

PZ
3

.W/74
T

FT MEADE
GenColl

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. PZ3 Copyright No.

Shelf W74T
Ser.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

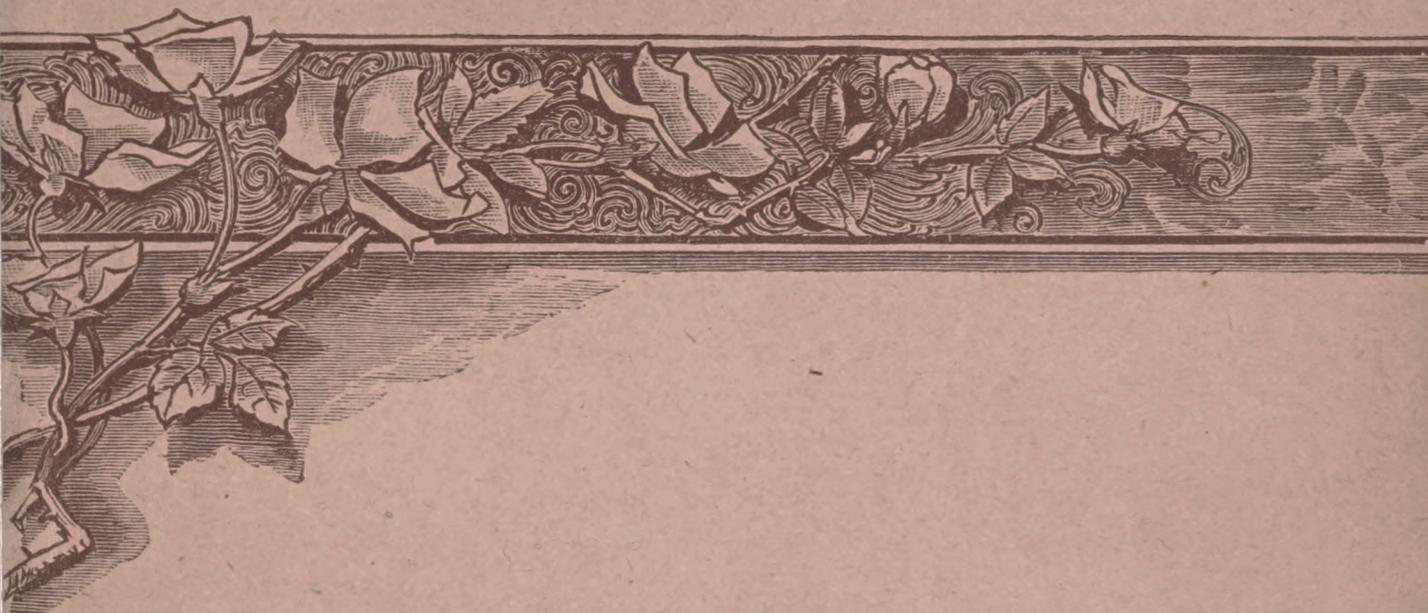


Published Semi-Weekly.

By Subscription, per Year, Ten Dollars.

April 16, 1892.

Entered at the New York Post-Office as second-class matter.



Thornycroft Grange.

BY

RETT WINWOOD.



NEW YORK:
THE F. M. LUPTON PUBLISHING COMPANY,
No. 65 DUANE STREET.

A decorative horizontal border at the bottom of the page, mirroring the top border, featuring a detailed illustration of a rose branch with several large, open roses and leaves.

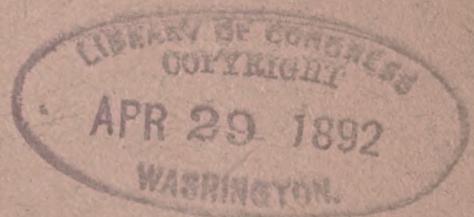
THORNYCROFT GRANGE.

A NOVEL.

BY RETT WINWOOD,

Author of "Was She a Wife?" "A Strange Woman," "A Girl's Heart," Etc.

40
2/22



5538 X 1

2-

NEW YORK:

THE F. M. LUPTON PUBLISHING COMPANY,
No. 65 DUANE STREET.

P23
W74T

COPYRIGHT, 1892, BY
THE F. M. LUPTON PUBLISHING COMPANY.

THORNYCROFT GRANGE.

CHAPTER I.

THE INGESTRE HOUSEHOLD.

A SUNSET scene, the sky dabbled and listless enough overhead, but on either hand breaking into waves of crimson and scarlet, that swept on, intensifying, to the very heart of the west, where they flamed and dazzled like some great universal fire.

There was a soft flush in the air that had set the whole landscape to blushing. The hills grew rosy under it, as if the last stray sunbeams, in kissing them farewell, had also whispered some wondrous secret in their ear. Even the valley was warmly tinted and luminous, and the little village nestled so cosily in it, with its odd, Scotch name of Linden-Car, had never seemed half so pleasant or inviting as it now did, in all this crimson glory.

Thornycroft Grange, the home of the Ingestres, loomed up rather grandly from the summit of the hill just back of the village. On its gray, stately walls the western glory always shone the warmest and brightest, and lingered longest, as if aware of the hospitable hearts that beat within, and sure of a cordial welcome.

In this rosy sunset hour Maud Ingestre was standing on one of the long piazzas that take in the entire circumference of the family mansion of Thornycroft Grange—standing motionless and silent, like the foolish enthusiast that

she was, her whole soul drinking the beauty and soft tranquillity of the scene. There was a great deal of latent poetry and sentiment in the girl's nature, for a beautiful view always set her pulses to throbbing; and now her bosom was heaving, her lips slightly apart, her eyes large and luminous, while a soft color was staining her delicate cheeks. Her whole attention seemed to be wrapped up in, and absorbed by, the wondrous picture upon which she was gazing so eagerly.

Suddenly there came a rustle of drapery close behind her, and a warm, soft hand was dropped upon her own, where it lay carelessly resting upon the balustrade. She turned with a quick start, looking around.

"Is it you, mamma?" she asked, with a sigh of relief, and a ready smile.

"Yes, my child," replied Mrs. Ingestre's calm, gentle voice. "You seemed afraid. Whom did you take it to be?"

"I did not know who it was," with a slight hesitation. "I believe I had half forgotten myself in this scene before me. Is it not lovely?"

"Very. Italy itself cannot boast of anything more enchanting than some of our American sunsets. We have reason to be proud of them. But we cannot stay here to admire it now Maud. Magdalen and I have been arranging the flowers on the mantel and tables. Now we want your opinion on what we have done."

"Yes, mamma. I was quite forgetting that we are to have company this evening. I will come in directly."

Mrs. Ingestre smiled kindly as she took her arm. A truly refined and cultivated woman herself, gifted with a delicate sensibility and a rare perception of whatever is grandest and most beautiful among God's works, she could fully understand and sympathize with her daughter's mood.

They entered the parlor, through one of the long, low windows, which was open. She was standing beside the centre-table, just dropping a pink japonica bud into a bouquet of rare and exquisite exotics that had been placed there—this Magdalen Duprez, of whom they had spoken, a wondrous creature to look upon, as she stood there. Tall, even beyond the usual height of women, and superbly formed, her classic head, with its stately poise, had carried to perfection the idea of her majestic, Juno-like figure. It was a strong, passionate face from which the masses of purple-black hair were swept back in such fragrant waves; the jetty eyes, lighted by a deep, intense glow; the lips, ripe and luscious with their melting ruddiness; a rich carmine flaming from either cheek. Scores of infatuated admirers had raved about the magnificent beauty of this woman, and scores would again be guilty of the same folly; for she could hardly help but intoxicate and bewilder, with all these charms which nature had lavished upon her. She looked up as the mother and daughter entered, a shade of some hidden feeling sweeping suddenly over her face.

“O, you have come, Maud,” she began, with real or pretended animation. “Mrs. Ingestre and I have been arranging these flowers to the best of our ability, but we missed your taste sadly. We can do nothing just right without you, so please let us hear your criticisms at once.”

She smilingly crossed the room, laying her white hand upon Maud’s arm. There might have been a spice of sarcasm in what she had said, but if so, her companions utterly failed to detect it.

“How can you speak in that way?” asked Maud, with considerable earnestness. “You know that your taste is very nearly perfect, Magdalen. I am sure it is much better than mine, and mamma is the only person in the whole world who would not admit it at once.”

Mrs. Ingestre smiled.

“You are both abundantly gifted in that respect, but in a different way. I like Maud’s manner of arranging flowers, because they seem to look so fresh and pure when they come from under her hand. There is nothing gaudy or showy about them. Few have such a faculty, you will admit that, my dear Magdalen. She makes them seem more like God’s messengers—just what they were meant to be.”

Miss Duprez held up her hand deprecatingly.

“You are speaking as if you expected me to dispute you, Mrs. Ingestre,” she said, quickly and lightly. “But instead, I agree with you perfectly. Maud has this peculiar faculty, and no wonder, for she is the very impersonation of purity, herself. Am I not right Miss Dean?”

The question was addressed to Miss Barbara Dean, who at that moment entered the apartment. Miss Barbara was a maiden lady of near forty, single because she chose to be, not from any lack of eligible offers. Maud always called her Aunt Barbara, though the relationship between them was not so close as that. She had been the second cousin of Maud’s father, who was now dead, and had lived with the family at Thornycroft Grange for a great many years. She made a great pet of the young girl—“babied” would have been the term used, if Magdalen had had the choice of expression.

“Of what were you speaking?” she now asked, fixing her penetrating eyes upon Magdalen’s face.

“Of a subject that will be sure to call all your powers of eloquence into play,” Miss Duprez replied, merrily. “We were speaking of Maud’s excellencies and surpassing virtues.”

She looked significantly at Mrs. Ingestre, who replied to the glance by a rather faint smile. The doting fondness

of the old maid had long been a standard joke among some of the frequenters of the Grange (made so, in the first place, through the efforts of Magdalen in that direction;) but Mrs. Ingestre herself was too much of a real lady to relish any joke gotten up at the expense of another's feelings, especially one in which Aunt Barbara and Maud figured. To her, there was something really touching in the old maid's devotion to the interests of the young girl.

"Don't mind her, Aunt Barbara," interrupted Maud, feeling slightly hurt. "She is only joking. They called me in to look at the bouquets. Are they not beautiful?"

"They look well enough, child; but you must not expect a jaded-out person like myself to go into rhapsodies over them. We seldom do that, after passing the middle age. Am I not correct, Esther?"

Mrs. Ingestre smiled.

"Romance dies from some hearts earlier than from others; nevertheless I shall always love flowers myself," she said. "But, to descend to the practical, which is of more importance to us now, are we all dressed for the evening? It is quite time, at all events. We are in the country, you must remember, where early hours are fashionable. Our friends may drop in upon us at any moment."

"Maud could not find anything more becoming than that cloudlike stuff," returned Aunt Barbara. "She only needs a flash of color—one or two moss-rosebuds, or a spray of myrtle in her hair, and her toilet is complete. Miss Duprez is looking very well, as usual. As for myself, nobody will notice the appearance of a yellow old maid, and I shall not trouble myself to make a fresh toilet."

She laughed good-naturedly. Aunt Barbara had no conceit in her, and could read the world as it really was. Maud, always anxious to favor her fancies, concluded to be

governed by her taste since she had expressed an opinion ; but Magdalen decided to make a fresh toilet.

There were a few friends invited and they came early, as Mrs. Ingestre had been sure they would. They were nearly all assembled when Miss Duprez descended, in a magnificent dress of rich amber silk. An audible buzz of admiration greeted her entrance, as was nearly always the case when she went into company. Everybody was ready to do homage to her beauty, dazzling and bewildering as it was.

“Did you ever!” exclaimed Tempy Blake, a spinster, aged fifty, who had at once sought out Aunt Barbara, from a “fellowship of feeling,” as Magdalen would have said. “Do see in what a rig Miss Duprez has flashed in upon us! The impudence of some people is really astonishing. One would think she was a daughter of the house, in place of a poor dependent on Mrs. Ingestre’s bounty.”

“Miss Duprez is dressed rather showily,” assented Aunt Barbara. “But then you know plain dresses are not becoming to her style.”

“Then I wouldn’t have any style at all,” went on Miss Tempy, indignantly. “Just look at Maud, over by the window yonder, as modest and sweet as a new-blown rose. I always tell my friends that there isn’t a prettier girl in the whole country than Maud Ingestre. She is good as she is pretty, too. If she stood in Miss Duprez’s shoes, you wouldn’t see her rigging herself out in that shape, to attract everybody’s attention. That you wouldn’t!”

“Maud would hardly have fallen into Magdalen’s position—to be a dependent on the bounty of anybody,” said Aunt Barbara, with considerable emphasis. “She is too high-spirited for that. I believe she would sooner break stone on the highway.”

“Those two girls are not one bit alike, of course not, as I always tell people—my particular friends, you know.

But," sinking her voice a little, "is it really true that Miss Duprez is entirely dependent, that she hasn't a penny of her own?"

"She is as poor as any beggar in the streets, if the real truth were known. I ought not to have said so; but then she is putting on altogether too many airs, and deserves to be humbled. That very dress was a present from Mrs Ingestre. I can't see what possesses Esther to keep her here in this way, though she says it is to be company for Maud. Were it my case, I should choose anybody else for company, rather than her."

"That's my idea, exactly; that is just what I tell all my friends." And Miss Tempy bobbed her head most emphatically, sending the short, crisp curls tossing over her wrinkled, wizen face. "She has been here more than a year, now?"

"Yes."

"How did she happen to come, in the first place? I've often wondered, but never quite liked to ask. I have heard some say that Mr. Devonshire picked her up in some queer, out-of-the-way place, and brought her here. It isn't true, is it?"

"Hush! She is coming this way—she will hear you! Yes, Miss Tempy,"—in a louder tone, for Magdalen was close beside her—"I have really read the book, and I but tell you my honest convictions, when I say that it is a wonderful book, a wonderful book!"

CHAPTER II.

THE RIVAL SUITORS.

It would have been a pleasant scene for a stranger to look in upon, everything seemed so cosy and comfortable. There was nothing of the froth and sparkle and jam of heated drawing-rooms in the city, where one is bound to receive her "dear five hundred," whether she has accommodations for so many or not. Instead, the rooms were cool and fragrant, the guests few—the *creme de la creme* of Linden-Car society. The soft shimmer of lamp-light stole through the odorous air, which was forever athrob with soft, murmurous music. Everything seemed to be in precisely its proper place, and all was moving on harmoniously.

"There was nobody like Mrs. Ingestre for getting up a nice little reunion," was repeated more than once, among the guests that evening.

Maud glided about from room to room, assisting her mother in her duties as hostess, and striving to make everybody feel happy and at ease. She had never looked more lovely than she did that night, with only a knot or two of flowers to relieve the mist-like whiteness of her drapery, a soft color flaming into her cheeks, and a happy glow lighting her eyes. Perhaps the knowledge that a pair of earnest grey orbs, those of Earl Devonshire, were watching her every movement with a deep and tender interest, went far toward making up her enjoyment of the hour.

At last, she stood in the embrasure of one of the windows, the voluminous curtains dropping between her and the noise and glare of the room, looking quietly out upon

the landscape, which was now bathed in a flood of mellow light, for the moon was at its full. The scene seemed to correspond exactly with her mood, it was so unutterably calm and tranquil.

Suddenly the moonlight left a shadow darkening along the floor of the piazza. A quick step came striding toward her, and a hand was outheld.

“I was looking for you,” said an eager voice. “Come into the garden, Maud, for this is not a ‘black-bat night’ at all. Just notice how brightly the moon is shining.”

At first she had drawn back, with something like a shiver, but finally she stepped out upon the piazza. She had reasons for not being over and above partial to the society of this man, Leonard Harding, who had addressed her thus familiarly; but then he was their guest, and must be treated with courtesy, at least.

“What did you wish, Mr. Harding?” she asked, quietly, standing by his side, in the moonlight.

“I have something to say to you, Maud—something that had much better be said to-night. The garden seems deserted. Come down this walk, and I will tell you as we go.”

He tried to lead her on, but she drew back rather haughtily.

“Really, you must excuse me, Mr. Harding. I have my guests to look after. However, I will linger here a moment, if there is anything I ought to know immediately.”

The man bit his lip, frowningly.

“It is strange that you should not be more ready to oblige me,” he said, repressing his rising anger. “But I am sure you can guess what I have to say; it is only to re-iterate my declaration of the other night, and to tell you that I love you, *love* you, Maud Ingestre!”

His voice was hoarse with passion, but the girl shrank

away from him, with a gesture of something like repugnance.

“I am surprised at you, sir!” she exclaimed, with some hauteur. “You know very well that this is a forbidden topic between us. You have already received the answer to your suit, and know that I can only esteem you as a friend. Then why do you still persist in persecuting me with unwelcome attentions?”

He caught her hand, humbly, deprecatingly.

“My great love must plead for me. You have had more time for reflection since I spoke with you last, and I hoped that you might have arrived at a different conclusion. But I would not cause you pain or trouble. I will be forever silent rather than do that.”

“I am more sorry than I can say for what has happened,” she returned, in a softened tone. “If you will it so, we can still be warm, true friends, Mr. Harding, but nothing more. I can never care for you as you wish.”

She turned away with a look of regret upon her face, and went slowly back to the parlor again. Leonard Harding remained a few moments longer pacing back and forth the length of the piazza, his hands clenched, his teeth set hard, as if in a paroxysm of suppressed fury.

Finally, he turned to follow her, and was met in the doorway by Magdalen Duprez. She was a little startled at meeting him face to face there, but finally glanced somewhat significantly at his white lips.

“The lion has been raging internally, and is ready to tear himself,” she said, meaningly. “But where is the use of getting into a passion? It is your calm, collected men who always accomplish most. You ought to remember that, Leonard Harding.”

He looked at her in some surprise.

“What do you know of me or my feeling, Miss Duprez?” he asked.

She smiled.

“The veriest child might read your secret, and I am not blind or an imbecile. Sometimes I almost wish I were the latter. It would save me from realizing some rather harsh truths. Look yonder, will you?” and she pointed to the extreme left of the large parlor, where aunt Barbara and Miss Tempy were plainly visible through the open doorway.

“Well?” he uttered, impatiently.

“That’s the old maid’s retreat, and Miss Barbara Dean is prime minister. There is nothing happens here that they do not see. Look! they are watching us now. One would think these shrubs would shelter us from their observation, but they do not. They have eyes that see through everything. They are talking about us, and they shall have something to feed their gossip with.”

Suiting the action to the word, she struck an attitude so coquettish, that the young man could not help smiling.

“What do you think they are saying now, Miss Duprez?”

“Why, they are running over the gamut of our demerits, to be sure. Miss Dean is a crafty old maid, and does not love your humble servant any too well. It is fortunate for me that she has not succeeded in impressing Mrs. Ingestre or Maud with her sentiments. If she had, I should be utterly miserable.”

He looked her steadily in the face a moment. He had often met this fascinating woman, but somehow she had never attracted him as she had done most others. Perhaps his love for Maud would account for this, or it is possible he understood her real nature better than most did. At any rate, he had always kept rather aloof. Now he was

really surprised at the singularity of her words and manner. She was certainly foolhardy to trust him in this way, he thought.

“Why are you saying this to me?” he asked.

“Because I think we have played at cross purposes quite long enough.” And she looked straight into his eyes. “And because”—here her voice took a lower tone—“because I think we might help each other, could we but come to an understanding.”

There was no questioning her meaning now. She was making it manifest enough.

“Of course I wonder at your infatuation for Maud Ingestre,” she went on. “However, there is no accounting for whims. Believe it or not, every Bottom is sure to find some Titania to ‘stroke his amiable ears.’ Though a nonentity, she has managed to bewitch other men beside yourself. Let me cite Earl Devonshire, for instance.”

Leonard laughed sarcastically.

“Stay,” he cried. “A light breaks in upon me! I was just wondering at your depreciation of the fairest of her sex, and was setting it down to womanly jealousy. But the flash of your eyes, when you mentioned Earl Devonshire’s name, has let me into the real secret.”

Magdalen smiled, still provokingly cool.

“You are very discerning,” she said, calmly, “but be sure that you read the signs aright. Even a person of your discrimination, might be mistaken, you know. But a truce to this idle talk—you mean to marry Maud Ingestre? Possibly I might help you toward accomplishing your object.”

She stood before him unmoved, as dazzling and bewildering in her wondrous beauty as she had ever been. She was as unreadable as the Sphinx. He did not understand her—he could not. She baffled all his powers of penetration.

“How?” he asked, rather hoarsely.

She unclosed her lips to speak, but Mrs. Ingestre passed that way just then, pausing near them at the open window. Magdalen signed for him to be quiet.

“Are you not tired of admiring the moonlight, Mr. Harding?” she asked, abruptly. “Come, let us return to the parlor.”

She took his arm, and they entered the lighted room together, pausing to exchange a gay word or two with Mrs. Ingestre, as they went on. She was not to suspect the character of the conversation which they had just been holding.

They found Maud at the other end of the parlor, just rising from a game at chess with Colonel Lennox, an old, scarred veteran, who had nothing but his honorable name to recommend him.

“You dear, generous soul!” whispered Magdalen, softly. “I thought you did not like chess.”

“Nor did I,” returned Maud; “but Colonel Lennox could not find anybody else to play with him, and so I thought to try my skill.” And then, turning to the Colonel, with a pleasant smile, “I think, sir, you must have used more strategy in real warfare, or you would have made but a poor soldier. You did not allow your enemies to take the advantage of you as I have done.”

“That is easily accounted for, Miss Maud,” replied the old warrior, gallantly. “I never met with so formidable an adversary, for with you, I had two points to guard against all the while—your skill as a player, and the battery of your bright eyes.”

Maud blushing took up the chessmen once more.

“Stay,” she said. “You deserve to be beaten again, for attempting so daring a compliment. And I give you

fair warning at the outset, that I shall show no quarter, this time."

Maud played skillfully, but she knew Leonard Harding's eyes were upon her, and that thought seemed to make her nervous, for her hand shook a little as it fluttered among the chessmen. She was glad when the game was through, and she felt at liberty to withdraw.

She stole through the hall to the library, which was quite at the other end of the house, only pausing to catch a breath of the cool evening air from an open window, as she passed. She had expected to find the library deserted, but Earl Devonshire was sitting by the table, with an open book before him, when she entered. He held out his hand to her, with a frank, cheerful smile.

"I shall soon think my wishes are potent, Miss Ingestre," he said. "I had just sent one after you and here you come in answer to it."

"I was not aware that the library was occupied, or I should not have intruded," she stammered, in some confusion.

"It strikes me that you are misconstruing the meaning of that word 'intrude.' To intrude is to come where you are not welcome. You have not done that, Maud."

He spoke gravely and earnestly, looking down into her blushing face. It was the first time he had ever spoken to her thus familiarly, ever called her by her first name, Maud. The slow, tender way in which his lips lingered over the word, told the whole story.

"You know that you could never come unwelcome into my presence, Maud," he went on, clasping her hand in a warm, eager pressure. "It is the wish of my life to always have you with me—to claim you as the other half of myself—my wife!"

His tones never relaxed their grave seriousness though his

fingers quivered over her own, and his hot breath fanned her cheek. Those tones thrilled through her whole being, as those of mortal had never done before.

“My love for you has been growing ever since I knew you first. I am sure I have studied your character and disposition well, and I have found in you the perfection of my ideal of what true womanhood should be. It would be the height of bliss to claim you as my own. May I hope to do that, Maud?”

He had spoken earnestly, frankly. It was no time for maiden coyness or diffidence. His honest, simple avowal was deserving of a candid answer.

“You may. I do love you, Earl,” she said, in a soft whisper, lifting her eyes for a second to his own, and then dropping them suddenly to the floor, while a faint scarlet flushed over her face.

This simple avowal seemed to be all he cared for. He drew her to him, and held her there for single a instant, so that her heart beat fast and deliriously against his own, and then let her go, looking down at her, proud and smiling.

He detained her but a moment longer, merely to draw a circlet of gold from his pocket-book, and place it upon her finger.

“It was my mother’s ring,” he said, half sadly. “It has been in our family for years, and you will find our seal upon it. To but one person in the whole world would I part with it—to my betrothed wife.”

Maud received it as it had been given, as a sacred pledge of their affection for each other. Then he led her to the door, and they parted.

CHAPTER III.

A WOMAN'S HEART.

IT was a singular love story to which the girl had just listened—singular only from the manner in which it had been told, for we all know that the story itself is as old as time. But it was like Earl Devonshire, for all the world—straightforward, earnest, and told in calm, sincere tones. He was not one to deal in foolish rhapsodies; neither did he seek to detain her after having received the assurance of her regard. It was not a time for that. He recognized the rights of her other guests, and did not seek to infringe upon them.

Maud stole softly out, thinking to go directly to her room, for she wanted a moment in which to collect herself, before mingling once more with the gay throng below. She was afraid of her tell-tale face, just then, if the truth must be told.

In crossing the hall, she met Magdalen, who was going toward the library. She would gladly have avoided her, but they were nearly face to face before she heard her step.

“How lovely you are looking to-night, Maud?” Miss Duprez stopped to say. “I wonder where you stole that charming color—you are blooming as a Hebe!”

She lifted her black eyes to the girl's face, in sudden, half-suspicious scrutiny. Maud turned from her gaze, involuntarily, but in a moment had rallied herself.

“If I am a Hebe, what shall we call you?” asked she. “The royal Juno, or a priestess of the sun?”

Magdalen laughed.

“Do not give me too important a role; you know I could never sustain it. But your guests are waiting, fair Hebe, and I will not detain you.”

She raised Maud's hand with mock deference, and raised it to her lips. Something glittered in the lamplight upon one of the white, taper fingers. Her keen eyes caught it, and remained fixed upon it for a single instant, as if spell-bound there. Then she dropped the hand suddenly.

“Adieu,” she said, gayly. “Juno was a greater goddess than Hebe, so I shall not kiss your hand, after all. I must try and sustain my role, you know.”

She smiled again, sweeping grandly on to the library, as if she meant to borrow the bearing, as well as the name of the fabled goddess.

But the meeting with Maud had prepared her to go through with what was to follow. It had made her mistress of her position, and given her time to collect her forces as best she might. She paused but a moment outside the library door, and then went in, drawing her breath hard, once or twice, between her shut teeth. Mr. Devonshire was standing at one of the low windows, looking out, but he immediately came forward, as she entered the apartment.

“A thousand pardons!” she cried, affecting a start, as her eyes fell upon him. “I imagined the library was quite deserted.”

She had gone there on purpose to meet this very person.

“You are welcome, at all events, Miss Magdalen.”

“So you say, being too gallant to confess to anything else. But I wonder if you have been spending all your evening mewed up in this quiet place? You must have enjoyed yourself!”

“I have,” he replied, seriously. “Indeed, this has been the happiest evening of my life, without exception.”

She was silent a moment, looking at him a little curiously. Perhaps she was also revolving her own position in her mind. At any rate, she determined to strike a direct blow in her next remark. She knew he had a revelation to make to her, and now meant to take the confession out of his mouth. It would seem less as if she had more than a friend's interest in the man beside her.

"Indeed!" she began, with a meaning smile. "The mystery begins to clear itself. I wonder that I had not mistrusted sooner. I met Maud in the hall, just now, blushing like some June rose. Has she been the companion of your exile?"

"Yes." He spoke frankly, looking her full in the face. "I thought, a long time since, you had suspected my secret. I would gladly have told you sooner where my affections have been bestowed, but you never seemed to give me an opportunity. We are such old friends, that I knew you would rejoice in my happiness."

"Of course, Mr. Devonshire. But you would hardly have kept your secret so well, had I not felt pretty thoroughly convinced in my own mind that Leonard Harding was the favored individual with our brown-haired Maud. What absurd mistakes people will sometimes make!"

"It is strange that you should have made one of that kind, Magdalen. Mr. Harding is not a person Maud could ever especially fancy. It must be you are not very deep in her confidence."

"Oh, no!" affecting deeper seriousness. "I suppose it is all my fault, though. You know I was always very self-sufficient and reserved, myself. That may have kept Maud at a distance. Besides, she has other confidants—her mother and Miss Dean."

He seemed to take but very little notice of her reply. Perhaps he did not hear it, even.

“I have long felt this love for her growing in my heart, but it has never been confessed until to-night. I cared for her, though, long before so much was confessed in words. I wished to tell you of this, Magdalen, because of the past, in which we have been like brother and sister to each other. You hold a place second to Maud’s alone, in my heart!”

He had approached and taken her hand. She turned her face suddenly. Why need he have spoken just then of that past, of which the memory, even, was treasured in her heart at that very moment, as something so inestimably precious? For a single instant her lip quivered, and she grew pale; but she had too much at stake to betray herself.

“I hope you will be happy, Earl,” she said, gliding silently by the “brotherly” attachment of which he had spoken. “I am sure you will be, for Maud is a noble woman. But come, you have made me father-confessor, and now for a penance I shall take you back to the parlor with me.”

She glided quickly out at the door, motioning for him to follow, in her gayest and most imperious manner. He did so, though rather reluctantly. He would gladly have said more to her of his new-found happiness, as Magdalen was well aware, but she felt in no mood to listen. So she led him on, chatting gayly and carelessly as they went. To have looked at her sparkling face, no one would ever have suspected all the mad rage and fury that was even then seething in her heart.

Aunt Barbara had left the “old maid’s retreat,” when they entered the parlor, and was turning over a book of engravings at the centre-table. She looked up at them a little uneasily, as Magdalen was not slow in observing.

“The old witch is afraid I am interfering with the plans of her darling,” she muttered, under her breath, and

straightway threw as much *empressment* as she was able into her manner toward Mr. Devonshire, for the mere gratification of annoying Aunt Barbara, whom she most cordially detested.

But she could not play at this game for any length of time, for her companion soon spied Maud, and hastened to her side, with a half-muttered apology to Magdalen, as he left her; and the latter had the satisfaction of seeing the girl's cheeks flush and her eyes light up, as he approached, and of knowing, moreover, from his manner, that he had been as observant as herself of these unmistakable evidences of the light in which Maud now held him. Aunt Barbara had also been on the alert, and now looked somewhat relieved, for she more than mistrusted the sentiments with which her niece had learned to regard Mr. Devonshire.

After that, Magdalen Duprez was unnaturally gay and brilliant. It was the only way in which she could conceal the misery that seemed to be killing her by degrees, as it were. She tried to find Mr. Harding, to tell him of the engagement between Mr. Devonshire and Maud, but he was nowhere to be seen, and finally, in answer to the inquiries she ventured upon, one told her that he had left some time before, having been sent for by some of his patients.

It would have been a relief to have had a long conversation with him, in which she could have found an escape-valve for her pent-up emotions; but that gratification was denied her. Therefore she still kept them hidden deep within her turbulent heart, wondering, sometimes when they were fiercest, why she did not go mad then and there, and gnash her teeth, and tear at the ebon masses of her hair. She felt wicked enough to do that, or anything else that was desperate.

She was heartily glad when the last guest had gone, and the house sank into quiet. Then, for more than an hour,

she lay prone upon the floor in her own room, with the key securely turned against all intruders, fighting with the sharp pain that seemed tearing at her vitals. As matters were, she was glad to lie there in the night and darkness—she knew it would make her braver and stronger to meet the future ; or, if not stronger, at least more callous, and above all, more entirely mistress of herself. And this was what she wanted, and determined to obtain—self-command !

She descended to the breakfast-room the next morning, looking jaded and pale, and feeling a thousand times more miserable than she looked. Nor did the sight of Maud's rosy and smiling face, as she sat opposite, serve as a balm for the wretchedness she could not wholly conceal.

“What is the matter, Magdalen ?” asked Mrs. Ingestre, from behind the tea-urn, her voice betraying real solicitude. “Are you quite well, this morning ?”

“Quite, thank you, madam, with the exception of a slight headache, which is not worth minding. It will wear off soon, I think.”

Miss Dean was seated at Mrs. Ingestre's right hand. She turned suddenly, eying Magdalen with some curiosity.

“I suppose you attribute it entirely to late hours, and last night's dissipation,” she said, very quietly.

“Certainly ; that seems the most probable explanation.”

“Perhaps it does,” speaking with some significance ; “but I had always thought you remarkably exempt from the effect of late hours. You generally come out as fresh and rosy as Maud has done. Did you ever see her looking more blooming ?”

Miss Dean's manner was quiet enough ; but there was a sparkle in her eyes that spoke to Magdalen of a deeper meaning than the words themselves conveyed. She understood it and nerved herself instantly for the conflict, if there was to be one.

“She is irresistible, as usual. It is useless to praise Maud to you or Mrs. Ingestre. She seems happy, and must have enjoyed herself last evening more than I did.”

Maud blushed until her face was rosier than ever.

“I did have a very pleasant time,” she said. “It was the most delightful company I have met with for a long time.”

Miss Dean nibbled her waffle, looking across the table at Magdalen. The latter seemed to take this look as a sort of malicious defiance, for she immediately became gay and talkative, meeting Aunt Barbara’s keen scrutiny without flinching, skillfully parrying her covert thrusts so that her sharpest words—for she seemed inclined to be more than usually severe with Magdalen this morning—rattled about her ears as harmless and futile as spent balls. It was a kind of skirmishing in which the elder lady soon felt herself at a disadvantage and was glad to abandon, finally, for she clearly saw that she was likely to be worsted.

As they arose from the table, Mrs. Ingestre drew Magdalen into her own dressing-room, placing a chair for her at one of the windows.

“I have a word to say to you, my dear,” she began, a little nervously, “something that you must know sooner or later, and I can tell you better than Maud could.”

She paused, as if at a loss.

“Well, madam?” Magdalen crossed her hands in her lap, the very picture of meek and quiet attention.

“You have been so long a member of our household that you quite seem like one of the family,” Mrs. Ingestre went on after a pause. “Indeed, I have come to regard you almost in the light of a second daughter. May I speak plainly to you, as I would to a child of my own?”

“Certainly. I shall be glad to have you do so,” elevating her eyebrows the least bit in the world.

“It is about—about Earl Devonshire!” Mrs. Ingestre spoke now with considerable effort. “I have been afraid, sometimes, that you cared more for him than you ought! That he was dearer to you than a mere friend!”

Magdalen got up slowly, crossing over and kneeling beside Mrs. Ingestre’s chair.

“I see how it is,” she said, quietly. “You have thought that I loved him! I do, but only as a benefactor, a very dear friend. He has done so much for me, you know. He was my friend before I came here to Thornycroft Grange—my friend when I could claim but very few! I owe everything to him, even the privilege of living here with you. He is my brother, and as such I care for him. I could not love an own brother better.”

“Mrs. Ingestre breathed a sigh of relief.

“I am glad it is no different, and now I will tell you why, Magdalen. Maud came to me this morning to tell me of a new happiness that had crowned her life. She and Earl love each other—they came to an understanding last night. I was really afraid that you cared for him in the same way. I should not like to see you and Maud rivals, you know. That is why I have spoken to you.”

Magdalen was silent a moment. When she finally spoke, her tone was half-sarcastic.

“I suppose we are indebted to Miss Dean for the origination of such an absurd idea,” she said, energetically. “Old maids are wonderfully far-seeing in such matters, though I really wonder that a person of Miss Dean’s abilities should not be gifted with a more subtle instinct of penetration.”

She arose, while speaking, sweeping across the room in her old, haughty manner.

“To be sure, Barbara did first suggest the suspicion,” admitted Mrs. Ingestre, with some hesitation, “but it was with the best of motives. We were discussing it this

morning, early, Barbara, Maud and I. I could not but give credence to her suspicion, when you came down to the breakfast table, looking so ill. I am very glad we were both mistaken."

"I only regret that you should ever have thought of anything of the sort," said Magdalen, hurriedly, her back to the light. "I have long mistrusted where Earl's affections were bestowed. I was not so sure of Maud. Mr. Harding, the young surgeon, has been extremely attentive to her of late, you know."

"An attention which my daughter has always resented, and would gladly have had withdrawn," exclaimed Mrs. Ingestre, quickly. "But that is neither here nor there. She and Earl are now engaged, and with my perfect approval, also!"

"I wish them every imaginable happiness. But if this is all you have to communicate, I will now withdraw. My headache is really worse, instead of better, and I wish to retire to my own room."

"Stay! Let me ring for Jenny. She shall fix you something to take for it—and I will sit by you and bathe your head, if you will lie down."

Magdalen pulled her hand away from the bell-rope, rather impatiently.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Ingestre. I am better as I am, than I should be under Jenny's dosings. I only want a little rest and quiet."

She passed out quickly, as if resolved to end the conference there, bowing a very courteous adieu to Mrs. Ingestre, as she went.

"The senseless idiots!" she muttered with flashing eyes, as she crossed the passage to her own room. "They would trample my heart in the dust as remorselessly as that of some dog cringing at their feet! But it is all for that

baby-faced Maud! Nothing is too good for her. My Lady Ingestre would gladly send me on a pilgrimage to Mecca, barefoot and penniless, if she could serve the interests of her delectable daughter by so doing. But *n'importe!* If they think I am going to submit quietly, they are very much mistaken in Magdalen Duprez!"

A sneering smile played about her red lips. On entering her own apartment she paced back and forth across it for a few moments, as if in earnest thought, but finally seated herself at the open desk, and dashed off a few hasty lines. These she carefully folded and sealed, and then arose and pulled the bell-rope. The servant who appeared in answer to the summons was Lusette, a gay, dashing, French woman, who held the position of waiting-maid to Maude and Magdalen.

"So it is really you, Lusette?" she asked, looking around, as the girl made her appearance. "I am glad, for had it been one of the other servants, I should surely have sent for you."

"I want a faithful messenger to go on an errand for me. I must have some one I can trust—some one who will do my errand, and keep a quiet tongue in her head."

"You know that I will do just as you tell me, mam'selle; and I can keep a secret, too."

Magdalen looked the girl straight in the face a moment, as if trying to intimidate her.

"It will be well if you do, Lusette," she said, impressively. "Otherwise I might consider it my duty to bring up some old matters that you might not care to have reach Mrs. Ingestre's ears. You are probably well aware to what I refer."

Lusette turned pale.

"Don't say another word, Mam'selle!" she cried, im-

ploringly. "You shall find me devoted to your interest. I will do whatever you wish."

"See that you do, Lusette, and all will go well with you. I have no desire to work you ill. All I wish of you now is, to take this letter to Mr. Harding. Steal out quietly, so that no one in this house will know of your errand."

Lusette took the letter.

"I will go *directement*," she said glibly, gliding back to her broken French, now that she was more at ease.

Magdalen watched her departure with a covert smile upon her lips. Here was at least one being whom she had under her thumb, and now she meant to keep her there. This flashy French girl would make a very useful tool, on occasion.

In less than an hour Lusette was back again, bringing the same letter she had taken away.

"What is the trouble? Why did you not leave my note?" Magdalen asked, in some trepidation.

"I thought you might prefer to keep it by you, mam'selle. Monsieur Harding is away, and will not be back again until Tuesday next. He was called away on some important business early this morning. I think he has gone to New York."

Magdalen uttered an exclamation of dismay. This note contained a request for an immediate interview. Her scheming mind needed the active co-operation of his. Now everything must be deferred, and she must bear in silence still longer the misery that was tearing at her heart.

"Vexatious!" she muttered, her brow wrinkling into an angry frown. And then, suddenly seeming to recollect the presence of the maid, she resumed, more calmly, "That will do, Lusette. You may go now. I am glad, though, that you brought back the letter instead of leaving it at Mr. Harding's office."

CHAPTER IV.

MAGDALEN MAKES A CALL.

A FEW days slipped by, "velvet shod," at Thornycroft Grange. Maud was strangely, deliriously happy. The feeling of loving and being loved was still something very new and strange to her guileless heart. There seemed a deep, ecstatic joy in the bare idea. She was unceasingly glad and thankful for this unspeakable bliss. Even though her young life should now be suddenly overclouded forever, she felt that she could earnestly praise God for the cup of rare delight that had once been held to her lips for her to quaff her fill, and that she could better and more bravely meet and bear every ill of the future, on account of it! She had loved, and been beloved! Wondrous and intoxicating thought!

Earl Devonshire came nearly every day to Thornycroft Grange, and Maud honestly thought she discovered some new beauty and nobility of mind or character, at every visit. She could hardly realize that this grand, princely man could stoop from the high pedestal to which her admiration had raised him, to mate with such as she. Her great passion made her strangely humble. She felt herself to be a weak, foolish girl, while he was the greatest and most noble of men.

The subject of the engagement was discussed more than once in the family conclave, for, though reserved and reticent toward outsiders, there was a charming frankness and candor among the members of this happy household. Magdalen was rarely present at such discussions, and then

only when she had interrupted one of them by coming in unexpectedly, for they were never commenced in her presence, which at such times always threw a restraint over the conversation. Nevertheless, she knew enough of the progress of affairs to feel convinced that the engagement was fully consummated, and that it was entirely agreeable to all parties concerned.

When Mr. Devonshire called of an evening, Magdalen managed to see as much of his society as was possible. She exerted herself as she had never done before, brought to bear all the dazzling array of her bewildering charms, even tried the effect of covert sneers against Maud and Leonard Harding, but all to no avail. Earl was utterly unmoved. He would laugh at her insinuations, treating them as some idle jest, and turn from her intoxicating beauty to contemplate the blushing loveliness of Maud Ingestre with a sigh of relief and rapture. His whole soul seemed bound up in this pure, sweet girl, and at such times the infuriated woman could have torn out her own heart, in her unavailing rage and despair.

Mrs. Ingestre and Maud knew nothing of this, or if they had suspected anything at first, their fears were now entirely allayed, and they believed that Magdalen took only a sisterly interest in Earl's welfare. But not so with Miss Barbara Dean. She had passed through quite an experience in her eventful life had had her eyes thoroughly opened, and could see things more nearly in their true light, and so fully realized the game that Magdalen was playing.

"Miss Magdalen, let me warn you that you are not wise," she said one evening, when Miss Duprez had manifested more evidently than usual her desire to monopolize the attentions of Mr. Devonshire.

"Indeed, you display anything but wisdom," her tone

provokingly cool. "You ought not to waste your strength in a futile struggle after the golden apples of the Hesperides when you cannot help but see how securely they are kept beyond your reach."

They were standing near the open window, while Mrs. Ingestre, Earl and Maud were grouped about the piano at the other end of the apartment. Magdalen suddenly turned her back upon them, leaning forward as if to look from the window, but her face glowed with the white heat of smothered passion.

"Thank you, Miss Dean, for the very *friendly* interest which you seem to take in my welfare," she returned, rather fiercely. "I shall be likely to do better in future, since I have an Hecuba to rail at me, and set me right!"

She had unconsciously raised her voice in the fierce heat that consumed her. Aunt Barbara only smiled at the covert thrust. She was about to reply, when Mrs. Ingestre called out pleasantly, from her station by the piano:

"My dear Magdalen, what have you and Barbara found to quarrel about now?"

"Not much, Mrs. Ingestre—only a question in mythology," Magdalen returned sweetly. "I think I have finally settled it to Miss Dean's satisfaction."

Aunt Barbara smiled again, while Mr. Devonshire, who stood nearest to them, of the three grouped about the piano, looked suddenly at Magdalen, with a curious light in his eyes. She saw it, and wondered with considerable secret uneasiness, if he could have possibly overheard what they had been saying.

Thus the days sped on, and Tuesday finally came around. Lusette had discovered by some means that Mr. Harding was expected to return on the twelve o'clock train, and she reported as much to Magdalen. The latter felt that she must see him immediately, and make him ac-

quainted with the progress of affairs since his departure. Her extreme restlessness would not admit of delay, or the assignment of some secure place for meeting. Therefore, though not without many doubts as to the prudence of the step, she resolved to visit him at his office.

It was near two o'clock in the afternoon—the usual dinner-hour at Thornycroft Grange, but Magdalen excused herself, under the plea of indisposition, and waited quietly in her room until after the bell had sounded, and she heard Mrs. Ingestre and Maud descend to the drawing-room. Then she hastily wrapped a cloak about her, muffling a thick veil over her face, and stole carefully down-stairs, and out at a side door, speeding along a by-path that led through the fields of Thornycroft Grange to the village, thinking she would be less likely to be met and recognized there, than in the more frequented highway.

She found Mr. Harding in and alone, when she reached his office, which was situated just at the edge of the village. We have said little about this man or his business, heretofore, but now we will be more explicit. He was a singular character, and one which very few people fully understood—perhaps no one among his acquaintances at Linden-Car. They only knew that he was handsome, polished and witty, and exceedingly agreeable whenever he chose to make himself so. But this was not often, and he could be the most imperious and domineering of men, on occasion. Therefore he was rather feared and dreaded than loved among the people of Linden-Car, where he had been located nearly a year.

He was a surgeon by profession, but moved in the first circles of the village, being known to have come of a good family. He appeared to be a man of means, and made his profession merely nominal, though always ready to attend whatever came under his care. He was one of those

clever fellows who can turn their hand to anything, and was often called in, in the place of one of the practicing physicians, in cases of sudden illness which did not promise to become too serious. In this way he had won for himself quite a reputation.

Most men have their hobbies; Leonard Harding had his—chemistry. Of this science, he was an indefatigable student, though what, if any, good came from his constant trials of experiments with his chemicals, no one but himself really knew. His office looked more like a laboratory than anything else, and even contained a small furnace and an alembic, besides much valuable and costly apparatus. He was certainly more than an amateur in the science of which he appeared to be so fond, though whether he had ever turned it to practical utility was best known to himself.

He was seated at the table, looking over a pile of letters that had accumulated in his absence, when Magdalen Duprez knocked at the office door. It was opened by black Jake, a negro boy kept to run errands and take care of the rooms—opened just far enough to show his woolly pate, thrust for a single instant into the crevice thus made, and then suffered to slam back into her face.

“Good lor’, Massa Hardun, ef it ain’t a woman!” he exclaimed, turning to the surgeon, and rolling up his eyes. “Dis am de second one what has come pokin’ round dese premises within de week! What on earth brings dem here am more dan dis nig can tell, no how!”

His master looked up frowningly from the open letter before him.

“Don’t stand there, you blockhead!” he exclaimed, “but invite her in.”

Jake now flung the door wide open, and stood there grinning from ear to ear.

“Massa Hardum says you to please walk right in, missus,” he said, with the most obsequious of bows. “Never you mind dat nasty litter, nor all dem are chemicums, but come right along. You’s welcome, perfectly welcome, you is.”

He placed a chair for her, with another bow and a grin, carefully dusting it, in the first place, with his pocket-handkerchief. Mr. Harding cast a single scrutinizing glance at his visitor, and then said, hastily:

“There, you may go now, Jake. My chambers will certainly need dusting and airing, after having been closed so long. See that you do it well, too!”

Jake bowed with another broad grin, and bobbed out at the back entrance, muttering as he went. He had scarcely disappeared, when Dr. Harding arose suddenly and crossed over to his visitor’s side, hastily taking her hand.

“To what am I indebted for this visit, Miss Duprez?” he asked.

“Then you know me?” and she flung back her veil with an attempt at a smile. “I had hoped my disguise would have proven more effectual.”

“The attempt was quite thrown away, if it was made for my benefit. I am not easily deceived.”

“Nor did I wish to deceive you. I only assumed it because I did not know whom I might encounter here. I felt I must come to you at once. I knew you were expected home in the twelve o’clock train.”

“What have you got to say?” he asked.

“Have you the leisure to listen?”

“Yes. I took an early dinner, and have nothing but these letters to busy myself with, just now. I hope you will speak freely.”

His tone was calm, slightly cool. He seemed very dif-

ferent from what he had been that night at Thornycroft Grange. "Could it be that he was conquering his useless love for Maud?" Magdalen asked herself, with a sudden fear. She resolved to test the matter.

"I am not sure that you will care to listen," she said, slowly. "I came to tell you of Maud Ingestre."

"What of her?" he asked, rather hoarsely.

"Have you not heard!"

"I have heard nothing since the night of the party." He spoke eagerly now. "You will remember that I was called away before it was through; I left for New York early the next morning. I have seen nobody but Jake and my housekeeper since returning home. Speak out. What has happened? What have you come to tell me?"

He clutched at her sleeve nervously, his keen eyes burning her face like coals. She drew slightly away from him.

"I told you, that night at Thornycroft Grange, that I might help you to win Maud Ingestre for your wife," she returned, with relentless calmness, "but matters had progressed further than I was then aware. She is now betrothed to Earl Devonshire!"

He started forward with an oath, a sudden passion flaming into his face. For a moment he stood there, grinding his teeth impotently, but only for a moment. Then he sunk into the nearest chair, calm and unmoved once more outwardly.

"I suppose you have told me the truth, Magdalen, but this news is no sweeter to me than to yourself. I have a consolation there;" and he laughed sarcastically. "I don't know that I need to be surprised in the least, moreover, as it is just what I have been expecting."

Magdalen eyed him silently, as he sat there with one hand supporting his handsome head. Somehow the sight

of his calmness maddened her. She had expected to see him rage and tear, and vent curses on the man who had supplanted him.

“Are you going to suffer things to go on in this way?” she asked, fiercely. “Will you sit quietly by, and see the hope of your life frustrated?”

He looked quietly into her face, and smiled.

“I am only following your advice of the other night, my dear Miss Duprez. I remember it if you, my mentor, do not. What was it you said about calm, collected men, and getting into a passion? You see I am calm, collected, a perfect master of my own emotions. But let me whisper one word in your ear. Sooner than see Maud the bride of Earl Devonshire, I would wade through the heart’s blood of them both, and drain my own veins to swell the crimson flood.”

He smiled again, but a light had crept into his eyes from which she shrunk back appalled. For the first time, she realized how terribly in earnest he was, how much he would sacrifice or dare to accomplish his fell purpose. From that moment she had no further fears for him.

“Something must be done, but I know not what,” she said, after a pause. “If matters run on in this way much longer, I shall surely go mad. But I have been racking my brain in vain for any method that is likely to bring about a change. As a last resort, I have come to you.”

He was silent for some moments, buried in deep thought. Finally he looked up at her.

“You are very beautiful, Magdalen Duprez,” he said, slowly. “I do not say it to flatter you, but merely mention it as a fact. You ought to be able to turn that beauty to account. It is strange you have never succeeded in making an impression upon Earl Devonshire. I am sure he is impressible enough.”

She faced him suddenly, her black eyes glowing with a dangerous fire.

“You are treading on forbidden ground, Mr. Harding,” she said, excitedly. “I have done with you as I have never done with mortal before, put off my mask in your presence, and suffered you to read me as I really am. It is because we need each other, and disguise is worse than folly between us. But there is one subject with which you must never meddle—Mr. Devonshire’s relations with myself!”

“Suffer me to ask you a few questions, and then I will hold my peace. It is better that I should know more of you than I do, if I am to help you, as well as myself. Shall I go on?”

“Ask what you please, and I will use my own discretion about answering.”

“How long have you known Earl Devonshire?”

“For nearly three years. I made his acquaintance in New York. In fact, I suppose I might as well confess the whole truth,” a ranking bitterness in her tone. “He picked me out of the street where I was wandering, destitute, and nearly starved—it does not matter what brought me to that condition. He cared for me with the tenderness of a brother, and found me work, so that I was able to support myself, in part. A little more than a year since, he brought me here to Thornycroft Grange, and placed me with Mrs. Ingestre, whose acquaintance he had formed at Newport, the summer previous. My health seemed failing at the time, and I needed country air and quiet. It ended as you know. He paid my board at first, but finally Mrs. Ingestre took me in as a member of her own family, and refused to receive further remuneration. Earl had enlisted her sympathies for my deserted and orphan condition, and

his recommendation was sufficient. Now, you know the whole story."

"And I hope eventually to take advantage of that knowledge," he said, thoughtfully. "I am glad you have confided so much of your history to me, though I had suspected something of the kind before. It seems very strange, though. In a single year you have worked your way into the most select circles of Linden-Car society, and have become quite a reigning figure, despite your obscure origin."

"Mrs. Ingestre's patronage was the open sesame. Very many take me for the adopted daughter of the house, and of course I am careful that these shall continue to think so. No one outside the family knows my true history, and most people conclude I am a distant relative of Mr. Devonshire, since he has brought me here."

"It is better that they should," he said. "It may help us in our plans. Now I must have time for reflection. In a day or two I will see you again, and acquaint you with the result of my cogitations. We must venture on some bold stroke, if we hope to succeed. Just now I do not see that we can do anything."

Magdalen arose, and drew her cloak about her with an impatient jerk. She could not endure this delay with her blood at such a fever heat. She was about to rejoin something rather sharply when, the passage door suddenly opened, and Jake made his appearance, bearing a letter in his hand. She had just time to drop her veil before he was sufficiently advanced to catch sight of her face.

"I beg ten thousand' pardons, sartain sure, Massa Hardun!" he exclaimed, coming forward. "Dis here bundle doo arrived for you yesterday, but I leaves it in my leetle den up de stairs, and never tinks on it again till dis very minute, dat am de fact ov de case, sartain sure!"

Mr. Harding frowned slightly, but extended his hand for the letter, saying, rather impatiently :

“Remember to keep my letters together another time, Jake. You may go.”

The negro disappeared. The surgeon turned the envelope about, so that his eyes fell upon the superscription, Magdalen watching him closely. Suddenly he started to his feet with a gasping cry. A gray pallor settled slowly over his face, leaving it like the face of the dead. Even his lips grew white. Magdalen went toward him with an exclamation of alarm.

“What is the matter? are you ill, Mr. Harding?” she asked.

He quickly rallied, under her keen scrutiny. In a moment or two he was more composed.

“It is nothing, do not mind me,” he said, with the ghost of a smile. “I am used to it—this terrible pain in my side. It is soon over.”

He put up his hand. Magdalen said nothing, but she was not so easily deceived. She knew that it was not physical pain that distressed him so—it was the sight of that letter! Standing near him, she tried to get a glimpse at it, but he crushed it rather rudely in his hand. She had only time to see that it was directed in a lady’s hand-writing.

“You will have to excuse me this morning, Miss Duprez,” speaking with apparent effort. “I will see you again very soon. Then I hope we shall be able to arrange matters more to our satisfaction.”

He bowed her out, courteously bidding her good-morning, and then carefully locked and closed the door behind her, as also the one leading through the back passage to the rooms where he lodged.

Half an hour later he was bending over a furnace, stirring a few chemicals which were simmering in the alembic,

a glass mask upon his face. His features needed to be covered, for the expression upon them was villainous and wicked in the extreme. He might almost have sat for the head of one of the Gorgons!

CHAPTER V.

THE STRANGE LADY.

LINDEN-CAR was a small and very quiet village, having few visitors with the exception of those who came to spend a brief season with one of the many wealthy families in the neighborhood. As a natural consequence, the two inns of which it boasted, never being overburdened with guests, were not the best of their kind, but simply good, comfortable, wholesale houses, where one was sure of a hearty welcome, a clean bed, and the best that the larder afforded.

The Washington House was by far the more pretentious of the two. This was a large, square, wooden building, weather-beaten and stained by time, where the clapboards were always loose, and the shutters occasionally slamming. A great, lumbering sign-board, on which was daubed a rude caricature intended for Washington's portrait, creaked dismally from the bough of an elm that grew in front, and furnished to the passer-by an evidence that entertainment was to be had there for both man and beast.

Externally, the building was certainly lonesome and dreary-looking enough, but once inside the walls, and presto! you found pleasant halls, clean, spacious rooms, a neatly-laid table, and, best of all, a cordial, motherly soul in Dame Alden, the good Boniface's wife, who would be sure to make you feel easy and at home before you had been five minutes under her hospitable roof! Indeed, it was

she, mainly, who kept up the fallen fortunes of the house, as her husband was an easy, thriftless soul, who would have let everything go to wreck and ruin but for her ceaseless efforts to keep both their heads "above water."

But, to resume the thread of our story, we must go back to the afternoon of the Saturday preceding that Tuesday on which Magdalen had paid her visit to Mr. Harding at his office. It had been a busy day with Dame Alden—indeed, Saturdays were always busy. The chambers had to be dusted and swept, whether any one lodged in them or not, and the halls must be cleaned, for "that shiftless Joshua" was never the neatest or the most careful of men, and sadly tried the poor dame's patience, now and then, with the amount of dirt and litter which he left behind him.

"It seems that we must all have our crosses to bear in this wilderness o' woe," she was wont to say to Mrs. Deacon Jones, her particular crony, who lived just over the way. "I reckon that shiftless Joshua was meant to be my cross! There's no getting along with him. He only cumbers the airth, if I, his wife, who ought to love and honor him, do say it! He jest trots about, makin' me work, and doin' nothing himself. He's kind and good-natured enough, so far as that goes, but oh, *so* shiftless! You've no idea what I have to endure—no idea, Mrs. Jones."

And her trials had been fully as great as usual on this particular Saturday of which we write. But they were nearly over, for the house was swept and garnished from top to bottom, and Joshua had come shuffling in from the stables, and taken his usual seat in one corner of the front porch, to enjoy a quiet smoke there, with no further fear of being routed by duster or broom, when the five o'clock Harrisville coach came dashing up before the door, and

left its single passenger, a lady, upon the steps of the hotel.

Nearly all the strangers who found their way to this quiet village were gentlemen, and it was an exceedingly rare occurrence for a lady to be soliciting the hospitality of the Washington House. Dame Alden was just tucking fresh sprigs of asparagus behind the narrow mirror in the front room, but she dropped everything where she was, with an exclamation of surprise, at the sight of her unexpected guest, and hastened out to meet her.

“Good-mornin’, madam! Will you walk in?” she asked, with a courtesy, as she appeared in the low doorway.

The figure on the steps turned suddenly, and took a step or two forward, throwing back her veil as she did so, thus revealing a pale and rather sad, but very sweet face. The eyes were clear and expressive, the mouth tender and mobile, the features regular. She must once have been very beautiful, but now, though apparently not over twenty-five years of age, looked strangely wan, faded and old, as if she had seen much trouble. She was clad in mourning, and Dame Alden, from this fact, and her sorrowful face, at once took her to be a widow; therefore her motherly heart softened toward her immediately.

“Thank you,” the lady said, in a sweet voice, looking up with a wan smile, in answer to the good dame’s invitation to come in. “I wish to find some good, quiet hotel where I can remain undisturbed for a few days, perhaps longer.”

“Come in, madam, come in,” repeated Dame Alden, with much cordiality. “You won’t find a better place than this, in all Linden-Car, if I do say it! And as for bein’ quiet, there ain’t so much as a mouse stirrin’ about the old shell, except me and my shiftless Joshua, who sits

smokin' his dirty pipe yonder, Susan, my maid, and the stable-boy. Why, you won't know there's a living soul about the place but yourself!"

The lady smiled.

"I think your house will suit," she said, quietly. "Will you please show me a room—a front room on the second floor, if you have it to spare?"

"Lawks, madam, you can take your choice out of all the rooms in the house, if I has to give up my own to accommodate you."

"I shall be satisfied with any comfortable room, provided that it overlooks the street. This small trunk is all the luggage that I have. You will please have it brought up, as soon as I have settled on my quarters."

Dame Alden led the way through the tidy hall, and up one flight of stairs, throwing open the door of her best guest-chamber, with a look of pardonable pride and complacency upon her face.

"Do you think you could be satisfied with this 'ere, madam?" she asked, with a look that said plainly, "You don't know what's what, if you are not!"

It was a spacious chamber, separated from the hall by a narrow ante-room. It looked really elegant, from the scrupulous neatness that pervaded everything. The floor was covered with cool matting, the windows draped with muslin, and the bed, which stood in one corner, at the right of the door, seemed like a great bank of snow, so white and clean did it appear.

"Perfectly!" exclaimed the lady, a glow of pleasure breaking over her face. "It is the pleasantest and most home-like place I have seen for a long time. And," stepping forward, "the view from the window is just what I desire, also."

"I am glad you like it—very glad, Mrs.——"

The landlady paused, with a significant look. A slight flush crept into the guest's face, but was gone in an instant.

“My name is Grant—Mrs. Grant,” she said, quietly.

“Do tell? Why, there are Grants livin' on the hill yonder, just beyond Thornycroft Grange—Charles Grant, and his brother, Gideon. Are they any relation of yours, if I may make bold to ask?”

“Not the slightest. I have no relatives by my name in the country, that I am aware.”

“Do tell. Then you are an utter stranger to the folks here at Linden-Car. I didn't know but what you had come expectin' to meet some old friends here.”

“This is my first visit to your village,” was the brief reply.

“Lawks! Then you don't know anybody? Well, they are folks as is easy to git acquainted with, for the most part, supposin' you should stay here long. Now there's Mrs. Deacon Jones, jist over the way. She has got to runnin' in here just as if it were her own house. You'll know her before you've been here two days.”

Mrs. Grant laid aside her bonnet and shawl, and seated herself by the window, looking out rather wearily. Her face seemed paler and sadder than ever, in the full light that fell upon it.

“What house is that yonder—that large, gray house upon the hill?” she asked, turning suddenly.

“That ere is Thornycroft Grange, one of the handsomest places in the whole town. There has been a mint of money spent on it to make it look pretty and nice. But then, Mrs. Ingestre is as rich as a queen, and she can afford it. Why, she gives away every month of her life, more than all Joshua and I are worth, I do believe! But lawful sakes! you look tuckered e'ena'most to death, and must

want your tea, and I'm standing here gossipin' ! I'll have it sent up directly, Mrs. Grant, or it may be, if Susan is busy, I'll bring it myself."

"Do, I shall be glad to have you," returned Mrs. Grant, who seemed to encourage her hostess' predilection for gossiping. "I expect to be lonely at first, and you will be company for me."

Dame Alden hurried below, with a gratified smile breaking over her motherly face.

"The most civil-spoken lady I've met with this many a day," she said to Susan, while toasting some bread for tea. "Not a bit proud or stuckup, though I know she's a regular born lady, jest like Mrs. Ingestre and Miss Maud. But then, she is so poor and peaked, and so sad lookin' ! We must do all we can, Susan, to cheer her up."

When she carried up the tea and bread, Mrs. Grant was still sitting by the window, just as she had left her, so she wheeled a stand up beside her, and placed the tray upon it.

"There, my dear lady, it will be a heap pleasanter sitting here to sip your tea. You can watch the sunlight, if you choose, as it dies from them hills up yonder, and stays to take a last peep at Thornycroft Grange. It's a nice place, Linden-Car is, and I'm sure you'll learn to like it."

"I presume I may. It does seem very pleasant, and there must be some delightful scenery in the neighborhood."

Dame Alden gossiped on garrulously enough, and Mrs. Grant seemed inclined to extract from her all the information she could, relative to the village and its inhabitants. Finally she pushed her chair back from the stand, having finished her tea, and again gave her undivided attention to the prospect without.

"Who is building that new house at the right of Thorny-

croft Grange, on the eminence in the distance?" she finally asked. "It looks now as if it might be intended for a very elegant residence."

"Oh, yes, madam. It will be ahead of the Grange itself, folks say, though I haven't found time to go up and see it, as yet. It's a stranger that's buildin' that—a friend of the Ingestres. He had not been here long. Perhaps you may have heard of him, Earl Devonshire?"

Mrs. Grant had sat there listening quietly enough, but at the mention of that name, she started suddenly to her feet with the shrill cry, "Just Heaven! is it possible?" Her wan face grew whiter, until it looked like a corpse, her lids drooped, the light died slowly from her eyes, and with a low moan, she tottered, and fell forward into Dame Alden's arms, insensible.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LETTER.

THE good innkeeper's wife, of course, was surprised and a little frightened, at the unexpected occurrence. But she was one who seldom lost her presence of mind, or allowed herself to be much flustered. Therefore, while calling loudly for Susan, she now supported the woman's inanimate form on one stout arm, and began to loosen her dress with the hand that was disengaged. Her curiosity she could repress till another occasion, and did not now suffer it to embarrass her efforts in the least.

Susan came running up-stairs, panting and open-eyed; but she, like her mistress, saw that it was no time for asking questions, so she helped carry the insensible woman to the couch, and then darted below again, in search of re-

storatives. Mrs. Grant soon began to show symptoms of returning consciousness. A few gasping sighs escaped her lips, and after a little, she slowly unclosed her eyes.

“It’s curious, I must say,” muttered Dame Alden, under her breath, relaxing from the vigorous rubbing she had been giving the sufferer’s hands and arms. “I only so much as said Earl Devonshire’s name, and she just gave a screech, and went off as if she’d been shot! Where on airth has she ever known him, I wonder?”

“Was that what made her faint, missus?” asked Susan, in some surprise.

“I reckon it must have been; but it’s curious, very curious. I don’t know what Joshua would say to it. I do hope that woman is what she ought to be.”

She bent over her once more, suppressing a sigh, and shaking her head a little dubiously. Mrs. Grant soon rallied, and raising herself slightly on one elbow, looked about her.

“Where am I?” she asked, feebly.

“Don’t you remember? This am the Washington House, and you came here in the four-o’clock stage.”

“Yes, yes.” And the woman covered her face with her hands, and sank back upon the pillow once more, moaning audibly.

She lay thus for a long time, without speaking, Dame Alden and Susan still hovering around, anxious to do something to render her more comfortable. Finally she looked up again.

“I will not keep you here,” she said. “I shall do very well alone, now. I am only a little weak, and I may possibly be able to take a short nap, if left wholly to myself. I am really grateful to you for your kind care thus far.”

She pressed the landlady’s hand, and then signed for them both to go out. They did so; and Dame Alden im-

mediately sought her husband, in his retreat on the front porch, and recounted to him the whole circumstance.

"I don't know anything about the lady, I'm sure," she said, in conclusion; "but she has the sweetest, prettiest face I've looked on this many a day, only so sorrowful and sad-like. I feel just like crying every time I look at her. Poor thing! if she ain't just what she ought to be, I'm sure she's been more sinned against than sinnin', and I mean to do the best I can by her. Now what do you think, Joshua?"

"Don't bother, wife. I guess the gal is well enough," returned the spouse, puffing lazily at his pipe.

"She might be the witch of Endor, for all you'd care! But then I know she aint. I'll trust her sweet, innocent face, for that couldn't lie to me, only I *do* wonder how she came to know Earl Devonshire!"

"Gammon! There's nothin' so very strange about that, as I knows on. You women folks are greatest for conjurin' up a mystery! What if she does know Earl Devonshire, and half the men in town, for that matter? She needn't be any the worse for it, as I can see."

Dame Alden was silenced, and no wonder; for this was an uncommonly long speech for "Shiftless Joshua" to make, as he was usually as chary of his word as of his deeds. His better half concluded to let the matter drop, since he seemed inclined to take up the gauntlet in defence of her guest, though her womanly curiosity was by no means appeased.

The next day was Sunday. Dame Alden waited until after nine o'clock without having seen or heard from Mrs. Grant, and then fearing that she might be worse, concluded to visit her in her room. She found her still in bed, looking waner and thinner than the day before, if possible, but with a slight flush upon her face.

“You perceive that I have not risen yet,” her lodger said, with a faint smile. “I find I am still very weak, and the exertion seems very much for me.”

“I’m afraid you’re really ill, madam,” said the good dame, compassionately. “You are sartinly lookin’ flushed and feverish. I’ll have one of the doctors called in, if you say so.”

“Oh, no! I do not think I stand in need of medical advice. I shall be up again and well as ever, in a few days.”

Dame Alden shook her head a little doubtfully, for she was sure she saw indications of incipient fever in the flushed face and bounding pulse of her guest; but Mrs. Grant was firm in refusing to allow a physician to be summoned. Therefore she could only prescribe the best remedies she had at hand, and let it go at that, for the time being.

She sat with her guest nearly all day. Mrs. Grant seemed glad to have her with her, and encouraged her to talk as freely as she pleased, and listened with strange avidity to any gossip concerning the good people of Linden-Car. One would almost have thought, from the manner, that the villagers were old friends from whom she had been long separated.

“You mentioned a Mr. Devonshire, last night,” she said, finally, her face turned toward the wall. “I believe you said he had not been here long?”

“Only a year or two, off and on. Do you know him?”

“I have heard of him.”

The landlady pricked up her ears. She could not see the woman’s face, but she noticed there was a sort of tremor in her voice. She waited a moment for Mrs. Grant to say more; but as she did not, she herself said:

“I believe he’s a good man, is Mr. Devonshire. Every-

body speaks well of him. I heard yesterday mornin', that he was about to marry Maud Ingestre, of Thornycroft Grange. I hope it's true, I'm sure for they'd make a splendid couple, as I was tellin' my Joshua, last evenin'."

"Is this Miss Ingestre good and beautiful?"

"She's sweet and fair as a June rose, madam. We all think a heap of Miss Maud. She has a good many beaux, too, and might take her pick from any of them. Leonard Harding was dead set after her, one while, and I wasn't sure but he'd get her.

"Who?"

Was it Dame Alden's imagination, or had there indeed come a sudden sharpness into Mrs. Grant's voice as she asked this question?

"Leonard Harding, the surgeon, who lives in that odd-looking brown house at the end of the street. You may have noticed it as you came along. There is a sign over his office door.

"I do not remember seeing it."

"Well, as I was sayin', he was fast enough after Miss Maud, for one while; and would be still, if there was a ghost of a chance left, no doubt. But now they say Earl Devonshire has really come in ahead, and it is a settled thing between him and Miss Maud. For one, I'm heartily glad of it."

"Is not Mr. Harding a good man?"

"I know no special harm of him, as to that, and I don't like to speak ill of my neighbors, unless I've a good reason for doin' it; but I will say that for Miss Maud's future happiness, I would a thousand times sooner see her married to Mr. Devonshire."

Mrs. Grant made no reply to this, but after a little, turned her face toward the light once more. Dame Alden thought she saw the glitter of tears in her eyes;

but she closed them so soon it was impossible for her to be sure. She lay very still after this, seeming inclined to sleep; and so the worthy landlady very shortly left her to herself.

The next morning she was worse instead of better. Her fever was higher, and she complained of a pain in her head. Dame Alden began to feel seriously alarmed, and to wish she had acted in accordance with her own judgement, and sent for a physician the day before.

“You must have a doctor called in now, sartain sure, or we shall have you droppin’ away on our hands. I’m afraid,” she said, “you’ll only grow worse and worse unless something is done for you.”

“I believe you are right,” returned the sick woman, wearily. “A physician will know better what to prescribe for me. Whom would you advise me to send for?”

“There is Doctor Rynd and Doctor Andrews. Either of ’em is good enough—in fact, I am not sure that there would be much choice between them. Then there’s Mr. Harding; some folks call him in, when there ain’t much ailin’ them.”

“Indeed!” The woman’s voice was expressive of real surprise. “I thought he was a surgeon.”

“And so he is; but then, he seems to understand physic, and a good many sich things. He’s a great chemistry, too, they say, though the Lord knows what that is, for I don’t. He’s a man that knows a heap—more than the parson, even! But then you don’t want him. You ought to have either Doctor Andrews or Doctor Rynd.”

Mrs. Grant was silent for some moments, as if revolving a serious question in her own mind. Finally she looked up resolutely.

“I have decided to have Mr. Harding,” she said. “I

am not seriously ill, and he can prescribe for me as well as another could. Please bring me writing materials, and draw the stand to my bedside. I will drop him a note."

The landlady lifted both hands in surprise.

"Lawks, madam, don't think of such a thing!" she urged. "Now if you'd allow me to suggest, I should say send for Doctor Andrews, by all means. He's a real clever man, and knows his business, too. We had him when Joshua was took down with the rheumatiz, and he saved him in no time. Mr. Harding is all well enough, but not jest the person in a case like this."

"Permit me to be the judge. I know I should not like Doctor Andrews, therefore I'm determined to have Mr. Harding. If you will please furnish me with writing materials, I will prepare a note directly."

The landlady saw there was no appeal from this decision, and so hastened to comply with her request, muttering as she went that there "was no use in talkin' where a person was bound to be obstinate!"

It was nearly an hour afterward, when Mrs. Grant's bell rang for the note to be taken away. Dame Alden wondered what she could have been doing all this time; for she had herself been busy about the house, and her guest was consequently left entirely alone. Half a dozen words would have been sufficient for the note, and here it had taken her a whole hour to write them!"

Dame Alden herself took it down to the stable boy. In descending the stairs, she carelessly turned it over, glancing at the superscription. It was backed in a neat, lady-like hand, and addressed to "Mr. Leonard G. Harding, Linden-Car."

"I wonder how Mrs. Grant knew his middle letter is G? I am sure I never said anything to her about it," she thought, in a momentary surprise. "Oh, it must be she's

run across one of his cards in her room. There's plenty of 'em lying round the house, I've no doubt."

The stable boy was sent on his errand, but very soon returned, and alone. "Mr. Harding had gone to New York," he said, "and would not be back until noon of the next day."

The landlady took the message up to Mrs. Grant. It seemed to discompose her very much. For several moments after having heard it, she kept her face hidden in the pillow.

"What have you done with the letter?" she finally asked, with considerable eagerness.

"Sam left it at Mr. Harding's office. He'll be sure to open it, the first thing after he comes home to-morrow. Then I reckon he'll come right over here."

This assurance seemed to quiet Mrs. Grant, for she said no more. However, she still persisted in refusing to have Dr. Andrews called in, declaring that she would wait for Mr. Harding's return. So it was through the entire day; but the next morning, Tuesday, she seemed to have thought better of it, for she made no objection to having Dr. Andrews summoned for the time being, only stipulating that Mr. Harding was to take his place when he should return.

Dr. Andrews came about ten o'clock. After thoroughly testing the patient's symptoms, he declared that there was no danger to be apprehended, as it seemed a case of fever and nervousness combined, and said she only required rest and quiet, with just medicine enough to right her system, which was sadly out of tune. He gave her some soothing powders, and shortly left, promising to send her in something more during the afternoon.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOTTLE OF CORDIAL.

ON that same eventual Tuesday afternoon when Magdalen Duprez had visited Mr. Harding at his office, and while the sick woman at the Washington House was yet waiting impatiently for the coming of the surgeon, whom she still seemed determined should attend her, Earl Devonshire had gone up to Thornycroft Grange, finding the family just at the dessert, and not yet risen from the dinner-table. Of course they insisted that he should join them, and Aunt Barbara rang for another plate.

“You ought to have come a little sooner,” she said, with a wry, comical sort of a smile. “It is so very awkward to dine without a gentleman to wait upon one.”

Mrs. Ingestre laughed.

“One would think you were used to such attentions, to to hear you talk, Barbara, and that it was the exception, and not the rule, for us to dine as we have done to-day.”

Miss Dean raised her hand with a playful gesture of depreciation.

“Esther, it is really cruel of you to remind Mr. Devonshire of my desolate condition by pretending that I am not used to the attentions of the other sex. What if I’m not? It’s all Maud’s fault,” slyly pinching the girl’s cheek, “for she has no business to look so provokingly lovely, and thus charm all the beaux away from me.”

Maud blushed vividly, for she felt that Earl’s eyes were on her face. But he took pity on her confusion, and hastened to relieve her.

“Don’t say another word, Miss Dean, for the envy or jealousy that prompts your remarks is a little too palpable,” he said, in laughing retort to the old maid’s remark. And then, turning to Maud :

“I have brought over Tennyson’s ‘Princess’ for you to read. You know I forgot it when I came in last evening.”

He sat chatting with them all a few minutes, and then suddenly seemed to miss Magdalen, as he inquired for her.

“She is not well, and did not wish to come down,” Mrs. Ingestre answered. “I should have gone up to her, but she always prefers being left alone when feeling slightly indisposed.”

He did not remain long—going away in less than half an hour. “He might like to run in during the course of the evening,” he said, laughingly, as he arose to depart, “and should not feel so entirely at liberty to do so if he remained longer now.”

He occupied rooms at Colonel Floyd’s at the right of the village ; but having nothing in particular with which to busy himself just then, he went slowly down the road toward the village, instead of taking a shorter cut across the fields. In passing through the street, he ran into Dr. Andrews’s office, with whom he was on terms of intimacy. He found the doctor within, as was also Mr. Reed, a young man who was studying medicine with Dr. Andrews.

“Whom are you preparing to kill or cure now, my friend ?” Earl cried gayly, catching up a bottle from among several packages of drugs that were lying open on the table.

“Don’t deal in insinuations, my dear Devonshire,” the doctor returned, shaking his head smilingly, while pouring some dark liquid or other into a glass retort. But, seriously,

the bottle of medicine which you have in your hand is intended for a lady a Mrs. Grant, who is sick at the Washington House."

"Indeed! I had heard of no case of sickness there," returned Earl, carelessly, drawing a chair up to the table, and still retaining the bottle in his hand.

"Very likely. It is nothing alarming—mere nervousness, with some inward fever. She will be up in a few days, no doubt. I pity her, though, as she seems to be entirely alone."

"Has she no friends in the village?"

"I think not, from what I heard the landlady say. But Dame Alden is a good nurse herself, and will give her the best of care. But she seems to stand most in need of rest and quiet. She looks to me like some one who has seen trouble, and I believe it is even now preying upon her mind. She will never be quite well until she is free from that."

"You really interest me. Some one ought to take it especially upon himself to see that she is provided with everything she needs, since she is a stranger to all."

Earl still sat toying idly with the bottle, absently stopping and unstopping it, as he talked.

"So there had. I understand she has called in Mr. Harding, if he does not supply her wants, I shall surely consider myself bound to do so. He will be in this afternoon, I expect; but I shall send that cordial over, nevertheless. Take care, Devonshire; there is some strychnia on the table, and you might brush a grain or two into some of the drugs."

Earl put down the bottle, and moved further away from the table. After a little, he arose, and said he must be going.

"And you had better take the cordial up to Mrs. Grant

now," the doctor said, addressing his assistant, Mr. Read. "You can walk along with Mr. Devonshire, as your roads lie in the same direction. He will go past the Washington House, I suppose."

Earl bowed, and he and Mr. Read set out together. The latter left the medicine with Dame Alden, and immediately returned to the office, while the former kept on to Col. Floyd's.

Dame Alden herself took the medicine up to Mrs. Grant's room, but did not administer any, as the patient seemed to have dropped into a quiet slumber, from which she did not think it best to arouse her. Therefore she left the cordial on the bureau in the ante-room, and returned below, to look after her housework, which was sadly running behind-hand, with this sick lady to care for.

About an hour afterward, Mr. Harding came in, looking somewhat flurried and excited, as if he was in a great hurry.

"I understand you have a sick lady here, Dame Alden," he said, a trifle out of breath. "She sent for me, but I did not return from New York until twelve, and found fully a score of letters waiting for me. Moreover, hers was by no means the first one I opened, or I might have been here sooner."

"It is all well enough, I reckon," returned the landlady, not over-cordially. "Doctor Andrews was here this morning, and he's just sent in some fresh medicine that I left on the bureau in the ante-room. Mrs. Grant was asleep when it was brought, and I didn't think it was best to wake her."

"You were right, my good woman. Sleep is better than drugs any day.

"That's so, only I didn't s'pose a doctor would own it—nor a surgeon either, for that matter. But you can run

right up-stairs. My hands are in this bread, but I'll come up directly. Mrs. Grant is in my front chamber—the one at the left. You know where it is."

Mr. Harding nodded, and hastened across the hall, and a moment afterward she heard his footsteps ascending the stairs. He was absent but a few moments, and then came hurrying down again, before her bread was nearly ready for the oven.

"The lady is not awake yet," he said, quickly. "I will hurry on to Widow Grey's, and call again in the evening. The widow's son Tom has hurt his foot, I understand."

He started out, but turned again, with his hand upon the door.

"By the way, Dame Alden, what did you tell me was the lady's name?"

"Mrs. Grant. Didn't she sign it to the note she writ you?"

"Oh, to be sure; and I believe you've mentioned it once or twice since I came in; but then, I never could remember names. However, Mrs. Grant seems to be doing very well, and can be left until evening without any risk. Take good care of her, Dame Alden."

He smiled graciously, and bowed himself out as deferentially as though she were some queen to whom he owed allegiance. She watched his departure with a countenance expressive of distrust and resentment.

"He needn't try to come the perlite over an old woman like me," she muttered. "I've seen too many rogues, in my day, to be deceived by chaff!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A SUDDEN DEATH.

IT was nearly half an hour after the departure of Leonard Harding, and the good landlady of the Washington House had got her bread nicely in the oven, and the tea on to steep for her Joshua's early supper, before Mrs. Grant's bell was rung. She only stopped to wipe her hands and throw off her big apron, before hastening to her. She found her wide awake, and lying wearily back upon her pillow.

"So you've waked up at last, madam," she said, in a pleasant, cheery voice, as she approached the bedside. "Well, I must say you've had a wonderfully long nap; but you're lookin' better for it."

"And I am beginning to feel a little more like myself," returned Mrs. Grant. "I might be up again were it not for this weakness."

She lay some moments in silence, looking up at the landlady rather wistfully. Finally she said:

"I wonder if Mr. Harding has returned from New York yet? It is strange he does not come over."

"He *was* here, madam, not more than half an hour ago. He went over to the Widow Grey's from here, but said as how he should come in again this evening."

"Then he did call while I was asleep?" she asked, eagerly, a soft color stealing into her cheeks. "What did he say? Why didn't you wake me?"

"He didn't say anything much. I was mixin' my bread, and he jest ran up and seed you were asleep, and came

right down again. He seemed to be in a mighty hurry, and went right away then, without tellin' me a word what to do for you. But who cares? Doctor Andrews is worth a dozen on him, as I have always told you."

"Perhaps he is," speaking very wearily; "but I have got it into my head that Mr. Harding can help me the most of anybody. You must not think me obstinate for persisting in this idea. I really wish I had been awake when he came."

She lay quite still, her eyes drooping. Finally she turned.

"I am thirsty," she said, "I wish you would give me something to drink."

Dame Alden hurried below for a glass of toast and water. Coming back, she paused in the ante-room, and poured a little of the cordial which Dr. Andrews had prepared into an empty wine-glass that stood upon the bureau. With this in one hand, and the toast and water in the other, she hurried to the bedside.

"Drink the cordial first, madame," she said, offering it. "It's something that Doctor Andrews sent over this afternoon. It will be sure to do you good, I'm sartin of that, if Mr. Harding didn't leave it."

Mrs. Grant smiled feebly, but took the medicine and drank it down.

"It is bitter as wormwood," she said, returning the glass with a wry face.

"Medicine ain't apt to be over-sweet, I reckon. But this toast-water will take the taste out of your mouth."

Mrs. Grant took a swallow or two, and then settled back upon her pillow, while Dame Alden set the glasses back upon the bureau, and began to tidy up the room a little. She had been too busy to find the time for this earlier in the day, though she had taken care that it should be kept in a

condition that would render it comfortable and cheerful for the sick woman.

She was dusting the old picture of Martha Washington that hung over the mantel, when she was suddenly startled by a cry, coming from the bed. She sprang to it, and found Mrs. Grant lying there, livid and gasping, and tossing her arms wildly about as if in intense agony.

“O, O!” the woman screamed, “it is awful—the pain! I believe I am dying! Send for Mr. Harding!”

Dame Alden rang the bell long and loudly. In a moment Susan came hurrying up from the kitchen, looking pale and frightened, and wondering what was the matter.

“Run for Mr. Harding as quick as you can go!” cried her mistress, hurriedly. “Mrs. Grant is worse. Stop at Doctor Andrews’s as you go along, and tell him to come right over.”

The girl darted away, trembling all over with excitement. She had caught a glimpse of the sick woman’s ghastly face, and the sight by no means tended to reassure her. But the extreme urgency of the case seemed to give her strength.

Dame Alden was cooler and calmer, though she shivered and grew pale as she listened to her patient’s shrill screams of agony, and wondered what had happened to cause this sudden change in her. She tried to do something to relieve her distress, but felt herself perfectly at a loss. She had nursed a great many sick people, in her day, but never one who had exhibited such symptoms as these, and she did not know what to make of them. Every moan of the sufferer was like a blow to her tender, motherly heart, since she was utterly powerless.

Her husband soon came in, and Mrs. Jones with him. He had heard the woman’s screams from his seat on the porch, and had also learned something of the cause from

Susan, who had paused a moment, in passing him. The first idea that entered his mind was to bring Mrs. Jones over to the assistance of his wife, and this was the idea he had acted upon.

“O, Joshua,” cried his wife, catching at his sleeve, as he entered the front chamber where the sick woman was writhing in her agony, “O, Joshua, what shall we do? I never, in all my life, seed a cretur in such torment! Run for Doctor Andrews and Doctor Rynd, now do! Susan has gone, but there’s no tellin’ how much trouble she’ll have in finding them.”

The landlord did not wait to hear more, but darted downstairs and into the street, setting out at a brisk trot for the offices. It had never occurred to him until suggested by his wife, that he might be of assistance in bringing medical aid. He was never very quick-witted in an emergency; but now, when once put upon the right track, he made his heels fly with unusual rapidity, as he sped down the street. He was ready to do what he could for the poor woman lying so ill.

Doctor Andrews was away when he reached his office, so he kept on to that of Doctor Rynd, which was situated farther down the street. As ill luck would have it, he was out, also; however, the landlord left word for him to come directly to the inn on his return, and then began to retrace his steps more slowly, feeling that he had done a very magnanimous act in running himself out of breath in this way, when, as everybody in the village knew, it did not agree with him at all to hurry.

When he came opposite Doctor Andrews’s, on his return, he went puffing and blowing into the office. There was only a boy present, who said that Susan had already left a message, before the landlord came in the first time, and had gone on from there to find Mr. Harding. Moreover, neither

the doctor nor Mr. Read had been in since, but he was expecting them every moment.

From that, he began to question him as to the trouble, and the extent of the danger that threatened the sick woman. However, Joshua would not stay to answer many questions, when, much to his delight, he saw Doctor Andrews driving up in his gig. He darted toward him, holding up his hand.

“Quick, quick!” he exclaimed, almost inarticulately. “Drive to my house—to Washington House—that strange woman is—is—dying!”

Doctor Andrews at once comprehended the meaning, and was off like a flash. When he reached the inn, the sick room was full of confusion, and several of the neighboring women were crowding in and out. They had got an inkling that something dreadful was happening at the Washington House, and thought they must be on the spot to see what it could be. Mrs. Jones’s children had spread the alarm.

The doctor pushed through the crowd a little impatiently. When he reached the bedside, a single glance was sufficient to convince him that he had come too late. Mrs. Grant was just breathing her last. Only a moment before, she had drawn Dame Alden toward her, whispering :

“Tell him—my husband—that I—I—forgive him.”

These words were her last. After uttering them she had sunk back upon her pillow, gasping hoarsely. It was just then that the doctor had entered. He could do nothing to save her—she was nearly gone, and in less than fifteen minutes, all was over.

The confusion was worse than ever, when it was found that the woman was really dead. Those who had come in began to crowd about to catch a glimpse of her white, cold face, and all manner of questions were being asked

concerning her history, and the cause of her death. But Doctor Andrews very soon restored quiet, and cleared the room of all except Dame Alden and Mrs. Jones. Then he turned to the former, a stern gravity settling over his features, and hard lines forming about his mouth.

“Who took care of the woman who has just died?” he asked, almost severely. “Have you trusted the charge of her to any one else?”

“Not a soul,” returned the landlady with a sob. “Not even Susan has been near her. We didn’t think she was so very sick, sir, and we left her alone a great deal. But when anybody did go up to sit with the poor cretur, or give her medicine, it was always myself.”

“Do you think any one has been into the room to-day when you were not present?”

“Only Mr. Harding, sir. She would have Mr. Harding sent for, you know, and so he came over, about an hour before she was taken so bad. But he could only have run into the room and right out again. She was sleepin’ so nicely he didn’t think it best to wake her up; so he went straight over to Widow Grey’s, to see her boy Tom, and said as how he’d come back again this evenin’. O sir, wasn’t it awful to see the poor cretur takin’ on so, and wringin’ her hands? I wish you could have come sooner!”

“I hardly think it would have been of any use,” returned the doctor, very soberly.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

AT this moment, Mr. Harding and Doctor Rynd made their appearance. Susan had performed her duty faithfully, and not finding Doctor Andrews at his office, had hurried after Mr. Harding. He had already left the Widow Grey's when she arrived there; but she had hastened on, and overtaken him, making him acquainted with Mrs. Grant's danger in a very few words. They had then set out together for the inn.

As for Doctor Rynd, he had come in from a visit to a patient, and found the message which Joshua Alden had left at his office. It seemed very urgent and he had hastened at once to comply with it, and had met Mr. Harding at the door of the Washington House, bent on the same errand as himself. Thus it had happened that they had made their appearance at the same moment.

The women who still clustered in the hall told them the sad news, as they passed, but they kept on to the chamber of death. Doctor Andrews received them with grave courtesy, holding out his hand to each, as they entered the room.

"We have come too late," said Mr. Harding. "I am very sorry that it should have happened so."

"Yes, it is to be regretted," returned Doctor Andrews, briefly.

"So the woman is really dead?" And Doctor Rynd stepped toward the couch, in his brisk business-like way. "What was the matter with her?"

Doctor Andrews turned suddenly.

“She was poisoned!” he said, in a low, intense tone.

Exclamations of surprise and horror were heard from every other person present; but the physician still preserved his stern calmness.

“Yes,” he resumed, “she was poisoned! Her disease was nothing alarming—she would have been up from it in a few days. But there has been either treachery or culpable carelessness at work! I saw how it was when I first entered the room; but it was too late then—and there was no help for her.”

Dame Alden came close to him, pulling at his sleeve.

“Oh, you must be mistaken! I’m sure you must!” she cried, the tears dropping fast over her wrinkled face. “It is awful! awful! I can’t bear to think of it! The poor dead lady! Oh, who could have done it? You surely don’t think anybody in my house would be so wicked?”

She clung to him convulsively, a dreadful fear and horror in her dim and blurred eyes. This was something she had not even mistrusted, before—that her lodger had been poisoned!

“Do not distress yourself, my good woman,” said the physician, kindly. “You are innocent, at least in intention. But there is a mystery about this affair that I am utterly unable to fathom.”

Dame Alden wrung her hands impotently.

“I do not wonder that our good landlady is very much distressed,” said Mr. Harding, coming forward from the window, where he had been standing most of the time, his face paler and more serious than usual. “It is a dreadful occurrence to happen in one’s house, and leaves room for so many suspicions. There can be no doubt that the woman was really poisoned?”

“Not the slightest. I know the symptoms too well to be

mistaken. I am sure Doctor Rynd will confirm my opinion."

"Certainly, Doctor Andrews. There has been some deadly drug at work here, without question." And he approached the bed, pulling the sheet away from the head of the corpse. "See for yourself Mr. Harding. There is no mistaking those livid features."

Mr. Harding came a step or two nearer, though with evident reluctance. His face was paler than before, and he maintained his self-control by a great effort. He looked toward the corpse, his gaze wandering all around those white, set features, without ever falling directly upon them.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed, drawing back with a shudder, "I am ashamed of myself. I believe I shall never get used to these sights. It does not answer for a physician or a surgeon to have nerves."

He stepped back to the window once more, drumming uneasily on the pane. Suddenly he turned.

"How and when could the poison have been given to Mrs. Grant?" he asked. "Everything seemed to be right when I ran in here. She was sleeping as evenly as a child."

"I can't account for it nohow," said Dame Alden, through her tears. "She waked up about half an hour arter you left—leastways, that is when she rang the bell, I came straight up-stairs here, and found her lookin' real smart-like arter her nap. She complained of bein' thirsty, and I run down for some toast and water; but afore I gived it to her, I had her take a little of that cordial you sent over, Doctor Andrews. She drank the cordial, and a swaller or two of the water."

"And had she taken nothing else this afternoon?"

"Nothin' at all, sir, I'm sure of that. Arter I'd given the drinks to her, I stayed in the room, and went to tidyin'

it up a little ; for I didn't think it looked over and above nice for a sick lady, like her. All at once she gave a reg'lar screech, and seemed to be taken worse ; and it went on in that kind of a way until she died—that is, she kept cryin' out, and tossing about. I was scared enough, I can tell you ! ”

“ Where are the glasses from which she drank ? ” asked Dr. Andrews.

“ On the bureau, in the ante-room. You'll find them jest as she left them—the toast and water, in one, and the dregs o' cordial in t'other ! ”

Dr. Andrews brought the two glasses into the chamber, and set them both down upon the stand, in front of Dr. Rynd, too much agitated, himself, to attempt analyzing them. The latter tasted of the toast and water, testing that first.

“ There's nothing the matter with that, ” he said, carelessly spiriting it from his mouth. He next took up the glass which contained the cordial. There were still a few drops remaining in the bottom. He put his finger into the little that was left, and tasted it. Then he set the glass back upon the stand with an energy that made it ring.

“ I have found out the trouble, ” he exclaimed. “ There is strychnia in that cordial, and a powerful dose, too ! ”

Dr. Andrews grew pale to the very lips. For a moment he stood like one confounded, and then his senses and self-command seemed slowly to return to him. He tasted for himself.

“ You are right, ” he said, speaking rather hoarsely. “ The poison is strychnia, and I have some like it in my office. The cordial came from there, but I prepared it with my own hands, and could swear it was all right when I left it on my table before it was brought here ! I wonder if that remaining in the bottle is like this ? ”

He brought the bottle from the ante-room, placing it in Dr. Rynd's hand, without a word. The latter tested it, as he had done the dregs in the glass, shaking his head gravely, afterward.

"This is in the same condition," he said, with evident reluctance.

Dr. Andrews covered his face with his hands, and groaned aloud. He could take in the matter in all its bearings, and it is not strange that he felt troubled. There was no one at the inn, and so far as he could judge, had been no one, who could have the slightest object in compassing this woman's death. Without any question, she had died from the effects of a poison administered in the cordial, and the cordial itself had come from his office, had indeed been prepared by his own hand! More than that, some of that very poison was at that moment lying upon his table.

The conclusion would be inevitable. Everybody would point to him as the cause of the woman's untimely death. Not the intentional cause—he could have no object in committing such a deed—but the cause through culpable carelessness, or inadvertency. And what was more, he could blame no one for arriving at such a conclusion from the present appearances. Nevertheless, he was ready to have taken his oath that he had been neither careless nor guilty. But people would judge the case from their own standpoint. His reputation might be injured irretrievably—his practice would fall off—people would not care to trust him. Unless this mystery was soon cleared up, he was a ruined man.

All these thoughts flashed rapidly through his mind, as he still stood there with his face shaded by his hands. Mr. Harding came up to him, laying his hand upon his shoulder.

"I can read the fears that are troubling you," the sur-

geon said, with charming frankness. "This business does look a little dark, but I do not imagine you will be the worse for it. Cheer up, my dear sir! People have known you too long—and loved you too well, to be ready to cast you off lightly, or turn against you."

Dr. Andrews wrung his hand warmly.

"Thank you, Mr. Harding," he said with emotion. "Your friendly words are doubly precious, coming at such a moment. Appearances are against me, but I assure you I have not been guilty even of carelessness. My assistant, Mr. Read, will bear me out in my assertion. He helped me prepare the cordial. There has been some one whom we little suspect, concerned in this business."

The surgeon lifted his eyes suddenly, with a startled look. But there was only sorrowful uncertainty in the gaze that met his own.

"So it would seem," he said slowly. "But rest assured, whatever happens, that I shall always stand by you as a friend."

"And you may count upon me, also," Dr. Rynd exclaimed, heartily. "I will believe anything else, rather than think ill of my old friend, Dr. Andrews."

"You are both very kind," said the physician, much moved. "I hardly expected to find such warm advocates in you. I trust the really guilty party will soon be discovered. I shall spare no pains or effort to bring about a result."

He paused. There suddenly crossed his mind the thought of Earl Devonshire's visit to his office earlier in the afternoon—their conversation about this woman—and the careless manner in which he had sat toying with that identical bottle of cordial. Could it be possible that Earl had, either by accident or design, added strychnia to the contents of the bottle at that time? The idea was very im-

probable. He dismissed it at once, as not deserving of a moment's credence. He considered Mr. Devonshire one of the best and purest-minded men of his acquaintance, and therefore above suspicion.

There was a long silence in the room. Dr. Rynd and Mr. Harding seemed gloomily thoughtful. Dame Alden was still crying quietly, and Mrs. Jones doing her best to comfort her. Dr. Andrews was the first to speak again.

"Of course there will be an inquest held," he said. "The glasses and the bottle of cordial must be preserved for future use. Mrs. Jones, will you be so kind as to see that they are locked up securely?"

"Sartin, sir. Dame Alden will give me the key to the bureau drawer, I reckon, and I'll have them put right in there. I promise you there shan't any one meddle with 'em while in my care."

"The key is in the lock, Mrs. Jones," said the landlady. "You can put 'em away jest as soon as ever you please."

Mrs. Jones pleased to do it immediately, carefully dropping the key into the deep pocket of her dress. Mr. Harding, who had been watching her, turned suddenly to Dr. Andrews.

"Mrs. Grant seems to have come among us as an utter stranger," he said. "We do not know who are her friends, or where she is from. Her relatives, if she has any, ought to be immediately notified of her sudden decease."

Dr. Andrews bowed, very thoughtfully.

"I am the person selected by Mrs. Grant to prescribe for her," Mr. Harding resumed, after a pause. "You visited her first in your professional capacity, but that does not invalidate my claim, since I was the first one summoned. Some one must examine the effects of the deceased to ascertain the address, and what I was about to say is that, as

her physician, I am willing to incur the responsibility of that examination."

He looked from one to the other of the physicians, as if anxious to read their opinion of this plan in their faces, even before it was expressed in words.

"It would hardly be your right," said Dr. Andrews, at length. "The proper officers had much better be called in. Since I am so strangely mixed up in this affair, I will tell you frankly that I much prefer to have them attend to the business. Then no one could accuse us of the craft, or attempting to shield each other, or keep anything back."

"I am sure people would not think that, in any event," returned the surgeon, with suppressed eagerness. "I cannot see why it would not be just as well, and everything could be kept so much more quietly. Dame Alden and Mrs. Jones could assist me in the examination."

"I shall consent to nothing of the kind," said Dr. Rynd, sturdily. "It would be utterly useless, since the proper officers would be compelled to make another examination. We cannot take work out of their hands in that way, even though we do feel so disposed."

Mr. Harding flushed a little angrily. But he saw the force of Dr. Rynd's remarks, and could not but signify his assent to them.

Dame Alden had been quietly listening to their conversation. The terrible event which had just happened had seemed to take away her wits, at first, but now she could think more calmly.

"I reckon Earl Devonshire might be able to tell us something about this woman, if you should call him in," she said, suddenly recollecting the emotion which the deceased had manifested on first hearing his name, and her subsequent interest in his affairs. "Anyhow, if Mrs. Grant

didn't know him herself, she had heard on him, for she told me so with her own lips."

Two of the hearers were visibly affected by this announcement—Dr. Andrews and Mr. Harding. The surgeon smothered an exclamation, and a curious light crept into his keen eyes. As for the physician, he gave a sudden start, and swept his hand across his brow in deep perplexity. He again called to mind Earl's visit to his office, and the poisoned bottle of cordial, and asked himself once more if there could be any possible connection between the two. If Mr. Devonshire had been really acquainted with the dead woman, this would look more probable, as he then might have some object in getting her out of the way. But it was too horrible a thought to be entertained for one moment. Therefore he tried to dismiss it as he had done once before.

"Mr. Devonshire has traveled considerably," said the surgeon, after a little. "Nothing is more probable than that he may have met with Mrs. Grant. He had better be called over in the morning, to see if he recognizes the corpse."

He looked toward Dr. Andrews, inquiringly.

"Yes," assented the physician, with a suppressed sigh; "it might save us some trouble. But I must go now. Dr. Rynd, you will see that everything is done as it should be?"

Dr. Rynd bowed very gravely, and Dr. Andrews walked slowly from the room, and descended the stairs.

CHAPTER X.

A POSSIBLE LINK IN THE CHAIN.

“THERE’S a Divinity that shapes our ends.” Dr. Andrews had been gone from the chamber of death but a few moments, when Mr. Harding, feeling assured that he would not be allowed to examine the effects of the deceased, as he seemed so desirous of doing, quietly took up his hat, and went out also, with a parting bow to Dr. Rynd, whom he left behind. He pushed his way through the crowd of women who still filled the halls, and had just reached the street, when he was met, face to face, by Mr. Reed, Dr. Andrews’s assistant.

As we have once said of him, the young surgeon could be the most cordial of men, where it suited his purpose to make the effort. Now he paused, and shook hands very warmly with Mr. Read.

“Whither away, my fine fellow?” he asked, slapping him familiarly upon the shoulder.

“Only to Ben Hallett’s, to carry some medicine for his wife. Have you just come from the Washington House? I should have been up myself, but did not seem to find the time. That is sad business up there—very sad, sir.”

“Have you heard of it so soon?” asked the surgeon, in real surprise.

“Bless you, sir, the whole street knows that the woman is dead, by this time. It is a wonder how news does travel here! They don’t know what ailed her, but I have heard a dozen different stories already.”

“What sort of stories?”

“Oh, some say that she had a fit, and others even hint that she committed suicide.”

“The truth is more horrible than their suspicions, then. She was poisoned.”

“Poisoned!”

Mr. Read repeated the word, staring blankly at the surgeon, as if he could not quite comprehend.

“Yes. It is not yet known whether by accident or design. There seems to be a strange mystery enshrouding the affair. The poison was contained in the bottle of cordial which was brought up from your office. That is the worst phase of the matter, in my opinion.”

“You cannot mean it? Why, I carried the cordial over myself, this very afternoon! Mr. Devonshire went with me, I remember. He was going up to Colonel Floyd’s, where he is stopping.”

“Mr. Devonshire,” repeated the surgeon, with a start of surprise. “I wonder what he could have known about the murdered woman? Did he go in to see her?”

“Oh, no! He did not stop, and no more did I, except to hand the cordial to the landlady. Then I went straight back to the office. But it is strange, sir, that the poison should be put into the bottle of cordial. I saw Dr. Andrews when he mixed it, and know that it was all right when he left it on his table to be sent out. If there was poison in the cordial, it is not a case of carelessness, sir, but of wilful murder.”

The man’s voice was very earnest and impressive. Mr. Harding grew a shade paler.

“So it would appear,” he said. “But, Mr. Read, you have not told me how Earl Devonshire happened to be with you to-day. Did he tell you that he knew this Mrs. Grant?”

“No. I am sure he did not know her. He was passing

by, and called in at our office. He was not even aware that there was such a person at the Washington House, until Dr. Andrews told him. He seemed very much interested in her, though, and said he was very sorry for her to be sick there, away from her friends."

"Was this before or after the preparation of the cordial?"

"After. The cordial was standing on the table at that moment. I remember this particularly, because Mr. Devonshire sat down beside the table, and took up that very bottle. He held it for some time, toying with it rather absently, and Dr. Andrews had to call to him to be careful, at last, as there was strychnia lying open on the table, and he might flirt some of it where it did not belong."

"Ah!"

This was Mr. Harding's only comment, but the little monosyllable had a world of meaning, from the tone in which it was uttered. A strange smile crept to his lips, and that singular look stole into his eyes once more.

"There, there!" he exclaimed after a pause. "I'll not listen to another word! I have heard too much, already. Good morning, Mr. Read."

He turned, walking rapidly away, leaving Mr. Read very much perplexed at his words, and the peculiar manner in which they had been uttered. He might have understood them better, perhaps, had not his confidence in Mr. Devonshire's integrity been so unbounded. As it was, he did not even mistrust that they were meant to reflect particularly upon Earl.

"Well, Mr. Harding always did have a peculiar way of putting things," he finally muttered, as he slowly plodded his way back to the office. "But I *would* like to know what he meant! It seemed to me he was trying to fasten the guilt on some one or other, and was pumping me for

evidence to help his cause along. Well, much good may he get from any information I gave him ! ”

He found Dr. Andrews waiting for him a little anxiously when he reached the office. The good physician had been carefully considering matters since coming from the inn. A woman had been poisoned, perhaps designedly, and no effort would be spared to discover the guilty. Should it become noised abroad that Earl Devonshire, who, according to Dame Alden's account, was probably the only person in the neighborhood who had ever had any previous acquaintance with the woman had handled that identical bottle of cordial, and at a table where the very poison made use of had been lying open, suspicion would at once be roused against him. This little mass of circumstantial evidence would go a great way toward convicting him, in some minds. Dr. Andrews had revolved it carefully and seriously, but he could not bring himself to believe in his friend's guilt. He thought he had known him too well to be deceived, and so long as there was a question in the matter, he resolved to give him the full benefit of the doubt.

Had he been a selfish or a worldly man, for his own good he would at once have related the scene that had transpired in his office. It would have thrown all blame and responsibility from his own shoulders, as he knew Mr. Read would be ready to swear that the cordial was in a proper condition when he placed it upon the table. Mr. Devonshire's careless handling of it would explain a way in which the poison might have been introduced into it. But Dr. Andrews chose to believe that it was *not* introduced then, but subsequently, and by some other person (though he had not the slightest idea who that other person could have been), while the bottle was standing on the bureau in the ante-room at the inn. Therefore he resolved to keep his own counsel, for the present, at least, so that not even the

breath of scandal should sully Mr. Devonshire's fair fame. This is why he was so impatiently awaiting Mr. Read. He meant to put him, also on his guard.

"Have you heard the news—the tragical end of our patient at the Washington House?" was his first question, as his assistant entered the office.

"I have. It was dreadful was it not? I just now met Mr. Harding, and he told me."

"Did he tell you that the woman was poisoned?" asked the physician, rather anxiously.

"Yes. I could hardly credit his story, though. He says the poison was contained in the bottle of cordial that I carried up to the inn."

"Such is the fact," returned Dr. Andrews, very thoughtfully.

"Then, sir, I am sadly afraid that people will be blaming you. But they need not, though. I stood by when you mixed the cordial, you will remember, and I am ready to take oath, if need be, that it was prepared properly."

"I am glad of that. It is very probable that you will be called upon to testify to the same, for I certainly mean to vindicate myself from all suspicion, if it may be. It would nearly ruin my practice, for people to get the idea that I was so wickedly careless. They would consider life as something too precious to be risked in the hands of one so neglectful of common precautions. As a natural consequence, they would cease to employ me."

Mr. Read saw the force of these remarks. He now began to look upon the affair as one of more serious moment than he had thought when it had first been mentioned by Mr. Harding.

"I see, sir, I see!" he exclaimed. "You are left in a bad predicament, to say the least. It is of the utmost im-

portance to you that the mystery of the murder, if murder it was, should be speedily cleared up."

"Yes. But I have not the slightest clue, as yet, or at least, not any that I am willing to follow up."

He paused, his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the floor. Finally he looked up.

"I can trust you, Mr. Read?" he began, half-questioningly, closely scanning his assistant's face. "You will submit to be guided by my judgment, if I confide more to you?"

"Entirely, Dr. Andrews," was the frank reply. "Tell me as much or as little as you please. In any event, I will gladly abide by your wishes."

"I have not much to tell. It is rather to put you on your guard, that I have spoken. In the first place, Dame Alden says that the murdered woman knew Earl Devonshire, or at least, had heard of him."

"How strange! He never let on anything of the kind when he was in here, and you were speaking of her. I am sure he would, had he known who she was. Her name was certainly mentioned in his presence."

"I have also been puzzled to account for this. But the woman may not have been personally acquainted with him, even though she had heard of him. If they were old acquaintances, I do not see what possible motive he could have had in concealing this fact."

"I am sure that they were not, or at least, that he was not aware of her identity when he called here this afternoon. His whole manner indicated as much. I am certain I could not have been so deceived by appearances."

"I hope not. But that visit itself renders matters more complicated, and throws a suspicion of guilt upon Mr. Devonshire himself."

Mr. Read started violently.

“What do you mean?” he asked, in unfeigned surprise.

“The facts of the case are simply these. The woman at least knew *of* Earl Devonshire, and, so far as we know, was a stranger to everybody else in Linden-Car. Somebody evidently had an object in getting her out of the way. She was poisoned by the introduction of strychnia into the cordial. That cordial stood on this table, and was handled by Earl Devonshire before it left his office. Moreover the strychnia lay there, within his reach.”

Mr. Read uttered a stifled exclamation.

“It has a bad look, sir,” he said, slowly. “You surely do not suspect Mr. Devonshire? I would as soon accuse my own brother.”

“No, I do not suspect him. But others will, mark you, if they learn the full facts of the case. That is why I have spoken to you. We must maintain a strict silence in regard to Mr. Devonshire’s visit here.”

Mr. Read’s face flushed. He had already spoken of it to Mr. Harding. However, he did not now acknowledge as much, but mentally resolved to caution the surgeon to silence, at the very first opportunity.

“You are right,” he said, hesitatingly. “That is the only way in which we can shield him from suspicion, though, for my part, I’d wager my life on his innocence. But others might not have the same faith in him. Yes, we had better say nothing, at present, of his call here. Though, to tell the truth, it strikes me that it would be for your interest, Dr. Andrews, to make a clean breast of it.”

“I suppose it would,” returned the physician, slowly. “But I have no wish to clear myself of a suspicion of carelessness, if, to do it, I must charge a man who may be, and I think is innocent, with the most horrible of crimes. I should not feel justified in such a course. You and I must quietly bide our time, and watch the course of events. If

circumstances tell too glaringly against Devonshire, then it will be time enough to move in the matter, and confess what we know. Until that time we are to preserve a strict silence, remember."

Mr. Read saw, from Dr. Andrews's manner, that he was wholly in earnest, and he now began to wish, more than ever, that he had not been so deplorably hasty and careless in his remarks to Mr. Harding. Earl Devonshire was a great favorite with him, and he would not willingly have worked him ill. Since his conversation with Dr. Andrews, he thought he understood better the drift of Mr. Harding's questions and puzzling remarks. The surgeon must also have had his suspicions aroused against Mr. Devonshire, but assuredly he would hold his peace. They were rivals, to be sure, but Mr. Harding certainly would not suffer that fact to influence his course of conduct.

This is the manner in which Mr. Read reasoned. At nearly the same moment Mr. Harding was sitting in his private office at home, reflecting on the same subject, but with a smile of malignant triumph parting his thin lips.

"At last, at last! I was almost in despair, a few hours gone by," he muttered, "and now the very Fates seem to be playing into my hands. I have a hold on Earl Devonshire, and will use it, too—only the reins must be drawn lightly when my Lady Magdalen is around to see. At last, dainty Maud, my peerless darling, there is a chance of winning thee! I only wish," his brow darkening, thoughtfully, "that the inquest on that woman were well over! I do not think I need to borrow any trouble about it, though."

So saying, he shortly picked up a new chemical work from his table, and began to read it eagerly, as if seeking to banish all further thought and care in its perusal.

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEXT MORNING.

As we have before said, both Thornycroft Grange and the residence of Colonel Floyd were situated outside the village limits. Indeed, the Grange was nearly two miles away, and the colonel's house about half that distance, though they were not situated in the same direction, but more nearly at right angles to each other. It happened, curiously enough, that no member of either household was in the village after half-past four, on this Tuesday afternoon, and consequently the sad tragedy that had been enacted at the Washington House was not known at either place until the next morning.

At an early hour Wednesday morning, Earl Devonshire went over to the Grange, taking the shorter route, a bridle-path leading through the fields. He had arranged to accompany Maud and Magdalen on a horseback excursion, and wished to be there in good season, that they might take advantage of the cooler morning air for their ride.

Magdalen was not yet down, but Maud had already donned her riding-habit, and was standing on the piazza, waiting for him, when he reached the Grange. She came forward, blushing and holding out her hand, in welcome.

"How lovely you are looking this morning, *my* Maud," he whispered, softly, pressing her hand between both his own.

Aunt Barbara caught sight of him from the dining-room windows, and soon came rushing out, meeting him with her usual gay bandinage. "She was not going to leave him

and Maud there, to be cooing like two silly turtle doves," she said.

They were chatting very gayly, when Magdalen swept down through the spacious halls, her long skirts trailing the floor, and her softly-tinted plumes drooping gracefully about her beautiful face. Their peculiar droop had been the result of a full half-hour's study in her own room, and of course the effect was bewitching.

"I was not aware that you had arrived, Mr. Devonshire," she said, coming forward, and bidding him a very gracious good-morning. "That must be my apology for having kept you waiting."

"It does not matter. We have plenty of time before us," returned Earl.

"That is fortunate," broke in Aunt Barbara, "for Miss Duprez never likes to be hurried when she means to put on one of her killing costumes. A lady's toilet requires study, I would have you know, sir, and cannot be gotten up in a minute. If it is no more than a riding-rig, there is always a choice in the way in which it is to be put on."

"Just listen, will you, Mr. Devonshire?" Magdalen returned, with a gay laugh. "What an arrant diplomatist Miss Dean must have been in her younger days! No wonder the men were all afraid of her, and she drew a blank in the matrimonial lottery."

"At all events, I was never so base as to try to captivate their lovers away from my dearest friends," retorted Aunt Barbara, rather indignantly.

"Why Miss Dean, I hope you and Magdalen have not begun your sparring already, this morning," said Earl, laughingly. "I don't know what to make of you two. You always seem 'agreed to disagree.'"

Neither of the belligerent parties had an opportunity to reply to this, for just then a horseman came dashing up the

avenue, drawing rein before the door. It was a young man from the village.

“I have a note for you, Mr. Devonshire,” he said, hastily dismounting. “I rode over to Colonel Floyd’s in the first place, but you were gone, and as my business is of importance, I ventured to follow you here.”

Mr. Devonshire took the note which he presented, and breaking the seal, hastily ran his eyes over its contents. As he read, an expression of undisguised amazement came upon his face.

“I am really at a loss what to think of this,” he said, looking up from the paper, at last. “My letter is from Dr. Rynd. I will read it aloud, and perhaps you will be able to assist me in the solution of the mystery, Magdalen. You know many people with whom I used to be intimate.”

He ran his eyes over the letter once more, and then read aloud, as follows :

“MY DEAR DEVONSHIRE:—I beg ten thousand pardons for troubling you at all, but the urgency of the case must be my excuse. The effects of Mrs. Grant, who died yesterday evening, have been searched in vain for the address of some friend to whom we can communicate the sad event. She seems to have been a stranger to all, and no one can tell where she is from, or why she came here. Dame Alden thinks she may have been an acquaintance of yours. Will you please come over at your earliest convenience, to see if you recognize the body, and thus assist us in finding the friends of the deceased ?

“Very truly yours,

CHARLES RYND.”

He finished the perusal of the letter, and folded it away in his pocket, looking both puzzled and thoughtful.

“It must be the woman of whom Dr. Andrews was speaking when I called at his office yesterday. He did not consider her dangerously ill at that time, however. I was not aware that she had died since. It is the woman who

was stopping at the Washington House, is it not?" And he turned inquiringly to the messenger.

"It is, sir."

"And her name was Grant? I wonder why Dame Alden thought I knew her? She was mistaken. You may tell Dr. Rynd so. I was never intimate with a family of that name. Do you think you have ever met her, Magdalen?"

"I am sure I have not," was her reply. "I never forgot names, and should now remember Mrs. Grant's had I ever known her."

"Certainly. She is probably an utter stranger to us both. Were I not satisfied of that fact, I would willingly accompany you back to the Washington House. Say as much to Dr. Rynd from me, if you please. Poor woman! I deeply regret her untimely end. Did you learn the cause of her death?"

"She was poisoned, sir!"

Earl Devonshire turned a shade paler, starting back with a look of amazement. Aunt Barbara uttered a little shriek, while Maud gave vent to an exclamation of horror. Magdalen seemed to be the only unmoved person in the group.

"You shock me," Earl at last found voice to say. "I was not expecting to hear anything so dreadful. How did it occur?"

The young man gave him a full account of the particulars, so far as they were known, dwelling more especially upon the fact that the trouble had all arisen from a bottle of cordial which had been prepared for Mrs. Grant by Dr. Andrews.

"How distressing! Dr. Andrews must feel very badly, I am sure, whether the woman's death is the result of carelessness or not. He has always been one of the best and most faithful physicians. I cannot think the blame of this

matter lies with him: I remember the cordial. I was with Mr. Read when he took it over, yesterday."

The man remained but a few moments after this, but Earl repeated his message to Dr. Rynd, ere he rode back to the village. Our hero would have accompanied him, but for his engagement with the young ladies. As it was, he mentally resolved to find his way to the Washington House immediately after his return from their ride.

There was very little time on this occasion in which to discuss the terrible tragedy with which the party had just been made acquainted. The horses were ordered up at once, and they shortly set out on their excursion, though with seriously dampened spirits. The enjoyment to which they had looked forward so confidently, was utterly destroyed. The sudden death of the strange lady had no connection with the destiny of either of the three, so far as they were then aware, but it had the effect of rendering them all serious and thoughtful.

Magdalen was much more taciturn than her companions had ever before known her to be. She was, in truth, thinking over the account of Mrs. Grant's death, which the bearer of the letter had given. She had been interested in it, more than she cared to confess. She had always loved anything that had a touch of the horrible or marvellous in it. Now she felt impelled to know more of this affair, to clear up the mystery that enshrouded it, if might be. At any rate, it seemed as if she must look on that dead woman's face!

They were riding slowly along, in a direction opposite to the village. It had been their original design to scale the further line of hills, but now Magdalen suddenly stopped short in the middle of the road.

"We have gone far enough for to-day," she said, resolutely meeting the astonished glances which Earl and Maud

turned upon her. "I, for one, am going down to Linden-Car. I have a curiosity to behold this dead woman of whom we have been told."

Earl paused, irresolutely.

"What are your wishes, Maud?" he asked. "I too, would like to see the woman. Notwithstanding my present impression, it is possible that I have formerly known her under some other name. In that case, I could assist materially in finding her friends. Now, shall we go on, or turn back?"

"I am perfectly willing to be guided by your and Magdalen's wishes," said Maud, quietly turning her horse's head. "We will go to Linden-Car."

This settled the matter at once, and they took the road for the village, setting out on a brisk trot. When they reached the street, they immediately saw that quite an excitement was prevailing. Knots of people were gathered here and there, and everybody seemed to be eagerly discussing the singular events of the past twenty-four hours. Quite a crowd was collected before the Washington House, so that they really met with some difficulty in dismounting and effecting an entrance. In the upper hall they met Dr. Rynd, who shook hands with them very cordially.

"This is a shocking affair—very shocking," he said. "I hope you will forgive me for dropping you that note, Mr. Devonshire. We were in a great stress to know where Mrs. Grant was from. We hoped you might give us some information. That is why I wrote."

"Yes," said Dame Alden, who made her appearance while Dr. Rynd was speaking. "I told 'em you'd be sure to know somethin' about my late lodger, and really reckoned you would. Anyhow, she seemed to know you, for she gin an awful screech when she fust heard you were here, and dropped quite away. It was strange enough,

now wasn't it? I asked her arterwards, if she knowed you, and she said as how she had heerd of you afore."

Mr. Devonshire smiled quietly.

"I think you must have been mistaken as to the cause of Mrs. Grant's emotion," he said. "I can hardly imagine that it had any connection with my name. At all events, that lady was an utter stranger to me, unless, indeed, she was here under a fictitious name."

Dr. Rynd laughed knowingly. He had not the most profound respect for Dame Alden's power of discernment.

"I more than half believed that such was the case," he muttered. "But go on to the chamber. Our worthy hostess will pilot the way, and I will return in a moment. Since I wrote to you this morning, we have found the fragment of a letter that I would like to show you, when I come up. I want your opinion in regard to it, for it hints at something rather mysterious."

He passed rapidly on, and descended the stairs, without having explained himself further, leaving our trio entirely at the mercy of good Dame Alden.

"Lawks! I'm glad enough to have the likes of you in my poor house, Miss Maud," she said, addressing our heroine. "It ain't often that it is graced by sich folks. Nor by such a beautiful lady as yourself," she added, turning to Magdalen. "But come right along. You shall see the poor, dear creetur that came to her death under this roof, more's the pity. She is lyin' there in my front chamber, looking nat'ral as life, only so blue and queer! She was a sweet, pretty lady, if ever one lived! I wish you had known her!"

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE CHAMBER OF DEATH.

WHILE they still stood in the upper passage waiting for the slow-motioned landlady to conduct them to the chamber of death, Leonard Harding suddenly made his appearance, coming up from the hall below. He had evidently just arrived at the Washington House, and was not aware of their presence, until he came upon them so unexpectedly.

He was looking somewhat pale and depressed, but immediately came forward, warmly shaking hands with the three. This was the first time he had met Maud and Mr. Devonshire since the night of the party at Thornycroft Grange. Magdalen he had seen the day before, when she had visited him at his office. However, he now met her as if he had not seen her since the previous week.

“And so you have heard of this shocking business, even at the Grange?” he asked, fixing his eyes upon Maud’s blushing face.

“Yes. We did not know of it until this morning, however,” she returned. “We are but mortals, and must needs yield to our curiosity, and ride down here.”

“I am almost sorry that you have come, Miss Ingestre,” he said, earnestly. “This woman will not be a pleasant sight for you to behold.”

“It makes no difference. I expect to look upon scenes that will hurt and shock me, sometimes. I am no better than other people, that I should be shielded from them. If Magdalen goes in, I shall certainly accompany her.”

She spoke with considerable decision, moving further away from him, and drawing closer to Miss Duprez. There was a sad, half-reproachful look in his eyes, as he fixed them upon her, that annoyed her excessively. She felt that he had no right to regard her in that way, and intended to make him understand as much from her manner toward him. Magdalen mistrusted her design, whether he did or not, and felt that Mr. Harding was acting very unwisely for the good of his cause.

“Just observe how tender he is of Maud!” she exclaimed, in an aside to Earl. “All our friends seem to combine in petting and spoiling her. No one ever thinks of caring for me in that way.”

“You two are so different,” he returned, wholly unmoved by the surgeon’s very apparent devotion to his own promised wife. “You are strong and self-reliant, while Maud is tenderer and more clinging in her nature. Men are more apt to be courteous and careful of such a woman. I am not at all surprised at Mr. Harding’s solicitude. I have felt the same myself, but thought Miss Ingestre fully capable of exercising her own judgment in the matter.”

Magdalen was silenced. If she thought to arouse Mr. Devonshire’s jealousy or distrust by her covert thrust, she had most signally failed.

“Well, well! You are correct, no doubt; but I have no desire to discuss the point.” And then, slightly raising her voice, “Dame Alden, I think we are all ready to follow you, now.”

“Sartain, sartain, my dear young lady! Come right along. It will be a sad sight for you and Miss Maud to behold, as Mr. Harding has just been sayin’. But you’re welcome to come in, perfectly welcome.”

She opened the door of the ante-room for them to pass through. They found only Mrs. Jones and another woman

in the chamber of death. All others had been carefully excluded. Otherwise the room would have been continually thronged by the curious villagers, coming and going. There was no other way but to keep out all who were not really needed there.

The body was laid out upon the bed, and carefully covered with a sheet. Mr. Harding did not approach it, but loitered behind the rest, near the window. Magdalen took advantage of the opportunity, and coming close to his side, whispered, hurriedly :

“What have you done, Leonard? I am dying with impatience! Have you begun to see your way clearer than you did?”

He drew slightly away from her, shivering, and raising his hand with a gesture of impatience.

“Be cautious, Magdalen!” he almost hissed. “This is no time for discussing the matter—we shall be observed. If I am to do the work, you ought at least to be content to abide the result.”

He gloomily folded his arms, his lips compressed. There was a look of real suffering upon his face, as he turned it to the light.

“He must have loved my lily-white Maude far better than I had ever imagined,” Magdalen muttered, as she left him.

Meanwhile, Dame Alden had gone straight to the bed, pulling down the sheet from the livid face of the corpse. Earl and Maud had followed more slowly, the former clasping the girl’s hand, as if he thought she could look upon death more calmly, with him close beside her. They approached the bed slowly and reverentially. Maud was the first to look upon the features of the dead woman.

“What a sweet face,” she exclaimed, shrinking back,

with a half-shiver. "It fascinates, and yet fills me with dread. Oh, how awful death is, especially such a death!"

Earl bent over her, rather reluctantly, to look. Suddenly he dropped her hand, as if something had stung him. A wild, wandering expression crept into his eyes, and a deathly pallor settled over his rigid features. He shivered, his lips trembled and he sank upon his knees beside the bed, covering his white face with his hands, and giving utterance to the single, hoarsely-whispered exclamation:

"My God!"

He remained there fully five minutes, neither looking up nor speaking, but shivering now and then, as if with cold. Maud stood close beside him, trembling and tearful, and yet not daring to address him. She wondered at the sudden change that had come over him, but something in the expression she had seen upon his face, ere it had been hidden away from her, kept her silent, and froze the words of comfort and tenderness she might otherwise have uttered upon her lips. Whatever was ailing him, whether some torturing pain, or the agony of some sudden discovery, he evidently was in no mood to receive her sympathy, at least, just then.

Magdalen and Mr. Harding had also observed his emotion, the former with undisguised astonishment, the latter more calmly, as if he had been expecting to witness something of the kind. A strangely triumphant smile curled his lips for a single moment. Was he thinking of what Mr. Read had said, and glorying in this fresh proof of his rival's possible guilt? Only God and his own heart knew. He might also be pardoned for feeling some exultation at the debasement of his rival in the presence of the woman whom they both loved.

Neither did this scene pass wholly unobserved by Dame

Alden. Even to her obtuse mind, there was something significant in it. She could not think that Earl was suffering from a sudden spasm of physical pain alone.

“Lawks! if things ain’t comin’ to a pretty pass!” she muttered. “These are all mighty queer doings for a quiet sort of a house like mine. He may talk as much as he pleases, but if there warn’t nothin’ between Earl Devonshire and that woman, then I lose my guess! I can’t imagine what she could have been to him, though.”

There was a dead silence in the room. Magdalen glanced at Mr. Harding, a puzzled, inquiring expression flitting over her face. He met her gaze calmly, his own features inscrutable. She could read nothing of what was passing through his mind.

Earl got up, finally, standing beside Maud, calm and composed once more. But his face was very white still, and there were hard, stern lines upon it, such as she had never seen there before. He seemed like one who had passed through a great struggle, who had battled bravely with temptation and pain, and who, though earnestly striving to understand and do the right, yet felt himself sadly under the influence of the flesh and the devil. Some great passion was certainly struggling in his mind for the mastery, and, so far as his expression went, it might have been either a bitter repentance for his own sin and guilt, or a burning, irrepressible desire to have revenge for the crimes committed by another.

Maud drew nearer to him, gathering courage from the look of unutterable sadness that swept over his face.

“What is it, Earl?” she whispered, laying her hand softly upon his arm. “You look pale and ill. Can I help you? Do not fear to trust me. You have no idea how much I could or would suffer for your sake, if need be.”

He caught the hand, raining hot, sudden kisses upon it.

“Thank you, my darling!” he cried, with much emotion. “I know you are a brave, noble girl. I ought not to have given way to my feelings before you, but it was the effect of a sudden agony which I could not control, entirely. I am better and calmer now, do you not see that I am? I shall not suffer that old pain to overcome me so again.”

A look of quiet determination settled upon his face. It seemed as if he must then and there have settled some weighty question which he had been pondering in his mind. He looked down into Maud’s troubled eyes, forcing a smile, as if anxious to reassure her.

Magdalen came forward just then. She knew it was the sight of the dead woman’s face that had affected Earl so strangely, and she could not but wonder at it. “He must have recognized some old acquaintance, after all, she said to herself. But, even if such was the case, there was still something out of the usual order in the matter. Why did he not at once confess this acquaintance when Maud had addressed him, instead of attempting to account for his emotion in some other way? She could not tell; but of one thing she felt satisfied—that the woman, whoever she was, had been more than an ordinary friend to Earl, else he would not have been so much disturbed. It was all very strange and unaccountable.

It was with these feelings crowding through her mind that she pressed forward to look at the corpse. She, too, seemed to recognize something familiar in that cold, ghastly face, for she started violently, uttering a suppressed exclamation, as her eyes fell upon it. She turned to Earl, with a startled, inquiring look, and then, resuming her self-control by an apparent effort, went slowly back to the window where Mr. Harding was still standing.

“I have seen enough for to-day,” she said, in an altered voice. “It was very foolish in me to have come here. A dead face always haunts me for weeks after I have looked upon it. Come Maud, shall we not go back to the Grange?”

“Yes, yes, I am ready. I, too, wish we had never come. Let us return, by all means! I do not see that we can be of any use here!” exclaimed Maud, with feverish eagerness.

Mr. Harding turned suddenly, facing her.

“No, you will only be in the way,” he said. “There are plenty of women about, who can do everything that needs to be done. You had better have been guided by my advice, and not come in at all. But, before you go, I must ask Mr. Devonshire whether the countenance of the deceased is sufficiently familiar, so that he can assist us in finding her friends. We have been led to think that you may have known her at some period in your past life, sir, and were really depending upon you for information concerning her.”

A malicious glitter came into his eyes, when he turned to address Earl. He evidently thought he was taking him at a disadvantage. For a moment our hero's features worked convulsively, and his eyes burned like live coals. He bit his lip hard, and stood like a couchant lion, prepared to spring. Then a sudden change came over him. A strange smile parted his lips, and he faced the young surgeon resolutely and fearlessly:

“I can give you no information, Mr. Harding,” he said, calmly. “I doubt if I know any more than yourself of the deceased Mrs. Grant.”

The young surgeon gave him a quick, startled glance, as if afraid there might be some secret meaning lurking behind his words. But Earl's features were fully as inscrutable as

he could make his own, on occasion. He seemed to have fully recovered his self-possession.

Magdalen had been watching them closely, but with no particular result. She saw only that there was some secret understanding between these two men, and that each knew more than he pretended of the other's doings. The answer which Earl had given the surgeon puzzled her more than a little. He had seemed to speak honestly and truthfully, and yet she had reasons for being fully convinced that he *had* known the deceased. Could he have meant that Mr. Harding had also known her? It seemed very improbable.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

EARL DEVONSHIRE and the young ladies were preparing to depart, when Dr. Rynd came hurrying in.

"Oh, you are here yet?" he cried. "I am glad. I was really afraid you would be gone, as I was kept away longer than I had anticipated. Ah, good-morning, Mr. Harding. So you have managed to make your appearance, also?"

"Yes. I thought I might be of some use. My profession is not so driving as to keep me very busy, you know, and I could come over as well as not."

"Yes, yes. I'm glad you are here."

Mr. Harding stood leaning against the back of the chair in which Magdalen had seated herself, at the entrance of Dr. Rynd. The expression of his face was anxious, despite every effort. He was uneasily tapping the carpet with his boot.

"Mr. Devonshire did not know the deceased," he said,

suddenly. "Dame Alden must have been mistaken. It will be a pity if her friends are not discovered soon. Have her effects been searched?"

His tone was feverishly impatient, though he had made every effort to have it sound natural and unconcerned.

"Yes," Dr. Rynd replied. "That was done this morning. You should have come over."

"What discoveries were made?" he asked, quickly, his face blanching.

"None, so far as her trunk was concerned. I think she meant to preserve her incognito, when she came here. Every letter, and every scrap of paper that would have thrown the least light upon the subject had been carefully destroyed. We could not find the slightest clue to her friends, or her place of residence. From the contents of the trunk alone, we cannot even tell whether Grant was her true name or not, for her clothing is not marked, with the exception of a lace pocket-handkerchief, which bears the initials E. D. But these might have been her own initials, or those of somebody else, as the handkerchief is an old one."

The surgeon breathed a sigh of evident relief. Earl, who had been listening intently, changed countenance at the mention of the initials, and a look of bitter grief crossed his face. It was soon gone, however, and he quietly stepped forward.

"When you entered, I was just about to take Miss Ingestre and Miss Duprez back to the Grange," he said, addressing Dr. Rynd. "Do you desire to see me particularly?"

"I only wished to hear your opinion on a matter connected with the deceased. I will detain you but a moment, if the young ladies will permit me to keep you at all," he said, bowing low to Maud and Magdalen.

“Certainly,” returned the latter, anxious to hear what was coming. “We are not in such haste that we cannot wait a reasonable length of time, I hope.”

“Thank you. Then I will proceed at once with what I have to say. As I remarked to you before, Mr. Devonshire, those who searched Mrs Grant’s effects found no clue to her friends or former residence?”

“Well?”

“But there was the fragment of a letter of which I told you, discovered afterward. Mrs. Jones found it under the pillow not more than an hour since. It seemed to have been hastily crumpled-up and thrust there. The bed had not been made since yesterday morning, and that is why it was not found sooner.”

At the mention of a letter, Mr. Harding appeared startled, and even Earl looked anxious and ill at ease. However, Dr. Rynd soon produced it, handing it to Earl for him to read. His fingers trembled nervously as they closed over it, and he took it to the window, standing with his back toward those in the room, so that no one could see his face as he perused it.

He kept the sheet for some moments, and must have read it more than once. Finally he turned, and gave it to Mr. Harding without a word. It went the circuit of the room in this way, and at last came to Magdalen, who had been waiting with feverish impatience for a peep at its contents.

From the first, she was struck with something strangely familiar in the style of penmanship. She had seen that peculiar hand before, and lately, she was sure; but where, she was utterly unable to tell. The note was short, and had evidently been written in haste, and had been broken off abruptly. There was a great blot upon the page, and it had probably been abandoned on that account,

and another sheet substituted. These are the words which it contained :

“MY DEAR HUSBAND:—You will be very angry with me for coming here, I am afraid. But how could I help it? I had not seen you for such a long while! My heart was aching to be with you once again. I learned that you were here by the merest accident. I could not wait for you to write or come—I had waited too long already. I followed you! If it seems silly and foolish for me to have come, you must remember that I had been famishing for the sight of your face or the sound of your voice, for more months than I should dare to count—that I love you still, and always shall love you, even though you have not been so kind to me at times as you might have been, and have left me all these weary weeks, to grow sick with pain and misery, and mayhap to die. Yes, I love you still, and have come to you. I will do anything that you ask, now. You shall learn the true history of my birth—it was very foolish for me to have kept it from you at all. It was only my pride and obstinacy that caused me to do it. I am not the poor country school-teacher that you imagined me to be, but the daughter of—well, I will not tell you until you *will* come when you receive these lines. I am really sick, at last, and must have you by me. Do come, if it is only for a moment. I am here under an assumed name. Nobody knows that I am your wife, or anything to you, and nobody shall know it, if you do not wish me to tell. I am at the Washington House, dear——”

Here it ended suddenly with that great, evil looking blot of which we have spoken. A proper name was about to be written, and even the first letter had been formed, but the ink had spattered the paper so it was impossible to make out just what it was meant to be. It looked some like an L, but more like an E or C.

It was a strange letter, or rather a part of a letter. Magdalen could not comprehend it. A dim suspicion, as improbable as dreadful, caused her to catch her breath, and turn sick with fear.

“No, no! It cannot be,” she whispered to herself, in real agony. “Earl Devonshire could not have been guilty

of such a deed! It would have been more like Leonard Harding or myself! We are wicked and desperate enough for anything! But Earl is a grand, noble-souled man, if ever one lived! He never would stoop to crime."

But an exclamation from Dame Alden recalled her to herself. She had given the letter to the good landlady, after having perused it, and Dame Alden now read it for the first time. Even Mrs. Jones, who found it, had been ignorant of its contents until now. She had given it directly to Dr. Rynd, when she had taken it from under the pillow.

"Lawks!" cried the good dame, "if it don't grow queerer and queerer, every minute! What'll my Joshua say to this, I wonder? To think that the woman had a husband she had come to see, and should tell me with her own lips that she hadn't any relations here! It do beat all! I wonder who her husband was? It couldn't have been Charles Grant, or his brother Gideon, for they've both of 'em got wives, and then they belongs to the Presbyterian church, too!"

Dr. Rynd smiled.

"She probably told her that she had no relatives here by the name of Grant, which was most likely true, for that was not her own real name, according to this letter," he said.

"Lawks! There are queer goin's on, in this ere world. But I recommoner now that she spoke of her better-half jest afore she died. I didn't more'n half catch the words, but he must have been a graceless chap, forgivin' him and all that!"

Dr. Rynd took very little notice of this remark, but now turned to Earl Devonshire.

This letter, as I told you, has been discovered since I wrote you, early this morning," he said. "It is our only clue to the mystery of that woman's past, who is now lying

there so cold and still. No one but myself has read it until now. I wanted your opinion, Devonshire. Your judgment is better than that of most men. How shall we proceed in this case?"

"Do not ask me. I am not capable of advising," Earl returned, speaking with difficulty. "I believe I am not quite well to-day. At any rate, this shocking affair has unnerved me strangely."

"No wonder. I ought not to have distressed you with further particulars, but this letter throws so much additional mystery over the whole affair that I could not resist telling you about it, hoping that you might help me in getting at the truth."

"According to this letter, the woman's husband must be living at Linden-Car," said Mr. Harding. "Who is he, and why does he not present himself at once, and claim the body."

"That is easily answered, according to my view of the matter," returned the physician. "Her husband is probably the murderer. He stole into the inn, unknown to any one, and dropped the poison in the cordial. He must have had some very potent reason for wishing her out of the way."

"It is unutterably horrible, but I think you must be right. I hope no effort will be spared in detecting the wretch, and bringing him to punishment. Dr. Andrews will be glad for the discovery of this letter. It will help throw the burden of the deed from off his shoulders."

"Yes, that it will," speaking heartily. "Dr. Andrews was never considered a careless or an unprincipled man, and people must take care how they insinuate things against him in my presence!"

Earl Devonshire had been restlessly pacing the floor for

some moments, his arms folded, his brow moody. He now turned to Dr. Rynd.

“I will go at once, if this is all you have so say. I am not in a frame of mind to counsel with you to-day. My judgment would be worthless, and I should only trouble and perplex you. You will do much better without me.”

“I doubt that, my dear Devonshire. But I have already kept the ladies waiting an unconscionably long time. I hope they will be magnanimous and forgive me. I will excuse you, for their sakes.”

They thanked him, and at once arose to go. Both felt bewildered by what they had seen and heard, and longed to get away, where they could think the matter over more quietly. Maud gave Earl her hand, that he might lead her down-stairs, but Magdalen drew back a little, motioning for them to precede her.

She followed them into the passage, and would have kept on, but Mr. Harding came quickly up behind her, catching at her dress.

“One moment, Magdalen,” he whispered, hurriedly. “This is not the first time you have looked on that dead woman’s face, in yonder. I saw it in your eyes, as you bent over her. Now tell me where you have seen her.”

He seemed eager and excited, his breath coming in short, panting gasps. Magdalen drew away from him a little haughtily.

“What right have you to come to catechise me?” she asked. “If I had ever known Mrs. Grant, or the woman who went by that name, why should I not have acknowledged it in the room yonder, when we were all talking of her?”

“Do not put me off in this way, Magdalen,” he entreated. “You know that we are sworn allies. How can

we hope to help each other, unless there is perfect confidence between us?"

She paused, hesitating, deliberating with herself.

"Can I trust you, Leonard Harding?" she asked finally. "What assurance have I that you will not make use of what I say, against me, or against those I love?"

"What assurance can you wish further than the knowledge that I am as much in your power as you are in mine? There ought to be some honor among rogues." And he laughed, sarcastically.

She looked him fully in the face for a moment.

"I will tell you," she said, at last. "You will hardly dare betray my trust. I do not think I have ever seen the woman herself, but I saw her picture once. Earl Devonshire had it. It dropped from his pocket when he came to call on me once."

The surgeon uttered an exclamation. A look of puzzled surprise came upon his face. "Strange—strange!" he muttered to himself, absently. Finally he turned to Magdalen.

"Did you ask him to tell you the name of the original of the picture?" he inquired.

"Of course. I was too curious not to do that. But he put me off laughingly, trying to convince me that the picture was the property of some friend, and had accidentally found its way into his pocket. I never credited his explanation, though."

Mr. Harding was silent a moment, evidently debating some question in his own mind.

"No, he was deceiving you," he finally exclaimed, with considerable vehemence. "You must have remarked his manner when he first beheld the corpse in yonder! It is evident that he had known that woman, and known her in-

timately. I will tell you what is my firm belief—that yonder woman was his wife, and that he murdered her!”

Magdalen turned upon him suddenly, her hands clenched, her eyes fairly scintillant with anger.

“Leonard Harding!” she cried, in a fierce, passionate voice, “breathe that dreadful suspicion but once again, and I shall be tempted to strike you dead! I scorn such a calumny. It is at your peril if you even hint it to another living being!”

She seemed in terrible earnest. He laughed uneasily, for he saw what he should have to contend with. For the time being, he thought it best to conciliate her.

“Pshaw, Magdalen! can you not listen to a harmless joke? Of course, I do not consider Devonshire such a villain. I only meant to try you, and to pave the way for something further which I have to say to you.”

“Well?” She did not attempt to dispute his explanation, though evidently not crediting it at all.

“What I have to say is, that this is the very opportunity for which we have been wishing. We have set ourselves about one special purpose, the estrangement of Earl and Maud. We must make her believe that Earl really committed the deed! That he murdered Mrs. Grant. I think we can do it. There is considerable circumstantial evidence against him.”

“And yet you know that he is as innocent of the crime as I am, Leonard Harding,” she said, looking him straight in the face.

He seemed confused under her steady gaze, but very soon rallied himself.

“What does it matter?” he finally returned. “We must try some desperate means, if we would hope to succeed in our plans. It is Maud alone who must be made to believe Earl guilty. She loves him too well to betray him.

I think we can succeed in impressing the conviction on her mind, and it need go no further. She would be loath to believe it, but would be forced to, with the proper amount of evidence. And I am sure I can furnish that. Believing him guilty, she would never marry him. In that case the prospect would look more favorable for both of us, you see."

Magdalen caught eagerly at the idea. It did seem feasible. As he had said, they must resort to some desperate expedient, and no other plan seemed to suggest itself just then. Anything was better than to see Maud and Earl together as much as she had done of late.

"And if I consent to assist you in this matter," she said, after a pause, "I have your promise that not even a whisper from you to any other than Maud, shall ever sully Earl's fair fame?"

"Most assuredly. I have no wish to work him ill. It is only Maud's love that I am striving for. You will help me carry out my plan?"

"Perhaps so. I will think of it. But no more now—I cannot remain a moment longer. Maud is calling for me already."

She turned from him, and hastily descended the stairs, pushing her way through the crowd about the door, who fell back a little to let her pass. She found Maud already in her saddle, while Earl was holding her own "bonnie steed."

"Have you quite lost your patience, waiting for me?" she asked, gayly, as she prepared to mount her horse.

"Nearly. What in the world kept you so long? We thought you were following close behind us," replied Maud.

"I met a friend in the hall, and stopped to exchange a

few words with him. I am sorry to have detained you so long."

"It does not matter," returned Earl, as he assisted her into the saddle.

And so they rode back to Thornycroft Grange, slowly and silently. A weight was upon each of their hearts, that was soon to be lifted from them.

CHAPTER XIV.

SCHEMING.

THE coroner's inquest on the body of Mrs. Grant, as we shall continue to call her, in lieu of a more correct name, took place on the following Friday. During the interim, no pains or effort was spared to discover the author of the crime that had been perpetrated, but not a clue to the murderer, or the object of the deed, further than the fragment of a letter which had been taken from under Mrs. Grant's pillow, could be found.

In the first place, public opinion had been strong against Dr. Andrews, as he had felt assured it would be. The general sentiment was that the woman had come to her death through his carelessness, and many were the anathemas hurled at his head. But when the contents of the letter came to be known, an entirely new phase was put upon the matter. Persons who had begun to turn a cold shoulder on the good doctor, veered suddenly, like weather-cocks under the influence of a fresher breeze, and became his warmest partisans. Therefore, on the whole, instead of injuring his reputation as a practitioner, as he had at first been fearful, it had exactly the opposite effect, and he had become more popular than ever.

The inquest only served to strengthen his position. Dame Alden testified that the cordial had stood on a bureau in the ante-room, on that fatal afternoon, and that the front door had been left open, thus offering free ingress or egress to any one who might feel disposed to take advantage of the opportunity, while she was in the kitchen herself, busied with her cooking. Susan was on the back stoop most of the time, churning and working over the butter. Therefore, it was very possible that the poison had been introduced into the cordial by some one who had stolen in unobserved, though it still seemed strange that no one should have been seen loitering about the house.

Furthermore, Mr. Read was there, prepared to prove that the cordial had been properly mixed by Dr. Andrews, though nothing was said concerning Earl Devonshire's visit to his office. This was fully enough to convince the villagers, already more than willing to be prejudiced in his favor, of the physician's entire innocence, both of carelessness and malice aforethought, and fix the guilt on some third person. After due deliberation, the cononer's jury returned the verdict :

“Died by poison ; but there is no evidence to show by whom administered.”

Nevertheless, suspicion at once pointed to the person addressed in the woman's letter as “husband.” No one else could have any possible object in committing the deed, while he, very likely, wished to remove her out of his way. The letter itself was enough to show that he had abused her shamefully, and probably deserted her. Perhaps he had tired of her, found some newer fancy, or even married a second time, and so administered poison under the mad fear of detection.

However, at the best, people could only conjecture. The whole affair was wrapped in an impenetrable veil of mystery.

Nothing certain was known by any one. A dozen different men were assailed by suspicion, but nothing could be proven against any one of them. At last it began to seem as if no light was destined ever to be thrown upon the affair.

When preparations were being made for the funeral, Earl Devonshire came forward, and told the landlady to spare no expense in having the body of the unfortunate woman respectably interred, and to have all bills sent to me for settlement. He even appeared as a mourner at the funeral, and followed the body to the grave, giving no further explanation of his strange conduct than that "she was a stranger, and some one must perform these offices; he preferred doing them himself, rather than seeing them left undone."

In another, these eccentric whims would have been much commented upon, and might have given rise to suspicion. But with Earl it was different. He had been regarded, from the first, as a peculiar man in his fancies, and now the villagers only said:

"It is just like Earl Devonshire. There never lived a kinder or more tender hearted man. It was quite an acquisition to Linder-Car, when he came among us."

Our hero had seemed very much depressed and abstracted, since his visit to the Washington House that morning, in company with Maud and Magdalen. Much of his old cheerful flow of spirits was gone, and he was ordinarily grave and reticent, even in the company of his dearest friends, like a person brooding over some great wrong or terrible calamity. There had certainly come a remarkable change in his manner. Not that he was less tender or cordial toward those whom he loved, but he seemed constantly preoccupied by some all-absorbing thought.

Maud observed this change with feelings of real regret

and solicitude. She was at a loss how to account for it. Though she had said but little, she had felt fully convinced in her own mind, that morning at the inn, that Earl was not looking upon the dead woman's face for the first time. Otherwise, he would never have been so excessively agitated. The whole matter puzzled her exceedingly. She had hoped that Earl would offer some explanation, and so set her doubts forever at rest; but, instead, he had preserved the most complete silence upon the subject. This hurt her most of all. She felt, if he was in trouble, she had now a right to share it with him, and he ought to confide it to her. However, she never gave utterance to these feelings in words, not even to her mother.

As for Earl, not even a whisper of suspicion was breathed against him, at first. Among the villagers at large, no one ever thought of connecting him with that horrible transaction at the Washington House. Leonard Harding noted this with considerable chagrin and annoyance. Despite his promise to Magdalen, he had all along secretly intended to turn the tide of suspicion against our hero, whenever he could do so without having his agency in the matter mistrusted. At first, after his conversation with Mr. Read, on the evening of the commission of the deed, he had hoped that Doctor Andrews would have his suspicions awakened, and so institute inquiries that would tell effectually against Earl, but the worthy physician's determined silence non-plussed him not a little, and left him at a disadvantage. He could not doubt that Mr. Read must have understood his meaning, when they had discussed the subject of the poisoned cordial, and if so, he would be sure to report the result of the conversation to the doctor. However, the latter had not stirred in the affair, as yet, but the surgeon inwardly determined that his silence should not last forever.

He resolved to strike the first blow with Maud. So far, he would be sure of Magdalen's co-operation, and success seemed easy. He would be able, without doubt, to break up the intimacy which existed between her and Earl—an intimacy he could never look upon with any degree of calmness or reconciliation to it—and thus cause an estrangement between them. This would be at least an important step gained.

However, it was not the easiest matter to gain access to Maud, she avoided him so persistently. At first, he tried calling upon her, but she never saw him alone, always bringing her mother or Aunt Barbara to the drawing-room with her, and keeping them there until he had gone. In this way, he found no opportunity to exchange a word in private with her, and it would have ruined his plan to have spoken before a third person.

But fate seemed propitious, at last, after having toyed with him long enough. He was riding by the Grange one day, when he saw Maud in the garden, sitting under the shade of an old oak, and so busily engaged in the perusal of a book which lay open in her lap that she did not hear the noise his horse made in stepping lightly over the green sward beside the road. He dismounted hastily, throwing his bridal-rein over the nearest post, and approached her with rapid, though noiseless steps. He was close beside her before she saw him at all, or knew he was near.

“Good morning, Miss Ingestre,” he called out, gayly. “You must be wonderfully interested in that book of yours, if you cannot look up to greet an old friend like me.”

She started suddenly at the sound of his voice, raising her eyes to his face.

“I was not aware of your presence, Mr. Harding. That must be my excuse for not having addressed you sooner.

Will you walk to the house? My mother and Miss Duprez will be glad to see you, no doubt."

"Thank you, I prefer to remain here."

"Then you will have to excuse me, I am afraid. My engagements take me elsewhere," and she arose to depart.

He quietly put out his hand to detain her.

"Do not go," he said. "At least remain long enough to tell me what is that wonderful book you have been reading," and he smiled blandly in her face.

"You can take the book, and see for yourself, if you choose," she returned, resentfully, as she gave it to him.

"Ah! Tennyson's 'Princess.' I was not aware that the English poet was such a favorite with you. The present volume seems to have been thumbed very faithfully. Ah, excuse me!" with a gesture of deprecation. "I did not suspect it was Earl Devonshire's property, until I this very moment saw his name on the fly-leaf."

She reddened indignantly. His manner angered and annoyed her more than she would have cared to confess.

"I asked him for it," she said, "and he fetched it over for me to read."

The surgeon was silent a moment, reflecting how he could best broach the subject which had brought him to her side. She once more attempted to pass him.

"I cannot suffer you to go so soon, Maud," he exclaimed, stepping quickly before her. "I have something that must be said to you. I have long been seeking a private interview, but for some reason, you have seemed determined not to grant me one."

"I have no secrets from my mother. Come up to the house, and I will listen to you. I have already remained here too long."

"You have misunderstood me, Maud. It was not for my sake that I wished our interview private, but for your own

You would hardly care to have even Mrs. Ingestre hear what I am about to say."

Maud turned pale. A feeling of indefinable dread seized upon her.

"Say on," she uttered, in a faint voice, leaning giddily against the trunk of the tree. "I will listen."

"You have decided wisely. No third person must ever know the purport of our conversation, unless you work ill to the man you love—to Earl Devonshire."

She shivered at the mention of that name.

"What have you to reveal?" she asked sharply. "Do not keep me in suspense, but come at once to the point."

"I must first impress one fact on your mind—that I am not now speaking to you in the character of a rejected suitor, with some object in view, but as a friend who feels a very warm interest in your welfare," he said, with pretended earnestness. "I wish you to utterly ignore the past, in our present conversation. I fully realize that you do not love me, and shall never persecute you with unwelcome attentions."

"I shall always prize your friendship, Mr. Harding, while I deprecate any warmer feeling. But what is it of Earl? Will you never tell me?"

She caught at his sleeve, lifting her anxious, entreating eyes to his face.

"I dread to tell you, Maud." And he pityingly stroked the hand on his arm. "It will be a great blow to you, and will make you very unhappy; but it is best and right that you should know the truth."

"Then why do you hesitate? If it is something I ought to know, that should be enough. If you think I have not strength to bear anything you may reveal, you utterly mistake me."

She drew herself up with a pitiful attempt at perfect calmness and self-control.

“I would gladly spare you, Miss Ingestre, but it would be mistaken kindness to do so,” Mr. Harding said, with some effort. “As I hinted once before, what I have to tell relates exclusively to Earl Devonshire; but before I proceed, I must ask you a single question. That morning when you visited the Washington House, with him and Miss Duprez, did you not observe, from his manner, that he knew more of Mrs. Grant than he was willing to have suspected?”

“Well?” Maud’s voice was very faint, though she was too proud to make any other sign of assent than the utterance of this single word. But her heart began to fail her; he, too, had noticed Earl’s agitation. There must indeed have been more cause for it than she had thought, then!

“You also read the letter which was found under Mrs. Grant’s pillow, for I saw you take it in your hand. That letter was directed to the woman’s husband. Now, mark my words! it is my firm belief that it was intended for Mr. Devonshire himself!”

The last sentence was uttered in a whisper that was almost a hiss. Maud caught her breath with a low, shivering cry. She could not even pretend to misunderstand his terrible meaning.

“Just Heaven! Do you expect me to believe your base insinuations, Leonard Harding?” she exclaimed, rallying herself at last. “I wonder that they do not blister your lips!”

She faced him defiantly. He only regarded her with a sorrowful sigh, as if his heart was full of tender pity for her misery.

“I do not wonder that you turn from me, Maud. But, alas! you have not even yet heard the worst. If Earl

Devonshire was that woman's husband, he was also, in all probability, her murderer ! ”

The girl suppressed a shriek. She lifted her eyes to his face for a single instant, with a look so full of woful horror and despair that even Mr. Harding's heart was touched with real compassion. She sank back upon the seat from which she had risen, with a weary moan.

“ What more have you to say ? ” she asked, in a strangely calm, even tone, after she had sat there for full three minutes in utter silence. “ You even determined to exhaust the catalogue of crimes in heaping calumny upon a defenceless man. I pray you go on ! I am listening.”

The surgeon regarded her in real amazement. Was this cold, satirical woman the trembling, tearful Maud Ingestre of the moment before ? The change was something wonderful ; it had revealed an element of strength in her character that he had never previously supposed to exist.

“ This is all I have to tell,” he returned, in a pitying voice. “ It has cost me an effort to say as much to you ; but I felt that you had a right to know of my suspicions. They will not be repeated to any one besides yourself, and you can act as you see fit. I do not expect you to act in reference to them any further than they are capable of being corroborated.”

“ With what proofs can you furnish me ? ”

“ With very little that is not merely circumstance, I will acknowledge. There is hardly a person, aside from myself, who thinks of suspecting him. But I cannot blind myself to some facts that have been thrown in my way. You were yourself a witness to his agitation at the sight of the corpse ; there was but little money found among Mrs. Grant's effects, and he took it upon himself to defray the funeral expenses. Most people regard this last as a simple act of charity, but it has a different appearance, in my eyes.”

“ We will suffer that matter to rest, if you please. He might have done it or might not; he has always been kind to the poor. But if Mr. Devonshire were guilty of the crime with which you charge him, would he have taken Magdalen and myself to the inn, that morning? Furthermore, being prepared for the sight, would he have betrayed such agitation on beholding the dead woman’s face? You must make your evidence consistent.”

Maud spoke with the shrewd coolness of some lawyer, cross-questioning an important witness. Leonard Harding had never seen her more perfectly composed and mistress of herself than she had now become.

“ Alas! it is too consistent,” he returned. “ Mr. Devonshire took you to the inn merely as a blind; it was a very clever move on his part. As for his agitation, this was the first time he had looked on the woman’s face since her death, and not being utterly hardened, he was naturally much moved—his feelings overcame him, as he himself confessed, though pretending it was the result of physical pain. This, it strikes me, is the truth of the matter—the explanation I have given you.”

Maud was silent, pondering his words.

“ If that woman was his wife, what would he have made of me?” she asked, with an involuntary shudder.

“ Nay, I do not think he would have wronged you, in any event, for he loves you too dearly, I am sure of that. He would have found some means of freeing himself from this woman, before marrying you. A divorce would have been the probable result; but her coming here to Linden-Car expedited the matter until it ended in this horrible tragedy.”

Maud covered her face with both hands. Her fortitude was fast giving way.

“This is too dreadful to be believed!” she cried. “I will not give a moment’s credence to such a story.”

“But, for your own sake, do not entirely overlook the possible proofs of his guilt,” the surgeon urged, anxiously. “You heard of the evidence given in respecting the poisoned cordial, by Doctor Andrews and Mr. Read, at the time of the inquest. Now I entreat that you will go to Dr. Andrews before it is too late, and ask him if Earl Devonshire did not have that identical bottle of cordial in his hand, before it was even sent out of his office, and if he did not know at the time for whom it was intended. The physician’s answer to such a question ought to settle the matter beyond a doubt. If he had an opportunity to introduce poison into the cordial, it is probable that he did so, and the whole guilt lies at his door.”

Maud was silent. The awful aspect which the affair was taking seemed to stupefy her.

“I wish you would also speak with Miss Duprez,” Mr. Harding resumed. “She is better acquainted with Mr. Devonshire’s past life than any of us. She did not say as much, but I was confident, from her manner, that she recognized something familiar in Mrs. Grant’s looks. If you press the matter, she will perhaps tell you what she knows.”

Maud had already mentally resolved to do this. She had observed the peculiar expression which had crossed Magdalen’s face, and had heard her muttered exclamation, before this; but some ill-defined dread had hitherto restrained her. But the surgeon’s revelation now fully decided her as to her course.

“I shall certainly try to get at the truth of the matter,” she said, rather wearily.

“I hope you will, for your own interest. And you must remember, Maud, it is because I am your true friend, I have told you this. I wished to shield you from future

misery. But I will not detain you longer. I feel that I have done my duty in warning you—I cannot do more. God be with you, and help you to bear your troubles!”

He wrung her hand hard, and turned hastily away, as if the scene was more than he could bear with composure. A moment afterward, and he was again upon his horse, and galloping down the road. Ah, what wicked dissemblers men can be! Leonard Harding had tried to explain to Maud the mystery of that affair at the Washington House; but he would have given his right hand, at that very moment, to have known what connection Earl Devonshire had really had with it.

CHAPTER XV.

EVIDENCES OF GUILT.

WHILE Maud and the surgeon were holding their conversation in the garden, Magdalen Duprez sat by the window in her own room, her magnificent hair unastened, and drooping about her like a great veil of shining blackness. Susette was with her, brushing out the long, fragrant waves, and at the same time suffering her tongue to run much more nimbly than her fingers moved.

From her window, Magdalen had seen Mr. Harding, when he dismounted and entered the garden gate; she knew Maud was there, and therefore at once mistrusted the object of his errand, though the leafy branches of the oak under which Maud had been sitting effectually concealed them both from her view. However, she waited, with considerable impatience, the termination of the interview. She felt assured the surgeon would take advantage of this opportunity to charge Earl Devonshire with the murder of

Mrs. Grant, and if so, Maud would be likely to come to her at once, to learn what she could tell her of the woman's history.

The event proved the correctness of her conjectures. By-and-by she saw the surgeon leave the garden, and remount his horse, and shortly afterward Maud came slowly toward the house, her eyes downcast and thoughtful. Magdalen knew, even from the distance, that she was greatly troubled about something.

"Susette, I shall probably ask you to leave the room after Maud comes up," she said. "You are to go quite away, remember. I will have no eavesdropping, and you need not attempt it."

"Of course not, mam'selle. But Miss Maud may not come up here."

"Oh, yes, she will. And don't forget to take yourself quite beyond hearing. If I catch you listening, now, I shall consider it my duty to tell Mrs. Ingestre what became of the bracelet and those gold eagles that she missed."

Susette turned pale. "Don't do that, mam'selle. You know I am ready to do just what you say always. If you tells me to go away, I goes away ; if you tells me to listen, why then I listens. I has no other wish than your own, Miss Magdalen."

"That is sufficient. We understand each other, then."

Maud entered, just at that moment. Magdalen, though expecting to see her agitated, and perhaps in tears, was almost frightened at the sight of her stony eyes, and the hard, stern look which had come upon her face. It was not such an expression as she had ever expected to see on Maud Ingestre's usually gentle and lovely face. She came in very quietly, sitting down in a vacant chair, just opposite to Magdalen.

“Can you send Susette away?” she asked, in a whisper, bending forward. “I have a question to ask you.”

Magdalen nodded with a look of intelligence. Pretty soon she said :

“There, Susette, that will do. You may just put my hair up in a knot, and go now. I will have it dressed by-and-by.”

Susette, having had her instructions beforehand, obeyed with alacrity, though she would gladly have remained, had she dared to do so.

“It is of Earl Devonshire that I wish to speak,” Maud began, abruptly, as the door closed behind the waiting-maid. “You used to know him before you ever came to Thornycroft Grange.”

“Oh yes. I have told you so a great many times. We were very good friends, then, he was so kind and cordial to me.”

“I believe you know something of his history—more than ever you confided to me. I wish you would tell me all that you do know.”

“Why, Maud, how curious you have grown, all at once,” returned Magdalen, laughingly. “But I cannot conceive why you should come to me for such a purpose. Now that you and Earl are really engaged, I know of no reason why you should not solicit all necessary information from him.”

“It does not matter,” said Maud, with some impatience. “You are not telling me what I wish to know.”

“For a very good reason, dear Maud. My knowledge of Mr. Devonshire’s past life is extremely limited, and you have heard all I have to tell, fully a score of times, already”.

“You are certainly keeping back something,” she said. “I must and will know it! At least, answer me one question, Magdalen Duprez,” clutching almost fiercely at her

arm. "Who was that woman who was poisoned at the Washington House, and what had Earl to do with her?"

Magdalen started up, with a well-feigned exclamation of astonishment.

"O Maud, what have you discovered?" she cried. "Who has been telling you aught of her?"

"Was I not there to see for myself? From his manner alone, I discovered that Earl must have known the woman at some previous time. I saw that you, also, recognized her, and seemed to be looking to him for an explanation. Now, what is all this mystery? I must find it out!"

Magdalen was silent, at first.

"Perhaps I had better tell you the little I do know," she finally said, with pretended reluctance. "I have kept it back, hitherto, because I thought it would answer no especial purpose to reveal it. I cannot tell you the woman's name, nor anything about her. By accident, I once saw her picture in Mr. Devonshire's possession. That was long enough before I ever came to Thornycroft Grange. The picture looked younger than did Mrs. Grant, but the face is a peculiar one, and I knew that I could not be mistaken."

"But the picture?" Maud interrupted eagerly. "Did you not learn from whom it had been taken?"

"No. It had dropped accidentally from his pocket and I had picked it up. He seemed much confused, I remember, and would not suffer me to retain it half as long as I would have been glad to. Of course I questioned him about it; but he pretended that it was the property of some friend, who had slipped it into his pocket to carry out a joke."

Maud's expression became more helpless than before. Magdalen's words were but confirming her worst fears, and strengthening her conviction in the truth of Leonard Harding's suspicions.

“What is your opinion? You do not believe Earl’s explanation was the true one?” she asked, in a weary, despondent tone.

“I must answer in the negative. That woman was certainly a near relative, or a very dear friend. You mistrusted as much as that, from his manner in the inn. I cannot understand why he does not explain the matter. But for some circumstances, I should really think the woman must have been a former sweetheart, or possibly a divorced wife!”

Maud uttered a low cry.

“I cannot, will not believe it!” she exclaimed.

“Do you not remember the letter which was found? It was written to the woman’s husband, and no one doubts that he was the murderer! Do you not realize the position in which your suspicions are placing Earl Devonshire?”

Magdalen covered her face with both hands.

“O Maud, Maud, I cannot help it!” she groaned. “The thought is killing me, but I am utterly unable to crush or thrust it from me! I have loved Earl as a sister might have loved an only brother. He has been all that to me, so kind, so good and patient! It distresses me beyond measure to be compelled to think ill of him!”

Maud could not doubt the genuineness of her emotion. Her own face grew suddenly hard and repellent, once more.

“You have told me enough, Magdalen,” she said, in a low, quiet tone. “I have no desire to hear more. The subject need not be broached between us again.”

She turned away. Magdalen held out her hand, and seemed as if ready to mingle their tears and prayers together. Somehow she could not feel very cordial or affectionate toward her companion, just then. She had reached the door, when Magdalen came quickly forward.

“Remember, dear Maud, that this conversation must never be repeated, even to your mother,” she said, anxiously. “Otherwise, it might result in serious evil to Earl. We can keep our own secret—can and will! I could never rest easy, thinking I had harmed my best friend. Our suspicions may be entirely groundless, after all.”

“I am not a common newsmonger,” returned Maud, with some hauteur. “I can keep my own counsel, where it is for the interest of a friend so to do.”

She slowly crossed over to her own room, carefully locking the door as she went in. Once there, and her fortitude utterly gave way. She sank upon the nearest couch, sobbing and moaning as if her very heart would break. It was the first rude shock that had ever startled her from young love’s dream, and the awakening was terrible.

But her heart still plead strongly for Earl. It was so hard to believe him base and wicked—to give him up! She never would have given the least credence to anything Leonard Harding and Magdalen might have said, had not her own senses helped to convince her that they might be correct. There was a mystery about her lover’s relation to the poisoned woman, and guilt is the usual accompaniment of mystery. However, she resolved to put the matter to one additional test.

Accordingly, she carefully dressed herself, toward evening, and walked down to Linden-Car. She would not take the carriage, for she did not wish any one at the Grange to suspect her destination. Her object was to call upon Doctor Andrews, and get all the information she could from him.”

She found the physician in, and, for a wonder, alone. He seemed somewhat surprised at seeing Maud, but politely invited her in, and placed for her a chair.

“Pray what can I do for you, Miss Ingestre?” he

asked, with cordial affability. "Is there any one sick at the Grange, or are you troubled with some provoking tooth that needs looking to?"

"We are all well, thank you, Doctor Andrews, and do not stand in need of your professional service."

The quiet, grave tone in which she spoke seemed to surprise the physician. He eyed her keenly.

"How can I serve you, then?" he asked more seriously. "I shall be very glad to do anything in my power."

She was touched by the kindness of his manner. She drew a little nearer, feeling that he would be her true friend.

"I wanted to ask you about—about—that shocking affair at the Washington House," she began hesitatingly.

Doctor Andrews now appeared really startled. "Well?" was all the reply he made.

"It was you that mixed the cordial that was sent to Mrs. Grant?"

"Yes."

"I understand you have declared it was properly prepared, and that Mr. Read has testified to the same thing. Now what I wish to ask is, whether any one else had access to the cordial before it was sent from your office? Whether——"

She paused in deep distress, utterly breaking down. She wrung her hands convulsively, fixing her imploring eyes upon Doctor Andrews's face. He grew a shade paler, becoming more and more puzzled and uneasy every moment. He paced once or twice across the office, apparently at a loss what to do or say.

"Tell me why you are so curious about this matter, and then I will answer your questions, Miss Ingestre," he uttered, at last, pausing near her. "Do not fear to confide in me. You can trust me as implicitly as the best friend you have."

And she felt that she could—that he was worthy of her confidence. She lifted her eyes frankly, though very mournfully.

“I will,” she said. “I am going to trust you with more than my own life—with the reputation of another, and even his personal safety, perhaps. My coming here concerns Earl Devonshire. I wish to know if he was in your office while that cordial was here.”

The physician hesitated a moment, a look of keen pain upon his face.

“He was,” he firmly said, slowly.

“Did he see the cordial, and know for whom it was intended?”

“You are determined to force the truth from me—he did.”

“One question more,” and now her voice was sharp with pain. “Would it have been possible for Mr. Devonshire, during his call here, to have mixed poison with the cordial? possible without having been detected by yourself or Mr. Read?”

“Good heavens, Miss Ingestre, will nothing but the whole truth satisfy you? Must I answer your last question?”

“It is really necessary to my happiness that you should,” she returned, faintly.

He did not speak for a short space of time. He seemed pondering the matter in his own mind.

“It may be best to tell you,” he said, finally, looking at her with real compassion in his gaze. “I have heard that you are to marry Earl Devonshire. If such is the case, you certainly ought to know the truth. Yes, he might have introduced poison into that cordial; and I have often queried with myself whether he did or not, though I have always liked Devonshire, and so would not hint to any one

of my suspicion. I had been using some strychnia that afternoon, I remember, and had carelessly left a paper of it lying open on my table. The bottle of cordial stood near it when Devonshire came in. He had the cordial in his hand, I could swear to that! He might easily have dropped a few grains of strychnia into it, though whether he did or not is a mere matter of conjecture. At this moment, I would give half my fortune to be satisfied on that point."

Maud had listened with bated breath. Here was a confirmation of her worst fears. But she did not shriek or faint. At first, she felt dizzy and weak, almost numb with pain and agony. There was brave, true metal in that girl's character, and now it was manifesting itself. She might have grieved herself ill, had any misfortune that was not his own fault happened to her lover. But somehow, the thought of his baseness seemed to steel her heart against him, and her love was likely to die a speedy death, in all the haughty scorn which she felt for his wickedness.

"It seems so strange, Miss Ingestre," said Dr. Andrews, at last, almost awed by the cold, stern look upon her face. "What should have led you to suspect Devonshire? I did not imagine the idea had ever occurred to more than one or two persons besides myself."

"There are various circumstances which I cannot explain," she answered; "but you have put the last doubt at rest. I now believe he is a guilty man!"

"I fear so," shaking his head. "I would rather accuse my own brother. He must have been sorely tempted, or he would never have resorted to such a crime. But I do not consider it my duty to inform on him, under present circumstances. His own conscience will be punishment enough, for he is not one to commit crime with impunity."

We had better keep our own counsel, had we not, Miss Ingestre?"

Maud merely bowed. She thanked the good physician for his kindness, and very shortly took her leave. She was in no mood, just then, to endure even his sympathetic looks and words of comfort.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CLOUDED LIFE.

THE setting sun was just streaking the western sky with its crimson bars, as Maud, returning, walked slowly up to the Grange.

She had nearly reached it, when she saw Earl Devonshire himself, waiting for her a short distance ahead. He came down the road to meet her, holding out his hand with a smile that was gravely tender.

"I have been waiting for you, dear Maud," said he, "and am glad you have come at last."

She paused beside him, never seeming to notice his extended hand.

"What do you wish, Mr. Devonshire?" she asked, quietly, "I hope you will make your communication brief, as I am in a hurry."

"Maud!"

There was a world of reproach in the tone in which he uttered her name. His earnest eyes sought her face with a look of amazement. He took a step or two nearer.

"Maud, what is the matter? What has happened to trouble or vex you? Do you know that you were hardly civil to me just now?"

He tried to smile, but the attempt was a poor one. He

saw plainly from the expression of the girl's face, that something unusual had occurred. He tried to take her hand, but she resolutely kept it from him.

“What do you wish, Mr. Devonshire?” she repeated. “I cannot linger long here.”

He turned toward her with a look of keen pain upon his face.

“What is the meaning of this coldness, Maud?” he asked, anxiously. “You are not like yourself, to-night. You surely have not ceased to love me?”

“But I have, though,” she answered, meeting his gaze steadily. “I doubt if I ever cared very much for you, else I should not find it so easy to cast your image from my heart! Now, you are no more to me than any other mortal—indeed rather less than most, since I despise and scorn you more heartily than any other! Go, now, our engagement is at an end! I never wish to look upon your face again!”

These were wild, foolish words, but they were wrung from her in the keen agony of the moment.

“There must be some cause for your singular conduct and vehement language,” Earl said, in a voice that was husky, despite every effort. “Will you not explain yourself?”

“What further need I say than that I have ceased to care for you? We could never be happy together. There is another reason, though. Shall I tell it to you?”

“Yes.”

“You have tried to deceive me, for which I both detest and scorn you. I have discovered what that woman who was most foully *poisoned* at the Washington House, was to you!”

His face grew white to the very lips. He turned from her with a groan.

“And you give me up for this!” he cried. “Oh, Maud, Maud, I had thought you loved me better! Then we must indeed part! God be with you, and forgive you as I do!”

He did not say another word. He only caught her hand, which she was powerless to prevent, and wrung it hard, a look of such misery upon his face as made her shiver. Then he walked rapidly away, leaving her there.

She crept along the road, and up to the Grange, the most utterly desolate and wretched creature on the whole face of the globe—at least, so she thought.

She tried to steal in unnoticed, but Aunt Barbara’s quick ear caught the sound of her step, and she threw open the parlor door suddenly, while the poor girl was crossing the hall. The parlor was lighted, and Mrs. Ingestre and Magdalen were there, as well as Miss Dean. The light flared broadly upon Maud’s shrinking form.

“Why, it is our White Rose, and alone, too,” Aunt Barbara exclaimed, in surprise. “Where is Mr. Devonshire? He went out to meet you only a short time since. Magdalen told him you had gone in the direction of the village. Did you not see him?”

“Yes. But he did not come on to the house with me. I think he has returned to Colonel Floyd’s.”

Maud tried to steady her voice, but it sounded harsh and unnatural, despite every effort.

“How very strange! I thought he meant to spend the evening, as usual. But come in, child. You have been loitering too long in the evening air, and have taken cold, I fear. You are really quite hoarse.”

Maud attempted to escape up-stairs, but Aunt Barbara, in her solicitude, had taken a step or two nearer, and caught sight of the girl’s pallid face.

“Mercy! How white you are! What is the matter? Are you ill?”

Mrs. Ingestre now came out, looking anxious and uneasy.

“You are indeed very pale, dear Maud,” she said. “Do come in and lie down upon the sofa, and I will fetch you some tea.”

Maud shook her head, breaking from them almost rudely.

“Oh, no,” she said. “It is only a pain that may soon wear away. I would much rather go up to my own room, where I can be quiet and entirely alone.”

She found it very hard to get away, though, between her mother’s solicitude and Aunt Barbara’s officiousness. But she did succeed, at last, in reaching her chamber, and those listening below heard the key click in the lock. She was evidently determined to be let alone.

“What can be the matter, I wonder?” said Mrs. Ingestre, returning to the parlor. “Maud is very much troubled about something. I can see it in her face. It is not physical pain alone that distresses her so.”

Magdalen, who had heard her remark, smiled very queerly, for she shrewdly suspected what had occurred. Aunt Barbara, looking at her suddenly, caught the smile, and the significant expression of her features.

“You are at the bottom of this, Magdalen Duprez,” she exclaimed, regarding the girl suspiciously. “You have been at work at your despicable double-dealing! There has been a quarrel between Earl and Maud, or he would surely have come back to the Grange with her. I could take my oath that it is all your fault!”

Aunt Barbara’s eyes flashed indignantly, for she was pretty thoroughly aroused. Magdalen listened unmoved,

except the air of injured innocence that she put on. It was not best to be too resentful in Mrs. Ingestre's presence.

"Why, Barbara, I am really shocked," said the latter lady, reprovingly. "You ought not to attack Magdalen in that way—it is neither courteous nor proper. I am sure she had nothing to do with Maud's trouble."

Aunt Barbara muttered something to the effect that she "was not so sure of that," but very wisely suffered the conversation to drop there. She was feeling too anxious and worried about Maud to care, just then, to cross swords with her old enemy.

Maud was more like herself the next day, though she went about with a white face and swollen eyes, and no one could help seeing but that she was feeling very miserable. But she wisely kept her own counsel, only saying once to her mother that she had "given Earl Devonshire up, because she did not think they were by any means suited to each other." Further than that, no amount of persuasion could induce her to disclose. Therefore Mrs. Ingestre and Aunt Barbara concluded that she and Earl had been having some idle quarrel, as all lovers do, and that they would be glad enough to make up again, after a day or two had passed in this way.

Herein they were much mistaken. After a day or two had gone by, instead of seeing any signs of a reconciliation between the two, matters seemed at a worse pass than ever, for the news came to the Grange that Earl had advertised the house he was building, for sale, and was going to start for New York the next day, probably not to return.

Mrs. Ingestre and Aunt Barbara received the intelligence with real dismay and anxiety, they were so fearful of its effect upon Maud. But the young girl was really relieved.

As for Magdalen, she could have raved like a mad person, in her unavailing regret and fury. She had only meant to part Earl and Maud, and not to drive the man she loved so hopelessly, entirely from the place. It was better to see him as Maud's lover, even, than not to see him at all.

She put on her bonnet and shawl within an hour after she had heard the news, and went over to Col. Floyd's. She was afraid Earl would go away without coming to the Grange to see her once more, and she was ready to risk anything rather than to have that happen.

She stole softly along the garden-walks, keeping herself concealed from chance observation by the shrubbery, creeping along like some guilty creature, until she had come opposite his windows. She watched her opportunity, and darted across the piazza, and into the room, through one of the low windows.

"O Earl!" she cried, "is it indeed true that you are going away—going to leave Linden-Car forever?"

She went close up to him, standing there eager and panting. He started up with an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, Magdalen, is it you?" he asked, with some displeasure in his voice. "How came you here?"

"I heard that you were going to leave us," she answered, dropping her eyes in some confusion. "I knew that you and Maud had quarrelled, and I was afraid you would not come to the Grange to bid us all good-by, and that I should not see you very soon again."

He looked at her rather curiously, a light breaking suddenly over his face.

"And so you have stolen in here like some culprit, Magdalen! I am surprised at you. You are very unwise and imprudent."

"O Earl, how could I help it?" she cried, utterly giving

way to her emotions. "I believe it made me mad to think you were going to leave me, that I might never look on your face again! I forgot everything—prudence, womanly reserve, all—and only remembered how miserable I should be without you. Oh, do not go, Earl! You have been so much to me in this past year or two! I feel as if I could not give you up now!"

She clasped her hands, lifting her pleading eyes to his face.

"Hush, Magdalen!" he said, almost severely. "This is wild talk, and you will yourself be sorry for having said so much. Go back directly, and as you came. You are not yourself to-day. When you are calmer, you will see the folly of what you have done. I am sorry, so sorry, that you should have been so weak."

There was only cold, stern reproof in his tone. She clasped her hands with a gesture of despair. She was about to speak once more, but just then there came a rap upon the door leading to the hall.

Earl looked very much annoyed, but he made a gesture of caution to Magdalen, and opened it just far enough to see who was there. It was Aunt Barbara. She had been calling on Mrs. Col. Floyd, and had stopped at Earl's door on her way out. Indeed that had been all her real object in coming over—to see Earl.

"Ah, good afternoon, Mr. Devonshire! I am glad to see you!" she exclaimed, briskly. "Mrs. Floyd just told me that you were in, and I could not withstand the temptation of calling at your door. Besides, I heard that you were going away. It is not really so, is it, Mr. Devonshire?"

"It is," he returned briefly, without further unclosing the door; "I leave for New York early to-morrow morning."

“I am sorry, very sorry. You must surely come over to the Grange before you go. We shall be glad to see you.”

“Thank you, but I fear I cannot. My time will be pretty well occupied until I start.”

“But you must come, though. I shall take no excuse. If we had not wished you to come, I should never have been at the trouble of calling to see you. You will excuse the liberty, will you not?” laughingly. “It cannot be improper for an old lady like me!”

She changed her position just a trifle, enough so that she just then caught a glimpse of Magdalen’s dress through the hinges. A look of the most utter surprise crossed her face, and her expression changed almost instantly.

“Ah!” she uttered, in a sharp, significant tone. “Well, good-by, Mr. Devonshire, if I do not see you again.”

She turned away rather abruptly, without even offering to shake hands at parting. Her manner had altered so suddenly that Earl could not doubt but that she had seen Magdalen.

“I am afraid you have worked irreparable injury to us both by your folly in coming here, Magdalen,” he said, with relentless bluntness. “I am sure Miss Dean saw you, and, if so, she may put a very harsh construction on your conduct.”

Magdalen looked humiliated, and utterly despondent.

“I am sorry that I came,” she murmured, regretfully. “I will go back at once, before any one else finds me here. But do not think too harshly of me, Earl. Remember you are the only friend I have. I should die if you were to desert me entirely.”

“You must go now, Magdalen,” he said, holding out his hand. “I shall see you again ere many weeks, and will provide a home for you, if you are not happy and contented

at the Grange. Just now I have a task before me, which my duty to the dead compels me to perform. When that is done, I shall come for you. Farewell, till that time shall arrive."

She closed her fingers over his, almost convulsively, and then, not daring to trust herself further, crept quickly back through the window, as she had entered, and was almost immediately lost to sight among the shrubbery in the garden.

When she reached the Grange, she stole up to her own room, through one of the side doors, and did not descend until summoned to the tea-table, where she again met the members of the household. She expected to hear something of her visit, from Aunt Barbara, but that old lady only eyed her a little severely, as she entered the dining-room, and supped her tea in silence.

Affairs often work queerly enough in this world. Our hero had hardly been gone a single week, ere Leonard Harding had become a frequent and apparently welcome visitor at the Grange. He was cordially received, both by Mrs. Ingestre and Maud. By the latter, because of the service which she thought he had rendered her, in opening her eyes to Earl's true character, and by the former, simply because his visits seemed to afford her daughter pleasure. He seemed to have changed for the better, acting the part of a tender brother rather than a lover, toward Maud, and never persecuting her with unwelcome attentions, or even speaking of love.

But this was not all. Earl had scarcely turned his back upon Linden-Car, ere the wildest and most scandalous reports began to be circulated against him. People began to whisper—slyly at first, but soon more openly—that he knew more of the "strange lady," as Mrs. Grant was commonly designated by the villagers, than he would have

cared to tell. The whispers finally changed to direct accusations as the facts which we have narrated came gradually to light, until there was scarce a man, woman, or child, in all Linden-Car, who did not believe him guilty of poisoning the woman, and only his continued absence prevented people from demanding his arrest and trial.

Magdalen watched this course of events with considerable secret uneasiness. It troubled her not a little that Earl was falling into disrepute, and she was even fearful that the authorities would take measures to have him followed and taken charge of. She was utterly at a loss to determine by what means suspicion was at first excited against him in the public mind. She directly accused Leonard Harding more than once, but he most strenuously denied having had any agency in the matter, and as none of the reports could be traced to him, she was forced to believe his assertions. Had it been otherwise, she would have turned against him without a moment's hesitation; for with all her faults, Earl's honor and good name were very precious to Magdalen's heart, and not to be trifled with.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SURGEON'S ASSISTANT.

It was one of those hot, listless summer days, when even insects have a drowsiness in their continual drone and humming. Leonard Harding sat in his office, lolling lazily back in a large arm-chair, a half-smile parting his thin lips. It was an unusually good-natured smile for him. He had just been visiting a patient in the country, and had called at the Grange on returning, and been received there with

unusual graciousness. In this fact lay the whole secret of his present good-humor. He thought that Maud was beginning to favor him more and more.

The office door was wide open, and a man's shadow suddenly fell across the threshold.

Following the shadow, came the most singular-looking man he had ever set eyes upon. A tall hat, encircled by a mourning-band of tarnished crape, surmounted his head. His face below the hat seemed to be that of a person of fifty or thereabouts—the eyebrows were gray and shaggy, his heavy unkempt beard of the same color, as was also the long hair which he wore brushed so smooth and sleek behind his ears. A pair of green goggles sat astride his nose, and nearly concealed a pair of eyes that would otherwise have given a keen and determined expression to the face. He was dressed throughout in a suit of solemn black, though his rusty coat was an inch too short at the waist, and the sleeves two or three inches shorter than the arms required.

He must have noticed the look of quizzical amazement with which Mr. Harding regarded him, though he did not seem in the least discomposed, but came forward with considerable alacrity, carefully depositing the carpet-bag which he carried, in a chair, before he spoke.

“This is Mr. Harding?” he began, in a guttural tone, lifting his tall hat with an awkward bow.

The surgeon nodded.

“I have heard of you, my dear sir; of course I have heard of you! else why should I be here? A man of mark cannot circumscribe his reputation to a given limit, if he would.”

He laughed, a dry hack of a laugh, that would have made some people disagreeably nervous.

“Well, sir, what can I do for you?” asked Mr. Harding.

“You are a surgeon and a chemist, my dear sir?”

“I am.”

“So I have understood. You have chosen noble callings, and those befitting an elevated and refined soul, my dear sir. Surgery is very good to know, but chemistry, sir, chemistry! there is the science to make one great and famous! There’s nothing like it—it is truly wonderful! Even the gods might envy a man who is a perfect master of the great science of chemistry!”

“You know something of it?” asked Mr. Harding, seemingly.

“I am only an amateur. But I mean to be something more, my dear sir. You may say it is late in life to make a beginning, but it will be food and meat and drink to me. I only wish that I had been led to the exhaustless fountain of chemical analysis, at an earlier age. I might have made myself famous ere this—yes, famous, my dear sir!”

“You are quite an enthusiast.”

“Who can wonder, when such a limitless field of research is opening before me! It is a rapturous thought! You must help me—must teach me! Say will you not?” he exclaimed, pulling eagerly at the surgeon’s sleeve. “Your office is a perfect paradise, with all these facilities for experimenting. Let me stay with you, my good sir. I can be of use to you in many ways. I do not ask pay—money is a dross, and as nothing, compared with the priceless knowledge which I seek.”

It was a singular proposition, and at another time Mr. Harding would have ordered the man instantly from the room. But he was unusually good-natured this summer afternoon, as we have said, and therefore uncommonly gracious.

“But, sir,” he returned, “if you wish to become a mas-

ter of the science, you will find scores of institutions in the country, where you could learn much more than you would be able to here."

"But, you could give me a start, my dear sir, and then I should be in a condition to go on by myself. Such a glorious science! Just try me, sir! I will be your servant, your slave. Only give me a chance to study my delightful science with you?"

The surgeon took a moment for reflection. There seemed little risk in trying the man, he was so much in earnest. There were a thousand ways in which he could make himself useful.

He asked him a good many questions, even had him try two or three chemical experiments, to test the amount of his knowledge. Everything was satisfactory, and he soon determined to take this Gideon Wells, as the stranger called himself, for an assistant.

"Have you settled upon a lodging yet, Mr. Wells?" he asked, when everything else had been arranged between them.

"I have not, my good sir. I considered that as a matter of minor importance."

The surgeon smiled.

"Well, never mind," he said. "I think my house-keeper can accommodate you with a room, if you prefer to remain here."

Mr. Wells seemed grateful for the privilege, and was reiterating his thanks, when they were both startled by hearing the clang of the gate at the end of the walk. A lady was coming toward the office. Mr. Harding recognized her at once. It was Magdalen come to pay him a second visit.

"Go right in and get some dinner, Mr. Wells," the surgeon said, hastily. "You will feel better disposed for

work after a good meal. Tell Mrs. Brown that I sent you. This is the way, by that side door, and through the passage. Take your time at the table. There is no need to hurry."

Mr. Wells caught up his carpet-bag and dodged out, with another of his awkward bows. But he paused at the passage-door, with his ear to the key-hole, quietly listening. Surely the surgeon had found a singular assistant.

Meanwhile, Magdalen had entered the office. Mr. Harding received her with a not over-pleasant expression upon his face.

"Why have you come to-day?" he asked, rather coldly, as he placed her a chair.

"One would naturally conclude it was because I wished to see you," she returned, with provoking indifference. "What else could have caused me to take this long walk?"

"Well, what can I do for you?"

"In the first place, I wish to know how much you have told Maud concerning Earl Devonshire and that Mrs. Grant."

"How much have I told her? The whole truth, of course; that the woman called Mrs. Grant was Earl's wife, and that he murdered her because he was determined to marry Miss Maud herself."

Gideon Wells, listening in the passage, had heard every word of this speech, and now started so violently that he came near betraying himself.

"I thought as much," was Magdalen's reply to what the surgeon had said. "You also sent her to me to ask what I knew of Earl and the poisoned woman."

"Yes. I told you I should, you will remember; or, rather, asked your help in deceiving her. I must have some way of convincing her that Devonshire was really guilty. That was before so many of the facts were gener-

ally known. Doctor Andrews suspected that Earl might have put the strychnia into the cordial, while it was at his office, but at first he was too chicken-hearted to tell of it. I sent Miss Maud to him, however, for I knew she would get some information there."

"Yes, she did call on him, though at the time I did not suspect whom she had gone to see. But the time has come when I ought to know the whole truth of this matter. I believe you can solve the mystery, if you will, Leonard Harding, and I ask you what was Earl's real relation to Mrs. Grant? There certainly was some connection between them, but I cannot—will not believe that she was his wife, and he is guilty of her death?"

The surgeon turned pale.

"It is a disagreeable subject to converse upon," he cried, hastily. "Let us say no more about it. I know something of the truth, but I do most solemnly assure you that a part is as complete a mystery to myself as to you. I have vainly puzzled my brain over it."

Magdalen saw that he was really in earnest. It was some moments ere she spoke again.

"I am very sorry that people are beginning to suspect Earl," she said at last. "You must help me to clear his name from all reproach; otherwise, I shall have nothing further to do with your schemes. I can depend upon you?"

She eyed him resolutely. He quailed under her steady gaze, and writhed uneasily.

"Yes, Magdalen," he returned, finally. "Help me to win Maud, and the very day that makes her my wife, I will put the proofs of Devonshire's innocence into your hands. When Maud is once bound to me, it will be safe to let her know her former lover was not a guilty man!"

"You have the proofs, then?" asked Magdalen, eagerly.

“I did not say that,” smiling shrewdly; “but they are where I can make them available at any moment. I do not mind confessing so much to you.”

“Then, for Heaven’s sake, hurry your wooing with my dainty Maud! I cannot endure this waiting! You might as well strike while the iron is hot. Your charmer would marry you now, while smarting under a sense of Earl’s wickedness and injustice toward her, sooner than at any other time. I am sure there is no need for further delay. You have played the part of a disinterested friend to perfection, and now I think she would be ready to listen to your suit.”

The surgeon gave a start of glad surprise.

“I will act on your advice,” he said, with sudden eagerness. “You are right; she will hardly refuse me now, after all I have done for her. I have paid too heavy a price to lose her. But I must go at my wooing moderately. I will write to her and to Mrs. Ingestre this very night. That will be a better course than to see them personally.”

These two arch plotters had very much more to say to each other; but Gideon Wells appeared to have heard enough to suit his purpose, for he now stole softly away from the door, with a grim smile upon his lips, and went to order his dinner.

When he returned to the office, an hour later, Mr. Harding was alone, and busy in sorting over some papers in his private secretary, which stood at one end of the apartment. He seemed somewhat annoyed at his assistant’s sudden appearance, and, in his confusion, dropped a letter from the bundle of documents which he held in one hand. Mr. Wells stepped briskly forward, and picked it up, giving it to the surgeon. The face of the latter blanched, in spite of every effort, as he took it, for it was the letter which Jake had brought in to him on that memorable Tuesday

afternoon, when Magdalen Duprez had visited his office for the first time.

Was it the result of his guilty fears, or did he indeed hear a smothered exclamation from Mr. Wells, as he picked up the letter? He turned, eyeing him keenly, but his assistant had already taken up a scientific treatise which lay on the table, and only seemed bent on mastering its contents.

Several times after that, he found himself carefully scrutinizing Mr. Wells' face and figure, as if something about one or the other had suddenly struck him as being familiar. Could it be possible that he had ever seen him, previous to his coming there that day? It seemed very unlikely, as his was a physiognomy one would not be apt to forget, or find difficulty in locating.

However, Mr. Harding did not have long in which to revolve these thoughts in his mind, for he was soon called out to attend a patient. He left Mr. Wells in the office, telling him to make himself at home, and as comfortable as might be, seeing it was his first day there. The new assistant assured him that he should do so, declaring nothing would suit him better than to be left to "delve in the scientific truths of the treatise which he had found."

However, the door had hardly closed upon the surgeon, ere this enthusiastic chemist had crossed the room to the secretary, and was busy in stealthily taking impressions of the locks in some soft wax, with which he seemed to have purposely provided himself. Verily, Mr. Harding would not have been overmuch pleased, could he have seen his worthy assistant just then!

Later, near evening, he set out as if for a purposeless walk, but went directly to the office of Dr. Andrews, when sure that no one was watching his movements. At first, the physician received him as an utter stranger; but a few

whispered words on Mr. Wells' part called forth an exclamation of unbounded surprise from the good doctor, and the two retired to a room where they could converse without any risk of being surprised or overheard.

When they came out, after the lapse of half an hour, Doctor Andrews looked happier than he had done for many a day. He shook hands with Mr. Wells at parting, saying, earnestly :

“ May God bless and help you, my friend ! ”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

MR. HARDING was not one to hesitate long, having once made up his mind to a particular course of action. Therefore, late in the evening of the same day of Magdalen's visit, having dismissed Mr. Wells and black Jake for the night, he set about composing the two epistles which were to inform Maud and Mrs. Ingestre that he had not, as yet, relinquished all hopes of securing the hand of the former.

They were not sent over to the Grange until the next day. Mrs. Ingestre, Aunt Barbara, and Maud, were all in the dressing-room of the former. Magdalen had heard them go in some time before. She determined to know in what manner the letters were received, and so, after a few moments, stole across the hall, and into one of the spare chambers which communicated with Mrs. Ingestre's room through a small closet.

They had apparently just finished the perusal of the letters, for Mrs. Ingestre was saying, in the tenderest and most solicitous of tones :

“I think I can guess the tenor of the letter which you have just received, dear Maud. It is from Mr. Harding.”

“Yes, mamma,” returned the young girl.

“He has renewed his propositions for your hand. Such haste seems almost indecorous, but he pleads his cause in such a humble, deprecating way, that I am inclined to overlook it. What have you to say to his suit, my daughter?”

“I have no love to give him, mamma,” her tone very sad. “I like him much better as a friend than a suitor.”

“Poor child! I do not doubt it. But your happiness is all I seek. Mr. Harding has been a good friend to you, of late, and has shown himself a really generous and noble man. But you must answer him according to the dictates of your own heart.”

“I admire him much more than I did at one time; but I do not think I will ever marry. No new love can ever spring out of the ashes of the old.”

“It is very foolish of you to say that, child,” exclaimed Aunt Barbara, now making herself heard. “You ought not to close your heart against the tender passion, just because one lover has been proven a villain. Though, for my part, I can’t say that I believe Leonard Harding is a whit better man than Earl Devonshire. Magdalen Duprez had them both under her thumb, according to my view of the case.”

“What do you mean, Barbara?” asked Mrs. Ingestre, in some surprise.

“Just what I say. I have not been blind to all the winks, and blinks, and nods that have passed between her and Leonard Harding, if you have. I tell you there is some secret understanding between those two. Only yesterday afternoon I saw her stealing into his office as slyly as any thief! She went there for no good purpose, I can tell you that.”

“I think you misjudge Magdalen. You do not like her, and therefore put the worst possible construction upon her actions.”

“No, I do not like her, and have always told you so. You have been nourishing a viper ever since she came here. She has already stung our poor Maud nearly to death, and there is no telling where she will stop short of her wickedness. Somehow, I think there would have been no trouble but for her. I have never told you before, but she visited Earl, secretly, in his room, the day before he left Linden-Car. No respectable young lady would ever have been guilty of such folly. I was over to Colonel Floyd’s, and saw her there.”

Magdalen waited eagerly for Mrs. Ingestre’s reply, but there was an interruption to the conversation just then. A servant came to say that Dr. Andrews was in the library, and wished a private interview with the mistress of the Grange.

When Mrs. Ingestre re-entered her dressing-room, half an hour later, her countenance was fairly radiant with pleasure.

“My darling Maud, Doctor Andrews’s opportune visit has spared us a present decision in Mr. Harding’s case. With your consent, I will answer both his letters. I am going to invite him here to-morrow night, when matters may be arranged as our best judgment shall indicate.”

She sat down to her writing-desk, dashing off a few hasty lines; then, after looking them carefully over, she read aloud as follows:

“MR. HARDING:—Your letters have been received, and duly considered. In a matter of such importance, we require time for careful deliberation. Will you call at Thornycroft Grange to-morrow evening, at seven o’clock, and learn our decision?”

Respectfully,

E. INGESTRE.”

“Mamma,” exclaimed Maud, as her mother finished reading, “you surely have not meant to give him any encouragement?”

Mrs. Ingestre smiled rather queerly, but would answer no questions. Therefore Magdalen was compelled to go back to her room without having learned anything further.

CHAPTER XIX.

ALL THINGS MADE CLEAR.

THE listless hours of the long summer's day that followed dragged slowly enough; but when seven o'clock came around, Leonard Harding was punctual to the moment, and stood on the steps at Thornycroft Grange, dressed with the most fastidious care. He was immediately ushered into the well-lighted drawing-room, where, to his surprise and secret uneasiness, he found quite a motley group already assembled.

Mrs. Ingestre stood near the door, to receive him; Maud and Aunt Barbara were a little further along, while Magdalen was crouching near one of the windows, glancing about her with an anxious, half-scared look in her eyes, as if fearful of coming trouble.

Doctor Andrews was there, bland and smiling, as if enjoying himself quite hugely. Doctor Rynd was also present, as was Mr. Read, Mr. and Mrs. Colonel Floyd, Dame Alden and her husband, and Mr. Deacon Jones. Every countenance wore a slightly puzzled expression, with the exception of Dr. Andrews' and Mrs. Ingestre's.

The surgeon was secretly uneasy, but he seemed determined to put a bold face upon the matter, for he came forward, outwardly calm and composed, after the first start of

surprise, greeting those about him with cool, affable assurance.

He had barely found a seat, when the door-bell again sounded, and this time who should be admitted but Mr. Gideon Wells. He came forward, bowing to Mrs. Ingestre after his awkward fashion. Mr. Harding could not quite repress his surprise, but jumped suddenly to his feet catching his assistant by the arm, as he approached.

“Why are you here, Mr. Wells?” he asked excitedly. “Have any of my patients sent for me?”

“No one, my dear sir,” returned the assistant quietly. “I came because our worthy hostess was so very kind as to send me an invitation. I do not mind leaving my beloved chemicals for one evening, you know.”

At this moment, Doctor Andrews stepped toward the centre of the room, and suddenly spoke, addressing those assembled.

“My friends,” he began, “I see plainly from your faces, how surprised you all are at having been summoned here in this way. But it was at my suggestion that Mrs. Ingestre invited you. I wished to see justice done to one who has been most foully wronged. I was also desirous of clearing up a mystery that has troubled many besides ourselves of late. I allude to the poisoning of a woman known as Mrs. Grant, at the Washington House!”

A murmur of intense excitement ran through the room. Mr. Harding held his position, but his face had blanched to the color of death.

“Since Earl Devonshire’s departure from our village,” the physician resumed, “everything has been done that could be to brand him with this dastardly crime. You have nearly all thought him guilty. Pretended proof has been whispered about, but it was as fallacious and base as

the nature who originated it. Earl, come forward and prove your innocence ! ”

Mr. Wells stepped toward the centre of the room. With a quick movement, goggles, wig and false beard were thrown aside, and there, beneath the brown satin and well-painted wrinkles that were still left upon his face, were to be seen the well-known features of Earl Devonshire. All cried out in amazement, while the surgeon ground his teeth in baffled fury.

“ Yes, my friends,” said the hero, in a clear, ringing tone, “ I am indeed Earl Devonshire, though I have been playing at a masquerade for the past few days. I had an end to work out, but it is accomplished, thank God ! That is why I left you so suddenly, and gave out word I was going to New York. I was determined to avenge the death of Mrs. Grant, by bringing the murderer to justice. I went away, never once suspecting that I should myself be charged with the dreadful deed. At the time, I had told no one of my object, lest I should be foiled in my attempt, and the ends of justice be defeated. But the time has at last come when I may speak out, and let the whole truth be known. The real murderer stands among you, in the person of Leonard Harding ! ”

“ It is a lie—an infamous slander ! ” cried the surgeon, leaping to his feet, and foaming with rage. “ I defy you to bring forward proofs of what you have said ! ”

“ These shall be furnished in good time,” calmly returned our hero, sternly facing the infuriated man. “ You must remember that I have spent two or three days in your office, and that your private papers are kept in your secretary there ! Of course I have not hesitated to examine them. Your career of crime is nearly run. And furthermore, I have abundance of proof to show that the woman you murdered was your own wife ! ”

The surgeon cowed like a whipped cur. He saw that all was up with him. Maud Ingestre stepped forward, grasping Earl's arm.

"O Earl," she cried, "that man and Magdalen tried to make me believe that you were Mrs. Grant's husband, and that you murdered her! What was she to you? Will you not tell me?"

"Yes," repeated the surgeon, with a villainous smile, "what was she to you? This is a question which even I could not settle to my satisfaction. She was your paramour, no doubt. A pretty wife for me to have claimed, was she not?"

"Spare your insinuations—they cannot hurt me," Earl answered. "Neither will they reflect on the dead, when the truth is known. That woman was my sister!"

Every one was astonished at this announcement, even Mr. Harding. This was the first he had known of the real connection between these two.

"Yes, she was my sister," he resumed, after a pause. "We were orphans, and had been left in the charge of an uncle on my mother's side. My sister Emily was older than myself. While I was at college, my uncle, a rich but very avaricious man, attempted to marry her to a wealthy banker old enough to have been her father. She refused, but he still persisted, and finally, as I have since discovered, brought her a letter purporting to have come from myself, in which I sanctioned the match, and urged her to wed the banker without delay, if she wished to retain my brotherly affection and approval.

"This was too much. She saw herself beset on all sides, and finally fled from my uncle's house, leaving no clue to her destination. She went to a distant country village; and it was there, when laboring as the village schoolmistress, that she met Mr. Harding. He was spend-

ing a summer in the country, to recruit from the debaucheries of a winter in town. He was there under an assumed name, that of Giles Raynham.

“In the village my sister was only known as Emily Lee. She never told her true name, lest some old friend should hear of it, and find her out. Mr. Harding soon taught her to love him with a devotion rare even in a woman; but I have reason to think that not even to him did she ever confess the true secret of her birth. She thought I had turned against her, just as our uncle had done, and she was determined to have no further intercourse with either of us. That is why she persisted in keeping her secret, no doubt.

“After a little, Mr. Harding took her to the nearest city, and married her there. I think he must have loved her then, for he was married under his true name, Leonard Harding, as I have learned from consulting this marriage certificate, which I found, among many other papers, in his desk. After that, I have been able to gain but little clue to their movements until they came here to Linden-Car, though I think he shamefully abused her after a year or two, and finally deserted her.

“As for myself, when I learned of my sister’s flight, I made every possible exertion to discover her hiding place. When I at last learned the name of the village to which she had first flown, I hastened there without delay. But she was already gone, no one knew whither, and the most scandalous reports were being circulated concerning her and this Giles Raynham, as the villagers called him. From their stories, I could not doubt that she was a wronged and ruined girl; and from that moment I ceased to look for her, or to regard her as my sister. This is the reason why, when you saw her picture on one occasion,” turning to Magdalen as he spoke, “I did not tell you whose it really was, though it appears you must have subsequently

learned. And this, dear Maud," addressing our heroine, "is what I thought you meant when you told me you had discovered what the murdered woman was to me. I thought you had found out she was my sister, and a betrayed woman, and your Ingestre pride had taken alarm at the thought of the disgrace. How sadly we have misjudged each other, darling!"

Maud nestled closer to him, hiding her face upon his shoulder. Finally he resumed :

"At last my sister came here, and was taken sick at the Washington House ; but I had no suspicion of her identity until that morning when Maud, Magdalen and myself called to look upon her dead body. I will not attempt to tell you how terribly I was shocked and surprised at the discovery which I then and there made. But somehow, the idea seemed to possess me, all at once, that I must discover the murderer, and bring him to justice ; and in order to succeed in my object, it would be necessary to preserve an unbroken silence respecting my own relationship toward her. That thought helped to calm me. The reading of the letter which had been found only confirmed me in my purpose, for I thought even then I had found a clue—that Leonard Harding answered the description given by the villagers of Giles Raynham, and was in all probability the guilty man.

"I knew I had a wily person to deal with, and therefore went carefully to work, that he need suspect nothing. I remained about for a few days, but could learn nothing new, though I convinced myself, from a conversation held with Dame Alden, that Mr. Harding had found abundant opportunity to drop the poison into the cordial when he had visited my sister's room, while she was still sleeping, that Tuesday afternoon before she died. I felt that my only hope was in getting into his office and search-

ing his effects. To do this, I pretended to go to New York, and after a week or two, again make my appearance in the character of Gideon Wells. But I have succeeded in my object. I have found the paper from which he took the strychnia; I have also in my possession his marriage certificate, and the letter which my sister wrote him from the Washington House. It is precisely like the fragment found under her pillow, with the addition of a few more words."

He took from his pocket the identical letter over which the surgeon had been so much disturbed at the time of Magdalen's first visit to his office. It was examined by Doctor Rynd and several others, and found to be, as Earl had said, a *fac simile* of the fragment taken from under the woman's pillow. The conclusion was as follows:

"I am at the Washington House, dear Leonard, and am known as Mrs. Grant. My landlady says that I really require a physician, and you can attend me in that capacity without having our secret discovered, if you do not wish people here to know that I am your wife. I do entreat of you to come.

" Lovingly, your own

EMILY."

When the letter had been examined and commented on by nearly all in the room, Earl finally resumed in conclusion:

"I am very thankful to know my sister was not the guilty creature I, as well as the villagers among whom she had first taken refuge, thought her, until the recent discoveries which I have made. She was Leonard Harding's lawfully wedded wife, and as such was to be pitied, and not blamed, for she loved him not wisely, but too well. May she rest in peace!"

When Earl had concluded his recital, Harding sat glaring from one to another in a sort of fierce, fiery despair.

He read suspicion and horrified disgust in every averted eye.

He turned for one glance at Maud. She and Earl were still standing close together, her head on his shoulder, his arms folded about her. This was the woman for whom he had risked so much—had even stained his soul with the most fearful of crimes to possess ; and now she was lost to him forever, was resting in another's arms ! The sight was too much for him, and with a cry of thrilling anguish, he suddenly darted through one of the open windows, ere any one could mistrust his intention, and sped madly down the garden walk.

Most of the men started immediately in pursuit ; and so the little company was broken up in confusion, until there was no one left at the Grange besides the family, except Earl and Magdalen Duprez.

Magdalen was completely humbled and broken down. The utter failure of her schemes had subdued her proud haughtiness, and she confessed the whole truth with many bitter tears, and passionate entreaties for forgiveness. She became a better and a nobler woman for the experience through which she had passed.

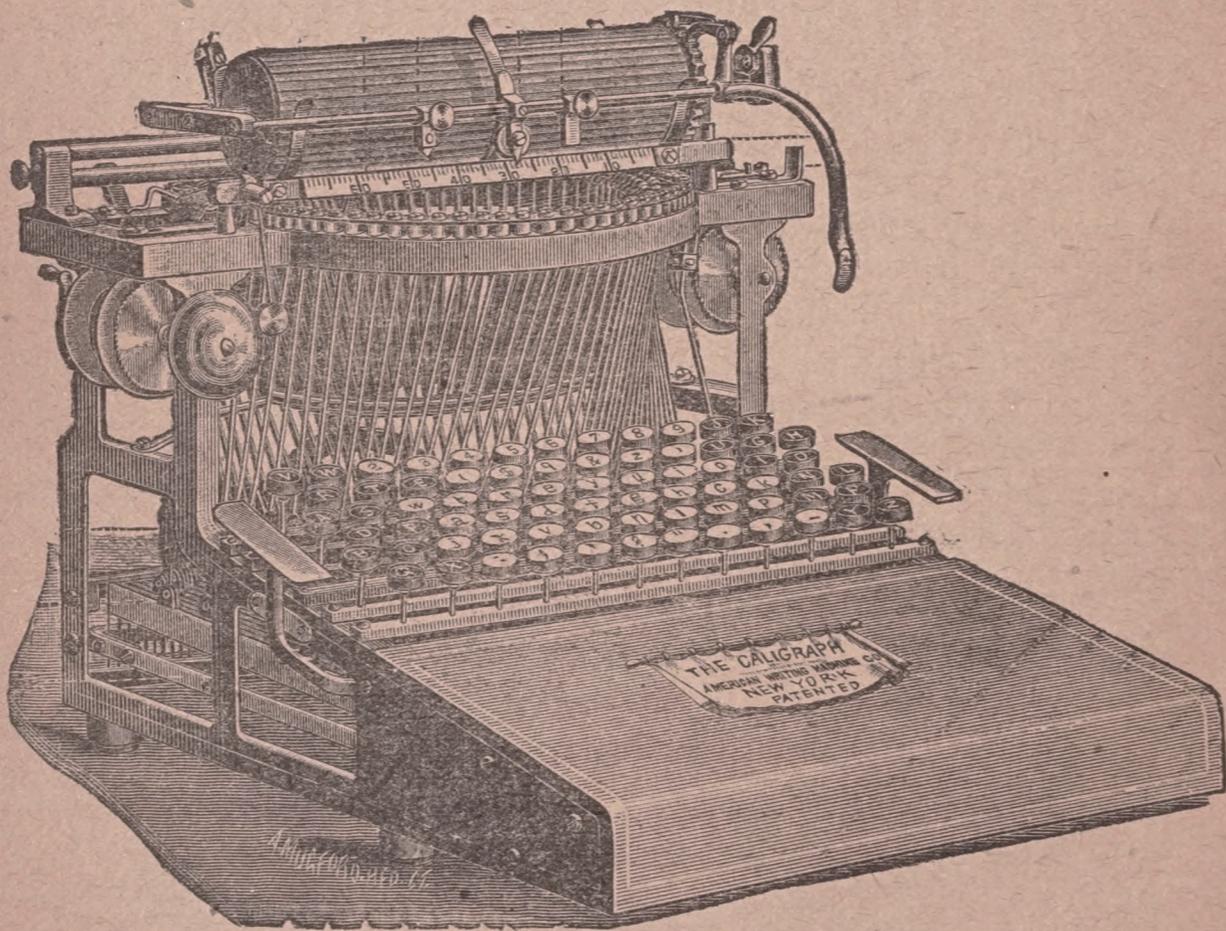
Those who had started in pursuit of Leonard Harding eventually found him in his office, sitting in his arm-chair by the secretary, his face dropped into his hands. They went forward, raising his head almost roughly, but immediately dropped it again, with exclamations of surprise. He was dead. A felon's doom had seemed too awful, and so he had taken his own miserable life.

[THE END.]

“The Caligraph Typewriter

Stands at the Head.”

THE FAVORITE OF PROFESSIONAL MEN
AND BUSINESS MEN.



The AMERICAN WRITING MACHINE CO.

237 Broadway, New York.

THE IDLE HOUR SERIES.

The works in this series are exclusively *American Copyright Novels*, by the most popular authors of the day, which can be obtained in no other edition. They comprise a series of novels of strong dramatic interest, and being printed from large type on good paper, uniformly bound in attractive paper covers, and sold at a popular price, they should command the attention of every lover of good fiction.

NO.	NO.
1. Tirzah Ann's Summer Trip, and Other Sketches. By Josiah Allen's Wife.	11. Ralph Raymond's Heir. By Horatio Alger, Jr.
2. Guilty or Not Guilty. By Amanda M. Douglas.	12. The Fatal Glove. By Clara Augusta.
3. Sir Noel's Heir. By Mrs. May Agnes Fleming.	13. The Heir of Glenville. By Francis A. Durivage.
4. The Twelve Great Diamonds. By Mrs. Jane G. Austin.	14. A Brave Little Woman. By Mrs. Mary A. Denison.
5. The Heiress of Hendee Hall. By Etta W. Pierce.	15. Blackbird Hill. By Esther Serle Kenneth.
6. The Cuban Heiress. By Mary Kyle Dallas.	16. Thornycroft Grange. By Rett Winwood.
7. The Lady Mary. By Mrs. Ann S. Stephens.	17. The Queen's Revenge. By Sylvanus Cobb, Jr.
8. Isora's Bridal Vow. By Margaret Blount.	18. The Mill-Girl of Tyrol. By M. T. Caldor.
9. Ivan the Serf. By Sylvanus Cobb, Jr.	19. David Hunt. By Mrs. Ann S. Stephens.
10. The Wizard of Granada. By M. T. Caldor.	20. It Never Did Run Smooth. By Mrs. Jane G. Austin.

Any of the above books will be sent by mail, postpaid, upon receipt of price, TEN CENTS each. Address

THE F. M. LUPTON PUBLISHING COMPANY.

No. 65 Duane Street,

New York.

THE SOUVENIR SERIES.

The works comprising this series are selected with great care, the aim being to include only the best and most popular works by writers of known ability. Each book is printed in large type on good paper, and uniformly bound in attractive paper covers.

- | | |
|--|---|
| No. | No. |
| 1. The Three Guardsmen. By Alexander Dumas. | 36. The Count of Monte Cristo. By Alexander Dumas. |
| 2. The First Violin. By Jessie Fothergill. | 37. Cast Up By the Sea. By Sir Samuel W. Baker, |
| 3. Mary St. John. By Rosa Nouchette Carey. | 38. A Born Coquette. By "The Duchess." |
| 4. Under-Currents. By "The Duchess." | 39. Willy Reilly. By Wm. Carleton. |
| 5. The Prairie. By J. Fenimore Cooper. | 40. Armored of Lyonesse. By Walter Besant. |
| 6. Knight-Errant. By Edna Lyall. | 41. A Modern Circe. By "The Duchess." |
| 7. Babylon. By Grant Allen. | 42. The Story of Antony Grace. By George Manville Fenn. |
| 8. The Deemster. By Hall Caine. | 43. The Wonderful Adventures of Phra, the Phœnician. Retold by Edwin Lester Arnold. |
| 9. The Miseries of Paris. By Eugene Sue. | 44. Oliver Twist. By Dickens. |
| 10. A Hardy Norseman.* By Edna Lyall. | 45. April's Lady. By "The Duchess." |
| 11. Wee Wifie. By Rosa Nouchette Carey. | 46. The Duke's Secret. By Charlotte M. Braeme. |
| 12. A Woman's Heart. By Mrs. Alexander. | 47. The Reproach of Annesley. By Maxwell Gray |
| 13. Eve. By S. Baring-Gould. | 48. Breezie Langton. By H. Smart. |
| 14. Tempest Driven. By R. Dowling. | 49. The Hon. Mrs. Vereker. By "The Duchess." |
| 15. A Terrible Legacy. By G. W. Appleton. | 50. Won by Waiting. By Edna Lyall. |
| 16. Two Years Before the Mast. By R. H. Dana, Jr. | 51. A Prince of Darkness. By Florence Warden. |
| 17. The Silence of Dean Maitland. By Maxwell Gray. | 52. Mona's Choice. By Mrs. Alexander. |
| 18. Saddle and Sabre. By H. Smart. | 53. Marvel. By "The Duchess." |
| 19. Second Thoughts. By Rhoda Broughton. | 54. Fair Women. By Mrs. Forrester. |
| 20. St. Katharine's by the Tower. By Walter Besant. | 55. A Fiery Ordeal. By C. M. Braeme. |
| 21. One Maid's Mischief. By George Manville Fenn. | 56. A Life's Remorse. By "The Duchess." |
| 22. Molly Bawn. By "The Duchess." | 57. Allan Quartermain. By H. Rider Haggard. |
| 23. Lady Audley's Secret. By Miss M. E. Braddon. | 58. The Witch's Head. By H. Rider Haggard. |
| 24. Kith and Kin. By J. Fothergill. | 59. Weaker Than a Woman. By Charlotte M. Braeme. |
| 25. Edmond Dantes. By Alexander Dumas. | 60. Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea. By Jules Verne. |
| 26. Pilgrim's Progress. By Bunyan. | 61. The Son of Porthos. By Alexander Dumas. |
| 27. The Last of the Mohicans. By J. Fenimore Cooper. | 62. A Dateless Bargain. By C. I. Pirkis. |
| 28. The White Company. By A. Conan Doyle. | 63. Grimm's Fairy Tales. |
| 29. This Wicked World. By Mrs. H. Lovett Cameron. | 64. A Woman's War. By Charlotte M. Braeme. |
| 30. Scheherazade. By Florence Warden. | 65. Anna K ^a renine. By Tolstoi. |
| 31. One Life, One Love. By Miss M. E. Braddon. | 66. His Helpmate. By F. Barrett. |
| 32. My Danish Sweetheart. By W. Clark Russell. | 67. Vivian, the Beauty. By Mrs. Annie Edwards. |
| 33. In the Heart of the Storm. By Maxwell Gray. | 68. Dora Thorne. By C. M. Braeme. |
| 34. Donald Ross of Heimra. By William Black. | 69. Tom Brown's Schooldays. By Thomas Hughes. |
| 35. Doctor Cupid. Rhoda Broughton. | 70. Michael Strogoff. By Jules Verne. |
| | 71. The Old House at Sandwich. By Joseph Hatton. |

 Any of the above books will be sent by mail, postpaid, upon receipt of price, TWENTY-FIVE CENTS each. Address

THE F. M. LUPTON PUBLISHING COMPANY,
No. 65 Duane Street,
New York.

THE BIJOU SERIES.

Comprising the most popular works of the most celebrated authors. Each work in this series is printed from large type on good paper, and uniformly bound in attractive paper covers.

- | | |
|--|---|
| No. | No. |
| 1. The Old Mam'selle's Secret. By E. Marlitt. | 29. A Rogue's Life. By Wilkie Collins. |
| 2. Blind Fate. By Mrs. Alexander. | 30. The Other Man's Wife. By John Strange Winter. |
| 3. A Vagrant Wife. By Florence Warden. | 31. The Master of the Mine. By Robert Buchanan. |
| 4. Peg Woffington. By Charles Reade. | 32. Dear Life. By J. E. Pantou. |
| 5. Ruffino. By Ouida. | 33. Lord Lisle's Daughter. By Charlotte M. Braeme. |
| 6. Love's Atonement. By Th. Bentzon. | 34. The Dark House. By George Manville Fenn. |
| 7. A Little Rebel. By "The Duchess." | 35. Essays. Second Series. By Ralph Waldo Emerson. |
| 8. Merle's Crusade. By Rosa Nouchette Carey. | 36. Doris's Fortune. By Florence Warden. |
| 9. I Have Lived and Loved. By Mrs. Forrester. | 37. The Bag of Diamonds. By George Manville Fenn. |
| 10. Jet: Her Face or Her Fortune. By Mrs. Annie Edwards. | 38. Addie's Husband. By the author of "Jessie." |
| 11. The House on the Marsh. By Florence Warden. | 39. The Tour of the World in Eighty Days. By Jules Verne. |
| 12. For Maimie's Sake. By Grant Allen. | 40. Struck Down. By Hawley Smart. |
| 13. The Essays of Elia. By Charles Lamb. | 41. The Rabbi's Spell. By Stuart C. Cumberland. |
| 14. Christie Johnstone. By Charles Reade. | 42. A Nemesis. By J. Maclaren Cobban. |
| 15. Ladies' Fancy Work. | 43. The Mystery of Mrs. Blencarrow. By Mrs. Oliphant. |
| 16. Wife in Name Only. By Charlotte M. Braeme. | 44. Master Rockafellar's Voyage. By W. Clark Russell. |
| 17. Through Green Glasses. By F. M. Allen. | 45. The Great Hesper. By Frank Barrett. |
| 18. The Story of an African Farm. By Ralph Iron. | 46. The Frontiersmen. By Gustave Aimard. |
| 19. She: A History of Adventure. By H. Rider Haggard. | 47. At the World's Mercy. By Florence Warden. |
| 20. Mr. Fortescue. By William Westall. | 48. The Yellow Mask. By Wilkie Collins. |
| 21. King Solomon's Mines. By H. Rider Haggard. | 49. Three Men in a Boat. By Jerome K. Jerome. |
| 22. Essays. First Series. By Ralph Waldo Emerson. | 50. Matt: A Tale of a Caravan. By Robert Buchanan. |
| 23. Camille. By Alexandre Dumas, Fils. | 51. Lily Lass. By Justin McCarthy, M.P. |
| 24. Beyond the End. By Clarence M. Boutelle. | 52. A Little Irish Girl. By "The Duchess." |
| 25. The Modern Home Cook Book. | 53. Forging the Fetters. By Mrs. ander, |
| 26. The Last Essays of Elia. By Charles Lamb. | 54. What Gold Cannot Buy. By Mrs. Alexander. |
| 27. The Shadow of a Sin. By Charlotte M. Braeme. | 55. A Marriage at Sea. By W. Clark Russell. |
| 28. The Secret of Her Life. By Edward Jenkins. | |

Any of the above books will be sent by mail, postpaid, upon receipt of price, TWENTY-FIVE CENTS each. Address

THE F. M. LUPTON PUBLISHING COMPANY,

No. 65 Duane Street,

New York.

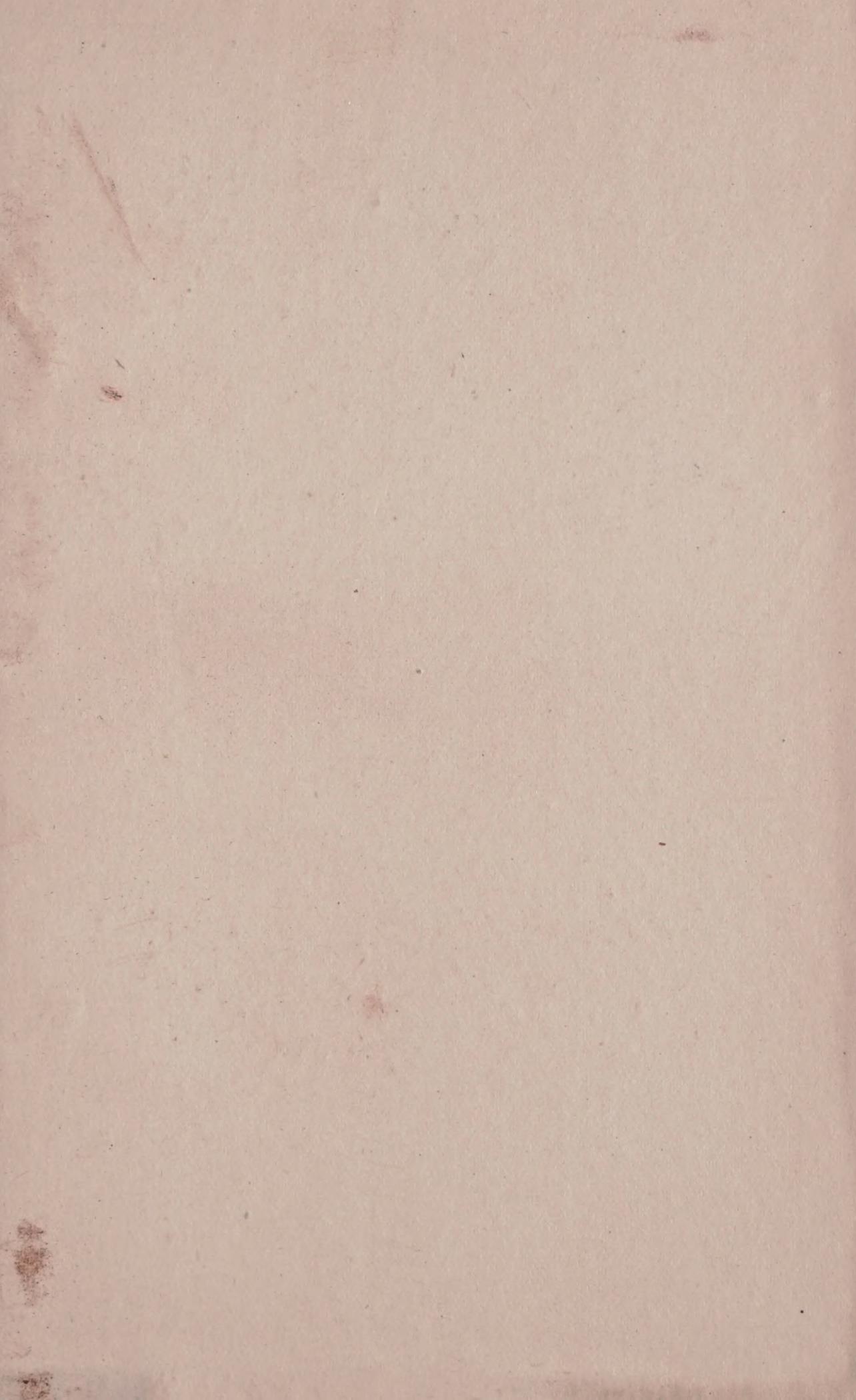
THE ELITE SERIES.

Comprising the best standard works of fiction. Each work in this series is printed from large type on good paper, and uniformly bound in attractive paper covers.

NO.		NO.	
1.	Lorna Doone. By R. D. Blackmore.	20.	The Nun's Curse. By Mrs. J. H. Riddell.
2.	East Lynne. By Mrs. Henry Wood.	21.	Not Like Other Girls. By Rosa Nouchette Carey.
3.	The Woman in White. By Wilkie Collins.	22.	Jane Eyre. By Charlotte Bronte.
4.	Romola. By George Eliot.	23.	Heriot's Choice. By Rosa Nouchette Carey.
5.	The Man in the Iron Mask. By Alexander Dumas.	24.	Dick's Wandering. By Julian Sturgis.
6.	A False Start. By Hawley Smart.	25.	John Halifax, Gentleman. By Miss Mulock.
7.	Donovan. By Edna Lyall.	26.	Double Cunning. By George Manville Fenn.
8.	Dawn. By H. Rider Haggard.	27.	Rory O'More. By Samuel Lover.
9.	Louise de la Vallerie. By Alexander Dumas.	28.	The Frozen Pirate. By W. Clark Russell.
10.	Under Two Flags. By Ouida.	29.	The Mysteries of Paris. By Eugene Sue.
11.	Wooded and Married. By Rosa Nouchette Carey.	30.	Only the Governess. By Rosa Nouchette Carey.
12.	The Master of the Ceremonies. By George Manville Fenn.	31.	Twenty Years After. By Alexander Dumas.
13.	The Struggle for Life. By Albert Delpit.	32.	The Pioneers. By J. Fenimore Cooper.
14.	The Last Days of Pompeii. By Sir E. Bulwer-Lytton.	33.	Handy Andy. By Samuel Lover.
15.	Lover or Friend? By Rosa Nouchette Carey.	34.	A Woman's Face. By Florence Warden.
16.	The Deerslayer. By J. Fenimore Cooper.	35.	In the Golden Days. By Edna Lyall.
17.	The Vicomte de Bragelonne. By Alexander Dumas.	36.	The Pathfinder. By J. Fenimore Cooper.
18.	Uncle Max. By Rosa Nouchette Carey.	37.	Deldee, the Ward of Warringham. By Florence Warden.
19.	We Two. By Edna Lyall.	38.	Robinson Crusoe. By Daniel Defoe.

 Any of the above books will be sent by mail, post paid, upon receipt of price, TWENTY-FIVE CENTS each. Address

THE F. M. LUPTON PUBLISHING COMPANY,
No. 65 Duane Street, New York.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00022830648

