fastidious part of the company saw all the defects; the homelier ones regretted the absence of meats that they knew, and wines they were accustomed to. None were pleased—none at their ease but the host himself. As for him, seated in the centre of the table, overshadowed almost by a towering epergne, he felt like a king on his throne. All around him breathed that air of newness that smacked of youth; and the table spread with flowers, and an ornamental dessert, seemed to emblematize that modern civilisation which had enabled himself to throw off the old man and come out into the world fresh, curled, and carmined, bewigged and be-waistcoated.

"Eighty-seven! my father and he were contemporaries," said Lord Kilgobbin, as they assembled in the drawing-room; "a wonderful man—a really wonderful man for his age."

The Bishop muttered something in concurrence, only adding, "Providence" to the clause; while Pemberton whispered the Attorney-General that it was the most painful attack of acute youth he had ever witnessed. As for Colonel Kimberley, he thought nothing of the Chief's age, for he had shot a brown bear up at Rhumnuggher "the natives knew to be upwards of two hundred years old, some said three hundred."

As they took their coffee in groups or knots, Sewell drew his arm within Pemberton's, and led him through the open sash-door into the garden. "I know you want a cigar," said he, "and so do I. Let us take a turn here and enjoy ourselves. What a bore is a big dinner! I'd as soon assemble all my duns as I'd get together all the dreary people of my acquaintance. It's a great mistake—don't you think so?" said Sewell, who, for the first time in his life, accosted Pemberton in this tone of easy familiarity.

"I fancy, however, the Chief likes it," said the other, cautiously; "he was particularly lively and witty to-day."

"These displays cost him dearly. You should see him after the thing was over. With the paint washed off, palpitating on a sofa, steeped with sulphuric ether, and stimulated with ammonia, one wouldn't say he'd get through the night."

"What a constitution he must have!"

"It's not that; at least, that's not the way I read him. My theory is, it is his temper—that violent, irascible, fervid temper—burning like a red-hot coal within him, sustains the heat that gives life and vigour to his nature. If he has a good-humoured day—it's not a very frequent occurrence, but it happens now and then—he grows ten years older. I made that discovery lately. It seems as though if he couldn't spite the world, he'd have no objection to taking leave of it."

"That sounds rather severe," said Pemberton, cautiously; for though he liked the tone of the other's conversation, he was not exactly sure it was quite safe to show his concurrence.

"It's the fact, however, severe or not. There's nothing in our relations to each other that should prevent my speaking my mind about him. My mother had the bad luck to marry him, and being gifted with a temper not very unlike his own, they discovered the singular fact that two people who resemble each other can become perfectly incompatible. I used to think that she couldn't be matched. I recant, however, and acknowledge candidly he could 'give her a distance.'"

Pemberton gave a little laugh, as it were of encouragement to go on, and the other proceeded.

"My wife understands him best of all. She gives way in everything, all he says is right, all he opines is wisdom, and it's astonishing how this yielding, compliant, submissive spirit breaks him down; he pines under it, just as a man accustomed to sharp exercise would waste and decay by a life of confinement. I declare there was one week here we had got him to a degree of gentleness that was quite edifying, but my mother came and paid a visit when we were out, and when we returned there he was!

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violent, flaring, and vigorous as ever, wild with vanity, and mad to match himself with the first men of the day."

While Sewell talked in this open and indiscreet way of the old Judge, his meaning was to show with what perfect confidence he treated his companion, and at the same time how fair and natural it would be to expect frankness in return. The crafty lawyer, however, trained in the school where all these feints and false parries are the commonest tricks of fence, never ventured beyond an expression of well-got-up astonishment, or a laugh of enjoyment at some of Sewell's smartnesses.

"You want a light?" said Sewell, seeing that the other held his cigar still unlit in his fingers.

"Thanks. I was forgetting it. The fact is, you kept me so much amused, I never thought of smoking; nor am I much of a smoker at any time."

"It's the vice of the idle man, and you are not in that category. By the way, what a busy time you must have of it now, with all these commitments?"

"Not so much as one might think. The cases are numerous, but they are all the same. Indeed, the informants are identical in nearly every instance. Tim Branegan had two numbers of the 'Green Flag' newspaper, some loose powder in his waistcoat-pocket, and an American drill-book in the crown of his hat."

"And is that treason-felony?"

"With a little filling up it becomes so. In the rank of life these men belong to, it's as easy to find a rebel as it would be in Africa to discover a man with a woolly head."

"And this present movement is entirely limited to that class?" said Sewell, carelessly.

"So we thought till a couple of days ago, but we have now arrested one whose condition is that of a gentleman."

"With anything like strong evidence against him?"

"I have not seen the informations myself, but Burrowes, who has read them, calls them highly important; not alone as regards the prisoner, but a number of people whose loyalty was never so much as suspected. Now the Viceroy is away, the Chief Secretary on the Continent, and even Balfour, who can always find out what the Cabinet wishes—Balfour absent, we are actually puzzled whether the publicity attending the prosecution of such a man would not serve rather than damage the rebel cause, displaying as it would that there is a sympathy for this movement in a quarter far removed from the peasant."

"Isn't it strange that the Chief Baron should have, the other evening in the course of talk, hit upon such a possibility as this, and said, 'I wonder would the Castle lawyers be crafty enough to see that such a case should not be brought to trial? One man of education, and whose motives might be ascribed to an exalted, however misdirected, patriotism,' said he, 'would lift this rabble out of the slough of their vulgar movement and give it the character of a national rising.'"

"But what would he do? did he say how he would act?"

"He said something about 'bail,' and he used a word I wasn't familiar with—like estreating: is there such a word?"

"Yes, yes, there is; but I don't see how it's to be done. Would it be possible to have a talk with him on the matter, informally, of course?"

"That would betray *me*, and he would never forgive my having told you his opinion already," said Sewell. "No, that is out of the question; but if you would confide to me the points you want his judgment on, I'd manage to obtain it."

Pemberton seemed to reflect over this, and walked along some paces in silence.

"He mentioned a curious thing," said Sewell, laughingly; "he said that in Emmett's affair, there were three or four men compromised, whom the Government were very unwilling to bring to trial, and that they actually provided the bail for them—secretly, of course—and indemnified the men for their losses on the forfeiture."

"It couldn't be done now," said Pemberton.

"That's what the Chief said. They couldn't do it now, for they have not got M'Nally—whoever M'Nally was."

Pemberton coloured crimson, for M'Nally was the name of the Solicitor-General of that day, and he knew well that the sarcasm was in the comparison between that clever lawyer and himself.

"What I meant was, that Crown lawyers have a very different public to account to in the present day from what they had in those lawless times," said Pemberton, with irritation. "I'm afraid the Chief Baron, with all his learning and all his wit, likes to go back to that period for every one of his illustrations. You heard how he capped the Archbishop's allusion to the Prodigal Son to-day?—I don't think his Grace liked it—that it requires more tact to provide an escape for a criminal than to prosecute a guilty man to conviction."

"That's so like him!" said Sewell, with a bitter laugh. "Perhaps the great charm that attaches him to public life is to be able to utter his flippant impertinences *ex cathedrâ*. If you could hit upon some position from which he could fulminate his bolts of sarcasm with effect, I fancy he'd not object to resign the Bench. I heard him once say, 'I cannot go to church without a transgression, for I envy the preacher, who has the congregation at his mercy for an hour.'"

"Ah, he'll not resign," sighed Pemberton, deeply.

"I don't know that."

"At least he'll not do so on any terms they'll make with him."

"Nor am I so sure of that," repeated the other, gravely. Sewell waited for some rejoinder to this speech, of which he hoped his companion would ask the explanation, but the cautious lawyer said not a word.

"No man with a sensitive, irascible, and vain disposition is to be turned from his course, whatever it be, by menace or bully," said Sewell. "The weak side of these people is their vanity, and to approach them by that you ought to know and to cultivate those who are about them. Now, I have no hesitation in saying there were moments—ay, there were hours—in which, if it had been any interest to me, I could have got him to resign. He is eminently a man of his word, and once pledged nothing would make him retire from his promise."

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"I declare, after all," said Pemberton, "if he feels equal to the hard work of the Court, and likes it, I don't see why all this pressure should be put upon him. Do *you?*"

"I am the last man probably to see it," said Sewell, with an easy laugh. "His abdication would, of course, not suit *me*. I suppose we'd better stroll back into the house—they'll miss us." There was an evident coldness in the way these last words were spoken, and Sewell meant that the lawyer should see his irritation.

"Have you ever said anything to Balfour about what we have been talking of?" said Pemberton, as they moved towards the house.

"I may or I may not. I talk pretty freely on all sorts of things, and unfortunately with an incaution, too, that is not always profitable."

"Because, if you were to show *him* as clearly as a while ago you showed *me*, the mode in which this matter might be negotiated, I have little doubt—that is, I have reason to suppose—or I might go farther and say that I know——"

"I'll tell you what *I* know, Mr. Solicitor, that I wouldn't give that end of a cigar," and he pitched it from him as he spoke, "to decide the question either way." And with this they passed on and mingled with the company in the drawing-room. "I have hooked you at last, my shrewd friend; and if I know anything of mankind, I'll see you, or hear from you, before twelve hours are over."

"Where have you been, Colonel, with my friend the Solicitor-General?" said the Chief Baron.

"Cabinet-making, my lord," said Sewell, laughingly.

"Take care, sir," said the Chief, sternly—"take care of that pastime. It has led more than one man to become a Joiner and a Turner!" And a buzz went through the room as men repeated this *mot*, and people asked each other, "Is this the man we are calling on to retire as worn-out, effete, and exhausted?"

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CHAPTER LX.

CHIEF SECRETARY BALFOUR.

Mr. Balfour returned to Ireland a greater man than he left it. He had been advanced to the post of Chief Secretary, and had taken his seat in the House as Member for Muddleport. Political life was therefore dawning very graciously upon him, and his ambition was budding with every prospect of success.

The Secretary's Lodge in the Phœnix Park is somewhat of a pretty residence, and with its gardens, its shrubberies, and conservatory, seen on a summer's day when broad cloud-shadows lie sleeping on the Dublin mountains, and the fragrant white thorn scents the air, must certainly be a pleasant change from the din, the crush, and the turmoil of "town" at the fag end of a season. English officials call it damp. Indeed, they have a trick of ascribing this quality to all things Irish; and national energy, national common sense, and national loyalty seem to them to be ever in a diluted form. Even our drollery is not as dry as our neighbours'.

In this official residence Mr. Balfour was now installed, and while Fortune seemed to shower her favours so lavishly upon him, the *quid amarum* was still there,—his tenure was insecure. The party to which he belonged had contrived to offend some of its followers and alienate others, and, without adopting any such decided line as might imply a change of policy, had excited a general sense of distrust in those who had once followed it implicitly. In the emergencies of party life, the manœuvre known to soldiers as a "change of front" is often required. The present Cabinet were in this position. They had been for some sessions trading on their Protestantism. They had been Churchmen "*pur sang*." Their bishops, their deans, their colonial appointments had all been of that orthodox kind that defied slander; and as it is said that a man with a broad-brimmed hat and drab gaiters may indulge unsuspected in vices which a more smartly got-up neighbour would bring down reprobation upon his head for practising, so may a ministry under the shadow of Exeter Hall do a variety of things denied to less sacred individuals. "The Protestant ticket" had carried them safely over two sessions, but there came now a hitch in which they needed that strange section called "the Irish party," a sort of political flying column, sufficiently uncertain always to need watching, and if not very compact or highly disciplined, rash and bold enough to be very damaging in moments of difficulty. Now, as Under-Secretary, Balfour had snubbed this party repeatedly. They had been passed over in promotion, and their claims to advancement coldly received. The amenities of the Castle—that social Paradise of all Irish men and women—had been denied them. For them were no dinners,—no mornings at the Lodge, and great were the murmurs of discontent thereat. A change, however, had come; an English defection had rendered Irish support of consequence, and Balfour was sent over to, what in the slang of party is called, conciliate, but which, in less euphuistic phrase, might be termed to employ a system of general and outrageous corruption.

Some averred that the Viceroy, indignantly refusing to be a party to this policy, feigned illness and stayed away; others declared that his resignation had been tendered and accepted, but that measures of state required secresy on the subject; while a third section of guessers suggested that when the coarse work of corruption had been accomplished by the Secretary, his Excellency would arrive to crown the edifice.

At all events the Ministry stood in need of these "free lances," and Cholmondeley Balfour was sent over to secure them. Before all governmental changes there is a sort of "ground swell" amongst the knowing men of party that presages the storm; and so, now, scarcely had Balfour reached the Lodge than a rumour ran that some new turn of policy was about to be tried, and that what is called the "Irish difficulty" was going to be discounted into the English necessity.

The first arrival at the Lodge was Pemberton. He had just been defeated at his election for

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Mallow, and ascribed his failure to the lukewarmness of the Government, and the indifference with which they had treated his demands for some small patronage for his supporters. Nor was it mere indifference—there was actual reason to believe that favour was shown to his opponent, and that Mr. Heffernan, the Catholic barrister of extreme views, had met the support of more than one of those known to be under Government influence. There was a story of a letter from the Irish Office to Father O'Hea, the parish priest. Some averred they had read it, declaring that the Cabinet only desired to know "the real sentiments of Ireland, what Irishmen actually wished and wanted," to meet them. Now, when a Government official writes to a priest, his party is always *in extremis*.

Pemberton reached the Lodge feverish, irritated, and uneasy. He had, not very willingly, surrendered a great practice at the bar to enter life as a politician, and now what if the reward of his services should turn out to be treachery and betrayal? Over and over again had he been told he was to have the bench; but the Chief Baron would neither die nor retire, nor was there any vacancy amongst the other courts. Nor had he done very well in Parliament; he was hasty and irritable in reply, too discursive in statement, and, worse than these, not plodding enough nor sufficiently given to repetition to please the House; for the "assembled wisdom" is fond of its ease, and very often listens with a drowsy consciousness that if it did not catch what the orator said aright, it was sure to hear him say it again later on. He had made no "hit" with the House, and he was not patient enough nor young enough to toil quietly on to gain that estimation which he had hoped to snatch at starting.

Besides all these grounds of discontent, he was vexed at the careless way in which his party defended him against the attacks of the Opposition. Nothing probably teaches a man his value to his own set so thoroughly as this test: and he who is ill defended in his absence generally knows that he may retire without cause of regret. He came out, therefore, that morning to see Balfour, and, as the phrase is, "have it out with him." Balfour's instructions from the "other side," as Irishmen playfully denominate England, were to get rid of Pemberton as soon as possible,—but, at the same time, with all the caution required not to convert an old adherent into an enemy.

Balfour was at breakfast, with an Italian greyhound on a chair beside him, and a Maltese terrier seated on the table, when Pemberton was announced. He lounged over his meal, alternating tea with the "Times," and now and then reading scraps of the letters which lay in heaps around him.

After inviting his guest to partake of something, and hearing that he had already breakfasted three hours before, Balfour began to give him all the political gossip of town. This, for the most part, related to changes and promotions—how Griffith was to go to the Colonial, and Haughton to the Foreign Office; that Forbes was to have the Bath, and make way for Betmore, who was to be Under-Secretary. "Chadwick, you see, gets nothing. He asked for a commissionership, and we offered him the governorship of Bermuda; hence has he gone down below the gangway, and sits on the seat of the scornful."

"Your majority was smaller than I looked for on Tuesday night. Couldn't you have made a stronger muster?" said Pemberton.

"I don't know: twenty-eight is not bad. There are so many of our people in abeyance. There are five fighting petitions against their return, and as many more seeking re-election, and a few more, like yourself, Pem, 'out in the cold.'"

"For which gracious situation I have to thank my friends."

"Indeed! how is that?"

"It is somewhat cool to ask me. Have you not seen the papers lately? have you not read the letter that Sir Gray Chadwell addressed to Father O'Hea of Mallow?"

"Of course I have read it—an admirable letter—a capital letter. I don't know where the case of Ireland has been treated with such masterly knowledge and discrimination."

"And why have my instructions been always in an opposite sense? Why have I been given to believe that the Ministry distrusted that party and feared their bad faith?"

"Have you ever seen Grünzenhoff's account of the battle of Leipsic?"

"No; nor have I the slightest curiosity to hear how it applies to what we are talking of."

"But it does apply. It's the very neatest apropos I could cite for you. There was a moment, he says, in that history, when Schwarzenberg was about to outflank the Saxons, and open a terrific fire of artillery upon them; and either they saw what fate impended over them, or that the hour they wished for had come, but they all deserted the ranks of the French and went over to the Allies."

"And you fancy that the Catholics are going to side with you?" said Pemberton, with a sneer.

"It suits both parties to believe it, Pem."

"The credulity will be all your own, Mr. Balfour. I know my countrymen better than you do."

"That's exactly what they won't credit at Downing Street, Pem; and I assure you that my heart is broken defending you in the House. They are eternally asking about what happened at such an assize; and why the Crown was not better prepared in such a prosecution; and though I *am* accounted a ready fellow in reply, it becomes a bore at last. I'm sorry to say it, Pem, but it is a bore."

"I'm glad, Mr. Balfour, exceedingly glad, you should put the issue between us so clearly; though I own to you that coming here this morning as the plaintiff, it is not without surprise I find myself on my defence."

"What's this, Banks?" asked Balfour, hastily, as his private secretary entered with a despatch.

"From Crew, sir; it must be his Excellency sends it."

Balfour broke it open and exclaimed, "In cipher, too! Go and have it transcribed at once; you have the key here."

"Yes, sir; I am familiar with the character, too, and can do it quickly." Thus saying he left the room.

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While this brief dialogue was taking place, Pemberton walked up and down the room, pale and agitated in features, but with a compressed lip and bent brow, like one nerving himself for coming conflict.

"I hope we're not out," said Balfour, with a laugh of assumed indifference. "He rarely employs a cipher; and it must be something of moment, or he would not do so now."

"It is a matter of perfect indifference to *me*," said Pemberton. "Treated as I have been, I could scarcely say I should regret it."

"By Jove! the ship must be in a bad way when the officers are taking to the boats," said Balfour. "Why, Pem, you don't really believe we are going to founder?"

"I told you, sir," said he, haughtily, "that it was a matter of the most perfect indifference to me whether you should sink or swim."

"You are one of the crew, I hope, an't you?"

Pemberton made no reply, and the other went on—"To be sure, it may be said that an able seaman never has long to look for a ship; and in these political disasters, it's only the captains that are really wrecked."

"One thing is certainly clear," said Pemberton, with energy, "you have not much confidence in the craft you sail in."

"Who has, Pem? Show me the man that has, and I'll show you a consummate ass. Parliamentary life is a roadstead with shifting sands, and there's no going a step without the lead-line; and that's one reason why the nation never likes to see one of your countrymen as the pilot—you won't take soundings."

"There are other reasons too," said Pemberton, sternly, "but I have not come here to discuss this subject. I want to know, once for all, is it the wish of your party that I should be in the House?"

"Of course it is; how can you doubt it?"

"That being the case, what steps have you taken, or what steps can you take, to secure me a seat?"

"Why, Pem, don't you know enough of public life to know that when a minister makes an attorney-general, it is tacitly understood that the man can secure his return to Parliament? When I order out a chaise and pair, I don't expect the innkeeper to tell me I must buy breeches and boots for the postilion."

"You deluge me with figures, Mr. Balfour, but they only confuse me. I am neither a sailor nor a postboy; but I see Mr. Banks wishes to confer with you—I will retire."

"Take a turn in the garden, Pem, and I will be with you in a moment. Are you a smoker?"

"Not in the morning," said the other, stiffly, and withdrew.

"Mr. Heffernan is here, sir; will you see him?" asked the secretary.

"Let him wait: whenever I ring the bell, you can come and announce him. I will give my answer then. What of the despatch?"

"It is nearly all copied out, sir. It was longer than I thought."

"Let me see it now; I will read it at once."

The secretary left the room, and soon returned with several sheets of note-paper in his hand.

"Not all that, Banks?"

"Yes, sir. It was two hundred and eighty-eight signs—as long as the Queen's Speech. It seems very important too.

"Read," said Balfour, lighting his cigar.

"'To Chief Secretary Balfour, Castle, Dublin.—What are your people about? What new stupidity is this they have just accomplished? Are there law advisers at the Castle, or are the cases for prosecution submitted to the members of the police force? Are you aware, or is it from me you are to learn, that there is now in the Richmond Gaol, under accusation of "Celtism," a gentleman of a loyalty the equal of my own? Some blunder, if not some private personal malignity, procured his arrest, which, out of regard for me as an old personal friend, he neither resisted nor disputed, withholding his name to avoid the publicity which could only have damaged the Government. I am too ill to leave my room, or would go over at once to rectify this gross and most painful blunder. If Pemberton is too fine a gentleman for his office, where was Hacket, or, if not Hacket, Burrowes? Should this case get abroad and reach the Opposition, there will be a storm in the House you will scarcely like to face. Take measures—immediate measures—for his release, by bail or otherwise, remembering, above all, to observe secresy. I will send you by post to-night the letter in which F. communicates to me the story of his capture and imprisonment. Had the mischance befallen any other than a true gentleman and an old friend, it would have cost us dearly. Nothing equally painful has occurred to me in my whole official life.

"'Let the case be a warning to you in more ways than one. Your system of private information is degenerating into private persecution, and would at last establish a state of things perfectly intolerable. Beg F., as a great favor to me, to come over and see me here, and repeat that I am too ill to travel, or would not have delayed an hour in going to him. There are few men, if there be one, who would in such a predicament have postponed all consideration of self to thoughts about his friends and their interests, and in all this we have had better luck than we deserved. WILMINGTON.'"

"Go over it again," said Balfour, as he lit a cigar, and placing a chair for his legs, gave himself up to a patient rehearing of the despatch. "I wonder who F. can be that he is so anxious about. It *is* a confounded mess, there's no doubt of it; and if the papers get hold of it we're done for. Beg Pemberton to come here, and leave us to talk together."

"Read that, Pem," said Balfour, as he smoked on, now and then puffing a whiff of tobacco at his terrier's face—"read that, and tell me what you say to it."

Though the lawyer made a great effort to seem calm and self-possessed, Balfour could see that the hand that held the paper shook as he read it. As he finished he laid the document on the table without uttering a word.

"Well?" cried Balfour interrogatively—"well?"

"I take it, if all be as his Excellency says, that this is not the first case in which an innocent man has been sent to gaol. Such things occur now and then in the model England, and I have never heard that they formed matter to impeach a ministry."

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"You heard of this committal, then?"

"No, not till now."

"Not till now?"

"Not till now. His Excellency, and indeed yourself, Mr. Balfour, seem to fall into the delusion that a Solicitor-General is a detective officer. Now, he is not,—nor any more is he a police magistrate. This arrest, I suppose—I know nothing about it, but I suppose—was made on certain sworn information. The law took its ordinary course; and the man who would neither tell his name nor give the clue to any one who would answer for him went to prison. It is unfortunate, certainly; but they who made this statute forgot to insert a clause that none of the enumerated penalties should apply to any one who knew or had acquaintance with the Viceroy for the time being."

"Yes, as you remark, that was a stupid omission; and now, what's to be done here?"

"I opine his Excellency gives you ample instructions. You are to repair to the Gaol, make your apologies to F.—whoever F. may be—induce him to let himself be bailed, and persuade him to go over and pass a fortnight at Crew Keep. Pray tell him, however, before he goes, that his being in prison was not in any way owing to the Solicitor-General's being a fine gentleman."

"I'll send for the informations," said Balfour, and rang his bell. "Mr. Heffernan, sir, by appointment," said the private secretary, entering with a card in his hand.

"Oh, I had forgotten. It completely escaped me," said Balfour, with a pretended confusion. "Will you once more take a turn in the garden, Pem?—five minutes will do all I want."

"If my retirement is to facilitate Mr. Heffernan's advance, it would be ungracious to defer it; but give me till to-morrow to think of it."

"I only spoke of going into the garden, my dear Pem."

"I will do more—I will take my leave. Indeed, I have important business in the Rolls Court."

"I shall want to see you about this business," said the other, touching the despatch.

"I'll look in on you about five at the office, and by that time you will have seen Mr. F."

"Mr. Heffernan could not wait, sir—he has to open a Record case in the Queen's Bench," said the secretary, entering, "but he says he will write to you this evening."

The Solicitor-General grinned. He fancied that the whole incident had been a most unfortunate *malapropos*, and that Balfour was sinking under shame and confusion.

"How I wish Baron Lendrick could be induced to retire!" said Balfour; "it would save us a world of trouble."

"The matter has little interest for me personally."

"Little interest for *you?*—how so?"

"I mean what I say; but I mean also not to be questioned upon the matter," said he proudly. "If, however, you are so very eager about it, there is a way I believe it might be done."

"How is that?"

"I had a talk, a half-confidential talk, last night with Sewell on the subject, and he distinctly gave me to understand it could be negotiated through *him*."

"And you believed him?"

"Yes, I believed him. It was the sort of tortuous, crooked transaction such a man might well move in. Had he told me of something very fine, very generous or self-devoting he was about to do, I'd have hesitated to accord him my trustfulness."

"What it is to be a lawyer!" said Balfour, with affected horror.

"What it must be if a Secretary of State recoils from his perfidy! Oh, Mr. Balfour, for the short time our official connection may last let us play fair. I am not so cold-blooded, nor are you as crafty, as you imagine. We are both of us better than we seem."

"Will you dine here to-day, Pem?"

"Thanks, no; I am engaged."

"To-morrow, then?—I'll have Branley and Keppel to meet you."

"I always get out of town on Saturday night. Pray excuse me."

"No tempting you, eh?"

"Not in that way, certainly. Good-bye till five o'clock."

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CHAPTER LXI.

A STARLIT NIGHT.

Late at night of the same day on which the conversation of last chapter occurred, Sewell was returning to the Priory: he was on foot, having failed to find a carriage at that late hour, and was depressed and wretched in mind, for he had lost a large sum at the club, which he had no means whatever to meet on the coming morning.

It was a rare event with him to take a retrospect of his life; and his theory was, that he owed any success he had ever won to the fact that he brought to the present—to the actual casualty before him—an amount of concentration which men who look back or look forward never can command. Now, however, the past would force itself upon him, and his whole career, with all its faults and its failures, was before him.

It was a bitter memory, the very bitterest one can imagine, not in its self-accusation or reproach, but in the thought of all the grand opportunities lost—the reckless way in which he had treated fortune, believing that she never would fail him. All his regrets were for the occasions he had suffered to slip by him unprofitably. He did not waste a thought on those he had ruined, many of them young fellows starting hopefully, joyously in life. His mind only dwelt on such as had escaped his snares. Ay, the very fellows to whom he had lost largely that night, had once been in his power! he remembered them when they joined. He met them when they landed at Calcutta, in all their raw inexperience of life, pressing their petty wagers upon him, and eagerly—almost ignominiously—courting acquaintance with the favoured aide-de-camp of the Governor-General.

And there they were now, bronzed, hard-featured, shrewd men of the world, who had paid for their experience, and knew its value.

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Nothing to be done with *them!* Indeed there was little now "to be done" anywhere. The whole machinery of life was changed. Formerly, when fellows started in life, they were trustful, uncalculating, and careless. Now, on the contrary, they were wary, cautious, and suspectful. Instead of attaching themselves to older men as safe guides and counsellors, they hung back from them as too skilful and too crafty to be dealt with. Except Trafford he had not seen one—not one, for many a day, who could be "chaffed" into a bet, or laughed into play against his inclination. And what had he made of Trafford? A few hundred pounds in hand, and those letters which now Fossbrooke had insisted on his giving up. How invariably it was that man who came up at every crisis of his life to thwart and defeat him. And it was a hard—a cruelly hard thing to remember, that this same man who had been the dupe of hundreds, who had been rogued and swindled out of all he had, should still have brought all his faculties to the task of persecuting *him!*

"One might have thought," said he, with a bitter laugh, "that he had troubles enough of his own not to have spare time to bestow upon me and *my* affairs. He was once, I own indeed, a rich man, with station and influence, and now he is a beggar. There was a time no society refused his *entrée;* now it is thought a very gracious thing to know him. Why will these things employ him? And this stupid rebellion? I wonder how far he is compromised, or how far one could manage to have him compromised by it? It was doubtless some personal consideration, some liking for this or that man, that had entangled him in it. If Pemberton were not so close, he could tell this; but these lawyers are so reserved, so crafty, they will not even tell what a few hours later the whole world reads in the public papers.

"If I were to have my choice, it would puzzle me sorely to determine whether I'd rather be left a fine estate—four or five thousand a-year—or be able to send old Fossbrooke to a penal settlement. I am afraid, sorely afraid, my disinterestedness would gain the day, and that I'd sacrifice my enjoyment to my vengeance! He has done me such a long list of wrongs, I'd like to square the account. It would be a moment worth living for—that instant when the word Guilty would drop from the jury-box, and that I could lean over the dock and exchange a look with him. I'm not so sure he'd quail, though; but the shame—the shame might unman him!"

He had reached the gate of the avenue as he thus mused, and was about to insert the key in the lock, when a man arose from a little bench beside the lodge, and said,

"A fine night, sir; I'm glad you're come."

"Who are you? stand off!" cried Sewell, drawing his revolver as he spoke from his breast pocket.

"O'Reardon, your honour—only O'Reardon," said the fellow, in his well-known whine.

"And where the devil have you been this fortnight? What rascally treachery have you been hatching since I saw you? No long stories, my friend, and no lies. What have you been at?"

"I was never on any other errand than your honour's service, so help me———"

"Don't swear, old fellow, if you want me to believe you. Perjury has a sort of bird-lime attraction for scoundrels like you, so just keep away from an oath."

O'Reardon laughed. "His honour was droll—he was always droll—and though not an Irishman himself, sorrow man could know them better;" and with this double compliment to his patron and his country, the fellow went on to show that he had been on "the tracks of the ould man" since the day they parted. He had got a case against him—the finest and fullest ever was seen. Mr. Spencer declared that "better informations never was sworn;" and on this they arrested him, together with his diary, his traps, his drawings, his arms, and his bullet-mould. There were grave reasons for secresy in the case, and great secresy was observed. The examination was in private, and the prisoner was sent to the Richmond Gaol, with a blank for his name.

To the very circumstantial and prolix detail which O'Reardon gave with all the "onction" of a genuine informer, Sewell listened with a forced patience. Perhaps the thought of all the indignities that were heaped upon his enemy compensated him for the wearisomeness of the narrative. At last he stopped him in his story, and said, "And how much of this accusation do you believe?"

"All of it—every word."

"You mean to say that he is engaged in this rebellion, and a sworn member of the Celt association?"

"I do. There's more than thirty already off to transportation not so deep in it as him."

"And if it should turn out that he is a man of station, and who once had a great fortune, and that in his whole life he never meddled with politics—that he has friends amongst the first families of England, and has only to ask to have men of rank and position his sureties—what then?"

"He'll have to show what he was at a year ago when he lodged in my house at Cullen's Wood, and wouldn't give his name, nor the name of the young man that was with him, nor ever went out till it was dark night, and stole away at last with all sorts of tools and combustibles. He'll have to show that I didn't give his description up at the Castle, and get Mr. Balfour's orders to watch him close; and what's more, that he didn't get a private visit one night from the Lord-Lieutenant himself, warning him to be off as quick as he could. I heard their words as I listened at the door."

"So that, according to your veracious story, Mr. O'Reardon, the Viceroy himself is a Celt and a rebel, eh?"

"It's none of my business to put the things together, and say what shows this, and what disproves that; that's for Mr. Hacket and the people up at the Castle. I'm to get the facts—nothing but the facts—and them's facts that I tell you."

"You're on a wrong scent this time, O'Reardon; he is no rebel. I wish he was. I'd be better pleased than yourself if we could keep him fast where he is, and never let him leave it."

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"Well, he's out now, and it'll not be so easy to get him in again."

"How do you mean?—out!"

"I mean he's free. Mr. Balfour came himself with two other gentlemen, and they took him away in a coach."

"Where to?"

"That's more than I know."

"And why was I not kept informed on these matters? My last orders to you were to write to me daily."

"I was shut up myself the morning your honour left town. When I swore the informations they took me off, and never liberated me till this evening at eight o'clock."

"You'll soon find out where he is, won't you?"

"That I will. I'll know before your honour's up in the morning."

"And you'll be able to tell what he's after—why he is here at all; for, mind me, O'Reardon, I tell you again, it's not rebellion he's thinking of."

"I'll do that too, sir."

"If we could only get him out of the country—persuade him that his best course was to be off. If we could manage to get rid of him, O'Reardon—to get rid of him!" and he gave a fierce energy to the last words.

"*That* would be easier than the other," said the fellow, slyly.

"*What* would be easier?" cried Sewell, hurriedly.

"What your honour said last," said the fellow, with a knowing leer, as though the words were better not repeated.

"I don't think I understand you—speak out. What is it you mean?"

"Just this, then, that if it was that he was a trouble to any one, or that he'd be better out of the way, it would be the easiest thing in life to make some of the boys believe he was an informer, and they'd soon do for him."

"Murder him, eh?"

"I wouldn't call it murdering if a man was a traitor: nobody could call that murder."

"We'll not discuss that point now;" and as he spoke they came out from the shade of the avenue into the open space before the door, at which, late as it was, a carriage was now standing. "Who can be here at this hour?" muttered Sewell.

"That's a doctor's coach, but I forget his name."

"Oh! to be sure. It is Dr. Beattie's carriage. You may leave me now, O'Reardon; but come up here early to-morrow—come to my room, and be sure to bring me some news of what we were talking about." As the man moved away, Sewell stood for a moment or two to listen—he thought he heard voices in the hall, which, being large and vaulted, had a peculiar echo. Yes, he heard them now plainly enough, and had barely time to conceal himself in the copse when Dr. Beattie and Mrs. Sewell descended the steps, and walked out upon the gravel. They passed so close to where Sewell stood, that he could hear the very rustle of her silk dress as she walked. It was Beattie spoke, and his voice sounded stern and severe. "I knew he could not stand it. I said so over and over again. It is not at his age that men can assume new modes of life, new associates, and new hours. Instead of augmenting, the wise course would have been to have diminished the sources of excitement to him. In the society of his granddaughter, and with the few old friends whose companionship pleased him, and for whom he exerted himself to make those little harmless displays of his personal vanity, he might have gone on for years in comparative health."

"It was not I that devised these changes, Doctor," broke she in. "I never asked for these gaieties that you are condemning."

"These new-fangled fopperies, too!" went on Beattie, as though not heeding her apology. "I declare to you that they gave me more pain, more true pain, to witness than any of his wild outbursts of passion. In the one, the man was real, and in the other, a mere mockery. And what's the consequence?" added he, fiercely: "the man himself feels the unworthy part he has been playing; instead of being overjoyed at the prospect of seeing his son again, the thought of it overwhelms him with confusion. He knows well how he would appear to the honest eyes of poor simple-hearted Tom Lendrick, whose one only pride in life was his father's greatness."

"And he is certainly coming!"

"He has made an exchange for Malta, and will pass through here to see the Chief—so he says in his short letter. He expects, too, to find Lucy here, and to take her out with him. I believe you don't know Tom Lendrick?"

"I met him at the Cape. He dined with us twice, if I remember aright; but he was shy and awkward, and we thought at the time that he had not taken to us."

"First acquaintance always chilled him, and his deep humility ever prevented him making those efforts in conversation which would have established his true value. Poor fellow! how little he was always understood! Well, well! I am keeping you out in the night air all this time——"

"Oh, it is perfectly delicious, Doctor. It is like a night in the tropics, so balmy and so bright."

"I don't like to offer rude counsels, but my art sometimes gives a man scant choice," said he, after a brief pause. "I'd say—take your husband away, get him down to that place on the Shannon,—you have it still? Well, get him down there; he can always amuse himself; he's fond of field sports, and people are sure to be attentive to him in the neighbourhood; and leave the old Judge to fall back into the well-worn groove of his former life. He'll soon send for Tom and his daughter, and they'll fall into his ways, and what's better, *he* will fall into *theirs*—without either ruining his health or his fortune: plain speaking all this, Mrs. Sewell, but you asked for frankness, and told me it would not be ill-taken."

"I don't think Colonel Sewell would consent to this plan."

"Would *you*?" asked he, bluntly.

"My consent would not be asked; there's no need to discuss it."

"I meant—do you sufficiently concur in it to advise it?"

"I can advise nothing. I advance nothing. I oppose nothing. I had thought, Dr. Beattie,

that your visits to this house might have taught you the place I occupy, and the consideration I am held in."

This was ground the Doctor would not enter upon, and he adroitly said, "I think it will be the saving of Colonel Sewell himself. Club gossip says that he loses heavily every night, and though his means may be considerable——"

"But they are not—he has nothing—not a shilling, except what this place brings in."

"All the more reason not to play; but I must not keep you out here all night. I'll come early in the morning, and hope to find him better. Remember how essential quiet is to him; let him not be disturbed; no talking by way of amusing him; pure rest—mind that."

"If he wishes to see my husband, or asks for him——"

"I'd make some excuse; say he is out. Colonel Sewell excites him; he never fully understood Sir William; and I fear, besides, that he now and then took a humoristic pleasure in those bursts of temper which it is always only too easy to provoke."

"He is very fond of my little boy—might he go in?"

"I think not. I'd say downright repose and isolation. You yourself can step in noiselessly from time to time, and only speak if you see that he wishes it; but on no account mention anything that could awaken interest—nothing to arouse or to excite. You saw the fearful state that letter threw him into to-night, and the paroxysm of rage with which he called for his will to erase Tom Lendrick's name. Now in all probability he will have totally forgotten the whole incident by to-morrow. Good-night."

After he drove off she still lingered about the spot where they had been talking. Whatever interest the subject might have had for her, it was not through her affections that interest worked, for she hummed an opera air, "Bianca Luna," and tried to recall some lines of Alfred de Musset's to the "timid moon," and then sat down upon the steps and gazed at the stars.

Sewell moved out into the avenue, and, whistling carelessly to announce his approach, walked up to where she was sitting. "Romantic, certainly!" said he. "Whose carriage was that I met driving out?"

"Dr. Beattie's. He has been here to see Sir William."

"Will he die this time, or is it only another false start?"

"He is seriously ill. Some news he received from his son gave him a severe shock, and brought on one of his worse attacks. He has been raving since six o'clock."

"I should like to know when he has done anything else. I should like to see the man who ever heard from his lips other than the wildest, crudest nonsense. The question is, is he going to die?"

"Beattie's opinion is very unfavourable."

"Unfavourable! To whom? To *him* or to *us*?"

"His death could scarcely be favourable to us."

"That's as it might be. We stand to win on one or two of these twenty wills he has made; and if he should recover and live on, I don't think—indeed I'm full sure—I couldn't bear it much longer, so that, take it either way, I'd rather he'd die."

"Beattie wishes his granddaughter were here."

"Well, send for her. Though, if he is as ill as you say, it won't be of much use."

"He has come through so many of these attacks, and has such great power of constitution, the Doctor still thinks he might rally."

"And so he will, I'll be sworn. There's a vitality in those people who plague and torment others that ought to get insurance offices to take them at half premium. Has he asked for *me*?"

"Only in his ravings. He rang his bell violently, and inquired if you had been at the prison, and asked what tidings you had brought him; and then he went off to say that all this Celt affair was no rebellion at all, and that he would prove it. Then he talked of quitting the Bench and putting on his stuff gown to defend these men against the Government."

"Sick or well, sane or insane, it's always the same story. His only theme is himself."

"Beattie was struck with the profound things and the witty things he said throughout all his rambling. He said that the intellect was never actually overthrown, that it only tottered."

"What rot! as if he knew anything about it! These fellows talk of a man's brain as if it was the ankle-joint. Was there any question of a will?"

"Yes. He made Beattie take a will out of his writing-desk; and he erased the name of Lendrick in every part of it. Beattie and he had some angry words together, for that was before he was raving; and I heard Sir William tell him, 'Sir, you are neither my priest nor my lawyer; and if your skill as a doctor be only on a par with your tact as a friend, my recovery is all but hopeless.'"

"That probably was one of the profound or witty things the Doctor was so delighted with."

"Dr. Beattie took nothing addressed to himself in ill part."

"No; that's part of medical education. These fellows begin life as such 'cads,' they never attain to the feeling of being gentlemen."

There was not light enough for Sewell to see the scornful curl of his wife's lip at this speech, but in the little short cough by which she suppressed her temptation to reply, he noted her indignation.

"I know he's one of your especial favourites, madam," said he, harshly, "but even *that* gives him no immunity with *me*."

"I'm sure I could never think it would."

"No. Not even from being aware that one of his chief claims upon the wife was the unhandsome way he spoke of the husband."

"He seldom mentions you," said she, superciliously

"I'm not so scrupulous about him, then; I have not forgotten his conduct when that fellow got his skull cracked at the 'Nest.' I saw it all, madam; but I have a trick of seeing and saying nothing that might have suggested some alarm to you ere this."

"You have many tricks, but not one that alarms me," said she, coldly; "the wholesome

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fear of consequences will always be enough to keep you harmless."

He almost sprang at her at these words—indeed, he came so close that his hot breath brushed her face. "It is a favourite taunt of yours to sneer at my courage," said he, fiercely; "you may do it once too often."

She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously, and slowly arose from where she sat.

"Where are you going?" asked he, roughly.

"Going in."

"I have many things to say yet; I want to hear more, too, about the old man's illness."

"I have told you all I know. Good-night."

He turned away without acknowledging her salutation, and strolled into the grass.

What a web of troubles he was involved in, and how hopelessly he turned from this or that expedient to extricate himself! It was but a short time before that, as a member of the committee of his club, he had succeeded in passing a law by which all play debts should be discharged within twenty-four hours, on penalty of the defaulter being declared excluded from the club. He was a winner at the time; but now luck had changed; he had lost heavily, and had not the slightest prospect of being able to meet his losses. "How like my fate!" muttered he, in intense passion—"how like my fate! my whole life has been a game I have played against myself. And that woman, too"—it was of his wife he spoke—"who once helped me through many a strait, assumes now to be too pure and too virtuous to be my associate, and stands quietly aloof to see me ruined."

A long thin streak of light crossed his path as he went; he looked up, and saw it came from between the shutters of the Chief's room. "I wonder how it fares with him!" muttered he. He pondered for some time over the old man's case, his chances of recovery, and the spirit in which convalescence would find him; and then entering the house, he slowly mounted the stairs, one by one, his heart feeling like a load almost too heavy to carry. The unbroken stillness of the house seemed to whisper caution, and he moved along the corridor with noiseless tread till he came to the door of the Judge's room. There he stopped and listened. There were the long-drawn breathings of a heavy sleeper plainly to be heard, but they sounded stronger and fuller than the respirations of a sick man. Sewell gently turned the handle of the door and entered. The suspicion was right. The breathings were those of the hospital nurse, who, seated in a deep arm-chair, slept profoundly. Sewell stood several minutes at the door before he ventured farther: at last he crept stealthily forward to the foot of the bed, and separating the curtains cautiously, he peeped in. The old man lay with his eyes closed, and his long shrivelled arms outside the clothes. He continued to talk rapidly, and by degrees his voice grew stronger and clearer, and had all that resonance of one speaking in a large assembly. "I have now," said he, "shown the inexpediency of this course. I have pointed out where you have been impolitic. I will next explain where you are illegal. This Act was made in the 23d year of Henry VI., and although intended only to apply to cases of action personal, or indictment of trespass—What is the meaning of this interruption? Let there be silence in the Court. I will have the tribunal in which I preside respected. The public shall learn—the representatives of the press—and if there be, as I am told there are"—his voice grew weaker and weaker, and the last audible words that escaped him were, "judgment for the plaintiff."

Though his lips still moved rapidly no sound came forth, but his hands were continually in motion, and his lean arms twitched with short convulsive jerks. Sewell now crept quietly round towards the side of the bed, on which several sheets of paper and writing materials lay. One of the sheets alone was written on; it was in the large bold hand of the old Judge, who even at his advanced age wrote in a vigorous and legible character. It was headed, "Directions for my funeral," and began thus:—"As Irishmen may desire to testify their respect for one who, while he lived, maintained with equal energy the supremacy of the law and the inviolability of the man, and as my obsequies may in some sort become an act of national homage, I write these lines to convey my last wishes, legacies of which my country will be true executors.

"First, I desire that I may be buried within the nave of St. Patrick's Cathedral. The spot I have selected is to the right of Swift's monument, under the fifth window, and for this purpose that hideous monument to Sir Hugh Brabazon may be removed, and my interment there confer a double benefit upon my country. Secondly, as by my will, dated this twenty-eighth day of October 18—, I have bequeathed, with exception of certain small legacies, all my estate, real and personal, to Dudley Sewell, Esq., late colonel in her Majesty's service, it is my wish that he alone should——" here the writing finished.

Three several times Sewell read over the lines, and what a thrill of delight ran through him! It was like a reprieve to a man on the very steps of the scaffold! The Judge was not rich probably, but a considerable sum of money he still might have, and it was money—cash. It was not invested in lands or houses or ships: it was all available for that life that Sewell led, and which alone he liked.

If he could but see this will—it must be close at hand somewhere—what a satisfaction it would be to read over the details by which at last—at last!—he was to be lifted above the casualties of a life of struggle! He tried three or four drawers of the large ebony cabinet in which the Chief used to throw his papers, with the negligence of a man who could generally rewrite as easily as he could search for a missing document. There were bills and receipts, notes of trials, and letters in abundance—but no will. The cumbrous old writing-desk, which Sir William rarely used, was not in its accustomed place, but stood on the table in the centre of the room, and the keys beside it. The will might possibly be there. He drew nigh the bed to assure himself that the old man was still sleeping, and then he turned towards the nurse, whose breathings were honest vouchers for insensibility; and thus fortified, he selected the key—he knew it well—and opened the desk. The very first paper he chanced upon was the

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will. It was a large sheet of strong post-paper, labelled—"My last Will and Testament.—W. L." While Sewell stood examining the writing the door creaked gently, and his wife moved softly and noiselessly into the room. If the sentiment that overcame him was not shame, it was something in which shame blended with anger. It was true she knew him well: she knew all the tortuous windings of his plotting, scheming nature: she knew that no sense of honour, no scruple of any kind, could ever stand between him and his object. He had done those things which, worse than deep crimes, lower a man in the eyes of a woman, and that woman his wife, and that she thus knew and read him he was well aware; but strangely enough there is a world of space between being discovered through the results of a long inquiry and being detected *flagrante delicto!* taken in the very act, red-handed in iniquity; and so did this cold-hearted, callous man now feel it.

"What are you doing here?" said she, calmly and slowly, as she came forward.

"I wanted to see this. I was curious to know how he treated us," said he, trembling as he spoke.

She took the paper from his hand, replaced it in the desk, and locked it up, with the calm determination of one who could not be gainsaid.

"But I have not read it," whispered he, in a hissing voice.

"Nor need you," said she, placing the keys under the old man's pillow. "I heard you coming here—I heard you enter the room. I am thankful it is no worse."

"What do you mean by no worse?" cried he, seizing her by the wrist, and staring savagely at her—"say what you mean, woman!" She made no reply; but the scornful curl of her lip, and the steady unflinching stare of her eyes, showed that neither his words nor his gesture had terrified her.

"You shall hear more of this to-morrow," said he, bending on her a look of intense hate; and he stole slowly away, while she seated herself at the bedside, and hid her face in the curtain.

———o———

CHAPTER LXII.

AN UNGRACIOUS ADIEU.

When Dr. Beattie came at seven o'clock in the morning, he found his patient better. The nurse gave her account, as nurses know well how to do, of a most favourable night—told how calmly he slept, how sensibly he talked, and with what enjoyment he ate the jelly which he had never tasted.

At all events he was better; not stronger, perhaps,—there was no time for that; but calmer and more composed.

"You must not talk, nor be talked to yet a while," said Beattie; "and I will station Haire here as a sentinel to enforce my orders."

"Yes, I would like Haire," whispered the old man, softly. "Let him come and sit by me."

"Can I see Mrs. Sewell? or is it too early to ask for her?" inquired the Doctor of a maid.

"She has been up all night, sir, and only just lain down."

"Don't disturb her, then. I will write a line to her, and you can give it when she awakes."

He went into the library, and wrote:—"Sir William is better, but not out of danger. It is even more important now than before that he have perfect quiet. I will change the nurse, and meanwhile I desire that you alone should enter the room till I return."

"What letter was that the Doctor gave you as he went away?" said Sewell, who during Beattie's visit had been secretly on the watch over all that occurred.

"For my mistress, sir," said the girl, showing the note.

Sewell snatched it impatiently, threw his eyes over it, and gave it back. "Tell your mistress I want to see her when she is dressed. It's nothing to hurry for, but to come down to my room at her own convenience."

"Better, but not out of danger! I should think not," muttered he, as he strolled out into the garden. "What is the meaning of stationing old Haire at the bedside? Does Beattie suspect? But what could he suspect? It would be a very convenient thing for me, no doubt, if he would die; but I'd scarcely risk my neck to help him on the way. These things are invariably discovered; and it would make no difference with the law whether it was the strong cord of a vigorous life were snapped, or the frail thread of a wasted existence unravelled. Just so; mere unravelling would do it here. No need of bold measures. A good vigorous contradiction—a rude denial of something he said—with a sneer at his shattered intellect, and I'd stake my life on it his passion would do the rest. The blood mounts to his head at the slightest insinuation. I'd like to see him tried with a good round insult. Give me ten minutes alone with him, and I'll let Beattie come after me with all his bottles; and certainly no law could make this murder. Bad-tempered men are not to be more carefully guarded by the state than better-natured ones. It would be a strange statute that made it penal to anger an irascible fellow. I wonder if some suspicion of this kind has crossed Beattie's mind? Is it for that Haire has been called to keep the watch on deck,—and if so, who is to replace him? He'll tire at last—he must sleep some time; and what are they to do then? My wife, perhaps. Yes; she would play their game willingly enough. If she has heard of this will, it will alarm her. She has always tried to have the children provided for. She dreads—she's not so wrong there—she dreads leaving everything in my power. And of late she has dared to oppose me openly. My threat of suing for a divorce, that used to keep her so submissive once, is failing now. Some one has told her that I could not succeed. I can see in her manner that her mind is reassured on this score. She could have no difficulty in filching an opinion—this house is always full of lawyers; and certainly nothing in the habits of the place would have imposed any restraint in discussing it." And he laughed—actually laughed—at the conceit thus evoked. "If I had but a little time before me now, I should work

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through all my difficulties. Only to think of it! One fortnight, less perhaps, to arrange my plans, and I might defy the world. This is Tuesday. By Thursday I shall have to meet those two acceptances for three hundred and two hundred and fifty. The last, at all events, I must pay, since Walcott's name was not in his own handwriting. How conscientiously a man meets a bill when he has forged the endorsement!" And again he laughed at the droll thought. "These troubles swarm around me," muttered he, impatiently. "There is Fossbrooke, too. Malevolent old fool, that will not see how needless it is to ruin me. Can't he wait—can't he wait? It's his own prediction that I'm a fellow who needs no enemy—my own nature will always be Nemesis enough. Who's that?—who is there?" cried he, as he heard a rustling in the copse at his side.

"It's me, your honour. I came out to get sight of your honour before I went away," said O'Reardon, in a sort of slavish cringing tone.

"Away! and where to?"

"They're sending me out of the way, your honour, for a week or two, to prevent the ould man I arrested charging me with parjury. That's what they purtend, sir," said he, in a lower voice. "But the truth is, that I know more than they like, ay, and more than they think; for it was in my house at Cullen's Wood that the Lord-Liftenant himself came down, one evening, and sat two hours with this ould man."

"Keep these sort of tales for other people, Master O'Reardon; they have no success with me. You are a capital terrier for rat-hunting, but you cut a sorry figure when you come out as a boar-hound. Do you understand me?"

"I do, sir, right well. Your honour means that I ought to keep to informations against common people, and not try my hand against the gentlemen."

"You've hit it perfectly. It's strange enough how sharp you can be in some things, and what a cursed fool in others."

"You never was more right in your life, sir. That's my character in one sentence," and he gave a little plaintive sigh, as though the thought were a painful one.

"And how do you mean to employ your leisure, Mr. O'Reardon? Men of your stamp are never thoroughly idle. Will you write your memoirs?"

"Indeed no, your honour; it might hurt people's feelings the names I'd have to bring in; and I'm just going over to France for the present."

"To France?"

"Yes, sir; Mr. Harman's tuk heart o' grace, and is going to sue for a divorce, and he's sending me over to a place called Boulogne to get up evidence against the Captain."

"You like that sort of thing?"

"I neither like it nor dislike it," said O'Reardon, while his eye kindled angrily, for he thought that he who scoffed at him should stand on higher moral ground than Sewell's.

"You once lived with Captain Peters, I think?"

"Yes, sir; I was his valet for four years. I was with him at Malta and Corfu when he was in the Rifles."

"And he treated you well?"

"No man better, that I'll say for him if he was in the dock to-morrow. He gave me a trunk of his clothes—mufti he called them—and ten pounds the day I left him."

"It's somewhat hard, isn't it, to go against a man after that? Doesn't your fine nature rather revolt at the ingratitude?"

"Well, then, to tell your honour the truth, my fine 'nature' never was rich enough to afford itself that thing your honour calls gratitude. It's a sort of thing for my betters."

"I'm sorry to hear you say so, O'Reardon. You almost shock me with such principles."

"Well, that's the way it is, sir. When a man's poor he has no more right to fine feelins than to fine feeding."

"Why, you go from bad to worse, O'Reardon. I declare you are positively corrupting this morning."

"Am I, sir?" said the fellow, who now eyed him with a calm and steady defiance, as though he had submitted to all he meant to bear. Sewell felt this, and though he returned the stare, it was with a far less courageous spirit. "Well?" cried he at last, as though, no longer able to endure the situation, he desired to end it at any cost—"Well?"

"I suppose your honour wouldn't have time to settle with me now?"

"To settle with you! What do you call settle, my good fellow? our reckonings are very short ones, or I'm much mistaken. What's this settlement you talk of?"

"It's down here in black and white," said the other, producing a folded sheet of paper as he spoke. "I put down the payments as I made them, and the car hire and a trifle for refreshment; and if your honour objects to anything, it's easy to take it off; though, considering I was often on the watch till daybreak, and had to come in from Howth on foot before the trains started of a morning, a bit to eat and to drink was only reasonable."

"Make an end of this long story. What do you call the amount?"

"It's nothing to be afeard of, your honour, for the whole business—the tracking him out, the false keys I had made for his trunk and writing-case, eight journeys back and forwards, two men to swear that he asked them to take the Celt's oath, and the other expenses as set down in the account. It's only twenty-seven pound, four and eightpence."

"What?"

"Twenty-seven, four, and eight; neither more nor less."

A very prolonged whistle was Sewell's sole reply. "Do you know, O'Reardon," said he at last, "it gives me a painfully low opinion of myself to see that, after so many months of close acquaintance, I should still appear to you to be little short of an idiot? It is very distressing—I give you my word it is—very distressing."

"Make your mind easy, sir; it is not *that* I think you at all;" and the fellow lent an emphasis to the "that" which gave it a most insulting significance.

"I'd like to know," cried Sewell, as his face crimsoned with anger, "if you could have dared to offer such a document as this to any man you didn't believe to be a fool."

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"The devil a drop of fool's blood is in either of us," said O'Reardon, with an easy air and a low laugh of quiet assurance.

"I am flattered by the companionship, certainly. It almost restores me to self-esteem to hear your words. I'd like to pay you a compliment in turn if I only knew how."

"Just pay me my little bill, your honour, and it will be all I'll ask."

"I'm not over much in a joking mood this morning, and I'd advise you to talk of something else. There's a five-pound note for you," and he flung the money contemptuously towards him. "Take it, and think yourself devilish lucky that I don't have you up for perjury in this business."

O'Reardon never moved, nor made any sign to show that he noticed the money at his feet; but, crossing his arms on his chest, he drew himself haughtily up, and said—"So, then, it's defying me you'd try now? You'd have me up for porjury! Well, then, I begin to believe you *are* a fool, after all. No, sir, you needn't put your hand in your waistcoat. If you have a pistol there I have another—and, what's more, I have a witness in that clump of trees, that only needs the word to stand beside me. There now, Colonel, you see you're beat, and beat at your own game too."

"D—n you!" cried Sewell, savagely. "Can't you see that I've got no money?"

"If I haven't money, I'll have money's worth. Short of twenty pound I'll not leave this."

"I tell you again, you might as well ask me for two hundred or two thousand. I'll be in cash, I hope, by the end of the week——"

"Ay, but I'll be in France," broke in O'Reardon.

"I wish you were in ——" mumbled Sewell, as he believed, to himself; but the other heard him, and dryly said, "No, sir, not yet; it's manners to let *you* go first."

"I lost heavily two nights ago at the club—that's why I'm so hard up; but I know I must have money by Saturday. By Saturday's post, I'll send you an order for thirty pounds. Will that content you?"

"No, sir, it will not. I had a bad bout of it last night myself, and lost every ha'penny Mr. Harman gave me for the journey—that's the reason I'm here."

"But if I have not got it? There, so help me! is every farthing I can call my own this minute," and he drew from his pocket some silver, in which a single gold coin or two mingled—"take it, if you like."

"No, sir, it's no good to me. Short of twenty pounds, I couldn't start on the journey."

"And if I haven't got it? Am I to go out and rob for you!" cried Sewell, as his eyes flashed indignantly at him.

"I don't want you to rob; but it isn't a house like this hasn't twenty pounds in it."

"You mean," said Sewell, with a sneering laugh, "that if there's not cash there must be plate, jewels, and suchlike, and so I'm to lay an embargo on the spoons; but you forget there is a butler who looks after these things."

"There might be many a loose thing on your lady's table that would do as well—a ring or two, or a bracelet that she's tired of."

Sewell started—a sudden thought flashed across him;—if he were to kill the fellow as he stood there, how should he conceal the murder and hide the corpse? It was quick as a lightning flash this thought, but the horror of the consequences so overcame him that a cold sweat broke out over his body, and he staggered back to a seat, and sank into it exhausted and almost fainting.

"Don't take it to heart that way, sir," said the fellow, gazing at him. "Shall I get you a glass of water?"

"Yes. No—no; I'll do without it. It's passing off. Wait here for a moment; I'll be back presently." He arose as he spoke, and moved slowly away. Entering the house, he ascended the stairs and made for his wife's room. As he reached the door he stopped to listen. There was not a sound to be heard. He turned the handle gently and looked in. One shutter was partly open, and a gleam of the breaking daylight crossed the floor and fell upon the bed on which she lay, dressed, and fast asleep—so soundly, indeed, that though the door creaked loudly as he pushed it wider, she never heard the noise. She had evidently been sitting up with the sick man, and was now overcome by fatigue. His intention had been to consult with her—at least to ask her to assist him with whatever money she had by her—and he had entered thus stealthily not to startle her; for somehow, in the revulsion of his mind from the late scene of outrage and insult, a sense of respect, if not of regard, moved him towards her, who, in his cruelest moments, had never ceased to have a certain influence over him. He looked at her as she slept—her fine features, at rest, were still beautiful, though deep traces of sorrow were seen in the darkened orbits and the lines about the mouth, while three or four glistening white hairs showed themselves in the brown braid over her temple. Sewell sat down beside the bed, and, as he looked at her, a whole life passed in review before him, from the first hour he met her to that sad moment of the present. How badly they had played their game! how recklessly misused every opportunity that might have secured their fortune! What had *he* made of all his shrewdness and ready wit? And what had *she* done with all her beauty, and a fascination as great as even her beauty? It was an evil day that had brought them together. Each, alone, without the other, might have achieved any success. There had been no trust, no accord between them. They wanted the same things, it is true, but they never agreed upon the road that led to them. As to principles, she had no more of them than he had, but she had scruples—scruples of delicacy, scruples of womanhood—which often thwarted and worried him, and ended by making them enemies; and here was now the end of it! *Her* beauty was wasted, and *his* luck played out, and only ruin before them.

And yet it calmed him to sit there; her softly-drawn breathing soothed his ruffled spirit. He felt it as the fevered man feels the ice-cold water on his brow—a transient sense of what it would be to be well again. Is there that in sleep—image as it is of the great sleep of all—that subdues all rancour of heart—all

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that spirit of conflict and jar by which men make their lives a very hell of undying hates, undying regrets?

His heart, that a few moments ago had almost burst with passion, now felt almost at ease; and in the half-darkened room, the stillness, and the calm, there stole over him a feeling of repose that was almost happiness. As he bent over her to look at her, her lips moved. She was dreaming; very softly indeed came the sounds, but they seemed as if entreating. "Yes," she said—"yes—all—everything—I consent. I agree to all, only—Cary—let me have Cary, and I will go."

Sewell started. His face became crimson in a moment. How was it that these words scattered all his late musings as the hurricane tears and severs the cloud masses, and sends them riven and shattered through the sky? He arose and walked over to the table; a gold comb and two jewelled hair-pins lay on the glass; he clutched them coarsely in his hand, and moved away. Cautiously and noiselessly he crept down the stairs, and out into the garden. "Take these and make your money of them; they are worth more than your claim; and mind, my good fellow—mind it well, I say, or it will be worse for you—our dealings end here. This is our last transaction, and our last meeting. I'll never harm you, if you keep only out of my way. But take care that you never claim me, nor assume to know me, for I warn you I'll disown you if it should bring you to the gallows. That's plain speaking, and you understand it."

"I do, every word of it," said the fellow, as he buttoned up his coat and drew his hat over his eyes. "I'm taking the 'fiver' too, as it's to be our last meetin'. I suppose your honour will shake hands with me, and wish me luck. Well, if you won't, there's no harm done. It's a quare world, where the people that's doin' the same things can't be friends, just because one wears fine cloth and the other can only afford corduroy. Good-bye, sir; good-bye, any *how*;" and there was a strange cadence in the last words no description can well convey.

Sewell stood and looked after him for a moment, then turned into the house, and threw himself on a sofa, exhausted and worn out.

———o———

CHAPTER LXIII.

A PLEASANT MEETING.

No sooner did Sir Brook find himself once more at liberty than he went to the post-office for his letters, of which a goodly stock had accumulated during his absence. A telegram, too, was amongst the number, despatched by Tom in great haste eight days before. It ran thus:—"Great news!—we have struck silver in the new shaft—do not sell—do not even treat till you hear from me. I write by this post.—LENDRICK." Had Tom but seen the unmoved calm with which Fossbrooke read this astounding tidings—had he only seen the easy indifference with which the old man threw down the slip of paper after once reading it, and passed on to a letter of Lord Wilmington from Crew Keep—his patience would certainly have been sorely tried. Nor was it from any indifference to good fortune, still as little from any distrust of the tidings. It was simply because he had never doubted that the day was coming that was to see him once more rich. It might be a little later or a little earlier. It might be that wealth should shower itself upon him in a gradually increasing measure, or come down in a very deluge of prosperity. These were things he did not, could not know; but of the fact—the great Fact itself—he had as firm a belief as he had of his own existence; and had he died before realizing it, he would have bequeathed his vast fortune, with blanks for the amount, as conscientiously as though it were bank stock for which he held the vouchers.

When most men build castles in the air they know on what foundations their edifices are based, and through all their imaginative ardour there pierces the sharp pang of unreality. Not so with Fossbrooke. It was simply a question of time with him when the costly palace might become fit for habitation, and this great faith in himself rescued him from all that vacillation so common to those who keep a debtor and creditor account between their hopes and fears. Neither was he at all impatient because Destiny did not bestir herself and work quicker. The world was always pleasant, always interesting; and when to-morrow or next day Fortune might call him to a higher station and other modes of life, he almost felt he should regret the loss of that amusing existence he now enjoyed, amongst people all new and all strange to him.

At last he came to Tom Lendrick's letter—four closely written pages, all glowing with triumph. On the day week after Sir B.'s departure, he wrote:—"They had come upon a vein of lead so charged with silver as to seem as though the whole mass were of the more precious metal. All Cagliari came down to see a block of ore upwards of two hundredweight, entirely crusted with silver, and containing in the mass forty per cent. We had to get a guard from the Podesta, merely to keep off the curious, for there was no outrage nor any threat of outrage. Indeed, your kind treatment of our workpeople now begins to bear its fruit, and there was nothing but goodwill and kind feeling for our lucky fortune. The two Jews, Heenwitz and Voss, of the Contrada Reale, were amongst the first visitors, and had actually gone down into the shaft before I knew of it. They at once offered me a large sum for a share in the mine; and when I told them it was with you they must treat, they proposed to open a credit of three hundred thousand francs with their house in my favour, to go on with the working till I heard from you and learned your intentions. This offer, too, I have declined, till I get your letter.

"This was on Tuesday, but on Thursday we struck pure silver without a trace of lead, the only alloy being a thin vein of cobalt, like a ribbon, running through the ore; and which Chiusani says—for he has worked in Mexico and the Brazils—is proof of a strong vein. The news spread like wildfire at Cagliari; and I have

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had such levees of the money folk! all offering me millions at any, or indeed at no interest, and actually entreating me to put my hand in their pockets while they look away or close their eyes. As for the presents that pour in, we have no room for them; and you know how dangerous it would be to refuse these people. It is only a short step with them from a sworn friendship to the stiletto. The only disturbing element in all this joy is a sort of official protest from the Delegato of the province against our working what the Crown may claim as a royalty; but I am instructed that Sardinia once acquired all royal rights by a fixed payment, and Lucy thinks she read somewhere the details of the cession. At any rate, she and Contini, the lawyer, are hard at work making out the reply; and the English version, which Lucy does, will be forwarded to our minister at Naples to-morrow. You'd laugh if you saw how she has familiarized herself with not only all the legal terms, but with all our mining phraseology, and how acutely she marks the difference between intact royalties and the claims of the Crown to certain percentages on exempted mines. Contini is a bachelor, and I am fully persuaded intends to make her an offer of his legal hand and heart—that is, if he finds that we are likely to beat the Crown lawyers. I cannot help thinking he's a lucky fellow that you are not here, nor like to be, on the day he makes his proposal.

"As much for peace's sake as for convenience, I have accepted twenty thousand francs on loan. I have taken it from the four principal bankers in Cagliari, in equal sums from each, to prevent jealousy. I hope this was not wrong. I send you herewith bills for fifteen thousand, remembering, if I be right, that you borrowed some hundred pounds on the security of the mine, which you might like now to pay off." After some business details, given at length, and with a degree of amplification that somewhat wearied Sir Brook to read, he summed up thus:—"Write to me therefore at once, and say what course we ought to take regarding our rights. Could our home lawyers afford you no information of value? Shall we oppose or shall we compromise? I suspect they wish the latter.

"Are you satisfied that I accepted this loan? I have my own misgivings, not about the fact, for we wanted money to go on, but as to your concurrence.

"And when are you coming back? I cannot say how impatient I am for your return, all the more that you have only written that hurried note from Dover since you left us. Lucy is in great spirits, takes immense interest in all we are doing, and does all the Italian correspondence for me. She wears a little silver hammer, the miner's hammer, in her hat; and her popularity with the people is unbounded. You will be amused, on your return, to find that your sketch on the wall of the splendid palace that was to crown our successes has acquired two wings and a great tower; and a third figure, a lady, has been added to the riding-party that are cantering up the avenue. Lucy says that nothing but humility (!) could have devised such a house for people so rich as we are. It certainly was not the sentiment with which hitherto I have regarded this edifice. I have come to the end of my paper, but I will not close this till I see if the post should not bring us news of you.

"Your letter has just come. The latter part of it has given us great uneasiness. It is precisely such a time as a private enemy—if you have one—would choose to work out a personal grudge. No matter how totally you feel yourself free from implication in these Irish troubles, do nothing—positively nothing—without legal advice. It will save you a world of trouble; not to speak of the comfort you will feel in knowing that your interests are matter of care and thought to another. Above all, keep us informed daily by telegraph how and where you are, and what doing.

"Lucy wants to go off to you to-night, but I have had a slight return of my fever, a very slight one, and she half fears to leave me. If your next gives us good news, we shall soon forget this unpleasantness; but, I repeat, let no day pass without tidings of you.

"The evening report has just come in from the mine—one hundred and seventy-eight pounds silver in the last twenty-four hours! I have taken on forty additional men, and the new smelting-house will be in full work within a week. If you only were here, I'd have nothing more to wish for.

"I suppose Trafford has written to you. In the short note I got from him yesterday there is nothing but gratitude to you. He says he owes everything to your friendship. He means to be in England in a few days, and of course will go over to you; but write, or rather telegraph.—Yours ever, T. L.

"I wrote to Colonel Cave this morning to tell him his small venture with us would not turn out so badly. Our first dividend will be at least cent per cent, so that he cannot lose by us. It's downright jolly to be able to send off such a despatch."

The last letter of the heap was from Lady Trafford, and served in a measure to explain that paragraph in Tom's epistle which spoke of young Trafford's gratitude. It appeared that Lady Trafford's youngest son, on whom Sir Hugh had fixed to make the head of the family, had gone to winter at Madeira, and while there had fallen in love with and married a Portuguese girl, the daughter of his landlady. The news of this *mésalliance* had nearly killed his father, who was only recovering from a bad attack of gout when the tidings reached him. By good luck, however, on the very same day came a letter from Fossbrooke, declaring that no matter what treatment young Trafford might meet with from his own family, he, Sir Brook, would stand firmly by him, so long as his honourable and manly conduct and his fidelity to his word to the girl he loved entitled him to regard and affection. "In a worldly point of view," wrote he, "such friendship as mine is a poor thing I am a man of nothing, it is true; but I have lived long enough to know that there are other successes besides wealth and station. There are such things as self-respect, contentment, and the love of friends; and I do think my experiences will help him to secure some share of these.

"There is, however, one entreaty I would prefer, and if there be in your memory any

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kind thought of me, you will not refuse my prayer. Your boy is eager to see you, and shake your hand. Let him come. If you cannot or will not approve, do not at least condemn what he is about to do. In his anxiety to obtain your sanction, he has shown all deference to your authority. This shows he is worthy of your esteem; and if he were to palter between the hope of all your fortune and the love of this girl, he would only deserve your contempt. Be proud of him, then, even if you disinherit him to-morrow. If these be the sentiments of a man who has nothing, remember, Trafford, that I was not always a beggar; and if I thought that being rich would alter these opinions, I can only say I hope I may die as poor as now I write myself.

"There's a strong prejudice, I know, against being guided by men who have made such a sorry hand of their own fortunes as I have; but many a fellow who has been shipwrecked has proved a good sailor; at all events he knows what it is to be buffeted by the waves and torn on the rocks. Now, I have told your son not to be afraid of these, and I think he trusts me.

"Once more, then, I ask, let me tell Lionel you will receive him; and believe me faithfully your old friend,

"BR. FOSSBROOKE."

Lady Trafford's note was short—

"MY DEAR SIR BROOKE,—I suppose there is nothing for it but what you say, and Lionel may come here. We have had nothing but disasters with our sons. I wish I could dare to hope that this was to be the end of the calamities. Sir Hugh desires much that you could be here when L. arrives. Could you conveniently arrange this? George's shocking marriage, the terrible disappointment to our hopes, and other worries, have almost proved too much for me.

"Is there any truth in the story that Miss L.'s grandfather was negotiating for a peerage as the condition of his retirement from the Bench? If so, and that the object could be compassed, it would go far towards removing some of our objections to the connection. Sir Hugh's influence with 'the Party' would unquestionably be of use; and though a law lord does not mean much, it is something. Inform me fully on this head. It is very strange that Lionel should never have mentioned the matter, and, indeed, strongly indicates how little trouble he took, or cared to take, to obviate our natural objections to the match. I suppose her father is not a practising physician. At all events he need not be styled Doctor. Oh dear! when I think of it all, and think what an end my ambitions have come to, I could cry my eyes out. It often strikes me that people who make most sacrifices for their children are ever repaid in this fashion. The Dean says these are mysterious dispensations, and that we must submit to them. I suppose we must, but it certainly is not without reluctance.

"I thought of asking you to write to Lionel, but I will do so myself, painful as it is. I feel I am very forgiving to write you in this strain, seeing how great was the share you took in involving us all in this unhappy business. At one moment I positively detested—I don't suspect yet that I entirely pardon—you, though I may when you come here, especially if you bring me any good news of this peerage business, which I look to as our last refuge. Lendrick is a very odd name—are there many of them? Of course, it will be well understood that we only know the immediate relations—father and brother, I mean. We stand no cousins, still less uncles or aunts.

"Sir Hugh thinks I ought to write to the old Judge. I opine he would be flattered by the attention. but I have not yet made up my mind upon it. Give me some advice on this, and believe me sincerely yours."

After despatching a telegram to Cagliari, to say he was well and at large, and would soon be on his way back again, Fossbrooke wrote a few lines to Lord Wilmington of regret that he could not afford time to go over and see him, and assuring him that the late incident that had befallen him was not worth a thought. "He must be a more irritable fellow than I am," he wrote, "who would make a personal grievance of a mere accident, against which, in a time of trouble, it would be hard to provide. While I say this I must add that I think the spy system is a mistake—that there is an over-eagerness in your officials to procure committals; and I declare to you I have often had more difficulty to get out of a crowded evening party than I should have felt in making my escape from your jail or bridewell, whichever be its name. I don't suspect your law officers are marvels of wisdom, and your Chief Secretary is an ass."

To Lady Trafford he wrote a very brief reply. He scarcely thought his engagements would enable him to make a visit to Holt. "I will, however, come if I can, chiefly to obtain your full and free pardon, though for what beyond rendering you an invaluable service, I am puzzled to understand; and I repeat, if your son obtain this young lady in marriage, he will be, after Sir Hugh, the luckiest man of his name and family.

"As to the peerage, I can tell you nothing. I believe there is rather a prejudice against sending Irishmen up to the Lords; and it is scarcely ever done with lawyers. In regard to writing to Baron Lendrick, I hardly know what to say. He is a man of great ability, but of even greater vanity, and it should be a cleverly-worded epistle that would not ruffle some of his thousand sensibilities. If you feel, however, adroit enough to open the negotiation, do so by all means; but don't make me responsible for what may come of it if the rejoinder be not to your taste. For myself, I'd rather poke up a grizzly bear with an umbrella than I'd provoke such a man to an exchange of letters."

To get back to Cagliari as soon as possible, and relieve Tom of that responsibility which seemed to weigh so heavily upon him, was Fossbrooke's first resolve. He must see Sewell at once, and finish the business; and however unpleasant the step might be, he must seek him at the Priory, if he could not meet him elsewhere. He wished also to see Beattie—he wanted to repay the loan he had made him. The Doctor, too, could tell him how he could

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obtain an interview with Sewell without any intrusion upon the Chief Baron.

It was evening before Fossbrooke could make his visit to Beattie, and the Doctor had just sat down to dinner with a gentleman who had arrived by the mail-packet from England, giving orders that he was not to be disturbed on any score.

"Will you merely take in my name," said Sir Brook, "and beg, with my respects, to learn at what hour to-morrow Dr. Beattie would accord me a few minutes?" The butler's hesitation was mildly overcome by the persuasive touch of a sovereign, and he retired with the message.

Before a minute elapsed, Dr. Beattie came out, napkin in hand, and his face beaming with delight. "If there was a man in Europe I was wishing for this moment, it was yourself, Sir Brook," said he. "Do you know who is dining with me? Come in and see.—No, no, I'll not be denied."

A sudden terror crossed Fossbrooke's mind that his guest might be Colonel Sewell, and he hung back, muttering some words of apology.

"I tell you," repeated the Doctor, "I'll take no refusal. It's the rarest piece of luck ever befell, to have chanced upon you. Poor Lendrick is dying for some news of his son and daughter."

"Lendrick! Dr. Lendrick?"

"To be sure—who else? When your knock came to the door, I was telling him that I heard you were in Dublin, and only doubted it because you had never called on me; but come along, we can say all these things over our soup. Look whom I have brought you, Tom," cried Beattie, as he led Sir Brook into the room,—"here's Sir Brook Fossbrooke come to join us." And the two men grasped hands in heartiest embrace, while Fossbrooke, not waiting for a word of question, said, "Both well and hearty. I had a telegram this morning."

"How much I owe you!—how much, how much!" was all that Lendrick could say, and his eyes swam as he said it.

"It is I am the debtor, and well I know what it is worth to be so! Their loving kindness and affection have rescued me from the one terror of my life—the fear of becoming a discontented, incredulous old bachelor. Heaven bless them for it, their goodness has kept me out of that danger."

"And how are they looking?—is Lucy——" he stopped and looked half ashamed.

"More beautiful than ever," broke in Fossbrooke. "I think she is taller than when you last saw her, and perhaps a shade more thoughtful-looking; and Tom is a splendid fellow. I scarcely know what career he could not follow, nor where he would not seem too good for whatever he was doing."

"Ah, if I could but tell you how happy you have made me!" muttered Lendrick. "I ought never to have left them—never broken up my home. I did it unwillingly, it is true; but I ought never to have done it."

"Who knows if it may not turn out for the best, after all? You need never be separated henceforth. Tom's last letter to me—I'll bring it over to you to-morrow—tells me what I well knew must befall us sooner or later—that we are rolling in wealth, have silver enough to pave the streets, and more money than we shall be able to spend—though I once had rather a knack that way."

"That's glorious news!" said Beattie. "It's *our* mine, I suppose?" added he, laughing.

"To be sure it is; and I have come prepared to buy you out, Doctor, or pay you your first dividend, cent. per cent., whichever you prefer."

"Let us hear about this mine," said Beattie.

"I'd rather talk to you about the miners, Tom and Lucy," said Fossbrooke.

"Yes, yes, tell us of *them*. Do they ever talk of 'The Nest?' do they ever think of the happy days we passed there?" cried Lendrick.

"Ay, and more. We have had a project this many a day—we can realize it now—to buy it, out-and-out. And I'm to build a cabin for myself by the river-side, where the swans' hut stood, and I'm to be asked to dinner every Sunday."

"By Jove, I think I'll run down by the rail for one of those dinners," said Beattie; "but I certainly hope the company will have better appetites than my guests of to-day."

"I am too happy to feel hungry," said Lendrick. "If I only knew that my poor dear father could live to see us all united—all together again, I'd ask for no more in life."

"And so he may, Tom; he was better this afternoon, and though weak and low, perfectly collected and sensible. Mrs. Sewell has been his nurse to-day, and she seems to manage him cleverly."

"I saw her at the Cape. She was nicely mannered, and if I remember aright, handsome," said Lendrick, in his half-abstracted way.

"She was beautiful—perfectly beautiful—as a girl: except your own Lucy, I never saw any one so lovely," said Fossbrooke, whose voice shook with emotion as he spoke.

"I wish she had better luck in a husband," said Beattie. "For all his graceful address and insinuating ways, I'm full sure he's a bad fellow."

Fossbrooke checked himself with a great effort, and merely nodded an assent to the other's words.

"How came it, Sir Brook," asked Beattie, suddenly, "that you should have been in Dublin so long without once coming to see me?"

"Are you very discreet?—may I be sure that neither of you will ever accidentally let drop a word of what I shall tell you?"

"You may rely upon my secresy, and upon Tom Lendrick's ignorance, for there he is now in one of his reveries, thinking of his children in all probability, and I'll guarantee you to any amount, that he'll not hear one word you say for the next half-hour."

"The fact is, they took me up for a rebel—some one with more zeal than discrimination fancied I looked like a 'Celt,' as these fellows call themselves; and my mode of life, and my packet of lead ore, and some other things of little value, completed the case against me, and they sent me to jail."

"To jail?"

"Yes: to a place called Richmond Bridewell, where I passed seven or eight days, by no means unpleasantly. It was very quiet, very secure against intrusion. I had a capital room

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and very fair food. Indeed, I'm not sure that I did not leave it with a certain regret; but as I had written to my old friend Lord Wilmington to apprise him of the mistake, and to warn him against the consequences such a blunder might occasion if it befell one less well-disposed towards him than myself, I had nothing for it but to take a friendly farewell of my jailer and go."

"I declare few men would have treated the incident so temperately."

"Wilmington's father was my fag at Eton; let me see—no, I'll not see—how long ago; and Wilmington himself used to come and spend his summer vacations with me when I had that Wiltshire place; and I was very fond of the boy, and as he liked my partridge-shooting, we grew to be fast friends; but why are we talking of these old histories when it is the present that should engage us? I would only caution you once again against letting the story get abroad: there are fellows would like to make a House of Commons row out of it, and I'd not stand it. Is the Doctor sleeping?" added he, in a whisper, as Lendrick sat with closed eyes and clasped hands, mute and motionless.

"No," said Beattie; "it is his way when he is very happy. He is going over to himself all you have been telling him of his children, and he neither sees nor hears aught around him."

"I was going to tell him another piece of news that would probably please him," said Sir Brook, in the same low tone. "I have nearly completed arrangements for the purchase of 'The Nest;' by this day week I hope it will be Lucy's."

"Oh! do tell him that. I know of nothing that would delight him as much. Lendrick," said he, touching his arm, "here is something you would like to hear."

"No, no!" muttered he, softly. "Life is too short for these things. No more separations—no more; we must live together, come what may;" and he stretched out his hands on either side of him, as though to grasp his children.

"It is a pity to awaken him from such a dream," said Fossbrooke, cautiously; "let us steal over to the window and not disturb him."

They crept cautiously away to a window-bench, and talked till late into the night.

CHAPTER LXIV.

MAN TO MAN.

As Sewell awoke it was already evening. Fatigue and anxiety together had so overcome him that he slept like one drugged by a narcotic; nor did he very quickly recall on awakening how and wherefore he had not been to bed. His servant had left two letters on his table while he slept, and these served to remind him of some at least of the troubles that last oppressed him. One was from his law-agent, regretting that he could not obtain for him the loan he solicited on any terms whatever, and mildly suggesting that he trusted the Colonel would be prepared to meet certain acceptances which would fall due in the coming week. The other was from a friend whom he had often assisted in moments of difficulty, and ran—

"Dear S.—I lost two hundred last night at pool, and, what's worse, can't pay it. That infernal rule of yours about prompt payment will smash us both—but it's so like you! You never had a run of luck yet that you didn't do something that turned against you afterwards. Your clever rule about the selling-stakes cost me the best mare I ever had; and now this blessed stroke of your genius leaves me in doubt whether to blow my brains out or start for Boulogne. As Tom Beecher said, you are a 'deuced deal too 'cute to prosper.' If I have to cross the water, I suspect you might as well come with me.—Yours,

"Dick Vaughan."

Sewell tore the note up into the smallest fragments, muttering savagely to himself the while. "I'll be bound," said he, "the cur is half consoled for his mishap by seeing how much worse ruin has befallen *me*. What is it, Watkin? What do you want?" cried he to his servant, who came hastily into the room.

"His lordship has taken a bad turn, sir, and Mrs. Sewell wants to see you immediately."

"All right! Say I'm coming. Who knows," muttered he, "but there's a chance for me yet?" He turned into his dressing-room and bathed his temples and his head with cold water, and, refreshed at once, he ascended the stairs.

"Another attack has come on. He was sleeping calmly," said Mrs. Sewell as she met him, "when he awoke with a start, and broke out into wild raving. I have sent for Beattie; but what is to be done meanwhile?"

"I'm no doctor; I can't tell you."

"Haire thinks the ice ought to be applied; the nurse says a blister or mustard to the back of the neck."

"Is he really in danger?—that's the question."

"I believe so. I never saw him so ill."

"You think he's dying?" said he, fiercely, as though he would not brook any sort of equivocation; but the coarseness of his manner revolted her, and she turned away without reply. "There's no time to be lost," muttered Sewell, as he hastened down-stairs. "Tell George I want the carriage to the door immediately," said he; and then, entering his own room, he opened his writing-desk, and after some search came upon a packet, which he sealed and addressed.

"Are you going for Beattie?" asked Mrs. Sewell, as she appeared at the door; "for Haire says it would be better to fetch some one—any one—at once."

"I have ordered the carriage. I'll get Lysaght or Adams if I should not find Beattie; and mind, if Beattie come while I am away, detain him, and don't let him leave this till I return. Do you mind me?"

"Yes; I'll tell him what you say."

"Ay, but you must insist upon his doing it. There will be all sorts of stories if he should die——"

"Stories? what do you mean by stories?" cried she, in alarm.

"Rumours of neglect, of want of proper care

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of him, and suchlike, which would be most insulting. At all events I am resolved Beattie should be here at the last; and take care that he does not leave. I'll call at my mother's too; —she ought to come back with me. We have to deal with a scandal-loving world, and let us leave them as little to fall foul of as may be." All this was said hurriedly, as he bustled about the room, fussy and impatient, and with an eagerness to be off which certainly surprised her.

"You know where to find these doctors,—you have their addresses?" asked she.

"George knows all about them."

"And William does, at all events."

"I'm not taking William. I don't want a footman with a brougham. It is a light carriage and speedy cattle that are needed here; and here they come. Now, mind that you keep Beattie till I come back; and if there be any inquiries, simply say the Chief Baron is the same as yesterday."

"Had I not better consult Dr. Beattie?"

"You will do as I tell you, madam," said he, sternly. "You have heard my directions; take care that you follow them. To Mr. Lysaght's, George—no, first to Dr. Beattie's, Merrion Square," cried he, as he stepped into the carriage, "and drive fast."

"Yes, sir," said the coachman, and started at once. He had not proceeded more than half-way down the avenue, however, when Sewell, leaning out of the window, said, "Don't go into town, George; make for the Park by the shortest cut you can—the Secretary's Lodge."

"All right, sir; the beasts are fresh. We'll be there in thirty minutes." True to his word, within the half hour the horses, white with sweat and flanking like racers, stood at the door of the Secretary's lodge. Four or five private carriages and some cabs were also at the door, signs of a dinner-party which had not yet broken up.

"Take this card in to Mr. Balfour, Mr. Wells," said he to the butler, who was an old acquaintance, "and say I want one minute in private with him—strictly private, mind. I'll step into the library here and wait."

"What's up, Sewell? are you in a new scrape, eh?" said Balfour, entering, slightly flushed with wine and conversation, and half put out by the interruption.

"Not much of a scrape—can you give me five minutes?"

"Wells said one minute, and that's why I came. The Castledowns, and Eyres, and the Ashes are here, and the Langrish girls, and Dick Upton."

"A very choice company, for robbing you of which even for a moment I owe every apology, but still my excuse is a good one. Are you as anxious to promote your Solicitor-General as you were a week or two ago?"

"If you mean Pemberton, I wish he was—on the bench, or in Abraham's bosom—I don't much care which, for he is the most confounded bore in Christendom. Do you come to tell me that you'll poison him?"

"No, but I can promote him."

"Why—how—in what way?"

"I told you a few days ago that I could manage to make the old man give in his resignation—that it required some tact and address; and especially the absence of everything like menace or compulsion."

"Well, well, well—have you done it—is it a fact?"

"It is."

"I mean an indisputable, irrevocable fact—something not to be denied or escaped from?"

"Just so; a fact not to be denied or escaped from."

"It must come through *me*, Sewell, mind that. I took charge of the negotiation two years ago, and no one shall step in and rob me of my credit. I have had all the worry and fatigue of the transaction, and I insist, if there be any glory in success, it shall be mine."

"You shall have all the glory, as you call it. What I aspire to is infinitely less brilliant."

"You want a place—hard enough to find one —at least to find something worth having. You'll want something as good as the Registrarship, eh?"

"No; I'll not pester you with my claims. I'm not in love with official life. I doubt if I'm well fitted for it?"

"You want a seat in the House—is that it?"

"Not exactly," said Sewell, laughing, "though there is a good stroke of business to be done on private bills, and railway grants. My want is the simplest of all wants—money."

"Money! But how am I to give you money? Out of what fund is it to come? You don't imagine we live in the old days of secret-service funds, with unlimited corruption to back us, do you?"

"I suspect that the source from which it is to come is a matter of perfect indifference to me. You can easily squeeze me into the estimates as a special envoy, or a Crown prosecution, or a present to the Emperor of Morocco."

"Nothing of the kind. You are totally in error. All these fine days are passed and gone. They go over us now like a schedule in bankruptcy; and it would be easier to make you a colonial bishop than give you fifty pounds out of the Consolidated Fund."

"Well, I'd not object to the episcopate if there was some good shooting in the diocese."

"I've no time for chaff," said Balfour, impatiently. "I am leaving my company too long, besides. Just come over here to-morrow to breakfast, and we'll talk the whole thing over."

"No, I'll not come to breakfast; I breakfast in bed: and if we are to come to any settlement of this matter, it shall be here and now."

"Very peremptory all this, considering that the question is not of *your* retirement."

"Quite true. It is not *my* retirement we have to discuss, but it is, whether I shall choose to hand you the Chief Baron's, which I hold here'—and he produced the packet as he spoke—"or go back and induce him to reconsider and withdraw it. Is not that a very intelligible way to put the case, Balfour? Did you expect such a business-like tone from an idle dog like *me?*"

"And I am to believe that the document in your hand contains the Chief Baron's resignation?"

"You are to believe it or not—that's at your option. It is the fact, at all events."

"And what power have you to withhold it when he has determined to tender it?"

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"About the same power I have to do this," said Sewell, as, taking up a sheet of note-paper from the table, he tore it into fragments, and threw them into the fire. "I think you might see that the same influence by which I induced him to write this would serve to make him withhold it. The Judge condescends to think me a rather shrewd man of the world, and takes my advice occasionally."

"Well, but—another point," broke in Balfour, hurriedly. "What if he should recall this to-morrow or the day after? What if he were to say that on reconsideration he felt unwilling to retire? It is clear we could not well coerce him."

"You know very little of the man when you suggest such a possibility. He'd as soon think of suicide as doubt any decision he had once formally announced to the world. The last thing that would ever occur to him would be to disparage his infallibility."

"I declare I am quite ashamed of being away so long; couldn't you come down to the office to-morrow, at your own hour, and talk the whole thing over quietly?"

"Impossible. I'll be very frank with you. I lost a pot of money last night to Langton, and haven't got it to pay him. I tried twenty places during the day, and failed. I tossed over a score of so-called securities, not worth sixpence in a time of pressure, and I came upon this, which has been in my hands since Monday last, and I thought, Now Balfour wouldn't exactly give me five hundred pounds for it, but there's no reason in life that he might not obtain that sum for me in some quarter. Do you see?"

"I see—that is, I see everything but the five hundred."

"If you don't, then you'll never see this," said Sewell, replacing it in his pocket.

"You won't comprehend that I've no fund to go to; that there's no bank to back me through such a transaction. Just be a little reasonable, and you'll see that I can't do this out of my own pocket. It is true I could press your claim on the party. I could say, what I'm quite ready to say, that we owe the whole arrangement to *you*, and that, especially as it will cost you the loss of your Registrarship, you must not be forgotten."

"There's the mistake, my dear fellow. I don't want that. I don't want to be made supervisor of mad-houses, or overlooker of light-ships. Until office hours are comprised between five and six o'clock, and some of the cost of sealing-wax taken out in sandwiches, I don't mean to re-enter public life. I stand out for cash payment. I hope that's intelligible."

"Oh, perfectly so; but as impossible as intelligible."

"Then, in that case, there's no more to be said. All apologies for having taken you so long from your friends. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Balfour. "I am sorry we can't come to some arrangement. Good-night."

"As this document will now never see the light, and as all action in the matter will be arrested," said Sewell, gravely, "I rely upon your never mentioning our present interview."

"I declare I don't see why I am precluded from speaking of it to my friends,—confidentially, of course."

"You had better not."

"Better not! better in what sense? As regards the public interests or my personal ones?"

"I simply repeat, you had better not." He put on his hat as he spoke, and without a word of leave-taking moved towards the door.

"Stop one moment—a thought has just struck me. You like a sporting offer. I'll bet you twenty pounds even, you'll not let me read the contents of that paper; and I'll lay you long odds—two hundred to one, in pounds—that you don't give it to me."

"You certainly *do* like a good thing, Balfour. In plain words, you offer me two hundred and twenty. I'll be shot if I see why they should have higgled so long about letting the Jews into Parliament when fellows like *you* have seats there."

"Be good enough to remember," said Balfour, with an easy smile, "that I'm the only bidder, and if the article be not knocked down to me, there's no auction."

"I was certain I'd hear that from you! I never yet knew a fellow do a stingy thing, that he hadn't a shabbier reason to sustain it."

"Come, come, there's no need of this. You can say No to my offer, without a rudeness to myself."

"Ay, that's all true, if one only had temper for it, but *I* haven't; and I have my doubts that even *you* would if you were to be tried as sorely as I am."

"I never do get angry; a man shows his hand when he loses his temper, and the fellow who keeps cool can always look at the other's cards."

"Wise precepts, and worth coming out here to listen to," said Sewell, whose thoughts were evidently directed elsewhere. "I take your offer; I only make one condition—you keep the negotiation a secret. This resignation has reached you through the post; I do not appear in it in any shape."

"I think that's all fair. I agree to that. Now for the document."

"There it is," said Sewell, as he threw the packet on the table, while he seated himself in a deep chair, and crossed his arms on his chest.

Balfour opened the paper and began to read, but soon burst forth with—"How like him—how like him!—'Less oppressed indeed by years than sustained by the conscious sense of long services to the State.' I think I hear him declaiming it.

"This is not bad—'While at times afflicted by the thought, that to the great principles of the law, of which I had made this Court the temple and the sanctuary, there will now succeed the vague decisions and imperfect judgments of less learned expositors of justice, I am comforted by remembering that I leave behind me some records worthy of memory—traditions that will not easily die.'"

"That's the modest note—hear him when he sounds the indignant chord," said Sewell.

"Ay, here we have it—'If I have delayed, my Lord, in tendering to you this my resignation, it is that I have waited till, the scurrilous tongues of slander silenced, and the smaller, but not less malevolent, whisperings of jealousy sub-

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dued, I should descend from the Bench amidst the affectionate regrets of those who regard me as the last survivor of that race which made Ireland a nation.' The liquor is genuine," cried Balfour, laughing. "There's no disputing it, you have won your money."

"I should think so," was Sewell's cool reply. "He has the same knack in that sort of thing that the girl in the well-known shop in Seville has in twisting a cigarette."

Balfour took up his keys to open his writing-desk, and, pondering for a moment or two, at last said, "I wish any man would tell me why I am going to give you this money—do you know, Sewell?"

"Because you promised it, I suppose."

"Yes; but why should I have promised it? What can it possibly signify to me which of our lawyers presides in Her Majesty's Irish Exchequer? I'm sure you'd not give ten pounds to insure this man or that, in or out of the Cabinet."

"Not ten shillings. They're all dark horses to me, and if you offered me the choice of the lot, I'd not know which to take; but I always heard that you political fellows cared so much for your party, and took your successes and failures so much to heart, that there was no sacrifice you were not ready to make to insure your winning."

"We now and then do run a dead-heat, and one would really give something to come in first; but what's that?—I declare there's a carriage driving off—some one has gone. I'll have to swear that some alarming news has come from the south. Good-night—I must be off."

"Don't forget the cash, before you go."

"Oh, to be sure, here you are—crisp and clean, an't they I I got them this morning, and certainly never intended to part with them on such an errand."

Sewell folded up the notes with a grim smile, and said, "I only wish I had a few more bigwigs to dispose of—you should have them cheap; as Stag and Mantle say, articles no longer in great vogue."

"There's another departure!" cried Balfour. "I shall be in great disgrace!" and hurried away without a "good-bye."

CHAPTER LXV.

ON THE DOOR-STEPS AT NIGHT.

It was late at night when Sewell arrived at the Priory. He had had another disastrous night of play, and had scattered his "acknowledgments" for various sums on every side. Indeed, he had not the vaguest idea of how much he had lost. Disputes and hot discussions too, almost verging on personal quarrels, dashed with all their irritating influences the gloom of his bad-luck; and he felt, as he arose to go home, that he had not even that sorry consolation of the unfortunate gambler—the pitying sympathy of the looker-on.

Over and over, as he went, he asked himself what Fate could possibly intend by this persistent persecution of him? Other fellows had their "innings" now and then. Their fortune came checkered with its bright and dark days. He never emerged, not even passingly, from his ill-luck. "I suppose," muttered he, "the whole is meant to tempt me—but to what? I need very little temptation if the bait be only money. Let me but see gold enough, and my resistance will not be very formidable. I'll not risk my neck; short of that I'm ready for anything." Thus thinking, he plodded onward through the dark night, vaguely wishing at times that no morning was ever to break, and that existence might prolong itself out to one long dark autumn night, silent and starless.

As he reached the hall-door he found his wife seated on the steps as on a former night. It had become a favourite spot with her to taste the cool refreshing night-air, and rally her from the feverish closeness of the sick-room.

"How is he? is it over yet?" cried he as he came up.

"He is better; he slept calmly for some hours, and woke much refreshed."

"I could have sworn it!" burst he in vehemently. "It is the one way Fate could have rescued me, and it is denied me. I believe there is a curse on me! Eh—what?"

"I didn't speak," said she, meekly.

"You muttered though. I heard you mumble something below your breath, as if you agreed with what I said. Say it out, madam, if you think it."

She heaved a weary sigh, but said nothing.

"Has Beattie been here?" asked he, hastily.

"Yes; he stayed for above an hour, but was obliged to go at last to visit another patient. He brought Dr. Lendrick out with him; he arrived this evening."

"Lendrick! Do you mean the man from the Cape?"

"Yes."

"That completes it!" burst he, as he flung his arms wildly up. "I was just wondering what other malignant piece of spite Fortune could play me, and there it is! Had you any talk with this man?"

"Yes; he remained with me all the time Dr. Beattie was up-stairs."

"And what was his tone? has he come back to turn us out?—that of course he has—but does he avow it?"

"He shows no such intentions. He asked whether you held much to 'The Nest,' if it was a place that you liked, or if you could relinquish it without any regret?"

"Why so?"

"Because Sir Brook Fossbrooke has just purchased it."

"What nonsense! you know as well as I do that he couldn't purchase a dog-kennel. That property was valued at sixteen thousand pounds four years ago—it is worth twenty now; and you talk to me of this beggar buying it."

"I tell you what he told me, and it was this: Some mine that Sir Brook owned in Sardinia has turned out to be all silver, and in consequence he has suddenly become immensely rich—so rich, indeed, that he has already determined to settle this estate on Lucy Lendrick; and intends, if he can induce Lord Drumcarron to part with 'The Forest,' to add it to the grounds."

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Sewell grasped his hair with both hands, and ground his teeth together with passion as he listened.

"You believe this story, I suppose?" said he at last.

"Yes; why should I not believe it?"

"I don't believe a word of it. I see the drift —I saw the drift of it before you had told me ten words. This tale is got up to lull us into security, and to quiet our suspicions. Lendrick knows well the alarm his unexpected return is likely to give us, and to allay our anxieties they have coined this narrative, as though to imply they will be rich enough not to care to molest us, nor stand between us and this old man's money. Don't you see that?"

"I do not. It did not occur to me before, and I do not admit it now."

"I ought not to have asked you. I ought to have remembered what old Fossbrooke once called 'the beautiful trustfulness of your nature.'"

"If I had it once, it has left me many a long day ago!"

"But I deny that you ever had it. You had the woman's trick of affecting to believe, and thus making out what you assumed to think, to be a pledge given by another—a bit of female craft that you all trade on so long as you are young and good-looking."

"And what supplies the place of this ingenious device when we are neither young nor good-looking?"

"I don't know, for the simple reason that I never much interested myself in the sex after that period."

"That's a very sad thing for us. I declare I never had an idea how much we're to be pitied before."

"You would be to be pitied if you knew how we all think of you;" and he spoke with a spiteful malignity almost demoniac.

"It's better, then, for each of us that we should not know this. The trustfulness that you sneer at does us good service after all."

"And it was this story of the mine that induced Lendrick to come home from the Cape, wasn't it?"

"No; he only heard of the mine since he arrived here."

"I thought," rejoined he, with a sneer, "that he ought to have resigned his appointment on account of this sudden wealth, all the more because I have known that he intended to come back this many a day. And what is Fossbrooke going to do for you? Is there a diamond necklace ordered? or is it one of the brats he is going to adopt?"

"By the way, I have been robbed: some one has carried off my gold comb and some pins; they were on my dressing-table last night. Jane saw them when I went into my room."

"Now's your time to replace the loss! It's the sort of tale old Fossbrooke always responded to."

She made no answer; and for several minutes each sat in silence. "One thing is pretty evident," said he at last, as he made figures with his cane on the ground—"we'll have to troop off, whether the Lendricks come here or not. The place will not be tenable once they are in the vicinity."

"I don't know."

"You don't know! Do you mean that the Doctor and his daughter will stand the French cook here, and the dinners, and let the old man make a blessed fool of himself, as he has been doing for the last eight or ten months past? or do you pretend that if we were to go back to the leg-of-mutton days, and old Haire for company, that it would be worth holding on to? *I* don't; and I tell you frankly that I intend to demand my passports, as the Ministers say, and be off."

"But *I* can't 'be off.' I have no such alternative!"

"The worse luck yours, or rather the worse skill; for if you had played your hand better, it would not have been thus with you. By the way, what about Trafford? I take it he'll marry this girl now."

"I have not heard," said she, pinching her lips, and speaking with a forced composure.

"If I were you I'd make myself Lucy's confidante, get up the match, and go and live with them. These are the really happy *ménages*. If there be such a thing as bliss, perfect bliss in this world, it is where the wife has a dear friend in the house with her, who listens to all her sorrows, and helps her to manage the tyrant that inflicts them. It was a great mistake of ours not to have known this in early life. Marriage was meant to be a triangle."

"If you go, as you speak of going, have you any objection to my addressing myself to Sir Brook for some assistance?"

"None whatever. I think it the most natural thing in life; he was your guardian, and you have a right to ask what has become of your fortune."

"He might refer me to *you* for the information."

"Very unmannerly if he should, and very ungallant too, for an old admirer. I'm certain if I were to be—what is the phrase?—removed, yes, removed—he'd marry you. Talk of three-volume novels and virtue rewarded, after that!"

"You have been playing to-night," said she, gravely.

"Yes."

"And lost?"

"Lost heavily."

"I thought so. Your courtesies to me have been the measure of your bad-luck for many a day. I have often felt that 'four by honours' has saved me from a bad headache."

"Then there has been more sympathy between us than I ever suspected," said he, rising, and stretching himself; and after a moment or two asked, "Must I call on this Dr. Lendrick?—will he expect me to visit him?"

"Perhaps so," said she, carelessly—"he asked after you."

"Indeed!—did he ask after Trafford too? Do you remember the day at the Governor's dinner he mistook you for Trafford's wife, and explained his mistake by the familiarity of his manner to you in the garden? It was the best bit of awkwardness I ever witnessed."

"I suppose you felt it so?"

"*I*—*I* felt it so! I suspect not! I don't believe there was a man at table enjoyed the blunder as heartily."

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"I wish—how I wish!" said she, clasping her hands together.

"Well—what?"

"I wish I could be a man for one brief half-hour!" cried she, and her voice rang with a mild but clear resonance, that made it seem louder than it really was.

"And then?" said he, mockingly.

"Oh, do not ask me more!" cried she, as she bent down and hid her face in her hands.

"I think I *will* call on Lendrick," said he, after a moment. "It may not be exactly the sort of task a man would best like: but I opine, if he is about to give his daughter in marriage to this fellow, he ought to know more about him. Now *I* can tell him something, and my wife can tell him more. There's no indiscretion in saying so much, is there?"

She made no reply; and after a pause he went on—"If Trafford hadn't been a shabby dog, he'd not have higgled about buying up those letters. Cane & Kincaid offered them to him for a thousand pounds. I suspect he'd like to have the offer repeated now, but he shall not. He believes, or affects to believe, that, for my own sake, I'll not make a public scandal: he doesn't know his man when he thinks this. *You*, madam, might have taught him better—eh?" Still no reply, and he continued—"There's not a man living despises public opinion as I do. If you are rich you trample on it, if poor it tramples on *you*; but so long as a fellow braves the world, and declares that he shrinks from nothing—evades nothing—neither turns right nor left to avoid its judgments—the coward world gives way and lets him pass. *I'll* let them see that I don't care a straw for my own life, when at the price of it I can blow up a magazine."

"No, no, no!" muttered she, in a low but clear tone.

"What do you mean by No, no?" cried he, in a voice of passion.

"I mean that you care a great deal for your own life, and a great deal for your own personal safety; and that if your tyranny to a poor, crushed, weak woman has any bounds, it is from your fear, your abject fear, that in her desperation she might seek a protector, and find him."

"I told you once before, madam, men don't like this sort of protectorate. The old bullying days are gone by. Modern decorum 'takes it out' in damages." She sat still and silent; and after waiting some time, he said, in a calm, unmoved voice, "These little interchanges of courtesy do no good to either of us; they haven't even the poor attraction of novelty: so, as my friend Mr. O'Reardon says, let us 'be practical.' I had hoped that the old gentleman up-stairs was going to do the polite thing, and die; but it appears now he has changed his mind about it. This, to say the least of it, is very inconvenient to me. My embarrassments are such that I shall be obliged to leave the country; my only difficulty is, I have no money. Are you attending? are you listening to me?"

"Yes; I hear you," said she, in a faint whisper.

"*You*, I know, cannot help me; neither can my mother. Of course the old Judge is out of the question. As for the fellows at the Club, I am deeply in debt to many of them; and Kincaid only reminds me of his unsettled bill of costs when I ask for a loan. A blank look-out, on the whole; isn't it?"

She muttered something like assent, and he went on. "I have gone through a good many such storms before, but none fully as bad as this; because there are certain things which in a few days must come out—ugly little disclosures—one or two there will be. I inadvertently sold that beech timber to two different fellows, and took the money too."

She lifted up her face, and stared at him without speaking.

"Fact, I assure you! I have a confoundedly bad memory; it has got me into scores of scrapes all through life. Then, this very evening, thinking that the Chief couldn't rub through, I made a stupid wager with Balfour that the seat on the Bench would be vacant within a week; and finished my bad run of luck by losing—I can't say how much, but very heavily indeed—at the Club."

A low faint sigh escaped her, but not a word.

"As to bills renewed, protested, and to be protested," said he, in the same easy tone, "they are legion. These take their course, and are no worse than any other man's bills—I don't fret myself about *them*. As in the old days of chivalry one never cared how scurvily he treated the 'villains,' so he behaved like a knight to his equals; so nowadays a man must book up at Tattersall's, though he cheat his tailor. I like the theory, too; it keeps 'the ball rolling' if it does nothing else."

All this he rattled out as though his own fluency gave him a sort of Dutch courage; and who knows, too—for there is a fund of vanity in these men—if he was not vain of showing with what levity he could treat dangers that might have made the stoutest heart afraid?

"Taking the 'tottle of the whole' of these—as old Joe Hume used to say—it's an ugly balance!"

"What do you mean to do?" said she, quietly.

"Bolt, I suppose. I see nothing else for it."

"And will that meet the difficulty?"

"No, but it will secure *me;* secure me from arrest, and the other unpleasant consequences that might follow arrest. To do this, however, I need money, and I have not five pounds—no, nor, I verily believe, five shillings—in the world."

"There are a few trinkets of mine up-stairs. I never wear them——"

"Not worth fifty pounds, the whole lot; nor would one get half fifty for them in a moment of pressure."

"We have some plate——"

"We had, but I sold it three weeks ago; and that reminds me there was a rum old tea-urn got somehow mixed up with our things, and I sold it too, though it has Lendrick's crest upon it. You'll have to get it back some of these days—I told the fellow not to break it up till he heard from you."

"Then what is to be done?" said she, eagerly.

"That's the question; travelling is the one thing that can't be done on tick."

"If you were to go down to 'The Nest'——"

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"But our tenure expires on the seventeenth, just one fortnight hence—not to say that I couldn't call myself safe there one hour. No, no; I must manage to get abroad, and instantly, that I may escape from my present troubles; but I must strike out some way of life—something that will keep me."

She sat still and almost stupefied, trying to see an escape from these difficulties, but actually overwhelmed by the number and the nature of them.

"I told you a while ago that I did not believe one word of this story of the mine, and the untold wealth that has fallen to old Fossbrooke; *you*, however, do believe it; you affirm the tale as if you had seen and touched the ingots; so that you need have no reluctance to ask him to help you."

"You do not object to this course, then?" asked she, eagerly.

"How can I object? If I clutch at a plank when I'm drowning, I don't let go because it may have nails in it. Tell him that you want to buy me off, to get rid of me; that by a couple of hundred pounds—I wish he'd make it five—you can insure my leaving the country, and that my debts here will prevent my coming back again. It's the sort of compact he'll fully concur in; and you can throw in as if accidentally, how useless it is for him to go on persecuting me, that his confounded memory for old scores has kept my head under water all my life, and hint that those letters of Trafford's he insists on having——"

"*He* insists on having!"

"To be sure he does; I thought I had told you, what brought him over here! The old meddling humbug, in his grand benevolence vein, wants to smoothe down the difficulties between Lucy Lendrick and Trafford, one of which was thought to be the fellow's attachment to *you*. Don't blush; take it as coolly as I do. I'm not sure whether reading the correspondence aloud isn't the best way to dispel this illusion. You can say that better than I can."

"Trafford never wrote one line to me which I should be afraid or ashamed to see in print."

"These are matters of taste. There are scores of women like publicity, and would rather be notorieties for scandal than models of unnoticed virtue, so we'll not discuss that. There, there; don't look so supremely indignant and contemptuous. That expression became you well enough at three-and-twenty; but ten years, ten long years of not the very smoothest existence, leave their marks!"

She shook her head mournfully, but in silence.

"At all events," resumed he, "declare that you object to the letters being in other hands than your own; and as to a certain paper of mine—a perfectly worthless document, as he well knows—let him give it to you, or burn it in your presence."

She pushed her hair back from her temples, and pressed her hands to either side of her head as though endeavouring to collect her thoughts, and rally herself to an effort of calm determination.

"How much of this is true?" said she at last.

"What do you mean?" said he, sternly.

"I mean this," said she, resolutely—"that I want to know, if you should get this money, is it really your intention to go abroad?"

"You want a pledge from me on this?" said he, with a jeering laugh. "You are not willing to stoop to all this humiliation without having the price of it afterwards? Is not that your meaning?"

Her lips moved, but no sound was audible.

"All fair and reasonable," said he, calmly. "It's not every woman in the world would have the pluck to tell her husband how much meanness she would submit to simply to get rid of him; but you were always courageous, that I will say—you have courage enough."

"I had need of it."

"Go on, madam, finish your speech. I know what you would say.' 'You had need of courage for two;' that was the courteous speech that trembled on your lip. The only thing that beats your courage is your candour! Well, I must content myself with humbler qualities. I cannot accompany you into these high flights of excellence, but I can go away; and that, after all, is something. Get me this money and I will go—I promise you faithfully—go, and not come back."

"The children," said she, and stopped.

"Madam!" said he, with a mock-heroic air, "I am not a brute! I respect your maternal feelings, and would no more think of robbing you of your children——"

"There—there, that will do. Where is Sir Brook to be found—where does he live?"

"I have his address written down—here it is," said he—"the last cottage on the southern side of Howth. There is a porch to the door, which, it would seem, is distinctive, as well as three chimneys; my informant was as descriptive as Figaro. You had better keep this piece of paper as a reminder; and the trains deposit you at less than half a mile from the place."

"I will go early to-morrow morning. Shall I find you here on my return?"

"Of that you may be certain. I can't venture to leave the house all day; I'm not sure there will not be a writ out against me."

She arose and seemed about to say something—hesitated for a moment or two, and then slowly entered the house, and disappeared.

CHAPTER LXVI.

GOING OUT.

In a small dinner-room of the Viceregal Lodge, in the Phœnix Park, the Viceroy sat at dinner with Sir Brook Fossbroke. He had arrived in great haste, and incognito, from England, to make preparations for his final departure from Ireland; for his party had been beaten in the House, and expected that, in the last debate on the measure before them, they would be driven to resign office. Lord Wilmington had no personal regrets on the subject. With high station and a large fortune, Ireland, to him, meant little else than estrangement from the habits and places that he liked, with the exposure to that species of comment and remark which the Press

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so unsparingly bestows on all public men in England. He had accepted office to please his party; and, though naturally sorry for their defeat, there was a secret selfish satisfaction at being able to go back to a life more congenial to him that more than consoled him for the ministerial reverse.

It is difficult for the small world of place-hunters and office-seekers to understand this indifference; but I have little doubt that it exists largely amongst men of high position and great fortune, and imparts to their manner that seeming dignity in adversity which we humble folk are so prone to believe the especial gift of the "order."

Cholmondeley Balfour did not take matters so coolly; he had been summoned over by telegram to take his part in the "third reading," and went away with the depressing feeling that his official sun was about to set, and all the delightful insolences of a "department" were about to be withdrawn from him.

Balfour had a brief interview with the Viceroy before he started, and hurriedly informed him how events stood in Ireland. Nor was it without a sense of indignation that he saw how little his Excellency cared for the defeat of his party, and how much more eager he seemed to see his old friend Fossbrooke, and thank him for his conduct, than listen to the details of the critical questions of the hour.

"And this is his address, you say?" said Lord Wilmington, as he held a card in his hand. "I must send off to him at once."

"It's all Bentley's fault," said Balfour, full of the House and the debate. "If that fellow were drowning, and had only breath for it, he'd move an amendment! And it's so provoking, now we had got so splendidly through our prosecutions, and were winning the Catholics round to us besides; not to say that I have at last managed to induce Lendrick to resign, and we have a Judgeship to bestow." In a few hurried words he recounted his negotiation with Sewell, placing in the Viceroy's hand the document of the resignation.

Lord Wilmington's thoughts were fully as much on his old friend Fossbrooke all this time as on questions of office, and not a little disconcerted the Secretary by muttering, "I hope the dear old fellow bears me no ill-will. I would not for worlds that he should think me unmindful of him."

And now they sat over their wine together, talking pleasantly of bygone times and old friends—many lost to them by death, and some by distance.

"I take it," said Fossbrooke, after a pause, "that you are not sorry to get back to England."

Lord Wilmington smiled, but said nothing.

"You never could have cared much for the pomp and state of this office, and, I suppose, beyond these, there is little in it."

"You have hit it exactly. There is nothing to be done here—nothing! The shortness of the period that is given to any man to rule this country, and the insecurity of his tenure, even for that time, compel him to govern by a party; and the result is, we go on alternately pitting one faction against the other, till we end by marshalling the nation into two camps, instead of massing them into one people. Then there is another difficulty. In Ireland, the question is not so much what you do as by whom you do it. It is the men, not the measures, that are thought of. There is not an infringement on personal freedom I could not carry out, if you only let me employ for its enactment some popular demagogue. Give me a good patriot in Ireland, and I'll engage to crush every liberty in the island."

"I don't envy you your office, then," said Fossbrooke, gravely.

"Of course you don't; and between ourselves, Fossbrooke, I'm not heart-broken by the thought of laying it down. I suspect, too, that after a spell of Irish official life every statesman ought to lie fallow for a while: he grows so shifty and so unscrupulous here, he is not fit for home work."

"And how soon do you leave?"

"Let me see," said he, pondering. "We shall be beaten to-night, or to-morrow night at farthest. They'll take a day to talk it over, and another to see the Queen; and allowing three days more for the negotiations back and forward, I think I may say we shall be out by this day week. A week of worry and annoyance it will be!"

"How so?"

"All the hungry come to be fed at the last hour. They know well that an outgoing administration is always bent on filling up everything in their gift. You make a clear sweep of the larder before you give up the key to the new housekeeper: and one is scarcely so inquisitive as to the capacity of the new office-holder as he would be if, remaining in power, he had to avail himself of his services. For instance, Pemberton may not be the best man for Chief Baron, but we mean to bequeathe him in that condition to our successors."

"And what becomes of Sir William Lendrick?"

"He resigns."

"With his peerage?"

"Nothing of the kind; he gets nothing. I'm not quite clear how the matter was brought about. I heard a very garbled, confused story from Balfour. As well as I could gather, the old man entrusted his step-son, Sewell, with the resignation, probably to enable him to make some terms for himself; and Sewell—a shifty sort of fellow, it would seem—held it back,—the Judge being ill, and unable to act,—till he found that things looked ticklish. We might go out—the Chief Baron might die—heaven knows what might occur. At all events he closed the negotiation, and placed the document in Balfour's hands, only pledging him not to act upon it for eight-and-forty hours."

"This interests me deeply. I know the man Sewell well, and I know that no transaction in which he is mixed up can be clean-handed."

"I have heard of him as a man of doubtful character."

"Quite the reverse; he is the most indubitable scoundrel alive. I need not tell you that I have seen a great deal of life, and not always of its best or most reputable side. Well, this fellow has more bad in him, and less good, than any one I have ever met. The world has scores, thousands, of unprincipled dogs, who, when their own interests are served, are tolerably in-

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different about the rest of humanity. They have even, at times, their little moods of generosity in which they will help a fellow-blackguard, and actually do things that seem good-natured. Not so Sewell. Swimming for his life, he'd like to drown the fellow who swam alongside of him."

"It is hard to believe in such a character," said the other.

"So it is! I stood out long—ay, for years—against the conviction; but he has brought me round to it at last, and I don't think I can forgive the fellow for destroying in me a long-treasured belief that no heart was so depraved as to be without its relieving trait."

"I never heard you speak so hardly before of any one, Fossbrooke."

"Nor shall you ever again, for I will never mention this man more. These fellows jar upon one's nature, and set it out of tune towards all humanity."

"It is strange how a shrewd old lawyer like the Chief Baron could have taken such a man into his confidence."

"Not so strange as it seems at first blush. Your men of the world—and Sewell is eminently one of these—wield an immense influence over others immeasurably their superiors in intellect, just by force of that practical skill which intercourse with life confers. Think for a moment how often Sewell might refer some judgment or opinion of the old Chief to that tribunal they call 'Society,' of whose ways of thought, or whose prejudices, Lendrick knows as much as he knows of the domestic habits of the Tonga Islanders. Now Sewell was made to acquire this influence, and to employ it."

"That would account for his being entrusted with this," said the Viceroy, drawing from his breast-pocket the packet Balfour had given him. "This is Sir William's long-waited-for resignation."

"The address is in Sewell's writing. I know the hand well."

"Balfour assured me that he was well acquainted with the Chief Baron's writing, and could vouch for the authenticity of the document. Here it is." As he said, he opened the envelope, and drew forth a half-sheet of post-paper, and handed it to Fossbrooke.

"Ay, this is veritable. I know the hand too, and the style confirms it." He pondered for some seconds over the paper, turned it, looked at the back of it, examining it all closely and carefully, and then, holding it out at arm's-length, he said, "You know these things far better than I do, and you can say if this be the sort of document a man would send on such an occasion."

"You don't mean that it is a forgery?"

"No, not that; nor is it because a forgery would be an act Sewell would hold back from. I merely ask if this looks like what it purports to be? Would Sir William Lendrick, in performing so solemn an act, take a half-sheet of paper,—the first that offered, it would seem—for see, here are some words scribbled on the back,—and send in his resignation blurred, blotted, and corrected like this?"

"I read it very hurriedly. Balfour gave it to me as I landed, and I only ran my eyes over it; let me see it again. Yes, yes," muttered he, "there is much in what you say; all these smudges and alterations are suspicious. It looks like a draft of a despatch."

"And so it is. I'll wager my head on it—just a draft."

"I see what you mean. It was a draft abstracted by Sewell, and forwarded under this envelope."

"Precisely. The Chief Baron, I am told, is a hot, hasty, passionate man, with moments of rash, impetuous action; in one of these he sat down and wrote this, as Italians say, 'per sfogarsi.' Warm-tempered men blow off their extra steam in this wise, and then go on their way like the rest of us. He wrote this, and, having written it, felt he had acquitted a debt he owed his own indignation."

"It looks amazingly like it; and now I remember in a confused sort of way something about a bet Balfour lost; a hundred—I am not sure it was not two hundred——"

"There, there," said Fossbrooke, laughing. "I recognise my honourable friend at once. I see the whole, as if it were revealed to me. He grows bolder as he goes on. Formerly, his rascalities were what brokers call 'time bargains,' and not to be settled for till the end of the month, but now he only asks a day's immunity."

"A man must be a consummate scoundrel who would do this."

"And so he is—a fellow who stops at nothing. Oh, if the world only knew how many brigands wore diamond shirt-buttons, there would be as much terror in going into a drawing-room as people now feel about a tour in Greece. You will let me have this document for a few hours?"

"To be sure, Fossbrooke. I know well I may rely on your discretion; but what do you mean to do with it?"

"Let the Chief Baron see it, if he's well enough; if not, I'll show it to Beattie, his doctor, and ask his opinion of it. Dr. Lendrick, Sir William's son, is also here, and he will probably be able to say if my suspicions are well-founded."

"It seems odd enough to me, Fossy, to hear *you* talk of your suspicions! How hardly the world must have gone with you since we met to inflict you with suspicions! You never had one long ago."

"And shall I tell you how I came by them, Wilmington?" said he, laughing. "I have grown rich again—there's the whole secret. There's no such corrupter as affluence. My mine has turned out a perfect Potosi, and here am I ready to think every man a knave and a rascal, and the whole world in a conspiracy to cheat me!"

"And is this fact about the mine?—tell me all about it."

And Fossbrooke now related the story of his good fortune, dwelling passingly on the days of hardship that preceded it; but frankly avowing that it was a consummation of which he never for a moment doubted. "I knew it," said he; "and I was not impatient. The world is always an amusing drama, and though one may not be 'cast' for a high part, he can still 'come on' occasionally, and at all events he can enjoy the performance."

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"And is this fortune to go like the others, Fossy?" said the Viceroy, laughing.

"Have I not told you how much wiser I have grown? that I trust no one? I'm not sure that I'll not set up as a money-lender."

"So you were forty years ago, Fossy, to my own knowledge; but I don't suspect you found it very profitable."

"Have I not had my fifty—ay, my five hundred—per cent. in my racy enjoyment of life? One cannot be paid in meal and malt too; and *I* have 'commuted,' as they call it, and 'taken out' in cordiality what others prefer in cash. I do not believe there is a corner of the globe where I could not find some one to give me a cordial welcome."

"And what are your plans?"

"I have fully a thousand; my first, however, is to purchase that place on the Shannon, where, if you remember, we met once—the Swan's Nest. I want to settle my friends the Lendricks in their old home. I shall have to build myself a crib near them. But before I turn squatter I'll have a run over to Canada. I have a large tract there near the Huron, and they have built a village on me, and now are asking me for a church, and a schoolhouse, and an hospital. It was but a week ago they might as well have asked me for the moon! I must see Ceylon too, and my coffee-fields. I am dying to be 'bon Prince' again and lower my rents. 'There's arrant snobbery,' some one told me t'other day, 'in that same love of popularity;' but they'll have to give it even a worse name before they disgust me with it. I shall have to visit Cagliari also, and relieve Tom Lendrick, who would like, I have no doubt, to take that 'three months in Paris,' which young fellows call 'going over to see their friends.'"

"You are a happy fellow, Brook; perhaps the happiest I ever knew."

"I'll sell my secret of it cheap," said Fossbrooke, laughing. "It is never to go grubbing for mean motives in this life; never tormenting yourself what this might mean or that other might portend, but take the world for what it seems, or what it wishes you to believe it. Take it with its company face on, and never ask to see any one in *déshabille* but old and dear friends. Life has two sides, and some men spin the coin so as always to make the wrong face of the medal come uppermost. I learned the opposite plan when I was very young, and I have not forgotten it. Good-night now; I promised Beattie to look in on him before midnight, and it's not far off, I see."

"We shall have a day or two of you, I hope, at Crew before you leave England."

"When I have purchased my estate and married off my young people, I'll certainly make you a visit."

CHAPTER LXVII.

AT HOWTH.

On the same evening that Fossbrooke was dining with the Viceroy Trafford arrived in Dublin, and set out at once for the little cottage at Howth to surprise his old friend by his sudden appearance. Tom Lendrick had given him so accurate a description of the spot that he had no difficulty in finding it. If somewhat disappointed at first on learning that Sir Brook had dined in town, and might not return till a late hour, his mind was so full of all he had to say and to do that he was not sorry to have some few hours to himself for quiet and tranquil thought. He had come direct from Malta without going to Holt, and therefore was still mainly ignorant of the sentiments of his family towards him, knowing nothing beyond the fact that Sir Brook had induced his father to see him. Even that was something. He did not look to be restored to his place as the future head of the house, but he wanted recognition and forgiveness—the first for Lucy's sake more than his own. The thought was too painful that his wife—and he was determined she should be his wife—should not be kindly received and welcomed by his family. "I ask nothing beyond this," would he say over and over to himself. "Let us be as poor as we may, but let them treat us as kindred, and not regard us as outcasts. I bargain for no more." He believed himself thoroughly and implicitly when he said this. He was not conscious with what force two other and very different influences swayed him. He wished his father, and still more his mother, should see Lucy; not alone see her beauty and gracefulness, but should see the charm of her manner, the fascination which her bright temperament threw around her. "Why her very voice is a spell!" cried he, aloud, as he pictured her before him. And too, he nourished a sense of pride in thinking how Lucy would be struck by the sight of Holt—one of the most perfect specimens of old Saxon architecture in the kingdom; for though a long line of descendants had added largely, and incongruously too, to the building, the stern and squat old towers, the low broad battlements and square casements, were there, better blazons of birth and blood than all the gilded decorations of a heralds' college.

He honestly believed he would have liked to show her Holt as a true type of an ancient keep, bold, bluff, and stern-looking, but with an unmistakable look of power, recalling a time when there were lords and serfs, and when a Trafford was as much a despot as the Czar himself. He positively was not aware how far personal pride and vanity influenced this desire on his part, nor how far he was moved by the secret pleasure his heart would feel at Lucy's wondering admiration.

"If I cannot say, This is your home—this is your own, I can at least say, It is from the race who have lived here for centuries he who loves you was descended. We are no 'new rich,' who have to fall back upon our wealth for the consideration we count upon. We were men of mark before the Normans were ever heard of." All these, I say, he felt, but knew not. That Lucy was one to care for such things he was well aware. She was intensely Irish in her reverence for birth and descent, and had that love of the traditionary which is at once the charm and the weakness of the Celtic nature. Trafford sat thinking over these things, and thinking over what might be his future. It

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was clear enough he could not remain in the army; his pay, barely sufficient for his support at present, would never suffice when he had a wife. He had some debts, too; not very heavy, indeed, but onerous enough when their payment must be made out of the sale of his commission. How often had he done over that weary sum of subtraction! not that repetition made matters better to him; for somehow, though he never could manage to make more of the sale of his majority, he could still, unhappily for him, continually go on recalling some debt or other that he had omitted to jot down—an unlucky 'fifty' to Jones which had escaped him till now: and then there was Sewell! The power of the unknown is incommensurable; and so is it, there is that in a vague threat that terrifies the stoutest heart. Just before he left Malta he had received a letter from a man whose name was not known to him in these terms:

"Sir,—It has come to my knowledge professionally, that proceedings will shortly be instituted against you in the Divorce Court at the suit of Colonel Sewell, on the ground of certain letters written by you. These letters, now in the hands of Messrs. Cane & Kincaid, solicitors, Dominick Street, Dublin, may be obtained by you on payment of one thousand pounds, and the costs incurred up to this date. If it be your desire to escape the scandal and publicity of this action, and the much heavier damages that will inevitably result, you may do so by addressing yourself to your very obedient and faithful servant,

"James Maher,
"Attorney-at-Law,
"Kildare Place."

He had had no time to reply to this unpleasant epistle before he started, even had he known what reply to make, all that he resolved on being to do nothing till he saw Sir Brook. He had opened his writing-desk to find Lucy's last letter to him, and by ill luck it was this ill-omened document first came to his hand. Fortune will play us these pranks. She will change the glass we meant to drink out of, and give us a bitter draught at the moment that we dreamed of nectar! "If I'm to give this thousand pounds," muttered he, moodily, "I may find myself with about eight hundred in the world! for I take it these costs he speaks of will be no trifle! I shall need some boldness to go and tell this to Sir William Lendrick when I ask him for his grand-daughter." Here again he bethought him of Sir Brook, and reassured himself that with his aid even this difficulty might be conquered. He arose to ask if it were certain that Sir Brook would return home that night, and discovered that he was alone in the cottage, the fisherman and his wife who lived there having gone down to the shore to gather the seaweed left by the retreating tide. Trafford knew nothing of Fossbrooke's recent good fortune. The letters which conveyed that news reached Malta after he had left, and his journey to England was prompted by impatience to decide his fate at once, either by some arrangement with his family which might enable him to remain in the army, or, failing all hope of that, by the sale of his commission. "If Tom Lendrick can face the hard life of a miner, why should not I?" would he say. "I am as well able to rough it as any man. Fellows as tenderly nurtured as myself go out to the gold-diggings and smash quartz, and what is there in me that I should shrink from this labour!" There was a grim sort of humour in the way he repeated to himself the imaginary calls of his comrades. 'Where's Sir Lionel Trafford? Will some one send the distinguished baronet down here with his shovel!' "Lucy, too, has seen the life of hard work and stern privation. She showed no faint-heartedness at its hardships; far from it. I never saw her look happier and cheerier. To look at her, one would say that she liked its wild adventure—its very uncommonness. I'll be sworn if we'll not be as happy—happier, perhaps, than if we had rank and riches. As Sir Brook says, it all depends upon himself in what spirit a man meets his fortune. Whether you confront life or death, there are but two ways—that of the brave man or the coward.

"How I wish he were come! How impatient I am to know what success he has had with my father! My own mind is made up. The question is, shall I be able to persuade others to regard the future as I do? Will Lucy's friends let her accept a beggar? No, not that! He who is able and willing to work need not be a beggar. Was that a tap at the door? Come in." As he spoke the door slowly opened, and a lady entered; her veil, closely drawn and folded, completely concealed her face, and a large shawl wrapped her figure from shoulders to feet.

As she stood for an instant silent, Trafford arose and said, "I suppose you wished to see Sir Brook Fossbrooke; but he is from home, and will not return till a late hour."

"Don't you remember me, Lionel?" said she, drawing back her veil, while she leaned against the wall for support.

"Good heavens! Mrs. Sewell!" and he sprang forward and led her to a seat. "I never thought to see you here," said he, merely uttering words at random in his astonishment.

"When did you come?" asked she faintly.

"About an hour ago."

"True? Is this true?"

"On my honour. Why do you ask? why should you doubt it?"

"Simply to know how long you could have been here without coming to me." These words were uttered in a voice slightly tremulous, and full of a tender significance. Trafford's cheeks grew scarlet, and for a moment he seemed unable to reply. At last he said, in a confused way, "I came by the mail-packet, and at once drove out here. I was anxious to see Sir Brook. And you?"

"I came here also to see him."

"He has been in some trouble lately," said Trafford, trying to lead the conversation into an indifferent channel. "By some absurd mistake they arrested him as a Celt."

"How long do you remain here, Lionel?" asked she, totally unmindful of his speech.

"My leave is for a month, but the journey takes one-half of it."

"Am I much changed, Lionel, since you saw me last? You can scarcely know. Come over and sit beside me."

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Trafford drew his chair close to hers. "Well," said she, pushing back her bonnet, and by the action letting her rich and glossy hair fall in great masses over her back, "you have not answered me? How am I looking?"

"You were always beautiful, and fully as much so now as ever."

"But I am thinner, Lionel. See my poor hands, how they are wasted. These are not the plump fingers you used to hold for hours in your own—all that dreary time you were so ill;" and as she spoke she laid her hand, as if unconsciously, over his.

"You were so good to me," muttered he—"so good and so kind."

"And you have wellnigh forgotten it all," said she, sighing heavily.

"Forgotten it! far from it. I never think of you but with gratitude."

She drew her hand hastily away, and averted her head at the same time with a quick movement.

"Were it not for your tender care and watchfulness, I know well I could never have recovered from that severe illness. I cannot forget, I do not want to forget, the thousand little ways in which you assuaged my suffering, nor the still more touching kindness with which you bore my impatience. I often live it all over again, believe me, Mrs. Sewell."

"You used to call me Lucy," said she, in a faint whisper.

"Did I—did I dare?"

"Yes, you dared. You dared even more than that, Lionel. You dared to speak to me, to write to me, as only he can write or speak who offers a woman his whole heart. I know the manly code on these matters is, that when a married woman listens even once to such addresses, she admits the plea on which her love is sought; but I believed—yes, Lionel, I believed—that yours was a different nature. I knew—my heart told me—that you pitied me."

"That I did," said he, with a quivering lip.

"You pitied me because you saw the whole sad story of my life. You saw the cruel outrages, the insults I was exposed to! Poor Lionel," and she caught his hand as she spoke—"How severely did it often try your temper to endure what you witnessed!"

Trafford bit his lip in silence, and she went on more eagerly. "I needed not defenders. I could have had scores of them. There was not a man who came to the house would not have been proud to be my champion. You know if this be a boast. You know how I surrendered. For the very least of those caresses I bestowed upon you on your sick bed, there was not one who would not have risked his life. Is this true?"

"I believe it," muttered he.

"And why did I bear all this," cried she wildly—"why did I endure, not alone and in the secresy of my own home, but before the world—in the crowd of a drawing-room—outrage that wounds a woman's pride worse than a brought home crime? Why did I live under it all? Just for this, that the one man who should have avenged me was sick, if not dying; and that if *he* could not defend me, I would have no other. You said you pitied me," said she, leaning her head against his shoulder. "Do you pity me still?"

"With all my heart I pity you."

"I knew it—I was sure of it!" said she, with a voice vibrating with a sort of triumph. "I always said you would come back—that you had not, could not forget me—that you would no more desert me than a man deserts the comrade that has been shipwrecked with him. You see that I did not wrong you, Lionel."

Trafford covered his face with both his hands, but never uttered a word, while she went on—"Your friends, indeed, if that be the name for them, insisted that I was mistaken in you! How often have I had to hear such speeches as 'Trafford always looks to himself. Trafford will never entangle himself deeply for any one;' and then they would recount some little story of a heartless desertion here, or some betrayal there, as though your life, your whole life, was made up of these treachories; and I had to listen to these as to the idle gossip one hears in the world and takes no account of! Would you believe it, Lionel, it was only last week I was making a morning call at my mother-in-law's, and I heard that you were coming home to England to be married! Perhaps I was ill that day—I had enough to have made me ill—perhaps more wretched than usual—perhaps, who knows, the startling suddenness of the news—I cannot say how, but so overcome was I by indignation, that I cried out, 'It is untrue—every syllable of it untrue.' I meant to have stopped there, but somehow I went on to say—heaven knows what—that I would not sit by and hear you slandered—that you were a man of unblemished honour—in a word, Lionel, I silenced your detractors; but in doing so, I sacrificed myself; and as one by one each visitor rose to withdraw—they were all women—they made me some little apology for whatever pain they had given me, and in such a tone of mock sorrow and real sarcasm, that as the last left the room I fell into a fit of hysterics that lasted for hours. 'Oh, Lucy, what have you done!' were the first words I heard, and it was his mother who spoke them. Ay, Lionel, they were bitter words to hear! Not but that she pitied me. Yes, women have pity on each other in such miseries. She was very kind to me, and came back with me to the Priory, and stayed all the evening with me, and we talked of *you!* Yes, Lionel, she forgave me. She said she had long foreseen what it must come to—that no woman had ever borne what I had—that over and over again she had warned him, conjuring him, if not for his own sake, for the children's—— Oh, Lionel, I cannot go on!" burst she out, sobbing bitterly, as she fell at his feet, and rested her head on his knees. He carried her tenderly in his arms and placed her on a sofa, and she lay there to all seeming insensible and unconscious. He was bending anxiously over her as she lifted her eyelids and gazed at him—a long steadfast look it was, as though it would read his very heart within him. "Well," asked she—"well?"

"Are you better?" asked he, in a kind voice.

"When you have answered *my* question, I will answer yours," said she, in a tone almost stern.

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"You have not asked me anything, Lucy," said he, tremulously.

"And do you want me to say I doubt you?" cried she, with almost a scream. "Do you want me to humble myself to ask, am I to be forsaken?—in plain words, is there one word of truth in this story of the marriage? Why don't you answer me? Speak out, sir, and deny it, as you would deny the charge that called you a swindler or a coward. What! are you silent? Is it the fear of what is to come after that appals you? but I absolve you from the charge, Trafford. You shall not be burthened by me. My mother-in-law will take me. She has offered me a home, and I have accepted it. There, now, you are released of that terror. Say that this tale of the marriage is a lie—a foul lie—a lie invented to outrage and insult me;—say that, Lionel—just bow your head, my own—— What! It is not a lie, then?" said she, in a low, distinct voice—"and it is *I* that have been deceived, and you are —— all that they called you."

"Listen to me, Lucy."

"How dare you, sir?—by what right do you presume to call me Lucy? Are you such a coward as to take this freedom because my husband is not here to resent it? Do not touch me, sir. That old man, in whose house I am, would strike you to the ground if you insulted me. It was to see him I came here—to see him, and not you. I came here with a message from my husband to Sir Brook Fossbrooke—and not to listen to the insulting addresses of Major Trafford. Let me go, sir; and at your peril touch me with a finger. Look at yourself in that glass yonder—look at yourself, and you will see why I despise you." And with this she arose and passed out, while with a warning gesture of her hand she motioned that he should not follow her.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

TO REPORT.

It was long after midnight when Mrs. Sewell reached the Priory. She dismissed her cab at the gate lodge, and was slowly walking up the avenue when Sewell met her.

"I was beginning to think you didn't mean to come back at all," cried he, in a voice of mingled taunt and irritation—"it is close on one o'clock."

"He had dined in town, and I had to wait till he returned," said she, in a low, faint tone.

"You saw him, however?"

"Yes, we met at the station."

"Well, what success?"

"He gave me some money—he promised me more."

"How much has he given you?" cried he, eagerly.

"Two hundred, I think; at least I thought he said there was two hundred—he gave me his pocket-book. Let me reach the house, and have a glass of water before you question me more. I am tired—very tired."

"You seem weak, too; have you eaten nothing?"

"No, nothing."

"There is some supper on the table. We have had guests here. Old Lendrick and his daughter came up with Beattie. They are not above half an hour gone. They thought to see the old man; but Beattie found him so excited and irritable he advised them to defer the visit."

"Did you see them?"

"Yes; I passed the evening with them most amicably. The girl is wonderfully good-looking; and she has got rid of that shy, half-furtive way she had formerly, and looks at one steadfastly, and with such a pair of eyes too! I had no notion she was so beautiful."

"Were they cordial in manner—friendly?"

"I suppose they were. Dr. Lendrick was embarrassed and timid, and with that fidgety uneasiness as if he wanted to be anywhere else than where he was; but she was affable enough—asked affectionately about you and the children, and hoped to see you to-morrow."

She made no reply, but, hastening her steps, walked on till she entered the house, when, passing into a small room off the hall, she threw off her bonnet, and, with a deep-drawn sigh, said, "I am dead tired—get me some water."

"You had better have wine."

"No, water. I am feverish. My head is throbbing painfully."

"You want food and support. Come into the dining-room and eat something. I'll keep you company, too, for I couldn't eat while those people were here. I felt, all the time, that they had come to turn us out; and indeed Beattie, with a delicate tact quite his own, half avowed it, as he said, 'It is a pity there is not light enough for you to see your old flower garden, Lucy, for I know you are impatient to be back to it again.'"

"I'll try and eat something," said Mrs. Sewell, rising, and with weary steps moving into the dining-room.

Sewell placed a chair for her at the table, helped her, and filled her glass, and, telling the servant that he need not wait, sat down opposite her. "From what Beattie said I gather," said he, "that the Chief is out of danger; the crisis of the attack is over, and he has only to be cautious to come through. Isn't it like our luck?"

"Hush!—take care."

"No fear. They can't hear even when they try—these double doors puzzle them. You are not eating."

"I cannot eat; give me another glass of wine."

"Yes, that will do you good; it's the old thirty-four. I took it out in honour of Lendrick, but he is a water-drinker. I'm sure I wish Beattie were. I grudged the rascal every glass of that glorious claret which he threw down with such gusto, telling me the while that it was infinitely finer than when he last tasted it."

"I feel better now, but I want rest and sleep. You can wait for all I have to tell you till to-morrow—can't you?"

"If I must, there's no help for it; but considering that my whole future, in a measure, hangs upon it, I'd rather hear it now."

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"I am well nigh worn out," said she, plaintively; and she held out her glass to be filled once more; "but I'll try and tell you."

Supporting her head on both her hands, and with her eyes half closed, she went on in a low monotonous tone, like that of one reading from a book:—"We met at the station, and had but a few minutes to confer together. I told him I had been at his house; that I came to see him, and ask his assistance; that you had got into trouble, and would have to leave the country, and were without means to go. He seemed, I thought, to be aware of all this, and asked me, Was it only now that I had learned or knew of this necessity? He also asked if it were at your instance, and by your wish, that I had come to him? I said, Yes; you had sent me." Sewell started as if something sharp had pierced him, and she went on—"There was nothing for it but the truth; and, besides, I know him well, and if he had once detected me in an attempt to deceive him, he would not have forgiven it. He then said, 'It is not to the wife I will speak harshly of the husband, but what assurance have I that he will go out of the country?' I said, 'You had no choice between that and a jail.' He nodded assent, and muttered, 'A jail—and worse; and *you*,' said he, 'what is to become of you?' I told him 'I did not know; that perhaps Lady Lendrick would take me and the children.'"

"He did not offer you a home with himself?" said Sewell, with a diabolical grin.

"No," said she, calmly; "but he objected to our being separated. He said that it was to sacrifice our children, and we had no right to do this; and that, come what might, we ought to live together. He spoke much on this, and asked me more than once if our hard-bought experiences had not taught us to be more patient, more forgiving towards each other."

"I hope you told him that I was a miracle of tolerance, and that I bore with a saintly submission what more irritable mortals were wont to go half mad about—did you tell him this?"

"Yes; I said you had a very practical way of dealing with life, and never resented an unprofitable insult."

"How safe a man's honour always is in a good wife's keeping!" said he, with a savage laugh. "I hope your candour encouraged him to more frankness; he must have felt at ease after that?"

"Still he persisted in saying there must be no separation."

"That was hard upon you; did you not tell him that was hard upon *you?*"

"No; I avoided mixing up myself in the discussion. I had come to treat for you, and you alone."

"But you might have said that he had no right to impose upon you a life of—what shall I call it?—incompatibility or cruelty."

"I did not; I told him I would repeat to you whatever he told me as nearly as I could.' He then said, 'Go abroad and live together in some cheap place, where you can find means to educate the children. I,' said he, 'will take the cost of that, and allow you five hundred a-year for your own expenses. If I am satisfied with your husband's conduct, and well assured of his reformation, I will increase this allowance.'"

"He said nothing about you nor *your* reformation—did he?"

"Not a word."

"How much will he make it if we separate?"

"He did not say. Indeed he seemed to make our living together the condition of aiding us."

"And if he knew of anything harder or harsher he'd have added it. Why, he has gone about the world these dozen years back telling every one what a brute and blackguard you had for a husband—that, short of murder, I had gone through every crime towards you. Where was it I beat you with a hunting-whip?"

"At Rangoon," she said, calmly.

"And where did I turn you into the streets at midnight?"

"At Winchester."

"Exactly; these were the very lies—the infernal lies—he has been circulating for years; and now he says, 'If you have not yet found out how suited you are to each other, how admirably your tastes and dispositions agree; it's quite time you should do so. Go back and live together, and if one of you does not poison the other, I'll give you a small annuity.'"

"Five hundred a-year is very liberal," said she, coldly.

"I could manage on it for myself alone, but it's meant to support a family. It's beggary, neither more nor less."

"We have no claim upon him."

"No claim! What! no claim on your godfather, your guardian, not to say the impassioned and devoted admirer who followed you over India just to look at you, and spent a little fortune in getting portraits of you. Why, the man must be a downright impostor if he does not put half his fortune at your feet!"

"I ought to tell you that he annexed certain conditions to any help he tendered us. 'They were matters,' he said, 'could best be treated between you and himself; that I did not, nor need not, know any of them.'"

"I know what he alluded to."

"Last of all, he said you must give him your answer promptly, for he would not be long in this country."

"As to that, time is fully as pressing to me as to him. The only question is, Can we make no better terms with him?"

"You mean more money?"

"Of course I mean more money. Could you make him say one thousand, or at least eight hundred, instead of five?"

"It would not be a pleasant mission," said she, with a bitter smile.

"I suppose not; a ruined man's wife need not look for many 'pleasant missions,' as you call them. This same one of to-day was not over-gratifying."

"Less even than you are aware," said she, slowly.

"Oh, I can very well imagine the tone and manner of the old fellow; how much of rebuke and severity he could throw into his voice; and how minutely and pains-takingly he would dwell upon all that could humiliate you."

"No; you are quite wrong. There was not a word of reproach, not a syllable of blame; his manner was full of gentle and pitying kindness, and when he tried to comfort and cheer me, it was like the affection of a father."

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"Where, then, was this great trial and suffering of which you have just said I could take no full measure?"

"I was thinking of what occurred before I met Sir Brook," said she, looking up, and with her eyes now widely opened, and a nostril distended as she spoke; "I was thinking of an incident of the morning. I have told you that when I reached the cottage where Sir Brook lived, I found that he was absent, and would not return till a late hour. Tired with my long walk from the station, I wished to sit down and rest before I had determined what to do, whether to await his arrival or go back to town. I saw the door open, I entered the little sitting-room, and found myself face to face with Major Trafford."

"Lionel Trafford?"

"Yes, he had come by that morning's packet from England, and gone straight out to see his friend."

"He was alone, was he?"

"Alone! there was no one in the house but ourselves."

Sewell shrugged his shoulders, and said, "Go on."

The insult of his gesture sent the blood to her face and forehead, and for an instant she seemed too much overcome by anger to speak.

"Am I to tell you what this man said to me? Is *that* what you mean?" said she, in a voice that almost hissed with passion.

"Better not, perhaps," replied he, calmly, "if the very recollection overcome you so completely."

"That is to say, it is better I should bear the insult how I may than reveal it to one who will not resent it."

"When you say resent, do you intend I should call him out?—fight him?"

"If I were the husband instead of the wife, it is what I should do—ay," cried she, wildly, "and thank Fortune that gave me the chance."

"I don't think I'm going to show any such gratitude," said he, with a cold grin. "If he made love to you, I take it he fancied you had given him some encouragement. When you showed him that he was mistaken, he met his punishment. A woman always knows how to make a man look like a confounded fool at such a moment."

"And is that enough?"

"Is *what* enough?"

"I ask, is it enough to make him look like a confounded fool? Will *that* soothe a wife's insulted pride, or avenge a husband's injured honour?"

"I don't know much of the wife's part; but as to the husband's share in the matter, if I had to fight every fellow who made up to you, my wedding garment ought to have been a suit of chain-armour."

"A husband need not fight for his wife's flirtations; besides, he can make her give these up if he likes. There are insults, however, that a man," and she said the word with a fierce emphasis, "resents with the same instinct that makes him defend his life."

"I know well enough what he'd say; he'd say that there was nothing serious in it, that he was merely indulging in that sort of larking talk one offers to a pretty woman who does not seem to dislike it. The chances are he'd turn the tables a bit, and say that you rather led him on than repressed him."

"And would these pleas diminish your desire to have his heart's blood?" cried she, wild with passion and indignation together.

"Having his heart's blood is very fine, if I was sure—quite sure—he might not have mine. The fellow is a splendid shot."

"I thought so. I could have sworn it," cried she, with a taunting laugh.

"I admit no man my superior with a pistol," said Sewell, stung far more by her laughter than her words; "but what have I to gain if I shoot him? His family would prosecute me to a certainty: and it went devilish close with that last fellow who was tried at Newgate."

"If you care so little for my honour, sir, I'll show you how cheaply I can regard yours. I will go back to Sir Brook to-morrow, and return him his money. I will tell him besides that I am married to one so hopelessly lost to every sentiment and feeling, not merely of the gentleman, but of the man, that it is needless to try to help him; that I will accept nothing for him—not a shilling; that he may deal with you on those other matters he spoke of as he pleases; that it will be no favour shown me when he spares you. There, sir, I leave you now to compute whether a little courage would not have served you better than all your cunning."

"You do not leave this room till you give me that pocket-book," said he, rising, and placing his back to the door.

"I foresaw this, sir," said she, laughing quietly, "and took care to deposit the money in a safe place before I came here. You are welcome to every farthing I have about me."

"Your scheme is too glaring, too palpable by half. There is a vulgar shamelessness in the way you 'make your book,' standing to win whichever of us should kill the other. I read it at a glance," said he, as he threw himself into a chair; "but I'll not help to make you an interesting widow. Are you going? Good-night."

She moved towards the door, and just as she reached it he arose and said, "On what pretext could I ask this man to meet me? What do I charge him with? How could I word my note to him?"

"Let *me* write it," said she, with a bitter laugh. "You will only have to copy it."

"And if I consent, will you do all the rest? Will you go to Fossbrooke and ask him for the increased allowance?"

"I will."

"Will you do your best—your very best—to obtain it? Will you use all the power and influence you have over him to dissuade him from any act that might injure *me*? Will you get his pledge that he will not molest me in any way?"

"I will promise to do all that I can with him."

"And when must this come off—this meeting, I mean?"

"At once, of course. You ought to leave this by the early packet for Bangor. Harding or Vaughan—any one—will go with you. Trafford can follow you by the middle mail, as your note will have reached him early."

"You seem to have a capital head for these sort of things; you arrange all to perfection," said he, with a sneer.

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"I had need of it, as I have to think for two," and the sarcasm stung him to the quick.

"I will go to your room and write the note. I shall find paper and ink there?"

"Yes; everything. I'll carry these candles for you," and he arose and preceded her to his study. "I wish he would not mix old Fossbrooke in the affair. I hope he will not name him as his friend."

"I have already thought of that," said she, as she sat down at the table and began to write. After a few moments she said, "This will do, I think:"

"Sir,—I have just learned from my wife how grossly insulting was your conduct towards her yesterday, on the occasion of her calling at Sir Brook Fossbrooke's house. The shame and distress in which she returned here would fully warrant any chastisement I might inflict upon you; but for the sake of the cloth you wear, I offer you the alternative which I would extend to a man of honour, and desire you will meet me at once with a friend. I shall leave by the morning packet for Holyhead, and be found at the chief hotel, Bangor, where, awaiting your pleasure, I am your obedient servant.

"I hope it is needless to say that my wife's former guardian, Sir B. F., should not be chosen to act for you on this occasion."

"I don't think I'd say that about personal chastisement. People don't horsewhip nowadays."

"So much the worse. I would leave it there, however. It will insult him like a blow."

"Oh, he's ready enough—he'll not need poking to rouse his pluck. I'll say that for him."

"And yet I half suspect he'll write some blundering sort of apology; some attempt to show that I was mistaken. I know—I know it as well as if I saw it—he'll not fire at you."

"What makes you think that?"

"He couldn't. It would be impossible for him."

"I'm not so sure of that. There's something very provocative in the sight of a pistol muzzle staring at one a few paces off. *I*'d fire at my father if I saw him going to shoot at me."

"I think *you* would," said she, dryly. "Sit down and copy that note. We must send it by a messenger at once."

"I don't think you put it strongly enough about old Fossbrooke. I'd have said distinctly,—I object to his acting on account of his close and intimate connection with my wife's family."

"No, no; leave it all as it stands. If we begin to change we shall never have an end of the alterations."

"If I believed he would not fire at me, I'd not shoot him," said Sewell, biting the end of his pen.

"He'll not fire the first time; but if you go on to a second shot, I'm certain he will aim at you."

"I'll try and not give him this chance, then," said he, laughing. "Remember," added he, "I'm promising to cross the Channel, and I have not a pound in my pocket."

"Write that, and I'll go fetch you the money," said she, leaving the room; and, passing out through the hall and the front door, she put her arm and hand into a large marble vase, several of which stood on the terrace, and drew forth the pocket-book which Sir Brook had given her, and which she had secretly deposited there as she entered the house.

"There, that's done," said he, handing her his note as she came in.

"Put it in an envelope and address it. And now, where are you to find Harding, or whoever you mean to take with you?"

"That's easy enough; they'll be at supper at the Club by this time. I'll go in at once. But the money?"

"Here it is. I have not counted it; he gave me the pocket-book as you see."

"There's more than he said. There are two hundred and eighty-five pounds. He must be in funds."

"Don't lose time. It is very late already—nigh two o'clock; these men will have left the Club, possibly?"

"No, no; they play on till daybreak. I suppose I'd better put my traps in a portmanteau at once, and not require to come back here."

"I'll do all that for you."

"How amiable a wife can be at the mere prospect of getting rid of her husband!"

"You will send me a telegram?"

"Very likely. Good-bye. Adieu."

"*Adieu, et bonne chance,*" said she, gaily.

"That means a good aim, I suppose?" said he, laughing.

She nodded pleasantly, kissed her hand to him, and he was gone.

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CHAPTER LXIX.

A MOMENT OF CONFIDENCE.

Mrs. Sewell's maid made two ineffectual efforts to awaken her mistress on the following morning, for agitation had drugged her like a narcotic, and she slept the dull heavy sleep of one overpowered by opium. "Why, Jane, it is nigh twelve o'clock," said she, looking at her watch. "Why did you let me sleep so late?"

"Indeed, ma'am, I did my best to rouse you. I opened the shutters, and I splashed the water into your bath, and made noise enough, I'm sure, but you didn't mind it at all; and I brought up the Doctor to see if there was anything the matter with you, and he felt your pulse, and put his hand on your heart, and said, No, it was just over-fatigue; that you had been sitting up too much of late, and hadn't strength for it."

"Where's Colonel Sewell?" asked she, hurriedly.

"He's gone off to the country, ma'am; leastways he went away early this morning, and George thinks it was to Killaloe."

"Is Dr. Beattie here?"

"Yes, ma'am; they all breakfasted with the children at nine o'clock."

"Whom do you mean by all?"

"Mr. Lendrick, ma'am, and Miss Lucy. I hear as how they are coming back to live here.

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They were up all the morning in his lordship's room, and there was much laughing, as if it was a wedding."

"Whose wedding? What were you saying about a wedding?"

"Nothing, ma'am; only that they were as merry—that's all."

"Sir William must be better, then?"

"Yes, ma'am, quite out of danger; and he's to have a partridge for dinner, and the Doctor says he'll be down-stairs and all right before this day week; and I'm sure it will be a real pleasure to see him lookin' like himself again, for he told Mr. Chaytor to take them wigs away, and all the pomatum-pots, and that he'd have the shower-bath that he always took long ago. It's a fine day for Mr. Chaytor, for he has given him I don't know how many coloured scarfs, and at least a dozen new waistcoats, all good as the day they were made; and he says he won't wear anything but black, like long ago; and, indeed, some say that old Rives, the butler as was, will be taken back, and the house be the way it used to be formerly. I wonder, ma'am, if the Colonel will let it be—they say below-stairs that he won't."

"I'm sure Colonel Sewell cares very little on the subject. Do you know if they are going to dine here to-day?"

"Yes, ma'am, they are. Miss Lucy said the butler was to take your orders as to what hour you'd like dinner."

"Considerate, certainly," said she, with a faint smile.

"And I heard Mr. Lendrick say, 'I think you'd better go up yourself, Lucy, and see Mrs. Sewell, and ask if we inconvenience her in any way;' but the Doctor said, 'You need not; she will be charmed to meet you.'"

"He knows me perfectly, Jane," said she, calmly. "Is Miss Lucy so very handsome? Colonel Sewell called her beautiful."

"Indeed I don't think so, ma'am. Mr. Chaytor and me thought she was too robusteous for a young lady; and she's freckled, too, quite dreadful. The picture of her below in the study's a deal more pretty; but perhaps she was delicate in health when it was done."

"That would make a great difference, Jane."

"Yes, ma'am, it always do; every one is much genteeler-looking when they're poorly. Not but old Mr. Haire said she was far more beautiful than ever."

"And is he here too?"

"Yes, ma'am. It was he that pushed Miss Lucy down into the arm-chair and said, 'Take your old place there, darling, and pour out the tea, and we'll forget that you were ever away at all.'"

"How pretty and how playful! The poor children must have felt themselves quite old in such juvenile company."

"They was very happy, ma'am. Miss Cary sat in Miss Lucy's lap all the time, and seemed to like her greatly."

"There's nothing worse for children than taking them out of their daily habits. I'm astonished Mrs. Groves should let them go and breakfast below-stairs without orders from me."

"It's what Miss Lucy said, ma'am. 'Are we quite sure Mrs. Sewell would like it?'"

"She need never have asked the question; or if she did, she might have waited for the answer. Mrs. Sewell could have told her that she totally disapproved of any one interfering with the habits of her children."

"And then old Mr. Haire said, 'Even if she should not like it, when she knows all the pleasure it has given us, she will forgive it.'"

"What a charming disposition I must have, Jane, without my knowing it!"

"Yes, ma'am," said the girl, with a pursed-up mouth, as though she would not trust herself to expatiate on the theme.

"Did Colonel Sewell take Capper with him?"

"No, ma'am; Mr. Capper is below. The Colonel gave him a week's leave, and he's going a-fishing with some other gentleman down into Wicklow."

"I suspect, Jane, that you people below-stairs have the pleasantest life of all. You have little to trouble you. When you take a holiday, you can enjoy it with all your hearts."

"The gentlemen does, I believe, ma'am; but we don't. We can't go a-pleasuring like them; and if it an't a pic-nic, or a thing of the kind that's arranged for us, we have nothing for it but a walk to church and back, or a visit to one of our friends."

"So that you know what it is to be bored!" said she, sighing drearily. "I mean, to be very tired of life, and sick of everything and everybody."

"Not quite so bad as that, ma'am; put out, ma'am, and provoked at times—not in despair, like."

"I wish I was a housemaid."

"A housemaid, ma'am!" cried the girl, in almost horror.

"Well, a lady's-maid. I mean, I'd like a life where my heaviest sorrow would be refused leave to go out, or a sharp word or two for an ill-ironed collar. See who is that at the door: there's some one tapping there the last two minutes."

"It's Miss Lucy, ma'am; she wants to know if she may come in?"

Mrs. Sewell looked in the glass before which she was sitting, and as speedily passed her hands across her brow, and by the action seeming to chase away the stern expression of her eyes; then, rising up with a face all smiles, she rushed to the door and clasped Lucy in her arms, kissing her again and again, as she said, "I never dreamed of such happiness as this; but why didn't you come and awaken me? why did you rob me of one precious moment of your presence?"

"I knew how tired and worn-out you were. Grandpapa has told me of all your unwearying kindness."

"Come over to the light, child, and let me see you well. I'm wildly jealous of you, I must own, but I'll try to be fair and judge you honestly. My husband says you are the loveliest creature he ever saw; and I declare I'm afraid he spoke truly. What have you done with your eyes? they are far darker than they used to be; and this hair—you need not tell me it's all your own, child. Gold could not buy it. Yes, Jane, you are right; she *is* perfectly beautiful."

"Oh, do not turn my head with vanity," said Lucy, blushing.

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"I wish I could—I wish I could do anything to lessen any of your fascinations. Do you know it's very hard—very hard indeed—to forgive any one being so beautiful, and hardest of all for *me* to do so?"

"Why for you?" said Lucy, anxiously.

"I'll tell you another time," said she, in a half-whisper, and with a significant glance at her maid, who, with the officiousness of her order, was taking far more than ordinary trouble to put things to rights. "There, Jane," said her mistress at last, "all that opening and shutting of drawers is driving me distracted; leave everything as it is, and let us have quiet. Go and fetch me a cup of chocolate."

"Nothing else, ma'am?"

"Nothing; and ask if there are any letters for me. It's a dreadful house, Lucy, for sending one's letters astray. The Chief used to have scores of little scented notes sent up to him that were meant for me, and I used to get masses of formal-looking documents that should have gone to him; but everything is irregular here. There was no master, and, worse, no mistress; but I'll hope, as they tell me here, that there will soon be one."

"I don't know—I have not heard."

"What a diplomatic damsel it is! Why, child, can't you be frank, and say if you are coming back to live here?"

"I never suspected that I was in question at all; if I had, I'd have told you, as I tell you now, there is not the most remote probability of such an event. We are going back to live at The Nest. Sir Brook has bought it, and made it over to papa or myself—I don't know which, but it means the same in the sense I care for, that we are to be together again."

"How delightful! I declare, child, my envy of you goes on increasing every minute. I never was able to captivate any man, old or young, who would buy a beautiful house and give it to me. Of all the fortunate creatures I ever heard or read of, you are the luckiest."

"Perhaps I am. Indeed I own as much to myself when I bethink me how little I have contributed to my own good fortune."

"And I," said she, with a heavy sigh, "about the most unlucky! I suppose I started in life with almost as fair a promise as your own. Not so handsome, I admit. I had neither these long lashes nor that wonderful hair, that gives you a look of one of those Venetian beauties Giorgione used to paint; still less that lovely mouth, which I envy you more even than your eyes or your skin: but I was good-looking enough to be admired, and I was admired, and some of my admirers were very great folks indeed; but I rejected them all and married Sewell! I need not tell you what came of that. Poor papa foresaw it all. I believe it helped to break his heart; it might have broken mine too if I happened to have one. There, don't look horrified, darling. I wasn't born without one, but what with vanity and distrust, a reckless ambition to make a figure in the world, and a few other like good qualities, I made of the heart that ought to have been the home of anything that was worthy in my nature, a scene of plot and intrigue, till at last I imagine it wore itself out, just as people do who have to follow uncongenial labour. It was like a lady set down to pick oakum! Why don't you laugh, dear, at my absurd simile?"

"Because you frighten me," said Lucy, almost shuddering.

"I'm certain," resumed the other, "I was very like yourself when I was married. I had been very carefully brought up—had excellent governesses, and was trained in all the admirable discipline of a well-ordered family. All I knew of life was the good side. I saw people at church on Sundays, and fancied that they wore the same tranquil and virtuous faces throughout the week. Above all things I was trustful and confiding. Colonel Sewell soon uprooted such delusions. He believed in nothing nor in any one. If he had any theory at all of life, it was that the world consisted of wolves and lambs, and that one must make an early choice which flock he would belong to. I'm ashamed to own what a zest it gave to existence to feel that the whole thing was a great game in which, by the exercise of skill and cleverness, one might be almost sure to win. He soon made me as impassioned a gambler as himself, as ready to risk anything—everything—on the issue. But I have made you quite ill, child, with this dark revelation; you are pale as death."

"No, I am only frightened—frightened and grieved."

"Don't grieve for me," said the other, haughtily. "There is nothing I couldn't more easily forgive than pity. But let me turn from my odious self and talk of you. I want you to tell me everything about your own fortune, where you have been all this time, what seeing and doing, and what is the vista in front of you?"

Lucy gave a full account of Cagliari and her life there, narrating how blank their first hopes had been, and what a glorious fortune had crowned them at last. "I'm afraid to say what the mine returns at present; and they say it is a mere nothing to what it may yield when improved means of working are employed, new shafts sunk, and steam power engaged."

"Don't get technical, darling; I'll take your word for Sir Brook's wealth; only tell me what he means to do with it. You know he gambled away one large fortune already, and squandered another, nobody knows how. Has he gained anything by these experiences to do better with the third?"

"I have only heard of his acts of munificence or generosity," said Lucy, gravely.

"What a reproachful face to put on, and for so little!" said the other, laughing. "You don't think that when I said he gambled I thought the worse of him."

"Perhaps not; but you meant that *I* should."

"You are too sharp in your casuistry: but you have been living with only men latterly, and the strong-minded race always impart some of their hardness to the women who associate with them. You'll have to come down to silly creatures like me, Lucy, to regain your softness."

"I shall be delighted if you let me keep your company."

"We will be sisters, darling, if you will only be frank with me."

"Prove me if you like; ask me anything you will, and see if I will not answer you freely."

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"Have you told me all your Cagliari life—all?"

"I think so; all at least that was worth telling."

"You had a shipwreck on your island, we heard here; are such events so frequent that they make slight impression?"

"I was but speaking of ourselves and our fortunes," said Lucy; "my narrative was all selfish."

"Come—I never beat about the bush—tell me one thing—it's a very abrupt way to ask, but perhaps it's the best way—are you going to be married?"

"I don't know," said she; and her face and neck became crimson in a moment.

"You don't know! Do you mean that you're like one of those young ladies in the foreign convents who are sent for to accept a husband whenever the papas and mammas have agreed upon the terms?"

"Not that; but I mean that I am not sure whether grandpapa will give his consent, and without it, papa will not either."

"And why should not grandpapa say yes? Major Trafford—we needn't talk riddles to each other—Major Trafford has a good position, a good name, and will have a good estate—are not these the three gifts the mothers of England go in pursuit of?"

"His family, I suspect, wish him to look higher; at all events they don't like the idea of an Irish daughter-in-law."

"More fools they! Irish women, of the better class, are more ready to respond to good treatment, and less given to resent bad usage, than any I ever met."

"Then I have just heard since I came over that Lady Trafford has written to grandpapa in a tone of such condescension and gentle sorrow, that it has driven him half crazy. Indeed, his continual inference from the letter is—What must the son of such a woman be!"

"That's most unfair!"

"So they have all told him—papa, and Beattie, and even Mr. Haire, who met Lionel one morning at Beattie's."

"Perhaps I might be of service here; what a blush, child! dear me, you are crimson, far too deep for beauty. How I have fluttered the dear little bird, but I'm not going to rob its nest, or steal its mate away. All I meant was, that I could exactly contribute that sort of worldly testimony to the goodness of the match that old people like and ask for. You must never talk to them about affections, nor so much as allude to tastes or tempers; never expatiate on anything that cannot be communicated by parchment, and attested by proper witnesses. Whatever is not subject to stamp-duty, they set down as mere moonshine."

While she thus ran on, Lucy's thoughts never strayed from a certain letter which had once thrown a dark shadow over her, and even yet left a gloomy memory behind it. The rapidity with which Mrs. Sewell spoke, too, had less the air of one carried away by the strong current of feeling than of a speaker who was uttering everything, anything, to relieve her own overburdened mind.

"You look very grave, Lucy," went she on. "I suspect I know what's passing in that little brain. You are doubting if I should be the fittest person to employ on the negotiation; come, now, confess it."

"You have guessed aright," said Lucy, gravely.

"But all that's past and over, child. The whole is a mere memory now, if even so much. Men have a trick of thinking, once they have interested a woman on their behalf, that the sentiment survives all changes of time and circumstance, and that they can come back after years and claim the deposit; but it is a great mistake, as *he* has found by this time. But don't let this make you unhappy, dear; there never was less cause for unhappiness. It is just of these sort of men the model husbands are made. The male heart is a very tough piece of anatomy, and requires a good deal of manipulation to make it tender, and, as you will learn one day, it is far better all this should be done before marriage than after.—Well, Jane, I did begin to think you had forgotten about the chocolate. It is about an hour since I asked for it."

"Indeed, ma'am, it was Mr. Chaytor's fault; he was a-shooting rabbits with another gentleman."

"There, there, spare me Mr. Chaytor's diversions, and fetch me some sugar."

"Mr. Lendrick and another gentleman, ma'am, is below, and wants to see Miss Lucy."

"A young gentleman, Jane?" asked Mrs. Sewell, while her eyes flashed with a sudden fierce brilliancy.

"No, ma'am, an old gentleman, with a white beard, very tall and stern to look at."

"We don't care for descriptions of old gentlemen, Jane. Do we, Lucy? Must you go, darling?"

"Yes; papa perhaps wants me."

"Come back to me soon, pet. Now that we have no false barriers between us, we can talk in fullest confidence."

Lucy hurried away, but no sooner had she reached the corridor than she burst into tears.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE TELEGRAM.

When Lucy reached the drawing-room she found her father and Sir Brook deep in conversation in one of the window-recesses, and actually unaware of her entrance till she stood beside them.

"No," cried Lendrick, eagerly; "I can't follow these men in their knaveries. I don't see the drift of them, and I lose the clue to the whole machinery."

"The drift is easy enough to understand," said Fossbrooke. "A man wants to escape from his embarrassments, and has little scruple as to the means."

"But the certainty of being found out——"

"There is no greater fallacy than that. Do you imagine that one-tenth of the cheats that men practise on the world are ever brought to light? Or do you fancy that all the rogues are in jail, and all the people who are abroad and free are

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honest men? Far from it. Many an inspector that comes to taste the prison soup and question the governor, ought to have more than an experimental course of the dietary; and many a juryman sits on the case of a creature far better and purer than himself. But here comes one will give our thoughts a pleasanter channel to run in. How well you look, Lucy! I am glad to see the sunny skies of Sardinia haven't blanched your cheeks."

"Such a scheme as Sir Brook has discovered!—such an ignoble plot against my poor dear father!" said Lendrick. "Tell her the whole of it."

In a very few words Sir Brook recounted the story of Sewell's interview with Balfour, and the incident of the stolen draft of the Judge's writing bartered for money.

"It would have killed my father. The shock would have killed him," said Lendrick. "And it was this man—this Sewell—who possessed his entire confidence of late—actually wielded complete influence over him. The whole time I sat with my father, he did nothing but quote him—Sewell said so—Sewell told me—or Sewell suspected such a thing; and always with some little added comment on his keen sharp intellect, his clear views of life, and his consummate knowledge of men. It was by the picture Sewell drew of Lady Trafford that my father was led to derive his impression of her letter. Sewell taught him to detect a covert impertinence and a sneer where none was intended. I read the letter myself, and it was only objectionable on the score of its vanity. She thought herself a very great personage writing to another great personage."

"Just so," said Fossbrooke. "It was right royal throughout. It might have begun, '*Madame ma sœur*.' And as I knew something of the writer, I thought it a marvel of delicacy and discretion."

"My father, unfortunately, deemed it a piece of intolerable pretension and offensive condescension, and he burned to be well enough to reply to it."

"Which is exactly what we must not permit. If they once get to a regular interchange of letters, there is nothing they will not say to each other. No, no; my plan is the best of all. Lionel made a most favourable impression the only time Sir William saw him. Beattie shall bring him up here again as soon as the Chief can be about; the rest will follow naturally. Lucy agrees with me, I see."

How Sir Brook knew this is not so easy to say, as Lucy had turned her head away persistently all the time he was speaking, and still continued in that attitude.

"It cannot be to-night, however, and possibly not to-morrow night," said Fossbrooke, musing; and though Lucy turned quickly and eagerly towards him to explain his words, he was silent for some minutes, when at length he said, "Lionel started this morning by daybreak, and for England. It must have been a sudden thought. He left me a few lines in pencil, which went thus—'I take the early mail for Holyhead, but mean to be back to-morrow, or at farthest the day after. No time for more.'"

"If the space were not brief that he assigns for his absence, I'd say he had certainly gone to see his father," said Lendrick.

"It is not at all unlikely that his mother may have arranged to meet him in Wales," said Sir Brook. "She is a fussy, meddlesome woman, who likes to be, or to think herself, the prime mover in everything. I remember when Hugh Trafford—a young fellow at that time—was offered a Junior Lordship of the Treasury, it was she who called on the Premier, Lord Dornington, to explain why he could not accept office. Nothing but great abilities or great vices enable a man to rise above the crushing qualities of such a wife. Trafford had neither, and the world has always voted him a nonentity."

"There, Lucy," said Lendrick, laughing—"there at least is one danger you must avoid in married life."

"Lucy needs no teachings of mine," said Sir Brook. "Her own instincts are worth all my experiences twice told. But who is this coming up to the door?"

"Oh, that is Mr. Haire, a dear friend of grandpapa's." And Lucy ran to meet him, returning soon after to the room leaning on his arm.

Lendrick and Haire were very old friends, and esteemed each other sincerely; and though on the one occasion on which Sir Brook and Haire had met, Fossbrooke had been the object of the Chief's violence and passion, his dignity and good temper had raised him highly in Haire's estimation, and made him glad to meet him again.

"You are half-surprised to see me under this roof, sir," said Sir Brook, referring to their former meeting; "but there are feelings with me stronger than resentments."

"And when my poor father knows how much he is indebted to your generous kindness," broke in Lendrick, "he will be the first to ask your forgiveness."

"That he will. Of all the men I ever met, he is the readiest to redress a wrong he has done," cried Haire, warmly. "If the world only knew him as I know him! But his whole life long he has been trying to make himself appear stern and cold-hearted and pitiless, with, all the while, a nature overflowing with kindness."

"The man who has attached to himself such a friendship as yours," said Fossbrooke, warmly, "cannot but have good qualities."

"*My* friendship!" said Haire, blushing deeply; "what a poor tribute to such a man as he is! Do you know, sir," and here he lowered his voice till it became a confidential whisper—"do you know, sir, that since the great days of the country—since the time of Burke, we have had nothing to compete with the Chief Baron. Plunkett used to wish he had his law, and Bushe envied his scholarship, and Lysaght often declared that a collection of Lendrick's epigrams and witty sayings would be the pleasantest reading of the day. And such is our public press, that it is for the quality in which he was least eminent they are readiest to praise him. You wouldn't believe it, sir. They call him a 'master of sarcastic eloquence.' Why, sir, there was a tenderness in him that would not have let him descend to sarcasm. He could rebuke, censure, condemn, if you will; but his large heart had not room for a sneer."

"You well deserve all the love he bears you," said Lendrick, grasping his hand and pressing it affectionately.

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"How could I deserve it? Such a man's friendship is above all the merits of one like me. Why, sir, it is honour and distinction before the world. I would not barter his regard for me to have a seat beside him on the Bench. By the way," added he, cautiously, "let him not see the papers this morning. They are at it again about his retirement. They say that Lord Wilmington had actually arranged the conditions, and that the Chief had consented to everything; and now they are beaten. You have heard, I suppose, the Ministry are out?"

"No; were they Whigs?" asked Lendrick, innocently.

Haire and Fossbrooke laughed heartily at the poor Doctor's indifference to party, and tried to explain to him something of the struggle between rival factions, but his mind was full of home events, and had no place for more. "Tell Haire," said he at last—"tell Haire the story of the letter of resignation; none so fit as he to break the tale to my father!"

Fossbrooke took from his pocket a piece of paper, and handed it to Haire, saying, "Do you know that handwriting?"

"To be sure I do! It is the Chief's."

"Does it seem a very formal document?"

Haire scanned the back of it, and then scrutinised it all over for a few seconds. "Nothing of the kind. It's the sort of thing I have seen him write scores of times. He is always throwing off these sketches. I have seen him write the preamble to a fancied Act of Parliament—a peroration to an imaginary speech; and as to farewells to the Bar, I think I have a dozen of them—and one, and not the worst, is in doggrel."

Though, wherever Haire's experiences were his guides, he could manage to comprehend a question fairly enough, yet where these failed him, or wherever the events introduced into the scene characters at all new or strange, he became puzzled at once, and actually lost himself while endeavouring to trace out motives for actions, not one of which had ever occurred to him to perform.

Through this inability on his part, Sir Brook was not very successful in conveying to him the details of the stolen document; nor could Haire be brought to see that the Government officials were the dupes of Sewell's artifice as much as, or even more than, the Chief himself.

"I think you must tell the story yourself, Sir Brook; I feel I shall make a sad mess of it if you leave it to me," said he at last; "and I know, if I began to blunder, he'd overwhelm me with questions how this was so, and why that had not been otherwise, till my mind would get into a hopeless confusion, and he'd send me off in utter despair."

"I have no objection whatever if Sir William will receive me. Indeed, Lord Wilmington charged me to make the communication in person, if permitted to do so."

"I'll say that," said Haire, in a joyful tone, for already he saw a difficulty overcome. "I'll say it was at his Excellency's desire you came," and he hurried away to fulfil his mission. He came almost immediately in radiant delight. "He is most eager to see you, Sir Brook; and just as I said, impatient to make you every *amende*, and ask your forgiveness. He looks more like himself than I have seen him for many a day."

While Sir Brook accompanied Haire to the Judge's room, Lendrick took his daughter's arm within his own, saying, "Now for a stroll through the wood, Lucy. It has been one of my day-dreams this whole year past."

Leaving the father and daughter to commune together undisturbed, let us turn for a moment to Mrs. Sewell, who, with feverish anxiety, continued to watch from her window for the arrival of a telegraph messenger. It was already two o'clock. The mail-packet for Ireland would have reached Holyhead by ten, and there was therefore ample time to have heard what had occurred afterwards.

From the servant who had carried Sewell's letter to Trafford, she had learned that Trafford had set out almost immediately after receiving it; the man heard the order given to the coachman to drive to Richmond Barracks. From this she gathered he had gone to obtain the assistance of a friend. Her first fear was, that Trafford, whose courage was beyond question, would have refused the meeting, standing on the ground that no just cause of quarrel existed. This he would certainly have done had he consulted Fossbrooke, who would, besides, have seen the part her own desire for vengeance played in the whole affair. It was with this view that she made Sewell insert the request that Fossbrooke might not know of the intended meeting. Her mind, therefore, was at rest on two points. Trafford had not refused the challenge, nor had he spoken of it to Fossbrooke.

But what had taken place since? that was the question. Had they met, and with what result? If she did not dare to frame a wish how the event might come off, she held fast by the thought that, happen what might, Trafford never could marry Lucy Lendrick after such a meeting. The mere exchange of shots would place a whole hemisphere between the two families, while the very nature of the accusation would be enough to arouse the jealousy and insult the pride of such a girl as Lucy. Come therefore what might, the marriage is at an end.

If Sewell were to fall! She shuddered to think what the world would say of her! One judgment there would be no gainsaying. Her husband certainly believed her false, and with his life he paid for the conviction. But would she be better off if Trafford were the victim? That would depend on how Sewell behaved. She would be entirely at his mercy—whether he determined to separate from her or not. *His* mercy seemed a sorry hope to cling to. Hopeless as this alternative looked, she never relented, even for an instant, as to what she had done; and the thought that Lucy should not be Trafford's wife repaid her for all and everything.

While she thus waited in all this feverish torture of suspense, her mind travelled over innumerable contingencies of the case, in every one of which her own position was one of shame and sorrow; and she knew not whether she would deem it worse to be regarded as the repentant wife, taken back by a forgiving, pitying husband, or the woman thrown off and de

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serted! "I suppose I must accept either of those lots, and my only consolation will be my vengeance."

"How absurd," broke she out, "are they who imagine that one only wants to be avenged on those who hate us! It is the wrongs done by people who are indifferent to us, and who, in search of their own objects, bestow no thought upon us,—these are the ills that cannot be forgiven. I never hated a human being—and there have been some who have earned my hate—as I hate this girl; and just as I feel the injustice of the sentiment, so does it eat deeper and deeper into my heart."

"A despatch, ma'am," said her maid, as she laid a paper on the table and withdrew. Mrs. Sewell clutched it eagerly; but her hand trembled so she could not break the envelope. To think that her whole fate lay there, within that fold of paper, so overcame her that she actually sickened with fear as she looked on it.

"'Whatever is done, is done," muttered she, as she broke open the cover. There were but two lines; they ran thus—

"HOLYHEAD, 12 *o'clock.*

"Have thought better of it. It would be absurd to meet him. I start for town at once, and shall be at Boulogne to-morrow.

"DUDLEY."

She sat pondering over these words till the paper became blurred and blotted by her tears as they rolled heavily along her cheeks, and dropped with a distinct sound. She was not conscious that she wept. It was not grief that moved her; it was the blankness of despair—the sense of hopelessness that comes over the heart when life no longer offers a plan or a project, but presents a weariful road to be travelled, uncheered and dreary.

Till she had read these lines it never occurred to her that such a line of action was possible. But now that she saw them there before her, her whole astonishment was that she had not anticipated this conduct on his part. "I might have guessed it; I might have been sure of it," muttered she. "The interval was too long; there were twelve mortal hours for reflection. Cowards think acutely—at least they say that in their calculations they embrace more casualties than brave men. And so he has 'thought better of it'—a strange phrase. 'Absurd to meet him!' but not absurd to run away. How oddly men reason when they are terrified! And so my great scheme has failed, all for want of a little courage, which I could have supplied, if called on; and now comes my hour of defeat, if not worse—my hour of exposure. I am not brave enough to confront it. I must leave this; but where to go is the question. I suppose Boulogne, since it is there I shall join my husband," and she laughed hysterically as she said it.

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CHAPTER LXXI.

A FAMILY PARTY.

WHILE the interview between Sir Brook and the Chief Baron lasted—and it was a long time—the anxiety of those below stairs was great to know how matters were proceeding. Had the two old men, who differed so strongly in many respects, found out that there was that in each which could command the respect and esteem of the other, and had they gained that common ground where it was certain there were many things they would agree upon?

"I should say," cried Beattie, "they have become excellent friends before this. The Chief reads men quickly, and Fossbrooke's nature is written in a fine bold hand, easy to read and impossible to mistake."

"There, there," burst in Haire—"they are laughing, and laughing heartily, too. It does me good to hear the Chief's laugh."

Lendrick looked gratefully at the old man whose devotion was so unvarying. "Here comes Chaytor—what has he to say?"

"My lord will dine below stairs to-day, gentlemen," said the butler; "he hopes you have no engagements which will prevent your meeting him at dinner."

"If we had we'd soon throw them over," burst out Haire. "This is the pleasantest news I have heard this half-year."

"Fossbrooke has done it. I knew he would," said Beattie; "he's just the man to suit your father, Tom. While the Chief can talk of events, Fossbrooke knows people, and they are sure to make capital company for each other."

"There's another laugh! Oh, if one only could hear him now," said Haire; "he must be in prime heart this morning. I wonder if Sir Brook will remember the good things he is saying."

"I'm not quite so sure about this notion of dining below stairs," said Beattie, cautiously; "he may be over-taxing his strength."

"Let him alone, Beattie; leave him to himself," said Haire. "No man ever knew how to make his will his ally as he does. He told me so himself."

"And in those words?" said Beattie, slyly.

"Yes, in those very words."

"Why, Haire, you are almost as useful to him as Bozzy was to Johnson."

Haire only caught the last name, and thinking it referred to a judge on the Irish bench, cried out, "Don't compare him with Johnson, sir; you might as well liken him to *me!*"

"I must go and find Lucy," said Lendrick. "I think she ought to go and show Mrs. Sewell how anxious we all are to prove our respect and regard for her in this unhappy moment; the poor thing will need it."

"She has gone away already. She has removed to Lady Lendrick's house in Merrion Square; and I think very wisely," said Beattie.

"There's some burgundy below—Chambertin, I think it is—and Chaytor won't know where to find it," said Haire. "I'll go down to the cellar myself—the Chief will be charmed to see it on the table."

"So shall I," chimed in Beattie. "It is ten

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years or more since I saw a bottle of it, and I half feared it had been finished."

"You are wrong," broke in Haire. "It will be nineteen years on the 10th of June next. I'll tell you the occasion. It was when your father, Tom, had given up the Solicitor-Generalship, and none of us knew who was going to be made Chief Baron. Plunkett was dining here that day, and when he tasted the burgundy he said, 'This deserves a toast, gentlemen,' said he. 'I cannot ask you to drink to the health of the Solicitor-General, for I believe there is no Solicitor-General; nor can I ask you to pledge the Chief Baron of the Exchequer, for I believe there is no Chief Baron; but I can give you a toast about which there can be no mistake nor misgiving—I give you the ornament of the Irish Bar.' I think I hear the cheers yet. The servants caught them up too in the hall, and the house rang with a hip-hurrah till it trembled."

"Well done, Bozzy," said Beattie. "I'm glad that my want of memory should have recalled so glorious a recollection."

At last Fossbrooke's heavy tread was heard descending the stairs, and they all rushed to the door to meet him.

"It is all right," cried he. "The Chief Baron has taken the whole event in an admirable spirit, and like a truly generous man he dwells on every proof of regard and esteem that has been shown him, and forgets the wrongs that others would have done him."

"The shock, then, did not harm him?" asked Lendrick, eagerly.

"Far from it; he said he felt revived and renovated. Yes, Beattie, he told me I had done him more good than all your phials. His phrase was, '*Your* bitters, sir, leave no bad flavour behind them.' I am proud to think I made a favourable impression upon him; for he permitted me, not only to state my own views, but to correct some of his. He agrees, now, to everything. He even went so far as to say that he will employ his first half-hour of strength in writing to Lady Trafford; and he charges you, Beattie, to invite Lionel to come and pass some days here."

"*Viva!*" cried Haire; "this is grand news."

"He asks, also, if Tom could not come over for the wedding, which he trusts may not be long deferred,—as he said with a laugh, 'At *my* time of life, Sir Brook, it is best to leave as little as possible to *Nisi Prius*.'"

"You must tell me all these again, Sir Brook, or I shall inevitably forget them," whispered Haire in his ear.

"And shall I tell you, Lendrick, what I liked best in all I saw of him?" said Sir Brook, as he slipped his arm within the other's, and drew him towards a window. "It was the way he said to me, as I rose to leave the room, 'One word more, Sir Brook. We are all very happy, and in consequence very selfish. Let us not forget that there is one sad heart here—that there is one up-stairs there who can take no part in all this joy. What shall we—what can we do for her?' I knew whom he meant at once—poor Mrs. Sewell; and I was glad to tell him that I had already thought of her. 'She will join her husband,' said I, 'and I will take care that they have wherewithal to live on.'

"'I must share in whatever you do for her, Sir Brook,' said your father; 'she has many attractive qualities—she has some lovable ones. Who is to say what such a nature might not have been, if spared the contamination of such a husband?'

"I'm afraid I shocked, if I did not actually hurt him, by the way I grasped his hands in my gratitude for this speech. I know I said, 'God bless you for those words!' and I hurried out of the room."

"Ah, *you* know him, sir!—*you* read him aright! And how few there are who do it!" cried Haire, warmly.

The old Judge was too weak to appear in the drawing-room, but when the company entered the dining-room they found him seated at the table, and, though pale and wasted, with a bright eye and a clear, fresh look.

"I declare," said he, as they took their places, "this repays one for illness. No, Lucy—opposite me, my dear. Yes, Tom, of course; that is your place—your old place," and he smiled benignly as he said it. "Is there not a place too many, Lucy?"

"Yes, grandpapa. It was for Mrs. Sewell, but she sent me a line to say she had promised Lady Lendrick to dine with her."

The old Chief's eyes met Fossbrooke's, and in the glances they exchanged there was much meaning.

"I cannot eat, Sir Brook, till we have had a glass of wine together. Beattie may look as reproachfully as he likes, but it shall be a bumper. This old room has great traditions," he went on. "Curran, and Avonmore, and Parsons, and others scarce their inferiors, held their tournaments here."

"I have my doubts if they had a happier party round the board than we have to-night," said Haire.

"We only want Tom," said Dr. Lendrick. "If we had poor Tom with us, it would be perfect."

"I think I know of another, too," whispered Beattie in Lucy's ear. "Don't you?"

"What soft nonsense is Beattie saying, Lucy? it has made you blush," said the Chief. "It was all my fault, child, to have placed you in such bad company. I ought to have had you at my side here; but I wanted to look at you."

Leaving them thus, in happy pleasantry and enjoyment, let us turn for a moment to a very different scene—to a drawing-room in Merrion Square, where, at that same hour, Lady Lendrick and Mrs. Sewell sat in close conference.

Mrs. Sewell had related the whole story of the intended duel, and its finale, and was now explaining to her mother-in-law how impossible it would be for her to continue any longer to live under the Chief Baron's roof, if even—which she deemed unlikely—he would still desire it.

"He'll not turn you out, dear—of that I am quite certain. I suspect I am the only one in the world he would treat in that fashion."

"I must not incur the risk."

"Dear me, have you not been running risks all your life, Lucy? Besides, what else have you open to you?"

"Join my husband, I suppose, whenever he

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sends for me—whenever he says he has a home to receive me."

"Dudley, I'm certain, will do his best," said Lady Lendrick, stiffly. "It is not very easy for a poor man to make these arrangements in a moment. But, with all his faults—and even his mother must own that he has many faults—yet I have never known him to bear malice."

"Certainly, madam, you are justified in your panegyric by his conduct on the present occasion; he has indeed displayed a most forgiving nature."

"You mean by not fighting Trafford, I suppose; but come now, Lucy, we are here alone, and can talk freely to each other; why should he fight him?"

"I will not follow you, Lady Lendrick, into that inquiry, nor give you any pretext for saying to me what your candour is evidently eager for. I will only repeat that the one thing I ever knew Colonel Sewell pardon was the outrage that no gentleman ever endures."

"He fought once before, and was greatly condemned for it."

"I suppose you know why, madam. I take it you have no need I should tell you the Agra story, with all its shameful details?"

"I don't want to hear it; and if I did I would certainly hesitate to listen to it from one so deeply and painfully implicated as yourself."

"Lady Lendrick, I will have no insinuations," said she, haughtily. "When I came here it never occurred to me I was to be insulted."

"Sit down again, Lucy, and don't be angry with me," said Lady Lendrick, pressing her back into her chair. "Your position is a very painful one—let us not make it worse by irritation; and to avoid all possibility of this, we will not look back at all, but only regard the future."

"That may be more easy for *you* to do than for *me*."

"Easy or not easy, Lucy, we have no alternative; we cannot change the past."

"No, no, no! I know that—I know that," cried she, bitterly, as her clasped hands dropped upon her knee.

"For that reason then, Lucy, forget it, ignore it. I have no need to tell you, my dear, that my own life has not been a very happy one, and if I venture to give advice, it is not without having had my share of sorrows. You say you cannot go back to the Priory?"

"No; that is impossible."

"Unpleasant it would certainly be, and all the more so with these marriage festivities. The wedding, I suppose, will take place there?"

"I don't know; I have not heard;" and she tried to say this with an easy indifference.

"Trafford is disinherited, is he not? passed over in the entail, or something or other?"

"I don't know," she muttered out; but this time her confusion was not to be concealed.

"And will this old man they talk of—this Sir Brook somebody—make such a settlement on them as they can live on?"

"I know nothing about it at all."

"I wonder, Lucy dear, it never occurred to you to fascinate Dives yourself. What nice crumbs these would have been for Algy and Cary."

"You forget, madam, what a jealous husband I have!" and her eyes now darted a glance of almost wild malignity.

"Poor Dudley, how many faults we shall find in you if we come to discuss you!"

"Let us not discuss Colonel Sewell, madam; it will be better for all of us. A thought has just occurred; it was a thing I was quite forgetting. May I send one of your servants with a note, for which he will wait the answer?"

"Certainly. You will find paper and pen there."

The note was barely a few lines, and addressed to George Kincaid, Esq., Ely Place. "You are to wait for the answer, Richard," said she, as she gave it to the servant.

"Do you expect he will let you have some money, Lucy?" asked Lady Lendrick, as she heard the name.

"No; it was about something else I wrote. I'm quite sure he would not have given me money if I asked for it."

"I wish *I* could, my dear Lucy; but I am miserably poor. Sir William, who was once the very soul of punctuality, has grown of late most neglectful. My last quarter is overdue two months. I must own all this has taken place since Dudley went to live at the Priory. I hear the expenses were something fabulous."

"There was a great deal of waste; a great deal of mock splendour and real discomfort."

"Is it true the wine bill was fifteen hundred pounds for the last year?"

"I think I heard it was something to that amount."

"And four hundred for cigars?"

"No; that included pipes, and amber mouthpieces, and meerschaums for presents—it rained presents!"

"And did Sir William make no remark or remonstrance about this?"

"I believe not. I rather think I heard that he liked it. They persuaded him that all these indiscretions, like his new wigs, and his rouge, and his embroidered waistcoats, made him quite juvenile, and that nothing made a man so youthful as living beyond his income."

"It is easy enough to see how I was left in arrear; and *you*, dear, were you forgotten all this while and left without a shilling?"

"Oh, no; I could make as many debts as I pleased; and I pleased to make them too, as they will discover one of these days. I never asked the price of anything, and therefore I enjoyed unlimited credit. If you remark, shopkeepers never dun the people who simply say, 'Send that home.' How quickly you did your message, Richard? Have you brought an answer? Give it to me at once."

She broke open the note with eager impatience, but it fell from her fingers as she read it, and she lay back almost fainting in her chair.

"Are you ill, dear—are you faint?" asked Lady Lendrick.

"No; I'm quite well again. I was only provoked—put out;" and she stooped and took up the letter. "I wrote to Mr. Kincaid to give me certain papers which were in his hands, and which I know Colonel Sewell would wish to have in his own keeping, and he writes me this—

"DEAR MADAM,—I am sorry that it is not in

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my power to comply with the request of your note, inasmuch as the letters referred to were this morning handed over to Sir Brook Fosbrooke on his producing an order from Colonel Sewell to that intent.—I am, Madam, your most obedient servant,

"GEORGE KINCAID."

"They were letters then?"

"Yes, Lady Lendrick, they were letters," said she, dryly, as she arose and walked to the window to hide an agitation she could no longer subdue. After a few minutes she turned round and said, "You will let me stay here to-night?"

"Certainly, dear; of course I will."

"But the children must be sent for—I can't suffer them to remain there. Will you send for them?"

"Yes; I'll tell Rose to take the carriage and bring them over here."

"This is very kind of you—I am most grateful. We shall not be a burden beyond to-morrow."

"What do you mean to do?"

"To join my husband, as I told you a while ago. Sir Brook Fossbrooke made that the condition of his assisting us."

"What does he call assisting you?"

"Supporting us—feeding, housing, clothing us; we shall have nothing but what he will give us."

"That is very generous indeed."

"Yes, it is generous—more generous than you dream of; for we did not always treat him very well—but *that* also is a bygone, and I'll not return to it."

"Come down and have some dinner—it has been on the table this half-hour—it will be nigh cold by this."

"Yes, I'm quite ready. I'd like to eat, too, if I could. What a great resource it is to men in their dark hours that they can drink and smoke! I think I could do both to-day if I thought they would help me to a little insensibility."

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CHAPTER LXXII.

PROJECTS.

TRAFFORD arrived from England on the evening after, and hastened off to Howth, where he found Sir Brook deeply engaged over the maps and plans of his new estate—for already the preliminaries had so far advanced that he could count upon it as his own.

"Look here, Trafford," he cried, "and see what a noble extension we shall give to the old grounds of the Nest. The whole of this wood—eleven hundred and seventy acres—comes in, and this mountain down to that stream there is ours, as well as all these meadow-lands between the mountain and the Shannon—one of the most picturesque estates it will be in the kingdom. If I were to have my own way, I'd rebuild the house. With such foliage—fine old timber much of it—there's nothing would look better than one of those Venetian villas, those half-castellated buildings one sees at the foot of the mountains of Conigliano—and they are grand, spacious places to live in, with wide stairs, and great corridors, and terraces everywhere. I see, however, Lendrick's heart clings to his old cottage, and we must let him have his way."

"What is this here?" asked Trafford, drawing out from a mass of papers the plan of a very pretty but very diminutive cottage.

"That's to be mine. This window you see here will project over the river, and that little terrace will be carried on arches all along the river bank. I have designed everything, even to the furniture. You shall see a model cottage, Trafford—not one of those gingerbread things to be shown to strangers by ticket on Tuesdays or Saturdays, with a care-taker to be tipped, and a book to be scribbled full of vulgar praises of the proprietor, or doggrel ecstasies over some day of picknicking. But come and report yourself—where have you been, and what have you done, since I saw you?"

"I have a long budget for you. First of all read that," and he handed Sir Brook Sewell's letter.

"What! do you mean to say that you met him?"

"No; I rejoice to say I have escaped that mischance; but you shall hear everything, and in as few words as I can tell it. I have already told you of Mrs. Sewell's visit here, and I have not a word to add to that recital. I simply would say, that I pledge my honour to the strict truth of everything I have told you. You may imagine, then, with what surprise I was awoke from my sleep to read that note. My first impression was to write him a full and explicit denial of what he laid to my charge; but as I read the letter over a third and even a fourth time, I thought I saw that he had written it on some sort of compulsion—that, in fact, he had been instigated to the step, which was one he but partly concurred in. I do not like to say more on this head."

"You need not. Go on."

"I then deemed that the best thing to do was to let him have his shot, after which my explanation would come more forcibly; and as I had determined not to fire at him, he would be forced to see that he could not persist in his quarrel."

"There you mistook your man, sir," cried Sir Brook, fiercely.

"I don't think so; but you shall hear. We must have crossed over in the same packet, but we never met. Stanhope, who went with me, thought he saw him on the landing-slip at Holyhead, but was not quite sure. At all events, we reached the inn at the Head, and had just sat down to luncheon, when the waiter brought in this note, asking which of us was Major Trafford. Here it is:—"Pray accept my excuses for having given you a rough sea passage; but, on second thoughts, I have satisfied myself that there is no valid reason why I should try to blow your brains out, "et pour si peu de chose." As I can say without any vanity that I am a better pistol-shot than you, I have the less hesitation in taking a step which, as a man of honour and courage, you will certainly not misconstrue. With this assurance, and the not less strong conviction that my conduct will be safely treated in any representation you make

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of this affair, I am your humble and faithful servant, DUDLEY SEWELL."

"I don't think I was ever so grateful to any man in the world as I felt to him on reading his note, since, let the event take what turn it might, it rendered my position with the Lendricks a most perilous one. I made Stanhope drink his health, which I own he did with a very bad grace, telling me at the same time what good luck it was for me that *he* had been my friend on the occasion, for that any man but himself would have thought me a regular poltroon. I was too happy to care for his sarcasms, such a load had been removed from my heart, and such terrible forebodings too.

"I started almost immediately for Holt, and got there by midnight. All were in bed, and my arrival was only known when I came down to breakfast. My welcome was all I could wish for. My father was looking well, and in great spirits. The new Ministry have offered him his choice of a Lordship of the Admiralty, or something else—I forget what; and just because he has a fine independent fortune, and loves his ease, he is more than inclined to take office, one of his chief reasons being 'how useful he could be to me.' I must own to you frankly that the prospect of all these new honours to the family rather frightened than flattered me, for I thought I saw in them the seeds of more strenuous opposition to my marriage; but I was greatly relieved when my mother—who you may remember had been all my difficulty hitherto—privately assured me that she had brought my father round to her opinion, and that he was quite satisfied—I am afraid her word was reconciled, but no matter—reconciled to the match. I could see that you must have been frightening her terribly by some menaced exposure of the family pretensions, for she said over and over again, 'Why is Sir Brook so angry with me? can't you manage to put him in better temper with us? I have scarcely had courage to open his letters of late. I never got such lectures in my life.' And what a horrid memory you seem to have. She says she'd be afraid to see you. At all events you have done me good service. They agree to everything; and we are to go on a visit to Holt—such at least I believe to be the object of the letter which my mother has written to Lucy."

"All this is excellent news, and we'll announce it to-night at the Priory. As for the Sewell episode, we must not speak of it. The old Judge has at last found out the character of the man to whose confidence he committed himself, but his pride will prevent his ever mentioning his name."

"Is there any rumour afloat as to the Chief's advancement to the Peerage?"

"None—so far as I have heard."

"I'll tell you why I asked. There is an old maiden aunt of mine, a sister of my father, who told me, in strictest confidence, that my father had brought back from town the news that Baron Lendrick was to be created a Peer; that it was somewhat of a party move to enable the present people to prosecute the charge against the late Government of injustice towards the Judge, as well as of a very shameful intrigue to obtain his retirement. Now, if the story were true, or if my mother believed it to be true, it would perfectly account for her satisfaction with the marriage, and for my father's 'resignation!'"

"I had hoped her consent was given on better grounds, but it may be as you say. Since I have turned miner, Trafford," added he, laughing, "I am always well content if I discover a grain of silver in a bushel of dross, and let us take the world in the same patient way."

"When do you intend to go to the Priory?"

"I thought of going this evening. I meant to devote the morning to these maps and drawings, so that I might master all the details before I should show them to my friends at night."

"Couldn't that be deferred? I mean, is there anything against your going over at once? I'll own to you I am very uneasy lest some incorrect version of this affair with Sewell should get abroad. Even without any malevolence there is plenty of mischief done by mere blundering, and I would rather anticipate than follow such disclosures."

"I perceive," said Sir Brook, musingly, as with longing eyes he looked over the coloured plans and charts which strewed the table, and had for him all the charm of a romance.

"Then," resumed Trafford, "Lucy should have my mother's letter. It might be that she ought to reply to it at once."

"Yes, I perceive," mused Sir Brook again.

"I'm sure, besides, it would be very politic in you to keep up the good relations you have so cleverly established with the Chief; he holds so much to every show of attention, and is so flattered by every mark of polite consideration for him."

"And for all these good reasons," said Sir Brook, slowly, "you would say, we should set out at once. Arriving there, let us say, for luncheon, and being begged to stay and dine—which we certainly should—we might remain till, not impossibly, midnight."

Perhaps it was the pleasure of such a prospect sent the blood to Trafford's face, for he blushed very deeply as he said, "I don't think, sir, I have much fault to find with your arrangement."

"And yet the real reason for the plan remains unstated," said Fossbrooke, looking him steadfastly in the face, "so true is what the Spanish proverb says, 'Love has more perfidies than war.' Why not frankly say you are impatient to see your sweetheart, sir? I would to heaven the case were my own, and I'd not be afraid nor ashamed to avow it; but I yield to the plea, and let us be off there at once."

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CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE END OF ALL.

THE following paragraph appeared in the Irish, and was speedily copied into some of the English papers: "An intrigue, which involves the character of more than one individual of rank, and whose object was to compel the Chief Baron of her Majesty's Exchequer in Ireland to resign his seat on the Bench, has at length been

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discovered, and, it is said, will soon be made matter of Parliamentary explanation. We hope, for the reputation of our public men, that the details which have reached us of the transaction may not be substantiated; but the matter is one which demands, and must have, the fullest and most searching inquiry."

"So, sir," said the old Chief to Haire, who had read this passage to him aloud as they sat at breakfast, "they would make political capital of my case, and, without any thought for me or for my feelings, convert the conduct displayed towards me into a means of attacking a fallen party. What says Sir Brook Fossbrooke to this? or how would he act were he in my place?"

"Just as you mean to act now," said Fossbrooke, promptly.

"And how may that be, sir?"

"By refusing all assistance to such party warfare; at least, my Lord Chief Baron, it is thus that I read your character."

"You do me justice, sir; and it is my misfortune that I have not earlier had the inestimable benefit of your friendship. I trust," added he, haughtily, "I have too much pride to be made the mere tool of a party squabble; and, fortunately, I have the means to show this. Here, sir, is a letter I have just received from the Prime Minister. Read it—read it aloud, Haire, and my son will like to hear its contents also."

"DOWNING STREET, *Tuesday evening.*

"MY DEAR LORD CHIEF BARON,—It is with much pleasure I have to communicate to you, that my colleagues unanimously agree with me in the propriety of submitting your name to the Queen for the Peerage. Your long and distinguished services, and your great abilities, will confer honour on any station; and your high character will give additional lustre to those qualities which have marked you out for her Majesty's choice. I am both proud and delighted, my lord, that it has fallen to my lot to be the bearer of these tidings to you; and with every assurance of my great respect and esteem, I am, most sincerely yours,

"ELLERTON."

"At last," cried Haire—"at last! But I always knew that it would come."

"And what answer have you returned?" cried Lendrick, eagerly.

"Such an answer as will gladden your heart, Tom. I have declined the proffered distinction."

"Declined it! Great God! and why?" cried Haire.

"Because I have passed that period in which I could accommodate myself to a new station, and show the world that I was not inferior to my acquired dignity. This for my first reason; and for my second, I have a son whose humility would only be afflicted if such greatness were forced upon him. Ay, Tom, I have thought of all it would cost you, my poor fellow, and I have spared you."

"I thank you with my whole heart," cried Lendrick, and he pressed the old man's hand to his lips.

"And what says Lucy?" said the Judge. "Are you shocked at this epidemic of humility amongst us, child? Or does your woman's heart rebel against all our craven fears about a higher station?"

"I am content, sir; and I don't think Tom, the miner, will fret that he wears a leather cap instead of a coronet."

"I have no patience with any of you," muttered Haire. "The world will never believe you have refused such a splendid offer. The correspondence will not get abroad."

"I trust it will not, sir," said the Chief. "What I have done I have done with regard to myself and my own circumstances, neither meaning to be an example nor a warning. The world has no more concern with the matter than with what we shall have for dinner to-day."

"And yet," said Sir Brook, with a dry ripple at the angle of his mouth, "I think it is a case where one might forgive the indiscreet friend" —here he glanced at Haire—"who incautiously gave the details to a newspaper."

"Indiscreet or not, I'll do it," said Haire, resolutely.

"What, sir," cried the Chief with mock sternness of eye and manner—"what, sir, if I even forbade you?"

"Ay, even so. If you told me you'd shut your door against me, and never see me here again, I'd do it."

"Look at that man, Sir Brook," said the Judge, with well-feigned indignation; "he was my school-fellow, my chum in college, my colleague at the Bar, and my friend everywhere, and see how he turns on me in my hour of adversity."

"If there be adversity it is of your own making," said Haire. "It is that you won't accept the prize when you have won it."

"I see it all now," cried the Chief, laughing, "and stupid enough of me not to see it before. Haire has been a bully all his life; he is the very terror of the Hall; he has bullied sergeants and silk gowns, judges and masters in equity, and his heart is set upon bullying a peer of the realm. Now, if I will not become a lord, he loses this chance; he stands to win or lose on me. Out with it, Haire; make a clean confession, and own, have I not hit the blot?"

"Well," said Haire, with a sigh, "I have been called sly, sarcastic, witty, and what not; but I never thought to hear that I was a bully, or could be a terror to any one."

The comic earnestness of this speech threw them all into a roar of laughing, in which even Haire himself joined at last.

"Where is Lucy?" cried the old Judge. "I want *her* to testify how this man has tyrannised over me."

"Lucy has gone into the garden to read a letter Trafford brought her." Sir Brook did not add that Trafford had gone with her to assist in the interpretation.

"I have told Lord Ellerton," said the Chief, referring once more to the Minister's letter. "that I will not lend myself in any way to the attack on the late Government. The intrigue which they planned towards me could not have ever succeeded if they had not found a traitor in the garrison; but of him I will speak no more. The old Greek adage was, 'Call no man happy till he dies.' I would say, he is nearer

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happiness when he has refused some object that has been the goal of all his life, than he is ever like to be under other circumstances."

Tom looked at his father with wistful eyes, as though he owed him gratitude for the speech.

"When it is the second horse claims the cup, Haire," cried the old Judge, with a burst of his instinctive vanity, "it is because the first is disqualified by previous victories. And now let us talk of those whose happiness can be promoted without the intrigues of a Cabinet or a debate in the House. Sir Brook tells me that Lady Trafford has made her submission. She is at last willing to see that in an alliance with us there is no need to call condescension to her aid."

"Trafford's account is most satisfactory," said Fossbrooke, "and I trust the letter of which he was the bearer from his mother will amply corroborate all he says."

"I like the young man," said the Judge, with that sort of authoritative tone that seems to say, The cause is decided—the verdict is given.

"There's always good stuff in a fellow when he is not afraid of poverty," said Fossbrooke. "There are scores of men will rough it for a sporting tour on the Prairies or a three months' lion-shooting on the Gaboon; but let me see the fellow bred to affluence, and accustomed to luxury, who will relinquish both and address himself to the hard work of life rather than give up the affection of a girl he loves. That's the man for me."

"I have great trust in him," said Lendrick, thoughtfully.

"All the Bench has pronounced but one," cried the Chief. "What says our brother Haire?"

"I'm no great judge of men. I'm no great judge of anything," muttered Haire; "but I don't think one need be a sphinx to read that he is a right good fellow, and worthy of the dearest girl in Christendom."

"Well summed up, sir; and now call in the prisoner."

Fossbrooke slipped from the room, but was speedily back again. "His sentence has been already pronounced outside, my lord, and he only begs for a speedy execution.

"It is always more merciful," said the Chief, with mock solemnity; "but could we not have Tom over here? I want to have you all around me."

"I'll telegraph to him to come," said Fossbrooke. "I was thinking of it all the morning."

About three weeks after this, Chief Baron Lendrick opened the Commission at Limerick, and received from the grand jury of the county a most complimentary address on his reappearance upon the Bench, to which he made a suitable and dignified reply. Even the newspapers which had so often censured the tenacity with which he held to office, and inveighed against the spectacle of an old and feeble man in the discharge of laborious and severe duties, were now obliged to own that his speech was vigorous and eloquent; and though allusion had been faintly made in the address to the high honour to which the Crown had desired to advance him and the splendid reward which was placed within his reach, yet, with a marked delicacy, had he forborne from any reference to this passage other than his thankfulness at being so far restored to health that he could come back again to those functions, the discharge of which formed the pride and the happiness of his life.

"Never," said the journal which was once his most bitter opponent, "has the Chief Baron exhibited his unquestionable powers of thought and expression more favourably than on this occasion. There were no artifices of rhetoric, no tricks of phrase, none of those conceits by which so often he used to mar the wisdom of his very finest displays; he was natural for once, and they who listened to him might well have regretted that it was not in this mood he had always spoken. *Si sic omnia*—and the press had never registered his defeats nor railed at his vanities.

"The celebrated Sir Brook Fossbrooke, so notorious in the palmy days of the Regency, sat on the bench beside his lordship, and received a very flattering share of the cheers which greeted the party as they drove away to Killaloe, to be present at the wedding of Miss Lendrick, which takes place to-morrow."

Much-valued reader, has it ever occurred to you, towards the close of a long, possibly not very interesting, discourse, to experience a sort of irreverent impatience when the preacher, appearing to take what rowing men call "second wind," starts off afresh, and seems to threaten you with fully the equal of what he has already given? At such a moment it is far from unlikely that all the best teachings of that sermon are not producing upon you their full effect of edification, and that even as you sat, you meditated ignoble thoughts of stealing away.

I am far from desiring to expose either you or myself to this painful position. I want to part good friends with you; and if there may have been anything in my discourse worth carrying away, I would not willingly associate it with weariness at the last. And yet I am very loath to say good-bye. Authors are, *par excellence*, button-holders, and they cannot relinquish their grasp on the victim whose lapel they have caught. Now I would like to tell you of that wedding at the Swan's Nest. You'd read it if in the 'Morning Post,' but I'm afraid you'd skip it from *me*. I'd like to recount the events of that breakfast, the present Sir Brook made the bride, and the charming little speech with which the Chief proposed her health. I'd like to describe to you the uproar and joyous confusion when Tom, whose costume bore little trace of a wedding garment, fought his way through the servants into the breakfast-room.

And I'd like to grow moral and descriptive, and a bit pathetic perhaps, over the parting between Lucy and her father; and, last of all, I'd like to add a few words about him who gives his name to this story, and tell how he set off once more on his wanderings, no one well knowing whither bent, but how, on reaching Boulogne, he saw from the steamer's deck, as he landed, the portly figure of Lady Lendrick walking beside her beautiful daughter-in-law, Sewell bringing up the rear, with a little child holding his

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hand on either side—a sweet picture, combining, to Boulogne appreciation, the united charm of fashion, beauty, and domestic felicity; and finally, how, stealing by back streets to the hotel where these people stopped, he deposited to their address a somewhat weighty packet, which made them all very happy, or at least very merry, that evening as they opened it, and induced Sewell to order a bottle of Cliquot, if not, as he said, "to drink the old buck's health," at least to wish him many returns of the same good dispositions of that morning.

If, however, you are disposed to accept the will for the deed, I need say no more. They who have deserved some share of happiness in this tale are likely to have it. They who have little merited will have to meet a world which, neither over cruel, nor over generous, has a rough justice that generally gives people their deserts.

THE END.

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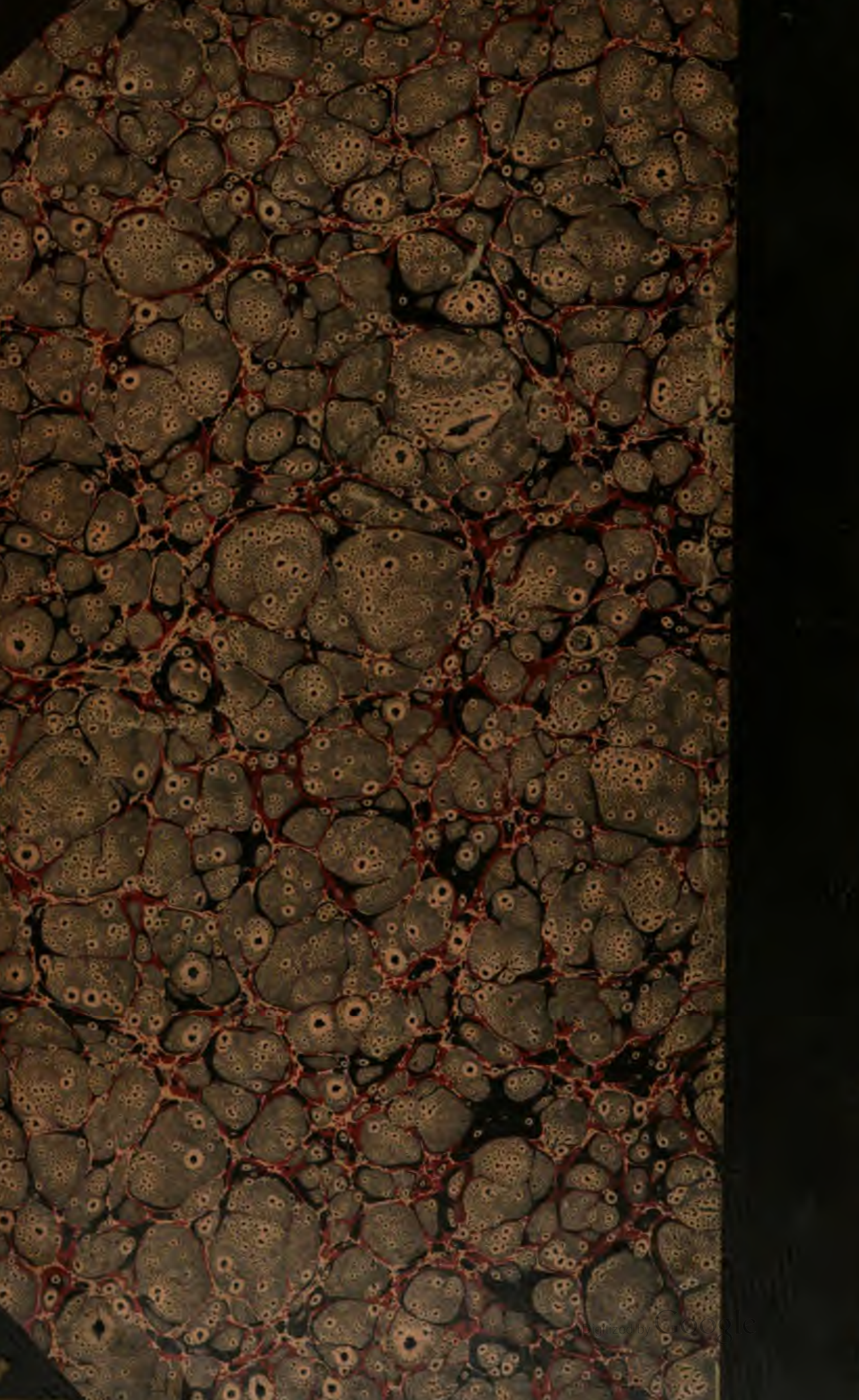
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