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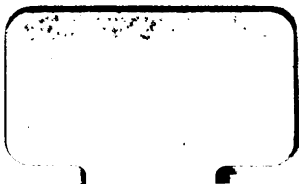
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# KITTY.



BY

M. BETHAM EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF

“DOCTOR JACOB,”

“A WINTER WITH THE SWALLOWS,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# KITTY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### AMATEUR CHIROMANCY.

**K**ITTY, of course, kept her own counsel about this little declaration of feeling on Sir George's part; but she did not forget it, and acted very warily during the few days that followed. She came to no conclusion as to the future. She did not say to herself, "Under such circumstances I will do this or that." She did not vex herself with contemplating the probable perplexities that this new turn of affairs must surely bring. She merely smiled and waited, as smiles and waits the contented angler, asking of the Fates—What next?

Her behaviour to her new adorer was admirable. In the society of others it was precisely her ordinary behaviour, not even Ella noticing a difference; but when alone with Sir George, which happened pretty often, she manifested a womanlike, ladylike show of embarrassment, would evade a tête-à-tête, would make a pretext for running away, would, in fact, behave as any modest girl behaves to a man who is more than a friend, and not quite a lover. Sir George found her more bewitching than ever, but he lacked courage to say so, feeling as yet too frightened at his first piece of audacity to venture upon repeating it. Towards the Baron, Kitty showed the same frank liking, perhaps a little, though a very little, modified; but not sufficiently so as to attract notice. She had all along felt sure that the Baron's friendship for her was a safe one, and, alone in the world of Malaga, refused to consider him as a lover; which conduct reflected great credit on Kitty's perception, seeing that time wore on, and the Baron's devotion remained stationary.

Matters stood thus, when it happened that a

little picnic was planned to a convent on the hills; and that the Baron, for some cause or other, was prevented from going. The fact of his absence piqued Kitty as much as it exhilarated Sir George.

“I would rather Monsieur Fontanié should not be in love with me, Kitty mused; but then the comradeship, of which he talks so much, must be neither cold nor hot, or he would join us to-day.”

“He thinks he is so sure of her, that he can leave off dancing attendance just when he likes,” Sir George thought to himself; “but he may find out that he has made a mistake, the conceited ass!”

Now, the Baron was as far from being a conceited ass as any man in the four seas; but if we wish for a correct estimation of ourselves we must go to our superiors for it, and Sir George was not his superior. Perhaps the Baronet would not have been flattered by the Baron's equally candid opinion of him—though, in truth, it was far from being very deprecatory. It may be safely affirmed that the faculty of contempt diminishes in proportion as we grow wiser, and

the Baron had been growing wiser for many years.

Kitty, as has been said, was exceedingly piqued by the Baron's absence from the picnic, and determined to punish him for his defalcation, when opportunity offered. It is a question whether such a pleasant thing as friendship can long exist between unmarried men and women, even of exceptionably well-balanced characters. Wise though they may be, they cannot unsex themselves, and the man will behave like a lover and the woman like a coquette upon the first semblance of a quarrel.

So Kitty dressed herself in the daintiest summer costume—it always seemed summer-time in Malaga—and started in search of pleasure with the others, feeling just a little mortified at her "friend's" neglect. Neglect was a novel thing to her, and though she had entreated for it at the hands of Dr. Norman and Perry, she did not find the reality so pleasant in this case. Certainly, undue admiration is easier to bear than ever so small a slight, she said to herself, and wished to compensate her ill-used lovers for

what they had endured from her own cruelty at that very moment. For Kitty was impulsive as a child where her compassions were concerned ; though a cool exercise of judgment was sure to prevail in the end.

People who go to warm climates more for the sake of enjoyment than anything else, are soon driven to the veriest trifles by way of pastime. Scenery, however beautiful, tires in time. Aspects of foreign life grow familiar ere long. Sight-seeing becomes a weariness to the spirit. So the little world of foreigners at Malaga gave its mind to amusement for the most part ; and drives, music, Tauchnitz novels, dancing, charades, with other mild and irreproachable species of dissipation, filled the hours "from morn till noon, from noon till dewy eve."

On this occasion, something new in the way of recreation was proposed by Lady Gardiner, who could enjoy a *jeu d'esprit* better than any of her daughters, and was always exerting her motherly wiles to light up their melancholy greenish-yellowish leaf with a little sunshine. Lady Gardiner did her best to keep them youth-

ful and to make herself look matronly, but time cannot be coaxed—even by a woman!

“Sit in a circle, all of you,” said Lady Gardiner, when the convent had been explored, and the little party were resting under a group of palms, “and you shall have your fortunes told.”

“Delightful!” cried Kitty. “I should dearly like to know what my fortune is to be. I always wished that I could read the stars when a child.”

Sir George looked at her angrily for a moment, and then softening down, edged to her side, saying,

“Your fortune is sure to be good; but I am not so sure that I was born on a day of auspicious omen. What do you think?”

“You have certainly been most fortunate lately,” Kitty said, with great gaiety, alluding to the twenty thousand pounds; “and very often one piece of happy fortune follows another.”

“Who knows?” said Sir George, with emphasis.

“Who knows?” echoed. Kitty, looking as innocent as a baby.

“Which of you will consult the oracle first?” asked Lady Gardiner, looking round. “Please bear in mind that I have been properly instructed in chiromancy by a Spanish gipsy, and that if I dole out evil fortune as well as good, it is not my fault.”

“It sounds very awful,” said Mr. Tyrrell to Ella, shrugging his shoulders. “I will beg to be excused, Lady Gardiner, being extremely superstitious.”

But Mr. Tyrrell was of course compelled to share the common fate, and as Lady Gardiner predicted a great deal of good fortune with a very little bad fortune to every one, no one felt quite doomed. Great merriment ensued upon Sir George being told that he could not do better than follow out his own inclination in a certain matter that lay next his heart—concerning a lady!

Lady Gardiner meant to infer by this, that if Sir George proposed to her daughter Madeleine, whom he certainly liked, he would be willingly

received as her son-in-law. Ella could not control a genuine laugh at her father's expense; not dreaming for a moment that he ever appeared in a marriageable light to anybody—even to the mother of four elderly young ladies! Kitty teased Sir George with the utmost *sang froid* about the prognostics that he seemed to take in such good part; and a certain Mrs. Macgregor, a young widow who loved titles as much as Kitty herself, treated the Baronet as if he had grown fifteen years younger, and fifty per cent. handsomer, within the space of a few minutes.

The short bright day was drawing to a close as the little party drove homeward, catching glimpses of mountain ranges transformed by the setting sun into miracles of blue and golden glory. Kitty sat by Ella's side, opposite to Sir George and Mr. Tyrrell, but wholly unable to enter into the spirit of the latter's enthusiasm. Whilst Mr. Tyrrell and Ella talked of palms and sunsets with the eager enjoyment of people who have lived with Nature, and loved her well, Kitty said to herself, feeling half envious, half con-



temptuous—"Thus could I have enjoyed, and thought, and talked about beautiful things, if the Fates had been more generous, and not compelled me to build up my fortunes unaided and alone."

Sir George said very little during the drive ; but when it came to an end, he asked Kitty whether she would not walk as far as the Consulate with him, and she said she should very much like a little walk at so bewitching an hour of the day.

So they set off, side by side.

"You don't object to a cigar, do you?" asked Sir George, after a considerable silence.

And of course Kitty did not object.

"Will you like to take my arm?" again asked her companion. "You must be a little tired."

And of course Kitty accepted his arm, saying that she was a little tired ; adding, that after the long drive, the exercise was most refreshing.

"Don't you think we have had a pleasant day?" Sir George went on.

"Delightful, indeed."

"Though I daresay you were quite affronted, because that ass of a Frenchman chose to stay away?"

"Why should I be affronted?" Kitty said with a smile.

"If you have really come to the conclusion that the protestations of a fellow like Fontanié are worth exactly thus much," Sir George went on, scattering a thimbleful of cigar-ashes to the winds, "you show more sense than I ever gave a woman credit for."

"Thank you for the compliment," said Kitty, saucily, and stepping out, dropped a bewitching little curtsy.

"But seriously speaking, if Ella's consent can be obtained, why should you not marry me?"

Kitty was silent.

"You wouldn't object, would you?" asked the Baronet, sharply. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, you know; and a peniless girl, no matter how handsome, can't marry a title and a comfortable home every day."

"I know you do me great honour," Miss

Kitty said, slowly—"very great honour indeed. But——"

"Of course there must be a few 'Buts!' I quite expected that."

"I was only going to say that nothing would induce me to marry you merely because you have a title," Kitty went on, with something of offended dignity in her voice. "I am not quite so mercenary as you seem to suppose."

"Oh! I take it for granted that you like me pretty well," answered her lover, coolly. "We have been such capital friends all along, and I'm sure, if ever a man was desperately in love, it is myself! But what about Ella?"

"Dear Ella! she must not be made unhappy, of all others in the world!"

"No, I must sooner give you up than spoil Ella's peace of mind. It would be morally impossible for me to grieve her."

"And I love her so dearly that I would almost give up my life for her sake."

"I know you would," Sir George said, eagerly, "and she knows it too. Surely she would make a little sacrifice in order to have you always with her."

Kitty, who knew Ella better than her father did, simply because they were both women, was silent.

“Suppose you name it to her?” Sir George added, with considerable uneasiness in his voice.

“On my soul, I don’t think I could!”

And Kitty promised to name it to Ella.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE SWEETS OF LOVE.

**B**EFORE Sir George and Kitty parted, they agreed that it would be best to keep their own counsel for a day or two. Sir George had long promised to visit an old military friend of his quartered at Gibraltar, and the bright thought struck him that he might just as well be out of the way whilst the two girls settled his love affair between them! Such a thought would hardly have entered the head of an ordinary lover; but then Sir George was not an ordinary lover. He considered himself to be desperately in love with his daughter's attractive protégée, and felt much elated at the idea of winning so young, devoted, and charming a wife, especially

as he was now in a position to marry without injuring Ella's prospects. He did not "compass her with sweet observances," after Dr. Norman's fashion, or woo her as only a born poet like poor Perry could. If Kitty felt satisfied, what did it matter? Certainly, to come down from the affection of such men as Dr. Norman and Perry to the affection of such men as Sir George, was coming down from figs to thistles, and from grapes to thorns, with a vengeance. Kitty, whatever might be her weaknesses, had the keenest perception of the reality of things, and whilst accepting Sir George's love, valued it exactly for what it was worth. She, moreover, looked into the future, and saw what it would be worth during the years to come.

In the first place, it would bring her a title, and Kitty exulted childishly over the idea of being called Lady Bartelotte. She repeated the name to herself again and again, and wrote it on little scraps of paper—

"LADY BARTELOTTE,"

and dreamed pleasantly at night of being called "My lady" by Françoise and the rest of the ser-

vants. Thus much would Sir George's love bring her. And it would bring her, if not wealth—for Sir George was the last person in the world to woo his Danae in a shower of gold—the appliances of wealth : a train of servants, a well-appointed house to live in—*home* hardly seemed the word to use—a carriage to ride in, fashionable clothes to wear, perhaps even a few jewels.

All these things she had hitherto prized beyond the most precious gifts of affection ; and was she going to undervalue them now when they were offered her for the term of her life ?

By no means.

If all went well—that is to say, if Ella could be brought to consent—she should marry Sir George, and make him as good a wife as his heart could desire. She should turn her back upon those sweet foolish fictions of youth, and love, and romance, and try to forget that for her they had ever been. She should take Sir George's gifts in a kindly and not a captious spirit ; not asking for more than he had to give, not making herself or her husband miserable,

because she could not love him as she knew it was in her nature to love!

During the two or three days that intervened between Sir George's proposal of marriage and his departure for Gibraltar, his behaviour was hardly what could be called dignified. In Ella's presence he conducted himself with so much discretion towards the woman he adored, that no one would have guessed his secret sentiments for an instant. He affected a sort of patronising air to her, which to any one less amiable and long-suffering than Kitty, would have been intolerable; asked her to run and fetch this, to sit down by his side and write that; corrected her faults of pronunciation, flatly quizzed her for such naïve little blunders in etiquette as the most careful and clever persons can hardly help making who have upheaved themselves from the proletarian to the patrician strata of society; in fine, whilst intending to blind Ella, and to put his relationship with Kitty on a sure and stable footing by a little wholesome discipline, made himself appear as unlike a lover as well could be.



Now, full credit must be given to Sir George for wooing Kitty in this frank and unceremonious manner. He had not forgotten Mrs. Cornford and her bottle of Hollands, and felt that, however much he might admire and adore Kitty, it was an act of extraordinary condescension on his part to make her Lady Bartelotte, and that if he began by spoiling her at the onset, there would be no telling what airs she might not take upon herself in the future. She must understand the sacrifice he was making for her sake. These splendid creatures, Sir George mused, who turn a man's brain, have often very strong wills of their own; and if Miss Kitty has a very strong will of her own, which she chooses to keep in the background for the present—well, we shall see who is to be the master!

Sir George was simply endeavouring, therefore, to curb Kitty's ambition, hoping by this means to prevent all misunderstanding in the future. Kitty had much better marry him with her eyes open if she married him at all; and though he felt that to lose her now would disap-

point him and enrage him beyond measure, he was determined to make courtship a fit preparation for marriage. When alone with her he would permit himself to indulge in tender little looks and speeches that, he thought, must more than compensate for overt castigations and hostilities. He would talk to her in a confidential way about their future manner of living, interlarding his words with "my love," and "my dear," as if they were married already. Once or twice he had attempted to behave in a more lover-like fashion, but Miss Kitty, who was as proud as a peacock where her personal dignity was concerned, had repelled these advances with a charming show of haughtiness, saying :

"You forget, Sir George, that we are not engaged as yet; and though I am the Beggar's daughter, and you are King Cophetua, I presume that the Beggar's daughter is not to be thought worse of for having a little womanly pride, sir?"

And this little touch of coquetry, prudery—call it what you will—made the Baronet swear a hundred secret vows that a girl with so

much spirit should be his wife at any cost.

In all other respects Kitty was as meek as if indeed she were the Beggar's daughter, and Sir George, King Cophetua. It was always "as you like" with her, or "of course, you know best," or, "as if I should not like any plans you formed for me!" She treated him exactly in the way that some men like to be treated by women, referring to his judgment in everything, anticipating his wishes, hanging upon his looks, paying the homage of a willing slave. What wonder that poor Sir George was intoxicated! He was continually checking himself in his generous impulses, however, thinking: "I must not—I will not be befooled by her, charming as she is; or there will be no peace for us in the future."

For instance, they were talking, one day, about their probable return to England, and Sir George, who had been extremely fault-finding and captious that morning, mentioned a season in London by way of a compensating sugar-plum.

Kitty's eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed

with pleasure at the bare thought. For a few seconds she could not speak.

A season in London!

As if in a vision, all the delights of such an old, old dream fulfilled passed before her mind. She saw herself, the Cinderella of bygone times, driving through the parks in the full sunshine of a June afternoon; her equipage flashing by, the dusty, eager foot-passengers looking on; her toilette as elegant as those she was wont to envy when she also had gazed at the gay scene, dusty and on foot; she saw herself, leaning on her husband's arm—he a baronet!—ascending carpeted staircases, and joining crowds of fashionable men and women in brilliantly-lighted reception-rooms; she saw—what, indeed, did she not see during that momentary rapture?

Sir George's voice broke the spell.

“You have too much good sense to care about conventionalities, I am sure,” he said; “and of course we could not do as other people do; but we should see the picture-galleries, and Ella would hear a little good music.”

He added, suddenly: "You don't care for gaieties, I hope?"

Upon which Kitty blushed guiltily, and said she did not care for them.

"Because it is better we should understand each other upon that point without delay," her lover went on. "We could not pretend to fashionable gaieties in any shape, and Ella does not like them; we should be able to stay at Clarges Street, or at Akenholme Park, and be very comfortable with a little economy; but there would be no sort of surplus for conventional extravagances. I must think of the future, and provide for you as well as Ella, in case——" he broke off hesitatingly,—“in case it should be necessary. You will have as comfortable a home as any lady could desire, and you know that I will leave no stone unturned to make you happy. But there is a medium in all things, and if comforts will not satisfy a woman, no amount of luxuries ever will.”

"I want no luxuries. You are much too good for me," poor Kitty said, humbly, feeling ready to cry, less overcome by Sir George's

goodness than by a feeling of childish disappointment.

“Nonsense!” he said. And not daring to kiss her, though sorely tempted to do so, he clasped her hand, and spoke out boldly like a lover: “I will be as good to you as my means will allow when you are my wife. You are a little fond of me, are you not?”

Of course Kitty was fond of him. Was she not naturally disposed to be fond of those who loved her, and gave her the things in which her soul delighted? He was unlike her former lovers. He had neither Perry’s beautiful genius, nor Regy’s boyish enthusiasm, nor Dr. Norman’s quiet dignity; and his love for her was not as the love of these had been. But he was rich, whilst they were poor, and, wanting alike the sweet gifts and graces of youth, and the more solid qualities of a manhood rife in goodness and wisdom, could win her, because he possessed wealth, and titles, and ancestral lands.

Kitty was far from forgetting the past under these new influences. Sometimes she would drop the book she was reading, and dream a

dream. She had heard many an old Greek fairy-tale in her girlhood, had seen many a nymph and god portrayed on canvas or sculptured in marble; and now, in her days of worldly care, and thoughts of other things, these beautiful fancies came back to her, fresher, fairer, more real than ever.

She pictured Perry and herself, both young, both beautiful, and both loving, wandering hand in hand about some enchanted island, where the sunshine, and the youth, and the contentment lasted for ever and ever.

And then Sir George's voice would suddenly break the spell, and the dream of youth, and love, and immortality vanished, as it had come. It must be all for the best, Kitty consoled herself by saying again and again. I meant to do Perry no harm; I meant to do no one any harm; but I could not, I dared not enter upon a life that was hateful to me. No amount of self-sacrifice on my part could have enabled me to be happy enough to make others happy under those circumstances.

Poor Kitty's moral notions were, it must be

confessed, sadly muddled. She could not see what good women—indeed, most women—perceive by intuition, that where self-sacrifice is a positive duty, one is generally as happy as one could be under any other circumstances, and often more so.



## CHAPTER III.

## THE BITTERNESS OF FRIENDSHIP.

SIR GEORGE set off to Gibraltar in high glee.

“Mind and do your best for us both—your very best,” were his last words to Kitty, before stepping on board the little steamer that was to carry him away from the field of battle. “Had I been able to do any good, I would have stayed; but I’m much better out of the way.”

Kitty smiled to herself as she walked home in the blazing noontide. What a parody upon love-making was this! and yet it was the only love-making to which she had ever willingly listened! Had she possessed the faculty of hu-

mour in equal degree with other faculties, she would have seen, not only the strangeness of Sir George's conduct, but the glaring whimsicality of it. She wished that he were different in many things, but she did not see that his conduct towards herself was as undignified as it was comical.

“After all, it is better he should be away,” she mused. “It would be intolerable to me to see a quarrel arise between Ella and her father on my account. I will banish myself, a beggar, to the uttermost ends of the earth rather than make them so miserable.”

But the idea of being banished, a beggar, to remote places of the earth, was not a cheerful subject of contemplation to Kitty; whilst that of being Lady Bartelotte and the mistress of Akenholme Park, was eminently so. She therefore set aside the prospect of martyrdom, fully determined to act the martyr if occasion required, mind you! and indulged in pleasant dreams of future splendour. All splendour is comparative, and to the Cinderella of Paradise Place, the most threadbare, out-at-elbow aristocracy imag-

inable seemed priceless, and not at all to be compared to the loving, merry poverty of Bohemia.

Whilst sauntering on with the man-servant at her heels—for English ladies do not walk unattended in Spain—she was overtaken by the Baron de Fontanié.

“I am going up to Sir George’s to pay my respects,” he said. “May I walk with you?”

“Certainly,” Kitty answered, smiling, “though Sir George is not at home.”

“I have to leave Malága for Paris by this evening’s train,” he went on, without heeding the last part of her speech, “and I wanted to thank you all for your hospitality to me.”

“I am sorry that you have to leave Malaga,” Kitty said, quite naturally.

“Pray don’t be sorry. I am very glad.”

Kitty coloured, and was silent. The Baron had always been so amiable, so courteous, so full of consideration for every one’s feelings, especially in small matters, that she could only attribute this sudden savageness of manner to a fit of extreme ill-temper.

“I suppose it happens to everybody to find the accumulated experience of life so unexpectedly hurled at him like Jupiter’s thunderbolt sometimes,” said the Baron; then turning to her quickly, he asked:

“Has it happened also to Mademoiselle Silver?”

Kitty smiled.

“Not yet,” she answered, in her frank innocent way.

“Ah! you are so much younger than I, not much above half my years: and yet you are a woman, and women live quickly.”

“Not all women; and I have lived very little in the world, which makes a difference.”

The Baron seemed a little disconcerted at Kitty’s manner, which was perfectly unembarrassed, easy, and free from sentiment. The fact is, her tact was for once wholly at fault, and she no more knew what was going on in her companion’s mind, than he knew what dreams had just before been making her eyes brighter, and her cheeks rosier than usual.

“I will tell you—that is to say, if you care to

hear—what has been the accumulated experience of my life on two subjects, or, rather, on one subject,” the Baron went on after a pause. Kitty not replying, he repeated,

“Do you care to hear?”

“Certainly,” Miss Kitty said, beginning to blush a little.

“My experience, then, Mademoiselle Silver, is that friendship is impossible between a man and woman, who have no stronger feeling for any third person. Am I not worldly-wise, and trained not in one, but a dozen schools of society? Am I not double your years? Am I not a cosmopolitan? Am I not a politician and a diplomatist? But I am a man, and you are a woman! Our friendship was a thing that could not last. *Voilà tout!*”

Kitty had crimsoned to the eyebrows at the beginning of this speech, but was now slowly recovering self-possession.

Was he, too, her lover? He, the elegant, the courtly, the brilliant Baron de Fontanié?

She felt as one in a dream. A hundred fancies, a hundred ambitions, passed across her

mind. The hurried leave-taking on the quay, and the secret courtship of the last day or two, seemed as far off as if they had taken place years ago.

“We may meet again or we may not; but how should that do us either good or harm? I cannot be your lover—I dare not be your friend. The rest doesn’t matter—at least to me,” he added, “and I have no right to ask whether it matters to you. But pray believe that this friendship of ours seemed the sweetest thing in my life once; and if it has since turned out to be the most bitter, you are wholly free from blame.”

They walked on, side by side, in uneasy silence. There appeared no need to say any more; and yet each was waiting for the sound of the other’s voice.

When Sir George’s villa was within a hundred yards of them, the Baron said very quickly and eagerly,

“If I can at any time serve you, or friends of yours, I entreat you to count on me. It will always give me pleasure to be reminded of the

first epoch in our acquaintance, and if I cannot forget the last," he shrugged his shoulders, and added, "*qu'importe?*"

"Thank you very much," Kitty said. "I may at some future time be very glad to remember your kind promise."

She said this thinking of poor Perry, and wondering whether the Baron would not buy pictures of him some day.

"Will you, too, remember the first pleasant days we spent together at Malaga?" he asked.

"Oh! *qu'importe?*" she answered, echoing his words somewhat bitterly; and then he opened the gate for her, and not a word more was said till they joined Ella.

As soon as she could get away, Kitty stole into a quiet garden-nook, and thought over the events of the last hour. At first there was a smile on her lips and an elation in her whole aspect; but, by-and-by, the smile faded, and her look became first subdued, and by little and little almost stern.

She felt very angry with the Baron, and did

not seek to excuse herself for the feeling. He had undoubtedly done what was upright, and dignified, and manly; but his way of doing it affronted her. It was the man's way of doing a thing, she said to herself—cold, straightforward, unflinching. The woman's way seemed best to her, just a little shilly-shallying, a little sentimental, a little kind. Had the tables been turned, and the verdict of farewell come from her own lips instead of his, how differently it would have been worded! When she was forced to tell painful truths to Dr. Norman and Perry, had she not sweetened them with tenderness, as children's physic is sweetened with sugar? The Baron administered his physic without caring how it tasted to her palate, and she owned that it was very bitter. Truth to tell, our poor Kitty saw such a future of common-places stretching before her, that she would fain have enjoyed a little romance ere it should have become forbidden fruit for ever.

And her vanity was somewhat hurt. Having said thus much, it surely behoved the



Baron to say a little more. If he could not be her lover, and dared not be her friend, he should at least have taken the trouble to find out in which light he was most acceptable. His conduct augured—at least to a mind like Kitty's, always too ready to gloss over the unpleasant side of things with plausibilities—hardness as well as coldness. Did he think that she cared for him, or did he not? In the first place, it was his duty to be kind; in the second, to have kept his counsel. As it was, he had spoken out, relieving his own mind, but undoubtedly disturbing the peace of her own.

She grew very angry as she pondered over the matter. It would have been such a triumph to let Sir George find the Baron at her feet on his return! Of course, she should have behaved in a firm and proper manner, cleaving to the old love, and not putting off with the new; for Miss Kitty always persuaded herself that she had done the right thing in the past, and would do the right thing in the future; but such a lesson must have been most salutary to her too confident and easy lover. Sir George knew right

well how dearly she loved and prized his title ; had not the Baron a title, and decorations of half the Courts of Europe besides ?

But he had gone, and she determined to drive the mortification of his going from her mind, and give it up to realities only.

They were not all pleasant.

She knew well enough that she could shield herself from Ella's anger ; but she felt sure that Ella would be vexed at the onset. What daughter ever approved of her father's marriage ? What only daughter ever willingly made way for a step-mother ? True, Kitty was determined to be all humility where her rights, as mistress of Sir George's house, were concerned. True, she was firmly resolved to go on as she had begun, sacrificing everything to Ella's slightest wish. But perhaps Ella would object to accept such sacrifices under their new relationship. Ella was the most unselfish being Kitty had ever known ; yet she doubted the issue of the forthcoming ordeal.

If Ella welcomed the change that would fix her friend irrevocably by her side, all would be

well. The wedding clothes need not occupy much time; the wedding could as easily take place at Malaga as anywhere else; she might become Lady Bartelotte in a few months—why not in a few weeks?

That thought acted as a salve to her wounded spirit. Whatever happened, she was to be Lady Bartelotte, and when that happy consummation arrived, she should taste of peace, and rest and the contentment that knows no ambition. There would no longer be any need for her to scheme, and ponder, and weave in loneliness the webs of Fate.

At least, so she assured herself, and putting on a blithe aspect, went straight to Ella, first to tell her of the Baron's strange confession, and next of her father's offer of marriage. Surely a stranger errand than the last had never been entrusted to any woman!

## CHAPTER IV.

## HOW KITTY PLEADED FOR HER LOVER.

ELLA heard the first story<sup>^</sup> complacently enough. She was angry with the Baron for having ruffled her friend's feelings, and quite agreed with Kitty that in love-making, half measures were inadmissible; and that a man who was not permitted by circumstances to make a proposal of marriage, was certainly not permitted by etiquette to make a declaration of love. But she could not conceal a certain amount of self-congratulation that all imminent danger of losing her darling was over.

"I do wish you to marry one day," she said, apologetically. "I am not selfish enough to hope for a moment that of all your lovers none shall win you and make you happy. But there

is time enough yet, and we are very happy as we are."

"Very happy," Kitty said, and sighed.

Ella looked up anxiously.

"What else has happened?" she asked, laying one little hand on her friend's arm.

"Oh, Ella! you would never guess."

"You are not unhappy? You did not love that man, dearest?" Ella cried, brimful of affectionate concern.

Kitty shook her head.

"You have not made up your mind that you care for Mr. Perugino, after all——"

"No—oh, no!"

"The traitorous Tyrrell has not made you an offer?" said Ella, blushing as she spoke, for she and Mr. Tyrrell had ever been the best of friends.

Again Kitty shook her head; and at last, being urgently pressed by her friend to confide her secret, she said, with almost a childish expression of dismay:

"Sir George wants me to marry him—if you don't mind."

This piece of information at first affected Ella in a wholly unexpected way. We have heard of earthquakes and other sudden convulsions of nature, or shocks of any kind acting magnetically upon chronic diseases, whether mental or physical ; and such was the effect of Kitty's disclosure upon Ella.

She forgot that since her last severe attack of illness at Arcachon she had never risen from her couch unassisted ; she forgot that even moderate laughter was almost sure to bring on a fit of coughing ; she forgot everything in comic amazement, jumping from her seat, walking up and down the room, laughing the loud enjoying laugh of a robust person.

“ Oh, that is delicious !” she cried ; and when her first ebullition of amusement was over, she sat down by Kitty's side and begged to be told all about it.

“ But you will be so tired. Do let me make you comfortable on the sofa,” Kitty urged. Ella, however, persisted in remaining where she was.

“ I am too impatient,” she said, “ and I do be-

lieve that papa's proposals to you have cured all my aches and pains for months to come. But we must soon put these romantic ideas out of his head, my dear."

Kitty looked a little shocked at Ella's levity.

"It is no laughing matter, I assure you," she said, with great seriousness. "I suppose it is difficult for you to look upon Sir George in the same light as other people do. But he is no older than Dr. Norman, and you saw no absurdity in Dr. Norman's attachment for me."

"That is quite another thing," Ella answered gravely comic. "Dr. Norman is not my father."

"But the circumstances were in a measure similar. Dr. Norman's eldest son was as old as you are," Kitty continued, "and people fall in love irrespective of circumstances."

"You have not fallen in love with papa, have you?" Ella asked, with another outburst of genuine laughter. "My dear, I adore you, but I couldn't endure a stepmother—I couldn't, indeed."

"Do be serious for five minutes," Kitty said, still as grave as a judge.

“I can't be serious where papa's love-affairs are concerned. How can I?” asked Ella. “He is quite unlike other people, and I know him so well,—dear, good, fidgety papa! What glamour have you cast over his eyes to work this mischief?”

“Oh, Ella! as if I ever dreamed that such a thing was going to happen.”

“Dear Kitty, I only spoke in jest. It is so much better that we treat the matter as a joke. It is, indeed.”

“Sir George would never forgive me if I so treated it,” Kitty answered.

Seeing that there was no prospect of coming to any conclusion whilst she persisted in her sportive mood, Ella returned to her sofa, and declared herself penitent, and willing to be good and tractable for the term of Kitty's good pleasure.

“Nothing could have happened so embarrassing,” Kitty began, “and you will readily believe me when I say, so unexpected. You have seen all along how frank and friendly has been the intercourse between Sir George and myself,



and how little I dreamed that it would ever change. But the mischief is done past cure——”

“We won’t say so,” Ella interposed cheerfully. “Papa loves me too dearly, and has too much friendship for yourself, to be incapable of making a sacrifice for us. He must see things in the proper light ere very long.”

Kitty shook her head.

“Indeed, Ella dear, I speak without exaggeration when I say that the mischief is done past cure.” Then she added with emphasis: “I am sure that Sir George’s liking for me is no passing fancy. I am sure that I shall not be able to stay under your roof, unless as Sir George’s wife. Would that, for your sake, this were not the truth.”

“Oh! Kitty, it cannot, cannot be the truth! I will not, I dare not believe it. We are both in a nightmare, from which we shall wake soon.”

Again Kitty shook her head, and this time there was even more of stately sadness and resolution in the gesture than before. Can a mind like Kitty’s be swayed by the paltry consideration of

rank? Would she sacrifice her freedom, her youth, her beauty, for the scant privileges of being Sir George Bartelotte's wife? Would she consent to give up so much in return for so little? These were the thoughts that flashed across Ella's mind.

"Putting myself wholly out of the question, would you marry papa?" she asked at length, turning suddenly cold and pale.

"My darling, it is impossible to put you out of the question. If I marry Sir George, I ensure myself the happiness of spending my life with you. If I do not marry him—into such straits has this madness of his brought us—I could not with comfort, with dignity, nay, with decorum, remain in his house."

And then she crossed over, and, kneeling by Ella's side, kissed her pale cheeks and her cold lips. For a time, Ella lay wholly silent, sighing gently, and making no sort of response to Kitty's caresses and tender words.

By-and-by, she asked :

"Did papa know that I was to be told this miserable secret during his absence?"

“ Sir George had no courage to tell you himself, and deputed me to do it,” Kitty said, blushing a little—as was surely natural—for her lover.

“ You could not marry papa ?” Ella cried, more impetuously than ever. “ It would not be good ; it would not be right. A woman should love her husband, at least a little.”

“ It was my dream, once, to marry a husband whom I should love a great deal ; but I suppose all women have those dreams when they are very young,” Kitty made answer, sadly: “ How seldom do they come true !”

“ To me it seems,” Ella said, “ that nothing could be more calculated to make you wretched. You know as well as I do what papa’s failings are. Could you bear to be tied to him, to be dependent on him, all your life ?”

“ One cannot have a perfect life, Ella. I would make any sacrifice to have you with me always.”

“ What if you should find the sacrifice greater than you could bear ? If papa should grow hateful to you ? Oh ! Kitty, next to him,

you are the dearest thing I have in the world, and I would rather die than lose you so."

And saying this, Ella cried bitterly, and would not be consoled, though Kitty said a hundred loving things, made a hundred loving protestations. Was not Ella her darling, her more than friend, as her very sister? Were they not unhappy when apart, contented if together? Would not she, Kitty, find any sacrifice light that knit them with a closer tie? Then, finding her passionate pleadings of no use, she reasoned calmly :

"If," she said, "my vanity is touched at the prospect of marrying a man of title and fortune, do you not see that it is just my affection for you prevents such a marriage from being worldly, mercenary—call it what you will? I am sure you do not dream, for a moment, that I would marry Sir George if I did not respect and like him sincerely, and if I did not love you beyond all my friends."

"Oh! no," Ella said, still crying.

"You must know from my past history," Kitty went on, "that I am the last person in

all the world to take upon myself duties that I could not fulfil. Why did I refuse poor Perry—Mr. Neeve? Why did I refuse Dr. Norman? Why did I forsake Myra? Simply because they wanted more of me than I could give.”

“And they were all more fitted to make you happy than papa! Oh! Kitty, I am his daughter, and, though I love him as a daughter should, I warn you solemnly against this marriage. You will not be able to bear the burden you are laying upon your own shoulders.”

“For your sake I shall,” Kitty said softly.

“My darling!” Ella continued in the same passionate strain—“my darling! let this unhappy business divide us now rather than put bitterness in our hearts by-and-by. Oh! think of what it would be if we ever grew to hate each other!” and again Ella sobbed as if her heart would break.

Kitty pressed her hand, but said never a word.

“I know that you would try to make us both happy, and that you would never think of yourself, or let us see what you suffered. But could

I help seeing it—I who love you so entirely? And though you would be the victim, I could not help or comfort you. How could I side with you against my father?"

"I think there would be no victim in the case at all," Kitty said, smiling. "I should have you to love me, and I am sure Sir George would always be kind and good; moreover, you would remain the real mistress of your father's house—I never dreamed of usurping your place——"

"Oh! Kitty, it is not that I am troubled about," Ella cried, with almost a moan of pain.

Kitty bent over her, caressing, tearful, bright.

"Let us not talk any more now, dear Ella. It will all come right in time. Sir George may overcome his fancy, or you may overcome your fears. But we will not break our hearts in advance."

And then she persuaded Ella to drive with her, to pay visits, to do a hundred and one pleasant and amusing things. As good fortune would have it, Mr. Tyrrell brought up a friend of his that very evening—an artist,

laden with a portfolio ; and what with sketches, music, and talk, Ella's spirits somewhat revived.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE LULL AFTER THE STORM.

AFTER the storm came a lull. Seeing Ella so implacably unhappy, Kitty could not do otherwise than let the question of a marriage between herself and Sir George rest for the present. She had tried argument, she had tried entreaty, she had tried coaxing—all failed ; and Kitty, who combined the wisdom of the serpent with the gentleness of the dove, saw that it was not only kind, but expedient, to wait and bide her time.

Meantime, Sir George, having heard from Kitty how matters stood at home, waited a little longer at Gibraltar, and wrote to Ella, proposing a yacht voyage for her and Kitty. His host was about to take his family to Tan-



giers, Algiers, Constantine, and other interesting places on the African coast, and invited Sir George to join them. Why should not the invitation be accepted? It was always cheap to accept invitations, and generally pleasant. A yacht voyage had been recommended to Ella. A yacht voyage would bridge over the time that should intervene before their arrival in England. A yacht voyage would be sure to please Kitty, because everything pleased her.

Ella was to write word by return of post whether she consented to the proposal or no; and in the former case, they must be ready for starting at a day's notice.

"What would you like best to do?" asked Ella to Kitty, after reading aloud her father's proposal.

"I think we had better go," Kitty said, without a moment's hesitation. "It will be amusing, and we all want amusement," adding, with a sigh, "We can never find Malaga such a happy place again."

"True," Ella answered. "I will write to

papa by the next post, and say that we are ready."

"And I will pay our bills, and get our clothes packed," Kitty said, briskly. "I think that this yacht voyage is a veritable piece of good fortune, dear Ella, and that the soft winds of the Mediterranean will blow all our troubles away."

She said this sportively, and, stooping, kissed her friend on the brow. But Ella did not respond to the mood.

"Heaven grant that you may prove a true prophet, dear!" she said, and that was all.

Kitty talked of the new places they were to see, of the benefit Ella was sure to derive from the trip, of their return to England afterwards, of Akenholme Park, and the improvements Ella was to effect there; of everything, indeed, that was pleasant under the sun.

"I know exactly how your room is to be fitted up at Akenholme," she said. "The walls shall be painted by hand—roses on a delicate grey ground picked out with gold, rose-coloured curtains, grey and rose carpet; your little

water-colour sketches, Mr. Tyrrell's gifts, framed and hung on silver rods; and a white and gold flower-stand in each window."

"I shall not have money enough for such elegances as those," Ella said, drearily; "and if you are not there, I dare say we shall have things much as they are."

"But I shall be there," Kitty said; adding, "for a time, at least. I *must* see your English home, even if I go away, never to cross the threshold again."

"Do not let us talk of those things," Ella asked, half crying; "I cannot bear it."

And she gathered her friend to her heart and sobbed like a child.

This was the only cloud that was permitted to pass over their horizon from the time of Kitty's disclosure to that of departure. Ella persistently refused alike consolation and confidence, and Kitty could not constrain her to either. It was a painful, embarrassed, dreary time to both, all the more that each felt she could have ended it had she willed.

Had Kitty said:

“Do you go for this little trip and let me stay behind to be fetched by-and-by, when Sir George has overcome his fancy,” all would have been well.

Had Ella said :

“Let it be as papa and you desire ; I will make up my mind to be happy,” all would have been well too.

Kitty, whose life for the last year or two had been made of infinitesimal sacrifices, hesitated—nay, recoiled—from making a great sacrifice when called upon to do so. She knew, well enough, that Sir George’s affection for Ella and his satisfaction in her happiness would have healed his wound in time ; but she did not wish it to heal, and she would not move a finger on Ella’s behalf. The conviction made her feel a little self-reproach.

Ella, on the other side, though possessing the most unselfish nature in the world, could not help being selfish now. It was just the one crisis of life that baffled alike her instincts and her convictions. If she let Kitty make herself happy—or rather, miserable—after her own

fashion, on whom would the retribution fall heaviest? If she, with apparent amiability and self-immolation, helped on the marriage which was so hateful to her, could she maintain the amiability?—could she act up to the self-immolation to the end?

She felt that she could not. She felt that, much as she loved Kitty, she should feel differently towards her, and that without any volition of her own, from the moment she became her father's wife. Kitty, she knew well enough, would never let her suffer vexations. Whilst measuring to the full her friend's capability of endurance, Ella shrank from putting it to such a test.

Far more than she doubted Kitty's powers of self-sacrifice, did she dread the limits of her own. Could she submit to become second in her father's house? Could Kitty's affection bear to be translated into such a relationship? Could either of the family trio proposed by Kitty, be happy without practising deception towards the others?

Ella was of too noble a nature to doubt the

integrity of her friend's purpose. That Kitty's better judgment was for once wholly at fault—that her fancy had been captivated by the prospect of such an alliance—that just a little vanity leavened the abundance of affection for herself—actuated her in this persistence, Ella readily admitted. More she would not admit.

Kitty might be ambitious; she might have a touch of worldliness in her disposition; she might unfairly appraise the little she would gain by this marriage and the all she would lose; but she was loyal, and would be loyal to the end.

Poor Ella prepared for the yacht voyage with a heavy heart; though after the first embarrassment of meeting Sir George was over, matters mended a little. Sir George welcomed her with more than ordinary tenderness, and Ella felt quite touched by his contrite, self-condemning look. Only half a dozen words passed between them on the one subject lying next their hearts.

“Kitty has told you what passed between us before I left,” he said, very humbly.

“Yes,” she answered, controlling her agitation by a great effort; “and we agreed that it would be better to let things rest as they are for a time.”

“Of course, of course,” he said, kissing her. “Whatever we do, we won’t make you unhappy, darling.”

Then matters mended a little; and the cheerful adieux were made to friends ashore, and the pretty yacht “curtsied to the land,” as a poet has said, and away they glided over the bright blue Mediterranean in search of sunshine. Mr. Tyrrell had contrived to be one of the invited, and his company added to the hundred and one distractions of Ella’s new life. She had never made this sort of sea-trip before. Everything interested her, from the simplest facts of nautical science to the waifs and strays of natural history she picked up by the way. All on board felt naturally interested in one so young, so winning, and so submissive under the burden of constant ill-health and deprivation; so Ella was too much petted, and too well amused, to feel her trouble ever present with her.

Kitty behaved with the utmost discretion and tenderness. No one would have imagined for a moment that anything beyond the merest friendly feeling existed between herself and Sir George; and yet, in the short tête-à-tête that occurred now and then, she consoled, pacified, reassured him. Sir George knew well enough the state of Ella's feelings, but throughout this, to him, too protracted interregnum, he never doubted that the issue of events would be contrary to his wishes.

If Kitty reassured Sir George, she equally reassured Ella; not by saying. This marriage shall for your sake be given up—but by a tacit acquiescence in delay. Ella was not to be made unhappy; Ella was not to become the victim; Ella was to settle the fateful question for them all by-and-by.

So great, almost passionate, was Kitty's tenderness to her friend in those days, that Ella felt as if the sacrifice required of her was one she ought to make. Who loved her in all the world as Kitty had done? Who cared for her so well? Ella reproached herself every day.



Thus, by a little wary temporising, and a good deal of reticence and sweet temper on Kitty's side, two months passed in at least outward tranquillity, and in something very nearly like inward peace. Kitty dreamed on; Ella never ceased to dread; Sir George hugged his pet ambition none the less; but all said to their secret hearts—It will be well; and went on hoping against hope.

And the pretty little *Undine* glided from port to port, and many cheerful adventures and beautiful sights they saw as they sailed along in that sweet, southern spring-tide, and none more beautiful than that of Algiers, the city of marble palaces flashing across the purple seas. But there was fever in the place, and thus it happened that when poor Perry came hither, burning with the desire of seeing Kitty once more, he found her gone, without a trace.

## CHAPTER VI.

## DR. NORMAN SEEKS CONSOLATION.

WHILST Kitty was guiding her little craft so warily across the seas of life, whilst Perry was rushing madly hither and thither in search of distraction, whilst Myra was forgetting "the bitterness of friendship" in the amusements of a wedding trip to Paris, whilst Laura's little heart was pining away for news of Perry, what was Dr. Norman doing? Dr. Norman confessed to himself that disappointment and misfortune had roused him at last from a state of culpable self-indulgence, and that, so far, they were both good. He did not cease to grieve passionately for the loss of Kitty, and, above all, for the loss of faith in her; he did not

cease to regret the wreck of his worldly prosperity; but these troubles, having quickened his faculties and stirred up his moral convictions, were wholesome. He reviewed the last few years of his life with pain and shame. During that sad and solitary period, what effort had he made on behalf of his children and of society, of the world? A supreme grief had fallen upon him, in the flower of his age, to which he had succumbed without a struggle. Full of manly contrition and self-reproach, he now set to work to build up his broken fortunes, and make of his life something nobler, better, more fruitful than it once promised to be.

A particular series of scientific investigations had desultorily occupied his time for many years; and lately, by dint of happy induction and indefatigable research, he had arrived at what was certainly a valuable hypothesis, and promised to develop into a discovery for all time.

With the inexhaustible patience of the love of truth, he now went on his way, if not as con-

fidant as Columbus, at least as hopeful. Having methodically arranged the result of his experiments in a set of papers, he laid them before the most eminent men of science he knew, and received ample encouragement, both to continue his researches, and to popularize those that were sufficiently advanced.

So, to Prissy's intense delight, Dr. Norman, who was already a fellow of several of the learned societies, promised to deliver a series of lectures at the Royal Institution. Of course, Prissy was much too young to have any idea of the real nature of her father's studies and speculations ; but she was quite old enough to understand the meaning of fame, and to be ambitious on his behalf. The little maiden jumped at conclusions quickly. At the luncheon-table she heard Dr. Norman's friends drop such phrases as these :

“ They will be making you fellow of half the scientific societies of Europe, after this, Norman ! ”

Or—

“ It is really incumbent upon you to make

known such valuable speculations to the world."

Or—

"I always said you would get tired of hiding your head under a bushel."

And she stored them up in her mind, and dreamed that her papa was a second Sir Isaac Newton, who, from the falling of the apple, discovered the centre of gravity; and that the next thing to happen was his summons to the Court of the Sovereign, and all sorts of consequent honours and emoluments.

She cut out, from scientific and other journals, every scrap of paper bearing her father's name, and pasted them in an album, which ever after took the place of her once-beloved dolls.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Laura," she would say. "You don't care a bit what papa does, any more than if he were the missionary at Timbuctoo, who was eaten up, and his hat and hymn-book too."

"Oh! Prissy, how can you say such unkind things?" gentle Laura made answer, her eyes filling.

"But it's the truth. Isn't it the truth?"

Prissy would urge; and Laura felt she could not honestly say no. She loved her father, but her whole heart and soul were with Perry, Mrs. Cornford, Vittoria, and those other dear enthusiastic friends who had made her life so passing sweet for a little space.

This new atmosphere of thoughtful activity and realism as little suited Laura's dreamy nature as the brisk air of mountain tops suited some poor *poitrinaire*. She would fain have interested herself, as Prissy did, in making experiments with vinegar and a lump of chalk, or in collecting and classifying fossils, or in finding out the component parts of a carrot at the South Kensington Museum; she would fain have understood, when a kindly Norwegian professor gave her and Prissy a little lecture about the lake-dwellers of Switzerland; and have showed some interest in the numerous topics so vigorously discussed at her father's dinner-table; but she could not force herself to do so. For her the dry bones would never live, and it made her very unhappy to spend her days thus unsympathised with and

unsympathising. The worst of it was, that she felt separated for ever from that seductive life of freedom, art, and friendship. As much sternness as it was in Dr. Norman's nature to show to any child of his, he had showed towards Laura when she so obstinately opposed his wishes in Paris. From that time to this the name of Mrs. Cornford was avoided on both sides; and it seemed to be a tacit understanding that all intercourse with Paradise Place was over. Dr. Norman did not say—"Stay away." Laura did not ask—"May I go?" But weeks and months wore on, and she lacked courage to moot the question.

All concerning them had become mysterious to her. Whether Mrs. Cornford was indeed home again; whether Perry had ever returned from his wanderings; whether she was remembered by him or purposely banished from recollection, she could not guess. Not a sign came from the old familiar circle of which she had once been a cherished member; and she shivered like the outcast who beholds some happy hearth from the desolation of the streets.

Perhaps most men in such a case would have been less blind than Dr. Norman regarding his little daughter, and would have seen that she was unhappy. But where sympathy does not exist between them, who so slow to comprehend each other as those of the same blood, who eat at the same board from day to day? Dr. Norman could not see what right Laura had to be unhappy, and certainly did all in his power to make her life bright and good; he did not understand his child; that was all. Had a transient cloud passed over Prissy's little soul, no mental vision would have been quicker to perceive it than her father's. And yet neither Dr. Norman nor Prissy, nor Laura herself, were to blame for her isolation. These things of daily life that look so simple, are often sad and complicated beyond human understanding.

Laura and Prissy, on half-holidays, accompanied by the boys, used to take long walks in the parks and Kensington Gardens; but they never encountered any one from Paradise Place. The fancied resemblance of some passer-by to Perry would make Laura's cheek flush and heart



beat quickly often, but the real Perry she never encountered.

One day it chanced that Laura and her little sister were walking along the High Street, when they heard a noisy scampering behind them, and a vociferated cry of—

“Hollo, Laura! it’s only us!”

And forthwith Minnie and the little tag-rag and bob-tail set, rushed upon her, kissing her, clutching her by the arms, demonstrating their joy in a dozen unconventional ways.

“What larks!” cried Miss Binnie. “Don’t you wish we were in Paris, though, Laura? I do. We’ve no one to take us to play now.”

“Aunty’s so grumpy,” broke in Mimi, “we daren’t say our souls are our own.”

“But we’re out on the rampage to-day, and we’ve been shooting for prizes at an oyster shop. Such a jolly little target, and an oyster for every hit within the blue line,” added Tommie, and smacked his lips with great gusto. “Have you got sixpence, and will you come with us and have a try?”

“Oh, no, we can’t stay,” Laura answered,

anxious to get away, and yet dying for a word about Perry. "Is Mrs. Cornford well?"

"She's as cross as two sticks—oh, my! Binnie, there goes the policeman who scolded us for jumping over the rails. Yes, you may look at us if you like, old Crusty!" and Miss Tommie returned the calm inspection of her Majesty's guardian of the peace with a rude gesture held in great favour by little street boys.

"I am afraid we must go," Laura said, growing more and more frightened at Prissy's consternation and comments to come. "Give my love to Mrs. Cornford, please."

"It's no use," Mimi said; "Aunty's too cross and glum to care about anybody's love. I'll say I've seen you."

"Is anything the matter?" asked Laura.

"Yes, a great deal is the matter," Mimi answered; "Papa Peter is paralyzed, and Aunty has to take care of him."

"And Aunty's last picture didn't sell, though it was such a beauty," added Binnie.

“And we had an execution in the house—we had!” said Tommie.

“And Perry has never come home, and we don’t know what’s become of him any more than the fishes at the bottom of the sea,” Mimi put in; adding, by way of a climax, “that’s what puts Aunty out.”

Laura’s heart was beating fast, but she encountered Prissy’s criticising eyes, and for the life of her dared not stay to hear any more.

“Good-bye, good-bye,” she said, giving a hand to each. “Tell Mrs. Cornford I will write to her. We must go now.”

“Let us go a little way with you. I’ll walk with her,” proposed Binnie, seizing Prissy by the hand, as unconscious of being obnoxious, as any little pariah of a dog which takes friendly notice of a fine lady’s pet.

But Laura made some incoherent excuse, and hurried away. Prissy burst out into exclamations of surprise ere they were fairly off. Before they were out of earshot, however, a shrill cry reached them from the distance, and looking

round, they beheld Miss Binnie performing pantomimic gestures on the pavement.

“Do come and see us one day,” she cried, pitching her voice to its highest key. “There’s little bricks.”

And Tommie echoed in the same tone—“*Little bricks!*”

This scene, as may well be imagined, afforded no small amusement to the passers-by; but poor Laura turned scarlet with mortification, and Prissy was horrified beyond measure. Prissy was as practical a little person as could well be, knowing exactly what was the conventional worth of good clothes and good manners; and to be accosted in the public streets by such a vagabond crew seemed terrible to her.

“Oh, Laura!” she said, “how can you like such rude girls?—and they had got on black stockings too, full of holes!”

“They didn’t mean any harm,” Laura said; “and as to their clothes and manners, we needn’t glorify ourselves because we are not like them; I daresay they are just as good as we are.”

And, as usual, Laura's Paradise, in other words, Mrs. Cornford and her people, proved a bone of contention between the sisters, and Dr. Norman had to settle the dispute.

## CHAPTER VII.

## POLLY CORNFORD PREACHES A SERMON.

L AURA'S recital of Mrs. Cornford's troubles touched Dr. Norman's kind heart. Though he was too deeply engrossed in his work to think much of anything else, he formed one or two hasty plans on her behalf. The first was, that he would ask her to take his little daughter's portraits. But there were two arguments against such an arrangement. He could not afford the portraits, and he did not wish Laura's acquaintance with Mrs. Cornford to be renewed. The second was, that he should call upon her and offer such pecuniary services as lay in his power; but from this proceeding he recoiled, on further reflection. At last, it occurred to him

that Laura and Prissy had begged him on many occasions to let them buy a little mirror for their bandbox of a drawing-room; why should not one of poor Mrs. Cornford's pictures do as well? Accordingly, he called Laura into his room one day and made the proposal. Laura was enchanted. Dr. Norman gave her the money forthwith, and she set off in the direction of Fulham, happy as some escaped bird flying back to its native woods.

She knew that she should not see Perry, that the sound of his name was as forbidden fruit to her; but to breathe the air of his old home, to see not one but a hundred things belonging to him, to be brought into never so slight a contact with the people who loved him, and the places that knew him—this, if anything, seemed happiness to her. She forgot the dreary disenchantment she had experienced in Paris, and all the roystering discomfort of the little *ménage* in the Rue de Trévisé, in her great delight. The chirping of the sparrows, and what signs she read of the spring-tide as she walked along—if, indeed, there are signs of spring-tide in London—

filled her heart with exhilaration. The world was a happy place, and she was a happy thing on it once more.

At Mrs. Cornford's house she did not meet with a gracious reception.

"Missus," the little maid-of-all-work answered, "was very cross, and couldn't see company."

"And the young ladies?" asked Laura.

"What young ladies?" repeated the maid-of-all-work. "Oh! I suppose you mean Tommie and the rest of 'em? Well, they're at the dyer's, and have been there for a week," speaking of Mrs. Cornford's nieces as if they were clothes gone to be dyed.

"But I am sure Mrs. Cornford will see me if you tell her my name," Laura said. "I have come on business, and must see her."

Thereupon a door was opened from above, and Mrs. Cornford's voice was heard asking of Mary Hann, as the maid-of-all-work was called, "What was the row?"

"Do let me come up just for a minute, dear Mrs. Cornford," Laura said, entreatingly; "I have really something to say."



“Up with you, then ; you’re like a bad shilling, Laura, always coming back ; but even a bad shilling that sticks to you is welcome in this inconstant world,” she said, and gave Laura a hearty kiss as they met on the little landing-place.

“Why, how pretty you’ve grown !” Mrs. Cornford added, holding the young girl out at arm’s length. “Eyes as blue as aquamarine, cheeks as pink as pea-blossoms, dainty little chin fit for Titian to paint ! My ! give me another kiss ! ‘A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,’ though you haven’t a sixpence of your own to keep the devil out of your pocket.”

“Oh ! Mrs. Cornford,” Laura said, holding her hand still, “I am so sorry——”

“‘Don’t be sorry for my skin, but take care of your own,’ says the eel who is caught to the eel in the mud. An ass gets beaten because he behaves like an ass, and not because of his long ears ; and if I get into scrapes, who’s to blame but myself ? But come into my studio. I’m at work with a—model.”

Laura followed her friend into the studio—

how well she remembered meeting Perry there for the first time!—and naturally walked up to the easel. A very commonplace-looking man, with an unpleasant face, sat attitudinising at one end of the room; but Mrs. Cornford begged him to go and smoke his pipe, and otherwise amuse himself for the present.

“What a very ugly model!” Laura said; “but I see what your picture is—*The Young Prince in the Tower*, and for the gaoler he does very well.”

“Oh! the picture is a mere pot-boiler,” Mrs. Cornford said, with an odd mixture of embarrassment and amusement, “and the man is not a regular model. He—he is staying in the house, and sat to oblige me, that’s all.”

Laura was far too simple to divine Mrs. Cornford’s meaning.

“He is not handsome, certainly,” she said.

“Ugly trades make ugly tradesmen,” Mrs. Cornford blurted out; “and gaolers are not handsome, either in pictures or real life. But what is it that you had to say to me?”

Laura told her errand with some hesitation.

Papa had given Prissy and herself the money wherewithal to buy a mirror for their tiny drawing-room, and they would so much rather have a little picture of Mrs. Cornford's.

"Any little picture," she added, in childish phrase, bringing out her two ten-pound notes.

Mrs. Cornford's conduct was thereupon extraordinary. Without saying one word, she took the two ten-pound notes in her hand, and holding them over her head, performed an exhilarated *pas seul* in the middle of the room; then she went downstairs. Laura heard a hurried confabulation with the so-called model, the street-door slammed, and Mrs. Cornford returned, empty-handed and brisk.

"I've got rid of him!" she said, dropping into a chair. "We part the best of friends, but may we never meet again, says I to my gentleman."

"Has he been making himself disagreeable?" asked little Laura, as much in the dark as ever.

Mrs. Cornford burst into a hearty laugh.

"You dear little simpleton! Don't you know that the best Christians make themselves disagreeable when you owe them money? And though

I didn't owe him money, he came to look after money I owed other people. But having got rid of the—the model, we'll choose the picture."

"Give us something you can't sell," Laura said; "we shall be delighted to possess any picture of yours."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" Mrs. Cornford answered, impatiently. "Do you take me for a thief? When fools don't get their money's worth, what knaves the wise must be! And though you spoke like a little idiot just now, as good a twenty-pounds' worth of brains as you would get elsewhere you shall have out of my studio."

"How nice to possess so many beautiful pictures of one's own!" Laura said, innocently, as canvas after canvas was taken from the wall.

"It isn't nice at all, goosey; and if times had gone well with us artists lately, I should have had a clear studio."

"Oh! I was so sorry your large picture did not sell," Laura said.

"Who told you that?" asked Polly, sharply.

"Binnie, when we met in the street the other day."

"Whew! now I see which way the wind blows," Mrs. Cornford, said. "If I had been as thriving as a caterpillar in a cabbage, you wouldn't have wanted a picture, would you?"

Laura coloured painfully.

"Papa——" she began, faltering.

"Well, my dear, we won't quarrel about it. A windfall is as good as an apple bought at the market any day. But to think of your daddy concerning himself about me! 'What with the gratitude and the ingratitude of the world, I don't know where I am,' says the donkey to the hay he likes, and the cudgel he doesn't. And I can tell you, little Laura, that I've had more to do with the cudgels than the hay lately."

"Poor Mr. Petroffsky is paralyzed, Binnie said."

"Oh! that's nothing. One just gets him up in the morning, and puts him to bed at night, feeds him as if he were a child, and keeps him warm, and there's an end to it; but it's the way the young ones go on that makes me wonder what the world is coming to! Look at Kitty: I loved her as her own mother ought to have done (but didn't), and how does she behave to me now?"

“Doesn't Kitty write to you?” Laura asked.

“Of course she writes, but I no more value her letters than if they were dishonoured bills. She calls me her dearest Polly, says she loves me, and fills two sheets with all sorts of pretty things. What is all that worth? Not a ha'porth of straw to light a fire with. Oh! how I hate words!”

“Kitty has treated us all badly,” Laura said; “but I shall always love her.”

“That's where we're all fools alike,” Mrs. Cornford went on bitterly. “We are like dogs, who love our masters the better when they beat us. I never beat my dogs, and the consequence is they don't care a pin for me.”

“Dear Mrs. Cornford, you must not say that.”

“What's the use of saying the contrary, if it isn't true? Look at my chicks; I've gone hungry that they should be filled before now; and I'd paint sign-boards rather than let them want, any day; they are twice as fond of their fine-lady aunt, who sees them once or twice a year, and gives them nothing but her old clothes. They pay no heed to what I say—

they won't lend a helping hand in the house ; if my back is turned, Petroffsky gets no dinner. They wouldn't go to the dyer's and earn sixpence a day now, only I bribed them with a shilling each to begin."

"It's very trying," Laura said.

"Then look at Perry," Mrs. Cornford went on ; "no one knows how I love that boy ! What does he care ? He goes on his travels, and lets me wait and wait for news of him, till I could cry my eyes out with suspense, if I had two pairs of 'em, one for ornament and one for use."

Laura's eyes filled now, partly with concern for Perry, partly out of sympathy for her old friend.

"Dear Mrs. Cornford !" she said, kissing her.

"Oh, bother ! I'm like the Irishman in the song," she said, putting the little thing away with a sort of bearish good-nature. "'Tis sentiment kills me,' says I. I didn't mean to talk of that boy, only he belongs to the lot, and has served me the worst of all. It isn't the last hair that breaks the camel's back, but the hand that lays it on ; and if the others had robbed

me, or played worse tricks, I wouldn't have minded, so long as Perry's heart was in the right place."

"Is it so very long since you heard from Mr. Perugino?" asked Laura.

"So long that he is either dead, or doesn't trouble his head about us poor fools crying at home. I shouldn't wonder if he has married a Mahometan woman."

"Oh, dear!"

"He can't have Kitty, you know, and when men are disappointed in love, one woman is much the same to them as another. Besides," Mrs. Cornford added, by way of physicking Laura's moral nature, and warning her off possible shoals and quicksands of sentiment in the future, "Perry could no more support a wife than he could say the Proverbs of Solomon backwards standing on his head."

A pause followed this speech, and Laura began to think of going; yet she lingered and lingered.

"May I call again if I am passing this way?" she said.



“Come when you like, but go when I please; that is my motto about visitors, Miss Laura. Tell papa if he likes to change the picture at any time, he can do so. I hope you children are good to him.”

And then Laura went away, saddened by her visit, yet unspeakably glad to have set foot in her paradise once more. It was a deserted paradise, but a paradise still.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## PERRY'S WANDERINGS CONTINUED.

**M**EANTIME, where was Perry? When he found that the yacht bearing Kitty had flown from Algiers like a bird, none knew whither, his heart was filled with disappointment, bitterness, and dismay. It seemed to him that not only Kitty's thoughts, but instincts also warred against his peace; and he fancied himself shunned as well as despised. Well, nothing remained but to hate her as well as he could, and go on his own way! He had tried to ruin himself in Paris, body and soul, by absinthe and bad company, and the experiment failed. He had tried in Spain to lead the life of a more harmless vagabond, serenading

bright eyes, singing *coplas*, and dancing *boleras* at village inns with village beauties, giving his soul to Nature, and his heart to the first pleasure that came in his way; and this experiment had failed also. Now he was determined to let things take their course, without an effort in any direction. He would neither try to sink nor swim, but would let the waves do with him as they would.

Bohemia, like Freemasonry, has its pass-word all the world over, and Perry soon made friends, to whose board and purse—when not empty—he was always welcome.

When April came the weather grew burning hot. The Sahel was carpeted with flowers of unspeakable splendour; the Atlas mountains looked faint as a cloud against the warm blue sky; a sirocco made the town like a furnace, save where some fountain bubbled in the court of a dusky mosque. Perry's temperament did not bear heat well, and after a week's enthusiasm and hard work, he longed to get away. One of his new friends, a writer for the *Moniteur d'Algérie* and other local papers, was deputed to

report a celebrated trial coming off at a place called Teniet, in the mountains. Would Monsieur Perugino go with him? He could get there for almost nothing, and a finer sight for an artist than the cedar forest of Teniet was not to be seen in the world.

To cram his clothes into a valise, to get a Napoleon or two on the security of sketches worth twenty pounds, to leave others in his landlady's charge, by way of apology for not paying a month's rent—all this was the work of a few minutes; and then he started, feeling as happy as a bird and no less free. He had neglected to write to poor Polly Cornford lately, from sheer idleness, and he said to himself that he would send her a letter from the cedar forest.

But in this he was reckoning without his host. When he beheld the unutterable majesty of the cedars, whether seen in spring-like sunshine, in clouds of mist, or in snow-storms—for the climate of Teniet varies with magical rapidity—he forgot everything except that he was a genius, and that the sight of a beautiful thing made him obliviously happy. Was it any won-

der that poor Polly went without her letter from day to day and from week to week ?

Meantime, the trial came to an end ; three or four Arabs were condemned to death for the murder of colonists, and Perry's friend had to return to Algiers and his newspaper.

Perry had made dozens of sketches, and had finished one small picture, all of which he now entrusted, well-packed, to his friend.

"Don't take them to my lodgings," he said, "or they'll be confiscated by the laundress, the restaurateur, and the Jew who let me have my Moorish scimitar on credit, but ship them straight off to London." And somehow it happened that the address—Madame Confor, Paradise Place, London, Fulham, Middlesex, Angletterre—was written by the reporter, and not by Perry himself.

When Perry's fit of rapturous enthusiasm and industry was over, love of adventure again took possession of him, and he went hyena-hunting with a party of gay young French officers, miles away in the plain.

Sleeping in tents is delightful to those who

love the wondrous sunrises of the South, and do not suffer from ague! Poor Perry was knocked down by malarian fever ere he had seen, much less killed, a hyena, and lay tossing in alternate paroxysms of heat and cold, to the great distress of his kind companions. Each had a little theory of his own about malaria, and practised it upon Perry to the best of his skill. He was dosed with quinine one day, with concoctions of herbs the next—was fomented, plaistered, mesmerised, charmed, and Heaven only knows what; but, in spite of all these infallible remedies, grew no better. Then a *cacolet* was written for, and poor Perry went back to Teniet like a disabled soldier from a campaign. There, thanks to the exquisite mountain air, rational treatment, and good nursing, he began to pick up a little strength and spirit.

All this time Mrs. Cornford was looking out for news of Perry, as a mother whose only son is at sea. When she heard the last postman's knock in the street at night, her heart never stopped beating tumultuously till the sound died away. Then she sat down to the

family supper in extreme bitterness of soul, wondering whether, indeed, there was such a thing as constant affection in all the world.

Little Vittoria, now Madame Puig, tried to comfort her old friend with the acquired solemnity of a few months' wife-hood.

"Dearest Polly," she would say, "I know, I feel that Perugino is only somewhat remiss, and that in his heart of hearts he is as true as my Victor. Why, I should believe in my Victor's affection if he were in Algérie, and never wrote to me for a year."

"Proving oneself a fool doesn't prove another person an angel," Mrs. Cornford said. "I dare say no harm has happened to the boy, and that he means nothing unkind; but don't attempt to pity me for my bunions till you've got a corn, then we will cry out together—Why did we ever wear tight shoes?"

"I don't think either of us wear tight shoes in that sense," Vittoria said.

"Well, corns don't come of their own accord," Polly answered; "and mine let me have no rest by night or day. I'm not dirty particular

where my affections are concerned ; I can put up with as many slights and crosses as most people ; but there's always one pill we can't swallow, with the best intentions in the world, and that boy's behaviour is mine."

When Perry's case of drawings arrived, addressed to her in a strange handwriting, Mrs. Cornford believed that her boy had fallen ill in Algeria, and had there died.

Things were going a little better with her at this epoch of our history. Vittoria and her husband, *Piggie*, as Mrs. Cornford affectionately termed him, helped to pay the rent, to look after poor old Petroffsky, and to scold Tommie and her wild crew into something like decent behaviour. One or two friends of Dr. Norman's had bought little pictures ; her winter's work was flatteringly spoken of by the hanging committee of the Royal Academy ; and Vittoria's sisters promised to take Mimi as an apprentice to photography at midsummer. She felt no immediate want of money ; she painted better than ever.

But prosperity comes with almost an insupport-



able bitterness when we cannot share it with the one who is the light of our eyes; and Perry was the light of Polly Cornford's eyes. As a woman weeps for her lover, as a wife weeps for her husband, as a mother weeps for her only son, she wept in secret for him.

And none in the little community felt very hopeful now about Perry's fate. Blue-eyed, fair-haired, fair-complexioned people do not bear tropical heats and disorders very well. Perry, moreover, was rash to the last degree where his health was concerned, and had never been robust: added to which, the Algerian season had been reported in the newspapers as an exceptionally unfavourable one.

Perry's boon companions, who used to drop in for the pleasure of abusing him, now ceased to inquire whether he had written, and one or two lacked courage to come at all. He was ever the spoiled child of the little community: not the most popular person, like Kitty, but the most beloved. All Bohemia went into mourning, which was none the less real because wanting outward symbols of crape.

Mrs. Cornford spoke in parables as much as ever, ate, drank, toiled and span; but is that sorrow alone real which leads us out of the world to fast and weep and refuse consolation?

It was quite by chance that Laura heard of Mrs. Cornford's supposed loss, for she had never found an excuse to visit her again. At her father's dinner-table one evening, the conversation happened to turn on the particular set of artists to which Perry belonged.

"I don't know how it is that, with all their talents, they do so little," said Dr. Norman's guest, himself an artist. "Look at Perugino Neeve, who painted 'An English Autumn Eve'! Three years ago I prophesied for that young fellow one of the finest positions among our rising artists; but he has done nothing since; and I have just heard that he has died of malaria in Algeria."

"I hope that the report may prove a false one," Dr. Norman said. "We know something of Mr. Neeve and his friends."

And then, after a little more talk of Perry,

the subject was dismissed, as if it were not of more than ordinary moment.

Poor Laura had flushed to the brow on hearing such terrible news of Perry, and it was with a very great effort that she could maintain anything like composure during the rest of the evening. As soon as she escaped to her own room, she wrote a passionate little letter to Mrs. Cornford, which was posted that same night, entreating to know more particulars of this rumoured calamity.

With what agitation Laura heard the postman's knock next day, it may well be imagined. She could not eat, she could not employ herself—she could only sit by the window, waiting and watching. At length came the following note from Mrs. Cornford, written with paint on a scrap of drawing-paper:—

“DEAR LAURA,—Perry has written to nobody. If he is alive, he is a bad boy. If he is dead, of course we shall call him an angel. I should like to have had three bundles of hay to choose from if I had been the donkey. How can I be-

lieve that Perry is dead?—or that he is alive?  
I've done the best for his picture anyhow.

“Yours, P. C.”

Laura wrote a long letter of condolence to her friend, which Mrs. Cornford did not read. There the correspondence ended. The summer came on apace, and still Perry gave no sign.

## CHAPTER IX.

## SUCCESSFUL DIPLOMACY.

**K**ITTY started on the yacht voyage determined to marry Sir George Bartelotte; Ella was equally determined not to have her dearest friend for her stepmother. How were these parallel lines to meet? Two months of pleasant distraction had slipped by, and neither Kitty nor Ella had yielded an inch. The obnoxious subject was wholly ignored for the most part, but whenever it came up each felt a transient bitterness towards her friend.

Kitty says she loves me better than anything in the world, reasoned Ella, and yet she cannot see how this wretched marriage must come between us. If we were indifferent to each other,

there would be no cause for me to raise objection to it.

Ella is so sweet and unselfish, Kitty thought, and she cannot understand that I am capable of unselfishness too. I suppose all women, even the angelic ones, are jealous by nature.

Thus they naturally went on misjudging and misinterpreting each other. It was as little likely that Ella should comprehend Kitty's ambitious eagerness, as that Kitty should comprehend Ella's generous scruples.

Between father and daughter, the subject had been tabooed from the beginning. Once or twice Sir George made a feeble effort on behalf of himself and his bride-elect; but Ella's deprecatory look and word were enough to awe him into immediate silence.

He was always saying to himself—To-day I will speak out, or to-morrow I will constrain Ella to listen; but to-day and to-morrow passed away, and he had not spoken out.

There were more reasons than one why Sir George was so eager to consummate this marriage. In the first place, he was in love with Kitty

after a fashion. In the second, it was reasonable to hope that a young wife would bring him an heir. In the third, he had a man's natural wish to bequeath the estates that had come to him from his father to a son of his own. Poor Sir George felt that such a blessing would indeed be a recompense for the crosses that had befallen him, and the upright and Christian career on which he prided himself. The anticipation of it made his heart light and his step elate.

If only Ella would listen!

Ella's uncompromising attitude drove him to Kitty for consolation. It was like a sudden descent from mountain regions of perpetual snow to soft green meadows, laughing streams, and hedgerows full of flowers.

When they were alone Kitty petted Sir George, as only women like Kitty can pet men or women whose liking they covet. She said all sorts of pretty things, that meant little enough, but effected a good deal; for Sir George felt himself younger, more confident, and of more worth in the world, for hours after. She told him, moreover, that nothing short of Ella's

persistent opposition should induce her to break the promise she had given him—"Because I should be so wretched away from you now"—she would say with insinuating fondness. Whereupon Sir George would boldly kiss the pretty hand that was never withdrawn, swearing to reward her for such constancy, and to stand by her as long as he lived.

When a young and beautiful woman makes love to a man double her years, he is sure to lose his head, whether he possesses a heart or no; and Sir George soon lost his head under the influence of Kitty's fascination. One day a gale was blowing, which was a lucky gale for Kitty. Excepting Sir George and Kitty, no one could keep his sea-legs, so that they had the deck to themselves, and many a pleasant tête-à-tête. Blessed by the gods are those mortals who know not what it is to suffer from *mal-de-mer*! and Kitty and Sir George felt a little superior to common humanity in being thus excepted from the common fate, and made a good deal of each other in consequence.

With Kitty leaning on his arm, Kitty looking



up into his eyes, Kitty's caressing words sounding in his ears, Sir George became intoxicated. Never before had Kitty allowed him to taste the sweets of courtship; never before had she frankly and fondly talked of the future they were to spend together; never before had she said how dear his affection was to her.

Truth to tell, Kitty's patience was giving way a little. She rebelled equally against Ella's wistful hostility, and against Sir George's long-continued supineness. Such a state of things could not go on for ever. Come what might, she determined to act boldly.

After all this friendly talk, with just a little show of shyness on Kitty's part, by way of tempting Sir George's outspoken admiration, she said, blushing and sighing:

"But of what use for us to build up so many card-houses, which dear Ella is sure to blow down? Most likely the end will be, that I shall leave you as I came, a poor outcast, and never once set foot in Akenholme Park."

"By George, no, no, I say!" exclaimed Sir George. "If I live, you shall be mistress of

Akenholme, and who knows but that it may go down to some of my name yet? You will manage things beautifully, too, for that poor darling girl when anything happens to me——”

“Oh! how can you talk of such cruel things?”

Kitty said.

“My dear, I did not mean to be cruel. It is only right to think of the future. Ella has got plenty of faculty, but she is a little inclined to be over-generous, and, without some friendly guidance, would inevitably cripple her resources. Now, you are the very soul of prudence.”

“You think much too highly of me,” Kitty began.

“Nonsense. I should be a fool if I did not know what a treasure I had won in you. Why, I do believe you will cost me less as my wife than as Ella’s companion,” Sir George said, gushingly. “And then the difference to me in comfort!”

“I think I could make you comfortable—I am sure I could,” Kitty answered, “if Ella will only let me try.”

“She will—she must!” Sir George said. “I

have no influence over her whatever, but I am sure she will listen to you."

"She did not listen before."

"Suppose you try once more?" Sir George ventured to suggest.

"I cannot help thinking that the second overtures would come better from yourself," Kitty said, feeling, in truth, hardly courageous enough to fight Sir George's battles with Ella over again.

Sir George was silent, but, by the curious contortion that passed over his features, she saw how unpalatable was the advice.

After a little reflection, he said briskly:

"I really see no necessity of speaking to Ella any more. She knows well enough what you and I have determined upon. Let us follow our own devices, and take her consent for granted.

"Would that be quite fair towards Ella?" Kitty asked.

"What can we do that she will consider quite fair?"

"Ah, true."

“Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte,” Sir George added. “Dear Ella cannot fail to see, by-and-by, that your marriage with me will be for her own good; and till that time we must bear her vexation as best we can. The sooner all is settled the better, I say.”

This was exactly what Kitty had thought for a long time, but she listened in silence.

“We might as well be married quietly when we get back to Gibraltar or Malaga as not; don't you think so?”

“That is for you alone to decide,” Kitty made answer modestly.

“I decide in favour of the proposition, taking it for granted, of course, that you have no womanish notions about trousseaux and that sort of thing.”

Kitty had very womanish notions about trousseaux “and that sort of thing,” but was too much overcome by her lover's condescending goodness to confess her weakness. Sir George went on—

“You will find me a much more practical person to deal with than Ella, who, I verily believe,

would spend every penny she possesses in decking you out with finery. Beauty unadorned is adorned the most, to my thinking; and you always look handsomer than other women, no matter how you dress."

Kitty acknowledged the compliment, though in her secret heart she prized beyond expression the adornments of the outer woman he seemed to think supererogatory. She was too well satisfied, however, with Sir George's new mood to cavil at minor mortifications, and had, moreover, schooled herself resolutely into an attitude of meekness.

"I have, indeed, won a treasure in this girl," Sir George thought, "who has so taken to heart the teachings of adversity. What other woman would recognise her true position—as she does—to the nicety of a hair?"

And as the rest of the party lay prostrate in their berths and the sailors were busy, he snatched a kiss from the object of his affections by way of rewarding her for her meekness, and himself for his generous behaviour.

Thus the matter was settled, and Kitty felt

sure at last that she should become Lady Bartelotte.

As soon as the weather improved, their companions crept on deck one by one. The first happened to be Mr. Tyrrell, and he was so impressed by the confidential and affectionate tone Sir George and Kitty assumed towards each other, that he could not resist running downstairs, and imparting his suspicions to the owner of the yacht, Colonel Fellowes. Colonel Fellowes, of course, repeated the story to his wife, and from her it went the round of the ladies, excepting Ella.

A spice of scandal at sea, how good and acceptable it is! Every one felt quite grateful to Sir George and Kitty for breaking the general monotony so kindly. Ella was not slow to interpret the sly looks and signs interchanged by her friends on every side; nor was she less slow to understand Kitty's somewhat artificial though devoted manner towards herself, and Sir George's affected ease and unaffected hilarity. Kitty, moreover, wore a ring of Sir George's giving. There was no need to ask questions.

The truth was so plain that those who ran might read.

In Ella's pure heart waged a terrible conflict. She would fain have exonerated Kitty from blame, and loved her as dearly as ever; but some strong spell seemed to hold her back. Perhaps she did love her as dearly as ever; only how terrible are our affections when the leaven of mistrust has leavened the whole lump!

## CHAPTER X.

ECONOMY *VERSUS* LOVE.

**B**UT Ella could not support her unhappy scruples long. The atmosphere of solitude and mistrust was so unbearable, that she determined to come down from the high level on which Kitty's spirit had once moved in unison with her own, and abide where Kitty willed. She reasoned with herself thus:—"Kitty is surely not to blame if her ideal of life and conduct is less lofty than mine; I am rather to blame for carrying an inborn and nurtured fastidiousness into my affections. She is what she is as much by the force of circumstances as I am myself. We must have patience—God only knows how much!—with those we love."



What Ella suffered in this conflict can hardly be told. To her loving, religious nature, Kitty had come as a sweet pariah from the outer world of sin and suffering, and she had set herself the task of turning the pariah into an angel. Loving Kitty passionately as she did, she had hitherto borne the moral defects of this superbly-endowed, captivating, enthusiastic creature, hoping to see them amended in time. But now what hope was there for Kitty? Was she not selling herself to a title? Was she not forfeiting all that good women hold dear and sacred—the close affection and friendship of married life?

Kitty had said that but for her friend, she would never have promised to marry Sir George; and Ella knew well that she believed such a statement to be true. Would Sir George have had to go away an unaccepted wooer, in any case? Ella doubted.

There was only one Kitty in all the world, however, and Ella felt that she could forgive even more at her hands than this. Accordingly, when the two girls were next alone, Ella's em-

barrassed mood melted, and she clasped her friend's hand, saying tearfully :

“I hope you will be happy in your own way, dear Kitty. If I have been angry that your way is not mine, I am sure you forgive me.”

Of course Kitty declared that she had nothing to forgive, and they kissed like children who have quarrelled about a cake. After a great many protestations on Kitty's part of her entire self-abnegation and devotion to Ella in the future—why was it that the loyal Ella made no promises?—the conversation naturally fell upon wedding-clothes, and other topics of the same kind.

There is a comic vein running through every tragedy, no matter how dismal it may be; and after the agonies of dismay, suspense, and apprehension described in these later pages, all the comedy of Sir George Bartelotte's engagement to Kitty Silver came out.

Having secured his bride, his whole being seemed concentrated on the economic arrangements of his new household. He was like a miser who has indulged a whim in buying a

pretty tame bird, and begrudges his pet any but the cheapest cage and the commonest food. That Sir George's bird would rebel against its ugly prison and uninviting fare, never once occurred to him. On the contrary, he was always chuckling over Kitty's good luck, and congratulating himself for disinterestedly making her the mistress of his house and the partner of his fortunes. He dared not talk to Ella in this strain; but "out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh," and Ella, perforce, heard much that was unpalatable to her.

To his bride elect he was more communicative, and a person less good-natured than Miss Kitty Silver must have resented his prosaic, not to say indelicate way of putting things. For instance, his eye fell by chance one day on an advertisement in the *Times* newspaper, headed *A Trousseau for Twenty Pounds*, which he cut out and brought to Kitty in great glee. After all, a penniless wife was not so very expensive a luxury, if her wants could be kept within reasonable bounds, and a trousseau for twenty pounds was certainly reasonable!

“What is your opinion?” he asked of Kitty, as her eye ran over the advertisement.

“It would be as well to have samples,” said Miss Kitty, artfully, determined not to displease her lover; and not to have the trousseau for twenty pounds.

“That is an excellent idea. Ah! you will not be imposed upon, I see. If Ella were only like you! but don’t say a word to her about this advertisement, for she would think me much too miserly and interfering. And what about your allowance in the future?”

“That is for you to determine,” Kitty answered.

“Nonsense! What can a man know about the price of ladies’ clothes? I only know that I have heard my poor mother say, she and her five sisters had to dress upon thirty pounds a year each; and they were of the very best blood in England.”

Kitty cast down her eyes very meekly.

“If I had only myself to consider, I could dress upon almost any sum,” she said; “but, as your wife, I must keep up a certain appearance.”

Oh! these women, these women! sighed Sir George Bartelotte, how they befool us with their handsome eyes and insinuating ways!

Then he waited for what Kitty should say, quaking with fear, and determined, at any cost, to hold his own.

“Pray understand that I wish to avoid meanness on the one hand as well as indiscretion on the other,” he said, at last growing impatient. “Tell me in plain English what a ‘certain appearance’ means in L. S. D.?”

Kitty still paused irresolute.

“Would fifty pounds a year hit the mark, eh?” asked her lover eagerly. “If fifty pounds isn’t liberal for a poor devil like myself, I don’t know what is.”

“Oh! Sir George,” Kitty said, smiling sweetly; “as if the beggar-maid did not accept whatever King Cophetua chose to bestow upon her, and be thankful!”

“But it is better to be business-like and know where we are. I always like to know where I am in money matters,” said the bridegroom elect

eagerly. "Can you dress like a lady, and keep your temper on an allowance of fifty pounds a year?"

Kitty burst out laughing, and, laying one little hand on Sir George's arm, looked up comically and caressingly into his face.

"I should make a point of being good-tempered," she answered, "but I can't answer for the other. You see, it takes twice as much stuff to make me a gown as it does most women—I am so tall, so unfortunately tall," she repeated, rearing her neck and surveying herself from head to foot with a very pardonable amount of satisfaction.

This little bit of coquetry so fascinated Sir George, that he committed himself to an ebullition of generosity on the spot.

"On my soul," he said, "I can refuse you nothing. Well, then, let us say a hundred. That will do, won't it?"

And poor Kitty, whose ambitions had aimed much higher, felt compelled to say Yes, and look delighted. How often in the day was she obliged to say Yes, and look delighted,

when her inmost heart was full of rebellion!

The matter of allowance being settled to Sir George's entire satisfaction, another no less important filled his mind. Since the fact of his engagement to Kitty had become an accepted one, she had assumed a sort of half-playful, half-serious, wife-like manner towards him, that he found inexpressibly bewitching. If only bewitching things did not interfere with one's purse!

For instance, no sooner was Kitty put in the sort of authority over him which the position of affianced wife implies, than she began to scold and tease him about his shabby clothes. She attached that overweening importance to appearances which people of inferior or uncertain breeding are sure to do, and thought it an affair of exceeding importance whether or no Sir George wore a threadbare coat, or a hat that cost less than his neighbour's. Of course, it flattered her elderly lover mightily to be told that he looked well in such and such a dress, and ill in another; but what Kitty found becoming was sure to cost the most money, and

love *versus* economy waged fierce war in the baronet's heart.

Had he kept his own counsel, all would have been well; but he was so anxious to approve himself generous in the eyes of the world, that his meanness became more apparent than ever. First he went to Mr. Tyrrell for advice, then to Lady Gardiner, and so on, making the complete round of his acquaintance, till soon not a creature on board but knew what was passing in his mind.

"That dear girl," he said once to Lady Gardiner, "has the most astounding capacity of any woman I ever knew. *Entre nous*, few young ladies would realise her position as she does; for no matter how charming and handsome a penniless girl may be, the man who marries her makes a sacrifice."

"Under some circumstances," said Lady Gardiner, smiling. She bore Kitty no grudge for having superseded her daughter Constance, and thought it a good opportunity to take down the Baronet's vanity.

"Exactly," Sir George replied; "and, devoted



as I am to dear Ella's friend, I can but feel that the sacrifice entailed upon me is enormous. Miss Silver has not a penny—absolutely not a penny!”

“Oh! Sir George, what is money in comparison to her many gifts and sweet temper?”

It was not to be expected of Lady Gardiner, the mother of fading unmarried daughters, to add—“her beauty.”

“True; but the predicament in which I find myself is most trying to a man's judgment. How can I behave so as to prove my devotion to Kitty, and at the same time avoid parsimony and lavishness? Now, if you were to give my dear Kitty a little motherly advice, I should be more grateful than I can tell you.”

“But it seems to me that she is too sensible to need any counsel of mine.”

“She has certainly showed admirable discretion in dealing with the question of our domestic arrangements hitherto; but the mis-giving crosses my mind whether she may not sometimes think me over-cautious in money matters. I am a poor man, Lady Gardiner—a

very poor man; and it is my earnest wish to prevent Kitty from feeling any disappointment in the future. I wish you would enlighten her mind as to the possibility of baronets being poor as well as artists and authors, and the people she has lived among."

"I must think your poverty is a pet bugbear of your own, dear Sir George," Lady Gardiner answered, incredulously; "but I will pour any amount of doleful tales into Kitty's ears about out-of-elbow aristocracy, if you like."

"Indeed, you are wrong," cried Sir George; then with an expression of alarm: "I am as poor as any church mouse going; and if it were not for Ella's sake—and another consideration equally weighty—ahem—I would never have permitted myself to dream of marrying again. Pray do not inoculate Kitty with such notions."

"Did I not promise to conjugate the verb—*To want money*—in all its moods and tenses for Miss Silver's benefit?" asked Lady Gardiner saucily. "I'm not good at grammar, but I know that conjugation by heart."

And then she began:

“To want money.

Very active verb indeed—governing all cases of personal pronouns ; declined as much as possible :—

I want money,  
Thou wantest money,  
He wants money.”

Sir George interrupted her a little pettishly, thinking her conduct rather flippant.

“It would be more to the purpose if you could persuade Kitty that a lady’s dress needn’t cost more than fifty pounds a year!” he said. “She has made me promise to allow her a hundred, but I am convinced that it is twice too much!”

Of course this story went the round of the ladies, and reached the ears of one or two of the men.

The former mostly blamed Kitty, the latter pitied her.

But Kitty did not as yet pity herself.

## CHAPTER XI.

“THIS, MY SON, WAS LOST, AND IS FOUND.”

“THERE is always one pill you cannot swallow,” was a favourite proverb of Mrs. Cornford’s, and it applied to herself with full force throughout the long summer of suspense that followed her unlucky spring. For the fresh green leaves of the Kensington Gardens grew brown and sere, and the tide of fashionable life was slowly ebbing under the glare of a July sun, and the Fulham fields were covered with clouds of heat and dust; yet Perry gave no sign. Mrs. Cornford had swallowed a great many bitter pills during the period of her lifetime with a tolerably good grace. She had been hardly used by an indifferent husband, had

been imposed upon by the shiftless and shameless of her kith and kin, and trodden under foot by such of them as were doing well in the world; she had experienced enough and to spare of the ills of poverty; but kindness of heart and abundance of natural spirits had never once abandoned her. "He who can't kill a flea isn't worth a flea," she would say in allusion to all minor troubles, and would console herself for great ones by a string of aphorisms, such as—When I've the making of the world, says the shrimp to the shrimper, you shall be I and I'll be you; but till then, eat me, and obey the laws of nature.

Or :

What am I that I should escape a licking?  
says every right-minded donkey.

Or :

Are not our duns, debtors, and creditors men  
and brethren?

This latter speech had especial reference to the friends who borrowed money of her and the tax collector she could not pay.

Poor Polly had done her very best for Perry's

sketches. One finished picture of great genius, representing the majestic Cedar Forest in a snowstorm, was sold before it appeared on the walls of the Academy; the others were to fill a screen of a Winter Exhibition.

Perry's "Cedar Forest in a Snowstorm," attracted all the more interest because it was rumoured that the promising young artist would never exhibit again. The report of his supposed death in Algeria had got about; fashionable ladies stopped a few seconds longer before the picture than they would otherwise have done, and said, sighing, "How sad!" and real judges of art monopolised it, and bent over it eagerly, criticising, admiring, deploring.

Pretty Laura's heart had leaped on reading from the catalogue the words—*Cedar Forest of Teniet-el-Haad, Algeria. Perugina Neeve*; and Dr. Norman must have noticed her changing colour, but for his interest in poor Perry's picture. Laura, leaning on his arm, answered a mechanical "yes" to the discriminating remarks he made expressly for her benefit. The thought of Perry absorbed her to the exclusion of every-

thing else ; and when she looked at his work, the artist's living self seemed to stand before her, animated, beautiful, beloved, as of old. Only to see him once again—once again ! Laura sighed heart-brokenly.

As the summer wore on, Dr. Norman carried off his children to Switzerland, where they were joined by Regy, their German student, and all—excepting Laura—spent a happy time.

They reached home in October ; the very next day Laura walked to Fulham.

The aspect of Paradise Place had never before been so dreary, to her thinking. There were dirty little boxes of faded mignonette in the windows ; dead geraniums and stocks filled the garden ; stray cats of lean exterior wandered about ; a miserable little child was wheeling a perambulator containing a baby up and down the pavement ; a cart-load of very shabby furniture was being unpacked before one door ; a melancholy monkey was performing tricks in a dingy red jacket before another, without any audience excepting the little child, the baby, and the lean cats before mentioned. A heavy

rain had begun to fall, but the monkey went on all the same, and the audience seemed not to mind it.

The door was opened by Mrs. Cornford herself, looking a little older, a little careworn, but as genial as ever.

“ ‘Who would have thought of seeing you?’ says the devil to the parson; ‘but you might go further and fare worse,’” she said, kissing the young girl. “Come in and have some dinner with me. I’ve got a dish of tripe just in hot from the baker’s, and must eat it as fast as I can without killing myself, and be off to the City.”

It was barely twelve o’clock, and Laura’s better-bred palette said “No” to this invitation; but Mrs. Cornford made her sit down for company’s sake, and, having sat down, she felt compelled to eat.

“Fetch an extra half-pint of beer, Mary Hann,” said Mrs. Cornford, giving the girl some halfpence; “and be quick about it, for you must carry up Mr. Troffsky’s dinner.”

Good Mrs. Cornford, who had been a guardian angel to outcasts and pariahs all her life, and



who painted as well as many a man with R. A. appended to his name, was certainly one of the women with whom Lord Byron would not have elected to dine. "Don't be dirty particular," was one of her favourite axioms in matters material as well as moral; and she saw no objection to the old-fashioned way of making fingers serve for forks and knives for spoons. She was, moreover, a *bon vivant* on a humble scale, and relished her food with the zest of health and gastronomic discrimination.

"If you've come for news, I've none to give you, so you needn't bother me with questions," she said, after a time. "Do you find the tripe good?"

"Indeed it is," Laura answered.

"Take some more, then. We won't leave any for manners. I'm mighty glad to see you, goosey. I've been as glum lately 'as a thief whose friends have been put in prison."

"Are you quite alone?" asked Laura.

"The chicks have had the measles, so I packed 'em off to Ramsgate, and Vittoria and Piggy have gone back to Paris."

“Monsieur Petroffsky is here,” Laura observed.

“For a very good reason, goosey; he is so paralysed that he can’t run away. But he’s very good company, though his mind is almost gone, bless him! and we sing duets together as merrily as two lame bluebottles caught in a spider’s web. But you don’t eat.”

“I have really had enough, dear Mrs. Cornford.

Thereupon Mrs. Cornford put her fork in the choice morsel dainty Miss Laura had left on her plate, saying naïvely :

“God thought of thrift before the devil invented company manners, so I save my tripe, my dear, and make no apology. It’s uncommon good.”

At this stage of affairs, happened one of those rare and happy surprises that are interwoven like golden threads in the sober tissue of human life, and make it the welcome thing it is, with all its sadness.

Mrs. Cornford was about to raise her glass to her lips, having wished Laura “Long life, a

pinch of good luck, and a handful of mother-wit," when the cry so dear to London cats :

"M——e——a——t!"

in "linked sweetness long drawn out," was heard at the area-steps.

Now, it had been one of Perry's minor accomplishments to imitate street-cries to such perfection that none but Polly Cornford ever knew when to distinguish the fictitious cat's-meat man, or lobster man, or water-cress vender, or sweep, from the genuine one. But Polly Cornford's love for Perry had taken root in the days of his early childhood, and was as nearly like a mother's instinct as could be. She recognized her prodigal's voice at once. Dropping her glass, shaking from head to foot, turning red and pale, she had just time to exclaim: "Perry, or Perry's ghost, as true as I'm a fool!" when the door opened, and Mr. Perugino himself stood before the two ladies, looking by no means like a ghost, but extremely like himself, and no little pleased at the sensation he had evidently created.

"How d'ye do, Polly?" he said, embracing

her with that good-natured condescension which over-indulged young men are apt to exercise towards their mothers, or any other good women whose love for them has never waxed cold. "How d'ye do, Polly? Better late than never, eh?"

Mrs. Cornford's conduct was not precisely what might have been looked for under the circumstances. Had Perry come home sick, dejected, tatterdemalion, her tenderness would have equalled the tenderness of a mother nursing a suffering baby; but seeing him evidently in vigorous health and buoyant spirits, and, as far as appearances went, totally unmindful of the intense suffering he had caused her, the great love of the woman for once rose up in rebellion against her darling. She tried to put on a jaunty air, took her old place at the dinner-table, bade Perry sit down and eat, as she said, "not according to his deserts, but according to his welcome," and was about to help him, when her fortitude broke down and, hiding her face in the corner of the table-cloth, she cried like a child.

Perry, whose attention had been wholly absorbed by Laura during the last few minutes, and the bewitching effect of her violet velvet pelisse bordered with soft white fur, now turned to Mrs. Cornford in dismay.

“Polly!” he cried, “what’s the matter? Is that the way to welcome a fellow whose perils have beaten Sinbad’s hollow? Thrice was I devoured of lions—nearly; thrice were my unburied bones bleached by the sun of the Sahara—at least, within an inch of it; I’ve been all but assassinated by wandering Bedouins, yet here I am safe and sound!”

Then he went up to his old friend, and drew away the table-cloth from her face, and smiled down upon her, and kissed her as a son might have done, and said foolish little endearing things. And Polly Cornford forgot everything except her joy that this her prodigal “was dead and was alive again, lost and was found.”

After a little further talk, Perry sat down and devoured all they gave him, rushing upstairs in the midst to shake old Petroffsky by the hand.

Mrs. Cornford sent out Mary Hann for a bottle of sparkling Bourdeaux; and Laura, who had risen to take leave once or twice, was compelled to stay and drink Perry's health. Whilst the young man ate and drank, the two ladies sat watching him with large eyes of admiration and contentment. What a beautiful beard he had got! What a delightful look of health travel had given him! Surely his eyes were bluer and his smile more winning than of old! And his very speech had caught some delicious accent—Spanish or Arabic, they knew not what—which made it more attractive than ever!

Then Perry brought out of his travelling-bag some little trinkets of Moorish fabrication, and presented his adorers each with a bracelet of Arab coins and a lion's claw, set as a charm to keep off the Evil Eye; displaying other treasures with the superior air a school-boy puts on amongst his little sisters.

But at last Laura felt that she must go. Fairyland could not last for ever. And very slowly she tied the strings of her little bonnet, and drew on her little fur-bordered gloves,

Perry watching her all the while, his eyes saying welcome things. Then she shook hands with each, and walked home, with what sweet dreams and fancies floating in her mind there is no need to say!

## CHAPTER XII.

## TIDINGS OF KITTY.

WHEN Laura had gone, Perry and Mrs. Cornford drew their chairs closer to the fire. Perry lighted a cigarette, Mrs. Cornford busied herself in roasting chestnuts on the bars, and a long confidential talk was inevitable.

Perry's evanescent gaiety passed as soon as they found themselves alone. A change came over his face, making him look years older than he had done just before, and slightly sharpening the beautiful features which betrayed every mood and passion of his frank, boyish nature. He caught hold of Mrs. Cornford's hand very eagerly, and said under his breath :

“Have you heard of her?”



“Of Kitty? Nothing good, you may be sure,” Polly retorted. “Expect a hull that has been stranded for twenty years to bear oak-apples, before you look for gratitude from the worldly wise.”

Perry smoked away in a sober, dreary, practical mood. Formerly he would have resented so severe a stricture on Kitty; but his eyes had been opened of late. There was no denying the fact that Kitty had approved herself worldly wise.

“What have you heard?” he asked.

“Oh! the old story,” Mrs. Cornford said, impatiently. “An eagle doesn’t forsake the carcase to chirp in the thicket with hedge-sparrows, and no more will Kitty change her nature to please you or me.”

Perry grew gloomier than ever.

“Many a time have I wished myself dead on that woman’s account,” he said.

“The Almighty doesn’t put fools out of harm’s way just to oblige ’em, or where would be the examples for the wise?”

“And I grew wiser when the fever brought

me so low that I verily thought my hour was come," Perry answered, smiling a little grimly. "I made a vow then, that if ever Richard was himself again, Kitty and care might go to the devil, and I would be from thenceforth a wise man."

"Keep the last part of that vow by all means," Polly said, making a somewhat satirical grimace.

"I knew well enough what you would say," Perry said, severely; "but wait and see. All I ask of you, my dear Polly, is to wait and see. The first step I take towards a reformed life is to marry sweet Laura Norman."

Mrs. Cornford would have interrupted him, but he waved his hand with a lofty air of command, and continued:

"The next step I take is to paint a grand Biblical picture—called The Queen of Sheba's Halt in the Desert—and sell it for five hundred guineas."

"Say two thousand at once," Mrs. Cornford put in wickedly.

"The third step I take is to get elected R. A. ;

and the fourth, to hire a nice house in Kensington, and live in ease and plenty all the rest of my days."

"How jolly!" cried Mrs. Cornford.

"You know you don't believe in me the least bit," Perry said. "You are like Kitty: you think me the most visionary creature in the world. Now, Laura Norman——"

"Oh! the vanity of men!—who shall compass it?" said Mrs. Cornford—"who shall mortify it? But come, my good Perry, tell me where you fell ill, and how it came about that I was so many months without hearing of you. You can make up your mind whether you will marry Laura Norman or the Queen of the Sandwich Islands to-morrow."

And she carried Perry upstairs to Petroffsky's room, that the lonely old man might be amused by his story, which lasted till the evening came on. Then Perry went out to see one or two of the "fellows," who kept him till past midnight, Mrs. Cornford waiting supper for him meanwhile.

After a few days he fell into his old habits—

painting when the humour seized him; playing on his piano for hours at a time; doing the things he liked to do, and avoiding those he found irksome. He seldom mentioned Kitty's name, and always with the utmost bitterness. Mrs. Cornford accepted it as a healthy sign that at last he acknowledged she did not care for him.

“She will marry that mean little beggar, Sir George Bartelotte,” he had said once or twice, telling Mrs. Cornford at the same time all sorts of stories he had picked up somehow about Sir George's odd ways. And, true enough, before Perry had been home a week, came the following confirmation of his fears in the *Court Journal*—the paragraph having been sent Mrs. Cornford by a friend who was a dressmaker in the West End—“A marriage is about to take place between Sir George Bartelotte, Bart., of Akenholme Park, Berks, and Miss Katharine Silver, daughter of the late Reverend Nehemiah Silver, of London.”

“Well done, thou daughter of Mammon!” cried Mrs. Cornford, after reading the extract

to Perry over their dinner-table. "May we all serve our gods as faithfully as thou hast done, and get as well rewarded! Health and long life to my Lady Bartelotte, and a good appetite to her for the flesh-pots of Israel."

Perry's eyes were devouring the paragraph, and he did not heed Mrs. Cornford's speech.

"Come, Perugino," she said, with a little forced gaiety, "toast our old comrade. Let by-gones be by-gones, and wish Kitty good luck."

"I can't be a hypocrite," said poor Perry, looking utterly miserable. "She has been my perdition. Why should I wish her good luck? I hope she will be a little unhappy sometimes."

"Stuff and nonsense!" interrupted Polly. "Have you no religion in you? Do you take Kitty to be like the brute beasts, born without a soul? Do you suppose the gilt on her gingerbread is an inch thick? I've other notions, and I wish the poor thing good luck."

"You are the most extraordinarily inconsistent person in the world," Perry answered savagely. "Had Kitty done the right thing, and

married me, I suppose you would have blamed her conduct as much as you seem to approve of it now."

"Who says I approve, oh, paragon of donkeys?" said Mrs. Cornford. "It isn't for us poor fools to judge each other, or to dole out the kicks and halfpence of this world either. If Kitty gets halfpence to-day, I'm glad; and if kicks to-morrow, which there's little doubt of, I'll put salve on the bruises, and make no remarks."

"You think she will be unhappy?" asked Perry, with a touch of self-reproach. "Oh, Kitty, Kitty!"

And saying this he rushed upstairs to his studio, and locked himself in for the rest of the day.

The news of Kitty's approaching marriage reached Dr. Norman's quiet household at the same time. Laura cut out the paragraph and sent it to Regy, who professed himself to be Kitty's devoted admirer still, and Prissy deluged her elder sister with questions about Kitty's future rank and position in the world. Dr. Norman made no comment, determined to let mat-

ters take their course ; but when day succeeded day, and Kitty's marriage was still the theme at meal-times, he said one morning, in a very decided tone of voice :

“Children, let this be the last talk about Miss Silver. It is right that we forgive her for the wrong she has done us ; but we can never have part or lot with her any more, and the sooner her very name is forgotten the better.”

“May Laura and I talk about her when we are by ourselves,” Prissy asked.

“I think you might easily find a more pleasant subject,” Dr. Norman said, bitterly.

“Laura doesn't care for my subjects, papa, and likes to walk for miles without speaking,” Prissy said.

Laura blushed deeply.

“Settle your subject, when out walking, as you like,” Dr. Norman answered ; “but, for heaven's sake, let us have our meals in future without all this talking about Kitty.”

“Oh! papa, dear, how cross we are to-day !” cried pert Miss Prissy, patting his hand reprovingly.

“We have enough to make us cross, I think,” Dr. Norman said, not heeding his little girl’s caress.

“Have we? but Dr. Watts says that ‘we should not let our angry passions rise,’ papa.”

“Dr. Watts was a fool,” Dr. Norman answered.

“Then I won’t learn any more of his hymns,” Miss Prissy rejoined.

Dr. Norman felt hereupon bound to give his little daughter an explanation.

“Pray understand me, Prissy,” he went on, “If Dr. Watts had said we should not let our angry passions rise for nothing, he would have been right. But there are occasions when it is one’s duty to be angry. For instance, Martin Luther was right to let his angry passions rise against the Pope.”

“And Kitty is your Pope, isn’t she, papa? Naughty Pope! Poor Martin Luther!”

Then the patting and caressing began again, and Dr. Norman, seeing no way to enlighten Prissy’s moral notions further, took refuge in his library. His experiments and lucubrations



did not go on well for the next few days. The former seemed unsatisfactory, the latter uninteresting. He invited a friend or two to dinner; but the conversation lagged, to his thinking, and the dishes were ill-cooked. He accompanied Laura to a small evening party, and found the women very dull or very frivolous. He received a flattering invitation from a learned society at Halle to read a paper there before their next assembly, coupled with a report of his speculations, and he thought what learned lumber German writing was, and what a long journey this humbugging amiability compelled him to make!

In plain English, the tidings of Kitty's approaching marriage put Dr. Norman into a state of irritation which lasted for several days, and might have lasted much longer, but for a severe cold, which he caught whilst moodily studying the binary stars from the house-top one damp autumnal night.

The cold, with its attendant discomforts, kept him to his bed for a week, and effectually cured his discontented mood.

Meantime, when the first flush of her great joy had passed away, Laura's heart was full of wonder and uneasiness. Should she encounter Perry again? Did he care for her still? Would he devise some way of seeing her and speaking to her sometimes? She remembered that she was no longer a child, and that Perry's friendship for her must henceforth mean more than it had done a year ago. And in those sweet days of comradeship it had not been all over with Perry and Kitty; but Kitty was lost to Perry now, and Laura read in his bright looks and buoyant manner happy auguries for herself.

She did not grudge Kitty the early, faithful passion of that dear heart—for Kitty had been a goddess to Laura also—but she longed to recompense him for past sufferings by loving him and clinging to him till life should end.

This was sweet Laura's sole ambition.

## CHAPTER XIII.

“FROGGY WOULD A-WOOING GO.”

PERRY shut himself up in his studio for several days, and refused alike counsel and comfort from everybody. When night came on, he would wrap himself up in his Spanish cloak, and stalk up and down the lonely Brompton lanes, to the infinite terror of any benighted little milliner's apprentice, or timid elderly gentleman he might encounter. Solitude, he said, was what he wanted, and he could never get half enough of it. Those who loved him now could best show it by betaking themselves out of his sight. “After Kitty's marriage, the deluge,” he reiterated to Polly Cornford. “The world for me is virtually at an end. I am a ghost, I consort only with dire shapes and

spirits. My nightly visions would terrify you so that your hair stood on an end."

"Not they," good Polly would answer, cheerfully. "I have never been frightened in my life but once, and that was when I slipped down on the rocks at Ramsgate, and there stuck like jelly-fish."

Perry gave vent to his feelings in painting a picture on an enormous canvas, which he said was to be his bridal gift to Kitty.

The composition was in the worst manner of Gustave Doré, and the execution perfect as scene-painting. Two Titanic figures stalked across a weird plain, bordered with apocryphal ravines, and mountains belching fire; the heavens were black, save where a ghastly moon broke forth above the two wanderers, one of whom was fleeing from the pursuit of the other.

The pursued, it is hardly necessary to say, was Kitty—Kitty young, Kitty beautiful, but Kitty haunted and aghast with fear; the other, who followed as her shadow, was Perry's ghost, with just as much likeness put into the face as a skeleton admitted of.

Perry exulted over this conception far more than he had ever exulted over any work before.

“Is it not a master-piece?” he would ask of Polly again and again; and Polly, to humour his frantic fancy, would say Yes, and stare at it and declare that it made her flesh creep.

When the picture was done Perry felt better. His frenzy passed as an ague-fit. He was again, as Polly said, “clothed, and in his right mind.”

Then his thoughts reverted to Laura.

“I have sowed my wild oats, Polly,” he said seriously. “Like the Ancient Mariner, I have become a sadder and a wiser man. Why should I not cast anchor for once and for all by marrying that sweet girl?”

“Why should you not, indeed?” cried Polly, “if she would have you, and if Dr. Norman approved of a scapegrace for a son-in-law?”

“An artist,” said Perry, waving his hand, “is always a gentleman, and my prospects could not be better.”

“Your clothes might be a trifle better,” Polly said, quizzically. “At any rate, don’t go a’court-  
ing till you’ve got a new coat.”

“I will order a velvet one to-morrow, and as soon as it comes home—well, we shall see what I do then.”

“A froggy would a-woeing go,  
Whether his mother would let him or no,”

began Polly; and for several days, whenever Perry broached the subject of his attachment to Laura, she repeated the strain. That Perry seriously entertained the idea of proposing to Laura, she never for a moment suspected. The idea was too preposterous.

But Perry had never been more in earnest during the term of his existence. He yearned for sympathy, and had not Laura given him sympathy of the sweetest kind? He yearned for some woman's love, and was he not as sure of Laura's love as of Kitty's indifference? In fine, he yearned to turn over a fresh page of life; and this one promised to be very fair.

Perry's genius was not baffled by such considerations as difference of social position and want of money. He consulted one of his friends, Crosbie Carrington, who promised to help him.

“I know some people who sometimes meet

Dr. Norman and his pretty daughter at a house in Bayswater. I'll ask 'em to take you, or get you invited—being a distinguished artist—and, once there, any one will introduce you to the old buffer—I mean the doctor.”

Crosbie Carrington was as good as his word, and soon there came a formal invitation from the family at Bayswater to an *At Home*. Perry got himself up magnificently, thanks to a dress-suit borrowed of Crosbie, and a new pair of shiny boots, and a dress-shirt on which he had laid out his last guinea. Moreover, he had his hair cut and his beard dressed by a barber, and got some one to lend him a limp French hat to carry in his hand, as the delectable fashion of the day requires.

Perry felt considerable elation as he alighted from his Hansom cab about eleven o'clock at a well-appointed, spacious house in Porchester Terrace, and heard the big footman at the bottom of the staircase call out stentoriously, “Mr. Perugino Neeve!” and then the big footman at the top, as Perry afterwards jocosely related, “took up the wondrous tale;” and the mistress

of the house came forward, and the master of the house came forward, and he was made much of, as, being a genius, it behoved him to be.

It was not a crowded party, and the first persons on whom Perry's eye lighted were Laura Norman and her father. Dr. Norman, recognising Mrs. Cornford's friend, at once held out his hand; Laura felt that she might do the same, and the three talked like old acquaintances.

"Your friends and the public have had great cause for uneasiness on your behalf," Dr. Norman began; and feeling a friendliness for the frank, handsome, gifted young fellow whom he imagined to be struggling with want and obscurity, he added one or two gracious little speeches about his last picture in the Academy.

By-and-by, Perry's hostess came up, wanting to introduce him to So-and-so and So-and-so; and Laura's heart bounded at the homage her hero was receiving. The mistress of the house was, in truth, a most amiable and liberal-minded lion-hunter, who did infinite service to society in general by collecting in her drawing-room not only the big lions who can roar, and show



their teeth, and lash their tails, but the timid lions and the toothless lions, and the little lions who have very small tails, and don't know in the least how to lash them.

Perry, coming under the last category, was trained accordingly. His hostess had heard of Mr. Neeve's great musical attainments. Would Mr. Neeve play some little bagatelle or other? And, of course, Perry sat down and played one or two of Mendelssohn's enchanting Songs without Words, in his best, most fantastic manner, and then a delicious French melody, light and airy as a play of fountains, and his audience listened with delight.

But the young lion was to lash his tail with still greater effect. Mrs. ——, the hostess, was honoured by the presence of a Persian gentleman, an attaché of some great Mogul or other then on a mission to England, and there was no one but his interpreter to talk to him. Could Mr. Neeve remember a word or two of Arabic? Perry could remember a word or two, he said; and lo! there was the painter of "The Cedar Forest," and the accomplished musician, talking

the language of Mohammed and the patriarchs trippingly on the tongue—gutturals, sibilations, astounding aspirated vowels, and all! Whether Perry's Arabic would have borne more critical investigation is another matter, but he began by quoting the opening verses of the Koran, to show his proficiency to his interlocutor, and necessarily did not feel called upon to make long speeches after such a beginning.

The Persian talked. Perry asked if he were hungry? whence he had come? whither he was going? if his grandmother were well?—a punctilio of Eastern ceremonial—and, finally, they blessed each other in the name of the Prophet. Perry was next deputed to take a lady down to the refreshment-room, where he made an excellent little supper, and he made a second little supper on his own account, and went away intoxicated with the evening's pleasure.

True, he had only talked to Laura for five minutes, but what an auspicious introduction to good society!

“I wish you had been there, Polly,” he said to poor, patient Mrs. Cornford, who was sitting

up to let him in and hear his report. "It was such a jolly party, and I cut as good a figure as any of my betters, I assure you."

Then he told her the whole story from beginning to end; and Polly went to bed, feeling that if one thing in the world would recompense her for the kicks and cuffs of fortune, it was her boy's success in life. Why should not Perry marry Laura Norman? Why should not Perry make himself a reputation in the world? After all, Kitty's evil behaviour might prove his salvation instead of his undoing. Who should say?

Perry rose next day, determined to strike while the iron was hot, and declare his intentions to Dr. Norman whilst Dr. Norman's favourable impression of him should be green.

Mrs. Cornford sent proverbs and wise saws at his head, as thick and hard hitting as hailstones, in dissuasion of such a proceeding, but Perry shook them off.

"Now or never is the time for me to marry and make a man of myself," he said; "if I once begin shilly-shallying, the end will be that

I shall take to thinking about Kitty again, and have no courage for anything."

"Well, wait a week."

"Not a day, not an hour," Perry said, authoritatively, and ringing the bell, cried out to Mary Hann: "Mary Hann, black my boots to the best of your juvenile ability, and then bring 'em to me to finish off."

As soon as he had finished his breakfast, Mr. Perugino took off his coat, and worked away zealously at his boots till the desirable polish was attained. Then he dived into the little scullery, and filling the largest bucket that could be found with warm water, went upstairs to perform his toilette.

The toilette occupied upwards of an hour, at the end of which time Mr. Perugino emerged like one of the Trojan heroes whom the wand of Pallas Athene has washed, curled, perfumed, and arrayed by magic.

"My stars!" cried Polly, "I'm sure the world must be coming to an end."

"I'm sorry to say my cravats are," Perry said, dolefully. "And a dark-blue necktie

would be just a point of colour in the picture !”

“I’ll run to the bottom of the street and buy you one,” Polly said, goodnatureedly ; and quick as lightning, she put on her bonnet and performed the errand.

When, as Perry complacently observed, the last touch had been put in, he sallied forth, Mrs. Cornford singing after him :

“—froggy would a-woing go,  
Whether his mother would let him or no ;  
Roly-poly gamage and spinach,  
Heigho ! says Roly.”

## CHAPTER XIV.

## LAURA'S SATURDAYS.

PERRY felt as brave as a lion till he found himself in Dr. Norman's library, awaiting Dr. Norman. Then, the sort of disagreeable suspense with which we await the dentist who is to draw out a tooth, took possession of him; and as he described to Mrs. Cornford, not a nerve in his body but turned traitor to him in his hour of need; and he thought nobody had ever quaked so thoroughly—except the devil when St. Dunstan held him by the nose!

Dr. Norman greeted his visitor with the utmost blandness, adding—

“You would not have been admitted, except that it is just lunch time, as I am always busy

till half-past one o'clock. Will you take a tête-à-tête lunch with me? My little girls are spending the day at Hampstead."

"Thank you—I am unable to stay to-day," poor Perry stammered forth; "I have an engagement."

"Now, I suppose, like all artists, you are glad to utilize what little daylight we get at this season?" Dr. Norman said, for he noticed the young man's embarrassment, and wanted to set him at his ease.

"Yes," Perry answered, gathering courage—"my last picture being well thought of, I want to make hay while the sun shines, as the saying goes. I trust you have no prejudice against men of my craft, sir?"

"On the contrary," Dr. Norman said; "I am proud to number artists among my acquaintances—the rising men as well as the veterans."

Perry grew bolder and bolder.

"I am delighted to hear you say so, especially as I have come to ask a great favour of you," he said, twirling his hat in his fingers—it was borrowed for the occasion—rather nervously.

"I daresay you will be surprised to hear that I have conceived a sincere attachment for your daughter, Miss Laura." (If that is not a proper and polite way of putting it, thought Perry, nothing is!)

Dr. Norman did not look, as young novelists say, as if a thunderbolt had dropped at his feet; but he certainly looked amused and amazed—amused at the idea of his little Laura having a lover, and amazed at Mr. Perugino, of unwashed memory, being that lover.

Smiling, not unkindly, but with an underlying current of mixed mirthfulness and vexation, he said,

"My dear sir, Laura is a child."

"She is nineteen, sir," Perry said, with great gravity; "and I am twenty-five. One can hardly begin a happy life too early."

"True, true," Dr. Norman answered; "but what do you two know of each other? It seems to me that the question is mooted somewhat prematurely."

"I had the happiness of seeing a good deal of Miss Laura in Paris," Perry answered, still on



his best behaviour; "and I think we understand each other pretty well. But of course I could not speak of my wishes to her, till I had heard how favourably you might be disposed towards me."

"You have acted like a man of honour," Dr. Norman said, shaking the young man by the hand. "My poor little girl is motherless, and has no advisers but myself—more's the pity."

Then tears filled Dr. Norman's eyes, and he walked up and down the room in great perplexity.

He did not know in the least what to say to this new friend of Laura's, this ardent young wooer, this promising aspirant in the field of Art. Certainly, he should not have chosen a poor young artist as the husband of his child; but in matters of love and marriage, who can choose for another? Dr. Norman had never entertained the thought of his little girls making, to use a delectable phrase, "a good match;" neither had he any such ambition for his boys. What he prized in women was grace, sweetness, beauty, wisdom. What he prized in men, was high purpose, integrity, elo-

quence, kindness. Gifts and graces were the criteria by which he appraised his fellows; wanting these, and possessing abundance of other things, they were poor in his eyes.

He knew little enough of Perry, except that he was a genius. That he possessed a sweet, affectionate, winning nature, one could read at first sight; but even coupled with genius, was this enough? Had Perry the stuff in him to clear him of his early connections, to embrace a hard-working and domestic life, to avoid the moral shoals and quicksands to which a young man of genius is exposed; to be such a friend, lover and protector, as Laura needed?

On the other hand, if he and Laura loved each other truly, had he the right to forbid their intercourse? Was not Perry fairly entitled to a fair trial at his hands? Many a less worthy man than he had been shipwrecked in early life, by the want of a little timely trust and kindness. Many a less promising youth had been nipped in the bud, by the contempt of those whose favour was as sunshine.

All these considerations passed through Dr.

Norman's mind in the space of a minute or two; Perry sitting by, fidgeting, changing colour, suffering from a suspense that was half real, half serio-comic.

"Could I only have bolted then," he told Polly, "never again would froggy have gone a-wooning in the space of his mortal career."

Dr. Norman sat down.

"I really don't know what to say to your proposition, so greatly has it taken me by surprise," he said. "I have no right that I know of to give you a point-blank refusal; at the same time, I feel hardly justified in giving my immediate consent. May I ask a question which, under the circumstances, is hardly indelicate?"

"Certainly," poor Perry said, colouring to the brow. He expected some allusion to Kitty.

"Have you sufficient means to support a wife—whose sole portion would be a modest allowance out of my own income?"

"I have only what I earn, sir," answered Perry, with great dignity.

"I should be sorry to see my child married to

a man who despised work or workers," Dr. Norman said, "but do you earn enough and to spare for your own wants? A man who marries a comparatively portionless girl, should first ask himself that question."

"I have no doubt that I could do so—had I any sufficient motive," Perry said. "A fellow loses pluck when it concerns nobody whether he works well or ill."

"True," Dr. Norman said very seriously, and for some minutes he was again silent. Then he hesitatingly asked Perry another question. "Could you withdraw yourself from the companions and associations among which Laura found herself in Paris when under Mrs. Cornford's roof? I having nothing whatever to say against them or Mrs. Cornford, whom I esteem from the bottom of my heart—except that it is not the kind of life I should select for my child."

"I would do anything in the world you like," poor Perry said, dying to end the interview.

"Well," Dr. Norman answered, in a more

cheerful tone, "you shall be at liberty to come to my house, and renew your acquaintance with Laura. Can I say more than this?"

"Oh! no," Perry said. "Indeed you couldn't possibly say more, and you're a—" he was going to say—a brick, sir—but checked himself in time, and added—"and you're a kind friend to me, indeed!"

Dr. Norman rose and gave Perry his hand. Perry started up like one electrified, so pleased was he at the prospect of a dismissal, and the two shook hands cordially.

"Laura and I receive our friends on Saturday evenings, from eight o'clock till eleven," Dr. Norman said. "On these occasions you will always be welcome. I need hardly ask of you a complete reticence on the subject of your wishes for the present."

"I will be as circumspect as possible," Perry said; and after a word or two more, he contrived to get away.

"I hope I have not been rash," was Dr. Norman's soliloquy, as soon as he found himself alone. "The young man seems modest and

sincere, and is undoubtedly gifted in a surpassing degree. Why should he not do well? And I could hardly forbid him my house. when he is made welcome at the houses of my intimate friends."

"I'm in for it," Perry cried, throwing himself at full length on Mrs. Cornford's little sofa. "I'm in for being respectable all the rest of my life! Laura is an angel, and I look upon myself as the happiest fellow under the sun; but oh! Polly, my good soul, give me a drink of water, for the African fever was not half so bad to encounter as Dr. Norman!"

But Perry determined to persevere. Every Saturday the bucket of warm water was carried up by Mary Hann to Mr. Perry's room; and after an hour's toilette, he emerged, curled, perfumed, and trim, as Odysseus from the transforming wand of Athene. At a quarter past eight precisely, he entered Laura's little drawing-room, hat in hand, gloved, and looking as much as possible like a Parisian dandy in a drawing-room comedy at the Variétés.

Dr. Norman had simply said to Laura, on the

first Saturday after Perry's interview with him, "Laura, perhaps Mr. Perugino Neeve may call this evening. If so, let us have a little music."

And Laura had coloured to the brow, and her sweet shy eyes had looked so exultant at the news, that Dr. Norman saw at a glance how matters stood with his little girl's heart.

That first evening, Laura put on a blue dress, bright as a bit of April sky, and bound her fair hair with a little gold fillet; and what with this enchanting dress, and the pea-blossom hue of her cheeks, and the grateful look of happiness filling her sweet eyes, she looked as dainty a little damsel as ever delighted a lover's sight.

Hitherto, these Saturdays had been somewhat a heavy undertaking to the poor child, who was at present only beginning to know her father's guests. But Perry's appearance altered the entire aspect of things. The weeks were all golden now, because each contained a Saturday, and Saturday was happiness.

Perry behaved in a manner wholly irreproachable, and he confessed to Polly Cornford that

he marvelled at himself. He behaved to Laura so circumspectly as to inspire Dr. Norman with confidence. He uttered no inadmissible slang. His appearance was irreproachable. He played superbly to amuse the company, and his hands had evidently been washed within recent memory.

It must be confessed that, up to this period, Perry's conversion was wholly that of the inner man. At home, he worked as fitfully, and smoked as persistently as ever; sat up till past midnight playing dominoes and drinking beer with Crosbie Carrington and other friends, or playing billiards at the "Fulham Arms;" descended to his studio at mid-day, unwashed, unkempt, and in his shirt-sleeves, to paint for an hour or two, or perhaps to compose a waltz for Laura's next reception, or, very often, to read a greasy novel of Bulwer Lytton's or Paul de Kock's, hired from the library at a penny a volume per diem.

Mrs. Cornford might coax or entreat, or declare that she would go and tell Dr. Norman what sort of son-in-law he was going to have—



Perry only laughed or chided in his patronizing, spoiled-child way, and made answer,

“All in good time, Polly. As soon as I am married, no fabricator of pictures for the London market shall work harder than I.”

“When the sky falls we shall catch larks,” Mrs. Cornford would retort; “and when parrots leave off prating, they’ll catch mice like owls. Oh! I know you.”

“I am such a poor creature, just because of your unbelief,” Perry said. “When I have got a trusting little wife by my side, I shall become a second Turner.”

“You are clever enough to become anything you choose. But what have you done since coming back, pray Mr. Harum-scarum?”

“I have been too brimful of impressions,” Perry said grandly. “The flash of inspiration, like molten gold, must cool ere it takes the form of sovereigns.”

And Dr. Norman would sometimes say—

“And your pictures, Mr. Perugino?” The Doctor preferred his young friend’s Christian

name, tickled by the artistic and sonorous sound of it.

“Oh! I work like a slave,” Perry would reply; “but the daylight is so short, that by the end of a week I have done nothing.”

He generally carried a sketch-book or portfolio with him to the Addison Road, and delighted Prissy beyond measure by illustrating a chapter of Robinson Crusoe for her especial benefit. But anything like a finished work never appeared.

Dr. Norman's friends were sufficiently versed in art to distinguish genius from mechanism, and declared Perry to be a genius of the first water. Moreover, the young man's simple, happy, impulsive way of doing things, and almost childish enjoyment of unexpected trifles, and his anxiety to please others, won every heart.

Things, therefore, favoured Perry's suit; and one day Dr. Norman called Laura to him, and said very kindly—a mother could hardly have been more kind—

“I think, Laura, we all know why Mr. Perugini is so fond of coming here by this time.

Shall I say that my little Laura likes to have him for her friend?—or send him away?”

And Laura, whose conscience smote her for having given her best friendship to Perry long ago, and for having tried to understand her father less than a daughter should, took his hand to her lips and shed tears over it, crying—

“Oh! papa, I have not been good to you; and you—you are an angel to me!”

## CHAPTER XV.

“A DREADFUL DOOR IN HER SOUL STOOD WIDE.”

KITTY and Sir George remained masters of the field. The marriage was accepted past question. The wedding preparations had been put in hand. In a fortnight's time, Kitty would become Lady Bartelotte.

Ella was not the person to make any sort of sacrifice with a bad grace, and she did her best, by every possible act of consideration and generosity, to atone for her past opposition. She lectured Sir George severely on one or two shabby little proposals that he happened to make in her hearing; and to her intervention poor Kitty owed a far more liberal trousseau than in her most ambitious moments she had

ever dreamed of. Then Ella talked to Kitty as any practical person double Kitty's age might have done, on the necessity of holding her own, and keeping her husband in his proper place, not by covert blandishments, but by rational candour.

"Dear papa and I would have been wretched if we had made a compact never to contradict each other," she said; "and I am quite sure, Kitty, that you will be ten times happier if you begin by treating papa quite frankly, and saying what you like or dislike."

"You forget," Kitty said, very humbly, "that I am not Sir George's daughter, but a penniless—in some senses—a friendless girl, whom he condescends to marry."

"Nonsense! When a man marries a woman, he makes her his equal; though," Ella added, with a touch of humour, "I think in this case, dear Kitty, that the condescension is wholly on your side."

And much more, Ella said to the same purpose; and Kitty listened, promising this, assenting to that, ready to do anything and every-

thing, out of the fulness of her gratitude.

She was enjoying a little interval of repose, that was inexpressibly welcome and dear. Behind lay the past—the past of unrest, and struggle, and ambition ; before lay the future, for which she had toiled and span, and she trusted it, and went on her way rejoicing.

There were trifles that made her cheeks glow with pleasure, such as wedding gifts, little notes of friendly recognition from Ella's cousins, invitations from some of Sir George's friends in England ; one—oh, happiness!—signed by a peer's daughter—and other things of the kind recurring daily. These small triumphs astounded and dazzled poor Kitty beyond measure. What had she done to deserve such signal good fortune ?

One evening she sat in her room, lost in the contemplation of her treasures, moral and material, and enjoying a rare feast of solitude. Sir George had become a much more exacting lover of late, reasoning thus—“ If my chivalry leads me so far as to marry this girl, surely she has a right to reward me accordingly !” Kitty

must always be walking with him, reading to him, writing for him, and flattering him, or he grew irritable and jealous. A little solitude was therefore a rare feast, and on this particular occasion Kitty felt disposed to enjoy it like an epicure. She walked to the wardrobe, and opening the door, contemplated her new dresses one by one. There was a velvet dress, a satin dress, and a lace dress, all new treasures, and a white dress for her wedding, and other delightful things, owed to Ella's generosity. Then she opened her drawers one by one, and handled delicate laces and cashmere morning-gowns, and embroidered pocket-handkerchiefs—all Ella's gifts. Lastly, she took up her jewel-case, and putting it on her lap, smiled the smile of a joyful child.

Kitty's belongings were certainly nothing extraordinary, and by no means exceeded those of any gentlewoman of ordinary means. But then she had been a draggle-tailed Cinderella, a beggar's daughter only two years ago, and she felt herself by comparison transformed into a fairy princess, a King Cophetua's bride! She

turned over her trinkets one by one. These were Myra's gifts—the trinkets she had worn in Paradise Place had been discarded long ago—the gold brooch of Trinchinopoly work, which had marked the beginning of their friendship, the bracelets, the rings, and other gifts. How rich she had once felt herself in the possession of these! And what were they in comparison to later acquisitions? There was the pearl necklace, Ella's gift, and the opal and diamond ring, Sir George's pledge of betrothal, and an old-fashioned, but handsome diamond agrafe, the wedding gift of Sir George's sister; and last of all, her crowning pride and delight, a case of jewels which had belonged to Sir George's mother, and which Ella declared to be Kitty's beyond all question now.

Kitty sat amid her wealth, a bewitched and bewildered thing. Was life in truth a reality or a dream, and should she wake up one morning to find her treasure spent, lost, visionary as fairy-gold? She felt so rich that she could hardly help doubting in her riches now and then.



As she was thinking these thoughts, Francine tapped lightly, and entered with letters. Letters were pleasant things to Kitty now, since they generally contained congratulations, or gracious little nothings from some of Ella's kin, and she took them eagerly. The first was a somewhat pompous but kindly-meant note from one of these future relatives of Kitty, which she read with a smile of contentment. The other was from Polly Cornford, and brimful, as Polly Cornford's letters were sure to be, of slang, good-natured scoldings, wise saws and comments. Polly wrote to congratulate her runaway upon her approaching marriage; and Kitty read on, thinking what a kind and forbearing letter it was, and how unselfish a slangy, slatternly, outspoken creature like Polly could be.

Polly, in truth, spite of her radical discontent with Kitty's conduct, could not help feeling and expressing a certain amount of pleasure at her good fortune. Polly loved Perry with all her heart, but she saw exactly how much his inconsequent behaviour was to be thanked for Kitty's so-called treachery; and when the vials

of her wrath were once spent upon the traitor, a little worldly-wise congratulation was evidently lurking behind. Polly Cornford was far from being a proper-minded person, giving just an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. From her the devil always got his due, and a little more. But the gist of her letter lay in a postscript. And this is how the postscript ran:—

“P.S.—You’ll be glad to hear that Perry is not the fool he was. The Lord be praised for it! He is engaged to marry Laura Norman, with her daddy’s consent, and will beat his betters yet. My blessing on you both; and to you, my lady, gilt gingerbread without end, and an appetite accordingly!”

Kitty started from her seat, and held Polly’s letter to the lamp, with trembling hands, and dilated eyes. Yes, the words were as plainly written as it was possible to be. *He is engaged to marry Laura Norman!*

She dashed the letter aside, took it up and tore it asunder, then matched the fragments, and read for a third, a fourth, nay, a

fifth time—*He is engaged to marry Laura Norman!*

She crushed the letter in her hands with fresh passion, and kneeling before the fire, thrust it between the bars. When it had burned away, she unlocked a drawer, and took out a little silk bundle.

It will be remembered that during the first weeks of Kitty's stay at Shelley House, Perry had gone down to see her. Terribly frightened lest his ragamuffinly appearance should scandalize so proper a young lady as herself, she brushed his coat, and taking up a pair of scissors, clipped an inch or two of that long curly hair that Perry never willingly trimmed. It will be remembered that the operation was hardly over when Regy entered, and, quick, as lightning, locks and scissors were thrust in Miss Kitty's pocket.

Kitty had often laughed at herself and chided herself for keeping such a souvenir of her old lover; but whenever her trunks were turned out, on arrival or departure, the little silk bundle had hitherto found a corner. She used to think

that some day or other the bright curls of hair should be put in a locket and occasionally worn. And if the temptation had come to destroy them, they looked so soft and bright, and reminded her so forcibly of Perry, that she hesitated. But now, why should she keep Perry's locks any longer? He no longer claimed pity or tenderness at her hands. He had engaged himself to Laura Norman. As much jealousy, madness, hatred, call it what you will, as a woman feels whose lover forsakes her, Kitty felt now, because her forsaken lover had found consolation.

She opened the little silk bundle with quick, angry fingers, and turned the mass of gold-brown locks into her lap. Then, gathering up her apron, she would have emptied its contents into the fire, but something seemed to hold her back. She sat down, glanced round at her velvets and silks, at the treasures of her jewel-case displayed on the table, at the betrothal-ring on her finger, and sighed, and was fain to weep, if tears would only come! Perry, then, cared for her no longer! Was there indeed no such

thing as truth in the world? Was Sir George's affection the most worth having? If so, she had chosen the right casket after all.

But a voice spoke from her heart on Perry's behalf. How had she requited his devotion? What had she done to make him happy? Was he not justly rewarded by Laura's love? Was she not justly punished by his indifference. She took up the soft, bright locks, kissed them, pressed them to her heart, rocking herself to and fro, in a passion of grief, anger, desolation.

At last she said, half aloud, as if Perry's spirit were near, and she were praying to it, "Oh! Perry, I do love you!—I do!—I do!"

The sound of her own voice, so pitiful, so solitary, so penitent as it was, brought tears; and on her knees—she knew not to whom she was praying, if indeed the act could be called a prayer at all—she cried abundantly, and called on Perry's name and begged for forgiveness.

In that brief conflict, half retrospection and half prophecy, "a dreadful door in her soul stood wide," as William Allingham's poem runs.

She saw wherein she differed from those whose goodness she now envied for the first time. She knew that she should rise up on the morrow and live and move and act as the Kitty of old, and enjoy the life she had chosen, in spite of such retributive thoughts as would come now and then.

But to-day Perry's image took complete possession of her. For his sake she would fain have had many acts of the past revocable. So strongly was she suffering with him, and by reason of him now, that had a straight, short path led to his abiding place, she would perhaps have taken it, and fled from her triumphs!

"Poor Perry!" she said to herself again and again, recalling his looks and words with fresh bursts of tears, as one recalls looks and words of the dead. How fond he had once been of her! Did he really love Laura Norman, or was his engagement the mere consequence of his desponding and loneliness? She knew not what she thought, or what she wished to think; and when at last she went to bed, it was

A DREADFUL DOOR IN HER SOUL STOOD WIDE. 175

to dream of the old life and the old love,  
before she had tasted ambition and Perry had  
battled with despair.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE BELGRAVIAN WEDDING.

SIR GEORGE was determined to do everything on as economical a scale as circumstances admitted ; and so absorbed did he seem in this matter, that one would have thought the saving of a few shillings of infinitely more importance to him than the securing a young bride. The marriage was to take place with the utmost privacy, at the Consulate. Poor Kitty must forego the train of bridesmaids, the bridal banquet, and other ceremonials that fashion has ordained ; and so strictly practical was her last and most favoured lover, that he even forbade himself the cost of a new coat in honour of the occasion.



Custom has also prescribed a honeymoon, but a honeymoon may be long or short, simple or costly, according to circumstances and inclination. Sir George ordained that their honeymoon should be very simple indeed.

“We have outlived our juvenile follies, have we not?” he would say to Kitty; as if the fact of their engagement equalized them in age as well as other things; and poor Kitty confessed to have outlived her juvenile follies. So they were to go to Gibraltar for a month, and take up their abode in a house lent them by a friend of Sir George’s. “If not too expensive, we will visit Cadiz and Ronda,” Sir George had said; and Kitty sincerely hoped that it might not be too expensive, thinking how dull they should find a month to themselves at Gibraltar. Ella was to remain, meantime, at Malaga with the Gardiners; and when the spring should have fairly set in, the little party intended to return homeward.

Nothing therefore could have been more prosaic than Kitty’s wedding. It was not a gloomy wedding, thanks to Ella’s intervention. There

was a pretty little breakfast, adorned with costly flowers. The Gardiners came, and Mr. Tyrrell, acting the part of Sir George's groomsman, and another friend; all of whom brought flowers and gifts for the bride, which they presented with pretty speeches. Ella exerted herself to the utmost, and was cheerful, if not gay, and affectionate as of old to her friend. The servants had been presented with new clothes, and little Françoise was in tears of delight at miladi's splendour.

The wedding was simply prosaic, as any wedding must have been with such a bridegroom.

"My dear Kitty," Sir George said, as they sat down to breakfast, "do gather up your dress a little. Don't you see how the servants keep treading on it?"

Then he turned to Lady Gardiner, who was sitting next him, and added, smiling,

"It is high time that this young lady had some one to look after her, you see."

All this was harmless and well-meant, but, coupled with a dozen remarks of the same kind, fidgeted the others, and took the bloom off the

occasion. When the adieux were being made, and Mr. Tyrrell waited at the door to hand Kitty into the carriage, Sir George cried out in a shrill key—"My dear, we must take our old cotton umbrellas with us. The idea of mountaineering without cotton umbrellas! *Françine, cherchez les ombrelles de coton.*"

And *Françine*, who was to accompany her mistress, rushed hither and thither, and Matthew, the man-servant, helped her. The old cotton umbrellas were not to be found—the women-servants having hidden them away, in honour of the wedding.

There was no alternative but to go without them, and Kitty felt thankful to be fairly off.

"We'll buy some good stout cheap umbrellas as soon as ever we get to Gibraltar," were Sir George's first words; "but, really, the culpable negligence of those servants is quite terrible. They have no sort of respect for property whatever."

"Shabby property," Kitty said, smiling.

"Exactly; of all snobs under the sun, are

footmen and ladies'-maids. There's one comfort, you are a sensible woman, and have been used to simple ways of living; so we can do with the least possible number of them. Is it necessary to keep Françoise—Ella's maid could surely wait on you both?"

Kitty smiled at this, and laid one little hand on Sir George's arm, and scolded him playfully.

"Of course I wish you to have everything becoming your position," he answered. "I'm sure if ever a man was ready to make a fool of himself for a woman, I am for you—ah! here we are at the harbour. And there's the yacht all ready. How pleasant it is to have a yacht lent one!"

The day was superb. The sky was a canopy of soft purple; the sea smooth as a lake in summer-time; the distant mountains, of loveliest shape and colour.

In honour of the bride and bridegroom, the little yacht hoisted colours, a crimson carpet was laid down on deck, and an awning of the same colour put up. Garlands of flowers hung

from the main-yard. The sailors wore gala dress and white rosettes, and a little negro boy presented Kitty with a bouquet as she stepped on board.

Kitty's cheeks flushed with pleasure at this reception, and Sir George was evidently much gratified, though, as he whispered to his bride—"he should be compelled to give a pretty penny in drink money to the men, which was a drawback."

On the whole he like it. Certainly, a bridal trip could hardly have been more auspicious or poetic. The *Undine* was a delightful little craft, and skimmed the waves gracefully as a bird. Dainty little fishing-boats, with sails shaped like butterflies' wings, kept her company. Her path lay along a bright blue sea, in sight of hills brighter and bluer still. There was enough solitude to inspire dreams, and yet not enough to inspire melancholy.

But Kitty's bridal trip was utterly unpoetic. Sir George could not have been kinder, and more cheerful; he could not have exerted himself more assiduously to amuse her. He had

simply nothing poetic in his nature.

“I don’t think I ever felt in better humour,” he said, as they paced the deck arm-in-arm. “I suppose nothing puts a man in a better humour with himself and the world in general, than acting up to his convictions. Now, I’m not a selfish man by disposition; but, of course, at first sight, it did seem that to marry you would be a little imprudent, especially on dear Ella’s account.”

“Ella has behaved beautifully,” Kitty said.

“She has indeed—the darling! But I hope and trust that she will have her reward. There was no other way to keep the property together except for me to marry, and it is greatly to Ella’s interest that the property should be kept together. You have so much good sense,” he added, “that I don’t mind dwelling on the practical side of things, though you know well enough that I should never have dreamed of marrying again, had I not been over head and ears in love.”

Kitty smiled, too much accustomed to Sir George’s good-natured self-glorification to take

any fresh outburst of it amiss; and he went on—

“And you shall not repent of the step you have taken. I am nearly fifty, it is true, and you are barely half as old; but a girl is often happier for marrying a man of experience, whom she can look up to; I certainly do not look my age?”

“Oh no!”

“How was it,” he continued, “that you were not married long ago? A handsome, high-spirited girl like yourself must have had lovers, no matter how much you might lack other good things of this world.”

Kitty blushed, and confessed that she had not been without lovers.

“And you liked me the best! Was that it?” he said, patting the little hand that rested on his arm.

“I suppose so,” Kitty answered with a little laugh. Sir George’s queer, self-satisfied love-making struck her, perforce, as a comical surprise now and then.

“Well, under the circumstances, I commend

your taste. But didn't I hear something from Ella, and from your friend Mrs. Wingfield, about Dr. Norman's fancy for you?"

Kitty confessed that Dr. Norman was fain to make her his wife.

"I must say I wonder that you refused him. He's a deucedly good-looking fellow, and a good fellow, I should say, though he was particularly unpleasant to me."

"The best people become unpleasant when they are jealous," said Kitty artfully; and then she led the conversation into other channels. Somehow she could not talk of her lovers to the man who was her husband.

When Sir George went to smoke a cigar with the captain on the quarter-deck, Kitty began thinking. She had been inclined just now to compare Sir George to Dr. Norman, to the disparagement of the former, saying to herself—"Look on this picture and on that!" but she checked the thought with sudden shame. Putting comparisons aside, how straightforward and sincere had Sir George's behaviour been to her all along! It was not his fault if he lacked



Dr. Norman's intellectual strength and nobility of character; it was not his fault if he lacked Dr. Norman's pleasant looks and dignified carriage. Sir George had wooed and won her in perfect good faith; pretending to no gifts and graces that he did not possess, never seeking to shield his faults or shortcomings from her observation; never assuming virtues that he lacked, or promising more than he could perform.

He had married her simply because he loved and admired her. By such a marriage he gained no worldly advantages, and sacrificed some; he was as good to her as far as it was in his nature to be.

And her own conduct?

She confessed that it would not bear such close scrutiny as his. It was a comforting thought that he trusted her so entirely, and had no idea of any conscious self-sacrifice in her part of the compact. He knew little of her outward history, nothing of her inner existence; and he would never know. She had written new chronicles over those dear pages of her old life inscribed with Perry's and Dr.

Norman's name—the first a poem, the second a scripture; and if at times a tear fell over the palimpsest, no prying eyes should see her weep.

How far off and distant the old life and the old loves seemed to her now! She had never before looked upon them as vanished beyond recall; but now, by her marriage, they had become so without a doubt. Well, the last would suffer no more at her hands; and the first had been embittered by the consciousness of wrong! And she should rest on her oars at last.

What must occupy her mind now was the duty she owed to Sir George, by whom rest, ease, and contentment—as she thought—had come. She determined to make his life happier if she could, and to be to him in all things, a true and loving wife.

He came up to her, all smiles and good-humour, accompanied by the captain, who was desirous “of paying his respects to Lady Bartelotte.” Kitty found him a delightful person, and forgot all painful retrospection for a time in the sensation of her newly-acquired dignity.

Yes, it was certainly pleasant to be Lady Bartelotte. She thought she had chosen the golden casket.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE BOHEMIAN WEDDING.

HAVING obtained Dr. Norman's consent to his suit, Perry could not rest till he had mooted the subject of marriage. There was no sort of moderation in the young man's character; and the more easily did he obtain his inch, the more fractiously did he demand his ell. He was, as he said, growing a little tired of shams;—"and soap and water," Mrs. Cornford would put in wickedly. Whereupon Perry declared that he liked soap and water well enough when not forced upon him, especially in cold weather.

"Well, well," rejoined Polly, "marry as soon as you can, if you can't marry as soon as you like. But you know that the devil's in an empty purse, and I fear that's the condition of yours."

Perry hit on a scheme. He sold the picture which had been intended to awaken terrors in Kitty's guilty mind to a strolling player; who exhibited it in the provinces as *The Avenged Lover*. He cleared out his studio of every marketable sketch and study he could well spare, and as much *bric-à-brac* as he could bring his mind to part with. He sold his Spanish *capa*, his Arab horse-trappings, his least valuable photographs and engravings. He borrowed a hundred pounds on his half-finished Academy picture. Then he seized Dr. Norman by the button one Saturday evening and spoke out. He had a little money, he said, with which to furnish a house. Laura's requirements were as modest as his own. Surely Dr. Norman could now say nothing against the marriage?

Dr. Norman knew not how to resist the young man's pleading, and Perry, having forced in the thin end of the wedge, by a well directed tap or two, secured it firmly.

He had seen the announcement of Kitty's marriage to Sir George Bartelotte in the newspaper, and if the iron did not enter into his soul

—to use a phrase young writers love—something very much akin to malice took possession of his heart. Poor Perry was by nature as harmless a being as Heaven had ever created; but would not an angel have resented Kitty's conduct? His first impulse, therefore, was a pure, unalloyed, childish feeling of spitefulness.

Kitty had trodden upon him as if he had been a worm. He would show her, forthwith, that there were poorer creatures than he in the world, and that others held in esteem the abject thing she despised.

So, for once in his life he painted zealously; and the result was the completion of his Academy picture.

Before the paint was fairly dry, he sent out Mary Hann for a cab, and drove off with his picture to the Addison Road in triumph.

“If that does not bring the doctor round,” he said to Polly Cornford, “nothing will;” and Polly said she thought it would bring the doctor round.

“Please forgive my untidy appearance,” Perry said to Dr. Norman; “I was too anxious to have

your opinion and Laura's of my picture, to think of anything else."

And the "Morning Prayer in the Desert" was advantageously placed in Laura's little drawing-room, and warm and hearty were the acclamations of his critics. It was a delightful picture; not perfect by any means, for Perry was as yet too impatient to do anything perfectly; but it was delightful in the sense of being informed with fresh, untired, passionate genius.

Dr. Norman's faith in Perry—which had been a little shaken of late by the undue earnestness the young man threw into the most trifling things—now rose.

"It is a good picture; and I congratulate you, Mr. Perugino," he said; "with your gifts, you ought to rise to a very high position in your art."

"Such is my ambition, sir," Perry answered.

Then finding himself alone with his future father-in-law, he added with great gravity:

"But a man is sure to lag behind others so long as he remains a bachelor."

And he replied to all Dr. Norman's arguments with such winning sophisms, and Dr. Norman

remembered his own early marriage with so much tenderness, that at last his scruples gave way.

“I have told you all along,” he said, “that my child has no portion.”

“Oh! sir, as if I expected that——”

“But you might reasonably have expected it, had things gone well with me. All, however, that lies in my power to do will I do most gladly. You and Laura will naturally begin housekeeping on a small scale——”

“I am sure we should be happy in a two-pair back in Seven Dials,” Perry said, with fervour.

“I don't agree with you there. But I will allow Laura a hundred a year, and a little money to furnish a house with, and you must do the rest.”

Perry was in raptures.

“I trust, when you commit yourself to Laura's keeping, that she will take care of your health,” the doctor added kindly. “I fear you have been shutting yourself up too much of late.”

Perry confessed that he had been imprudent for the last fortnight, but promised to be more careful in future, and made a secret vow to



think twice before again encountering Laura's father in broad daylight. The truth of the matter was that his present life was a feverish one. He led a dual existence—loving Laura with his better self, hating Kitty with his worst; and naturally the unhealthy moral diet disagreed with him. And—must it be confessed?—our poor Perry differed sadly from 'ordinary heroes of fiction in the matter of sinews and muscular perfection. Gifted and graceful as he was, he possessed neither lofty stature, nor Herculean strength, nor muscles of iron; and as his habits were sedentary and unwholesome in the extreme, he did not acquire what Nature had failed to bestow.

He returned to Polly in a state of exultation bordering on frenzy.

“Kitty couldn't marry me because I was a poor devil,” he cried, “and I'm good enough for sweet Laura Norman, who has a hundred a year! Give me a slip of paper, Polly, and I'll write out the announcement of our wedding for the *Times*, for Lady Bartelotte to see.”

“Barkis is willing, then?” asked Polly.

“My dear Polly, Dr. Norman is a brick—God bless him! And look ye, Polly, he’s going to furnish a house for us, so I can pay you the fifty pounds you lent me ages ago—in the glacial period.”

“Hoity-toity-toity-tum!” said Polly. “I’m sure the world must be coming to an end when you begin to pay your debts.”

Perry had seated himself at the table, and began to write—

“At the parish church of Kensington, on the —th inst., Perugino Neeve, Esquire——”

“Son of the late Perugino Neeve, Esquire, H.M.W.P.,” put in Mrs. Cornford, “which means, Walking Poster to Her Majesty’s Theatre. Never be ashamed of thy father, or of his trade, Perugino.”

“—At the parish church of Kensington,” repeated Perry, impatiently, “on the —th inst., Perugino Neeve, Esq.—Oh! Polly, if I had only a handle to my name!”

“Well, you have taken the degree of A.S.S., I’m sure—put that.”

Perry went on very gravely.

“What about the address?”

“Put Montgomery Lodge, or The Cedars, or something equally fine,” Polly said; “for if you live in a seven-roomed house now-a-days, it is sure to have a name fit for a mansion.”

“I’ll leave out the address for the present, and go on——‘Perugino Neeve, Esq., to Laura, eldest daughter of Edward Norman, LL.D., F.R.S., &c., &c., of Shelley House, Kent, and Muir Cottage, Kensington.’ What will Lady Bartelotte say to that, I wonder?”

“As if it mattered to you? You’re mighty lucky to get such a wife and such a father-in-law, and shouldn’t trouble your head any more about Kitty than if you had never seen her.”

“That is true, Polly,” Perry said seriously, and straightway he threw the announcement of his marriage in the fire.

Meantime, Laura was preparing for her new home as joyfully and shyly as a young bird that is enticed away from the parental nest.

“I don’t deserve you in the least,” Perry said to her, “but I will work like a slave for you.”

“As if I wanted you to do that!” Laura made

answer, her blue eyes shining with happiness.

“But I shall do it; I mean to get rich for your sake, though I know we should be happy in the dingiest alley in the Isle of Dogs.”

Thus Perry talked and Laura listened, assenting to everything, believing in everything; and for the first time Mr. Perugino woke up to find himself an oracle!

He had once proposed to Dr. Norman that they should spend the first year or two of their married life in Italy; but to this Dr. Norman firmly objected. He would do everything, he said, to promote Perry's wishes by-and-by; it was surely not unreasonable that he should like to have his young daughter near him for a little while longer.

So a tiny house was selected, overlooking the gardens of old Campden House, which Laura and Prissy proceeded to furnish with the three hundred pounds Dr. Norman had given for the purpose. For a time Perry was in his element, painting cornices, hanging pictures and brackets, doing, in fact, the work of carpenter and artistic decorator to perfection. He conveyed all

his prettiest treasures to his new home; and what with Dr. Norman's money, and Perry's good taste, Laura's little drawing-room was as charming as any young artist's wife could desire. One obstacle Perry had to overcome. The house was small, and had no good-sized room with a north light. He should be obliged to paint all his large subjects in the old studio at Polly Cornford's for the present. Dr. Norman demurred, and Laura looked greatly vexed; but at last the matter was happily settled in this way: Dr. Norman promised to buy the house as soon as he could afford it, and Perry was bound over to build a studio for himself.

Was ever a wedding in reality anything but dismal? Dr. Norman did not know till the time came what it would cost him to lose his little girl; and Laura's gentle heart was full of bitter self-reproach, thinking of the little she had done to make him happy, and of the wonderful undeserved happiness that Heaven had sent to her. Perry, perhaps, suffered more from inward struggle than any, since it was the first time in his life that he stood pledged to a

duty. He kept saying to himself—I can make Laura happy, and I will do so, though all that was best in me I gave to Kitty long ago. But he felt ashamed and sorrowful at not being made quite happy by Laura's pure adoring love. When they had started for their little wedding-trip to Cornwall, the two other guests took their leave, and Dr. Norman and Prissy were left alone.

Miss Prissy was full of the wedding. Had papa noticed what an ugly man the clergyman was, and how he stumbled at the name Peruginio?

Dr. Norman had not noticed.

Well, had papa noticed what a big coat Perry wore, and, oh! so creased? (Perry's new coat was not forthcoming in time, so he was married in one of his friend Carrington's.)

No, Dr. Norman had not noticed that either.

“Oh! papa, where could your eyes have been? But you must have heard the pew-opener whisper to the old woman next her—‘My! isn't she a bonnie one!’ meaning Laura; and the old woman answered—‘He licks her!’

meaning, I suppose, papa, that Perry was the handsomest."

To that speech Prissy elicited a monosyllabic answer only. Then she went up to her father coaxingly, and said—

"But why do you look so grave, papa?"

For Dr. Norman's face had been growing sadder and sadder, and at the sound of the loving little voice, and the touch of the caressing little hand, his composure gave way. It was not so much the loss of Laura that made him feel desolate, as the thought that they had been so little to each other, and that she could leave him so willingly. He had hardly felt so forlorn since, years ago, he had gone from the chamber of his dead wife to tell his little ones that they had no mother.

"Oh! Prissy," he cried, taking the child in his arms and weeping over her, "be very good to me, or my heart will break."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## HUSBAND AND WIFE.

**K**ITTY found her honeymoon endurable, but none the less did she long for it to come to an end. She said to herself that she should be perfectly happy when once she had settled down into the position of Sir George's wife, with recognized duties and a recognized sphere. It was all very well for foolish young lovers to have honeymoons ; but what had she and her husband to do with sentiment and romance ? He declared that he was frantically in love with her ; and the assertion seemed true, as far as the deed could certify the word. He had made her his wife. Love could go no farther. Kitty was schooling herself into gratitude to her husband



from morning till night. If he looked concerned when she took a little cold, or if he laid out a few francs on any trifle she had admired, she would say,

“How good you are! How good you are!”

And this sort of appreciation delighted him. He felt conscious of his goodness towards her; but then virtue is not always its own reward, and he coveted the reward.

They talked a good deal of Ella in these days. How generous had her conduct been, how candid, how loving! There was nothing they would not do by way of rewarding her. Sir George took a solemn resolution never to thwart her wishes again. Kitty proclaimed herself Ella's debtor as long as they both should live.

One thing struck Kitty.

Why was it that they should both recognize the necessity of insisting upon this devotion to Ella? She did not doubt them. She did not ask more affection at their hands than they were wont to give. She forgave them for the temporary suffering they had caused her.

Could it be that this marriage was already

ooming between father and daughter, friend and friend? Kitty's moral perception was as acute as her practical morality was lax. The thought that Ella, whom she had loved next to Perry better than anything in the world, should lose one iota of her father's affection through her, was intolerable. That she and Ella should ever become other than the firm friends they were, was hardly less so.

She longed impatiently to be with Ella again, and assure herself that all was well. Ella's letters were loving as ever, and quite gay; but even the most truthful people will at times write happier letters than circumstances warrant.

"Dear Ella writes word that we must soon go back," she said one morning to Sir George. "What do you say, dear."

Happy, happy Sir George! to have Kitty by his side always, accosting him in this loving, wife-like strain. Kitty to rejoice his eyes all day long, Kitty trying to please him whether he were moodish or content, grave or gay. What would not some others have given for the priceless boon he took much as a matter of course?

He was reading his letters when Kitty spoke to him, and finished a long sentence before looking up.

“You said something, I think, my dear?” he said.

“Ella says she must have us back again soon, or——”

“Read what she says,” Sir George answered. Kitty read the following :

“You must come back again very soon. We have done our best to amuse ourselves, but miss you both all the same. The Gardiners take the greatest care of me——”

“I’ll be bound she has invited the whole family to stay with her. A pretty expense!” growled the Baronet. “But go on.”

“And Mr. Tyrrell is delightful——”

“Do you know what I have thought for some time past?” Sir George cried, looking lively on a sudden,—“Tyrrell is in love with Ella.”

“But Ella will never marry,” Kitty said; “she has said so a hundred times.”

“Young ladies don’t marry till they’re asked by somebody they find delightful,” Sir George

answered with a chuckle of satisfaction at having been himself found delightful. "And Tyrrell has five or six thousand a-year. Ella might do worse."

"Do you wish Ella to marry?" Kitty asked, opening her large eyes.

"I never have wished it before, nor do I now, except for her own sake. It was in the nature of things that my marriage should make me wish it. But read a little more. I am amused."

Kitty continued to read Ella's letter:—

"Mr. Tyrrell is delightful, and not a day passes but we are indebted to him for some pleasant surprise in the shape of new excursions, new music, new sketches, or new books. I do think, Kitty, that his versatility is on the surface only, and that——" Kitty stopped on a sudden, and put the letter back in its envelope.

"Ladies don't like to have their letters to each other read aloud," she said smiling; "and though Ella and I have no secrets, we are afraid of such sharp criticism as yours."

Sir George laughed, and threw his own letters across the table to her.

“Don’t betray poor dear Ella’s confidence, on any account; but answer those letters for me, there’s a good child, and tell Ella when you write that we cannot possibly bring our honeymoon to an end yet.”

Kitty looked up with an expression of disappointment.

“Why not do Tyrrell and Ella a good turn, and leave them to make love in peace? We should only spoil the thing.”

Kitty acquiesced, of course, and did her best to seem pleased, though she was dying to be away, and fairly on the road to England. It ought to have flattered her vanity, if it did not touch her heart, that Sir George could so entirely content himself with her society. She chafed at his easy, self-complacent mood instead, and wanted him to feel something of her own impatience, forgetting that, whereas marriage had wholly altered the tenor of her own life, it affected his very little. He was delighted to have a young, handsome, and submissive wife,

and regarded the alliance as a great achievement; but there, for the present, the matter ended. He hoped and prayed every Sunday in church—for Sir George was an exemplary church-goer—that the blessing always desired by husbands should fall on his marriage. Beyond this he had no ambitions. Kitty had a thousand.

Of what use were parks and mansions and titles except to be enjoyed? Of what use was her wit, unless she moved in the world; or her beauty, unless there were eyes to delight in it? Partly from imagination, and partly from such fashionable life as novel-reading had made familiar to her, she drew a picture of her future, and delighted to dwell on it. She was to be a leader of fashion in London, a Lady Bountiful in the country, a patroness of poor artists, and a beneficent, happy, ruling spirit in any society among which she might find herself. Hitherto her career had been successful beyond her expectations. She looked very far forward, undoubting, as of old.

Six weeks passed—to Kitty's thinking the six

dullest weeks of her life—and then they returned home.

“Well,” Sir George said, as they came within sight of the villa, “I can honestly say that I never spent a happier time in my life. I hope you are of the same manner of thinking, my dear?”

“Have I looked otherwise than happy?” Kitty asked.

“I think you have had just a touch of melancholy now and then. But that is quite becoming. Every right-minded young lady is a little melancholy after her marriage; as, indeed, she well may be, for marriage is a most serious thing—most serious,” Sir George added. “A good Christian woman will then look into her heart, and see how far she is fitted for the solemn responsibilities of wife, mother, and citizen——”

Fortunately for Kitty the monologue was interrupted by a chorus of welcoming voices. They had come suddenly upon Ella and the Gardiners, grouped on the lawn; and after a great deal of hand-shaking, and a little kissing

among the ladies, all went indoors to partake of tea. After a little time, Ella and Kitty were left alone. Kitty went up to her friend, hung over her, kissed her, clasped her hand, and seemed fain to cry of joy.

“I am so glad to be with you again, my darling!” she said. “Have they taken good care of you? Have you been happy?”

“Everybody has been very good to me,” Ella answered. “The six weeks have slipped away, I hardly know how.”

“Ah!” Kitty cried, reproachfully, “then you did not miss me much?”

“I have indeed missed you,” Ella said, trying to look cheerful; “but was it not right to begin learning my hard lesson at once? You belong to papa now, and cannot devote all your time to me.”

“As if I should ever love you less dearly!”

“As if I doubted your affection or my own, dear Kitty. It would, nevertheless, be unreasonable to claim the thought and self-sacrifice you once gave me. Papa must be first in your eyes, and you first in his, you know.”



She said this smiling, though with underlying sadness in her voice, and changed the subject. Had Kitty found Ronda so very beautiful? Had she and Sir George decided upon returning to England soon? Should they stay in London for a little while? Was Akenholme to be repaired, and put in order, etcetera? Kitty answering with a blank face.

By-and-by, the conversation fell back into the old channel; and it was Kitty's turn to ask questions.

"Mr. Tyrrell has been here a great deal?" she asked.

"More than ever. What is to be done?" Ella said, with comic dismay.

Kitty laughed.

"Mr. Tyrrell is delightful!" she said. "Perfectly delightful!"

"And very fond of you?"

"So it seems."

"And you are fond of him?"

"Not in equal proportion, I think," Ella answered. "But he has been so good to me whilst you were away, that it is only natural I

should wish to be good to him. He must, however, have patience."

Just then Sir George came in. Would Kitty be so good as to go and find such and such a packet for him? The servants were far too stupid. And then, would she order the dinner to be a little earlier. He was so hungry. Thirdly, would she help him with his letters for half an hour? He must send off several to England that evening.

Of course Kitty complied. Formerly Ella would have said, "Dear papa, I am sure all these things can wait till poor Kitty is rested a little." But now Ella perforce must hold her peace.

Kitty hardly knew how it was that these first days of her return seemed so vexatious. Sir George was kind; Ella was affectionate; things went on smoothly in the house; yet she could have cried of sheer weariness from day to day. She accounted for such fits of chagrin in this way—"I am so childish and little-minded as to be piqued by the fact of Ella having a lover; and seeing daily and hourly how Mr. Tyrrell has usurped my supremacy and my influence.

But is not this behaving like a school-girl? Ought not a lover to usurp the first place, leaving the second for a friend?"

It was not likely that Kitty's introspection should go deeper than this. We cannot play the moralist to ourselves; and even had another spoken the plain though subtle truth to her, she would have gone away unbelieving. For the truth must have been this: Kitty and Ella could no longer sympathize with each other, no longer love each other, no longer delight in each other as before, simply because the less noble nature had knowingly, if not wilfully, wronged the nobler; and the wrong, though pardoned, was inevitably working out its retribution in self-abasement. We cannot completely love or be completely loved by those whose loftiest principles we have outraged.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## LADY BARTELOTTE IS INTRODUCED.

**A**N English spring was not to be thought of for Ella; and as Malaga had become monotonous of late, the little party journeyed to Cannes, where it was proposed to stay till April.

Cannes is eminently a gay place. Pic-nics, luncheons, "afternoons," dinners, and balls, succeed each other without intermission; and Kitty and Ella entered with zest into as much society as Sir George would countenance. Kitty wanted to see what fashionable life was like, and whether she should be as successful in it as she had been in such phases of life as were familiar to her. Ella's motives were purely un-

selfish. She saw in the distractions of intelligent society Kitty's only chance of happiness, and did all in her power to get Kitty introduced and welcomed into the choicest coteries.

There was a certain Lady Adela C——, whose house was one of the most pleasant places of afternoon resort; and it was Ella's achievement to get Kitty graciously received by her. Lady Adela might be called really a distinguished woman, and her house in Paris was frequented not only by princes and nobles, but by men of learning and women of genius. She had the happy art of filtering society so delicately that the finest sense could never detect a gross element in the stream she kept flowing about her. And the stream sparkled and glowed like a fountain with a rainbow playing on it, reflecting as it did so many bright and harmonious minds.

Hitherto, Kitty had outshone Ella in society, which was hardly wonderful, since the one possessed twice as many, and twice as striking personal attractions, and strove to shine; whilst the other ever hid herself in some quiet corner,

and watched the animated masses around her, as a speculation only.

Kitty, accompanied by Sir George and Ella, had come for the first time to one of Lady Adela's crowded afternoon parties. The ubiquitous Tyrrell was there, of course. He knew Lady Adela of old, and had somewhat mischievously rejoiced at the idea of Kitty being introduced to her. He no longer sat at Kitty's feet—if indeed he had ever done so—and longed to see the tables turned for once, and Ella outshining her for a little space.

Lady Adela was far from being a "trimmer" as could possibly be, and detested pretence, veneer, and flattering acquiescence at once. He felt sure she would have no sympathy and very limited admiration for Kitty.

She received her visitors in a charming south room, opening upon a garden full of coloured gladioli, and other brilliant flowers, which burned like flames against the deep blue sea. Leading out of this were other rooms, one a *salon de musique*, &c.; and after a little talk with their host, the guests dispersed themselves, and selected

conversation on music and croquet, according to taste. But Kitty and Ella being strangers, were taken especial care of, and were introduced to a great many of Lady Adela's friends.

Later in the afternoon Mr. Tyrrell entered, and at an exultant glance saw how matters stood.

There was Ella, his dainty Ella, dressed in simple white muslin, sitting away from the crowd, as utterly oblivious of self as a child. Gathered round her were Lady Adela, with two or three of the most interesting and distinguished persons in the room; and they were holding an animated conversation about art, which Mr. Tyrrell would fain have joined, but feared to interrupt.

And where was Kitty?

Lady Bartelotte, who had come superbly dressed in the latest fashion, and who was sure to have done her best to please, and be pleased, sat in the dullest room, surrounded by two or three officers from Gibraltar, and some very young ladies, the most insignificant of the company.

Extreme youth is a somewhat unmanageable element in society, unless left to itself. Kitty's companions had been obliged to give up croquet on account of the heat, and she was trying to amuse them. Mr. Tyrrell, seeing that she looked bored, sat down beside her; and after a little conversation, brought from a side-table a large basket of *carte-de-visites* of dead and living celebrities, those invaluable aids to lagging talk.

He took up a handful.

"Dr. Mary Walker, the Emperor Theodore, Pio Nono, Mr. Beales, and Martin Tupper! It reminds me of the Last Judgment in the Sistine chapel," he said, laughing.

And then he proposed a game of his own invention with the *carte-de-visites*, in which the young ladies and gentlemen joined delightedly. The photographs were numbered minus so much, or plus so much, according to the writer's estimation; and when each card was drawn, the drawer had to pay or receive, as the case might be, negligence being punished by forfeits; a dish of sugar-plums and bonbons from the tea-room being appropriated as counters.



In the midst of the game Kitty drew a card that made her change colour and pause. It was the portrait of Dr. Norman, and Mr. Tyrrell had written in the corner, "plus thousand," the highest number awarded.

"Why do you look so shocked, Lady Bartelotte?" exclaimed Mr. Tyrrell. "Is it the portrait of Mr. Swinburne, Home the spiritualist, or La Sœur Patrocino?"

"No," Kitty said, very slowly. "This is a portrait of no celebrity, but of a private gentleman, an old friend of mine. It must be here by mistake."

"Dr. Norman no celebrity!" cried Tyrrell, with animation. "That comes of living so much abroad, Lady Bartelotte. But you must know Dr. Norman has been doing great things in science of late, and will be ranked among the Herschells, and Tyndalls, and Lyells of the day. Do pass round his portrait."

Then the portrait was criticized and admired; and Mr. Tyrrell fetched a certain French Professor from the next room, that Kitty might have some talk with him about her old friend. Lady

Adela soon came in with her party, and she desired the Professor to re-commence the story for their benefit, adding—

“Lady Bartelotte is indeed an enviable person to know Dr. Norman so well; and when the Professor has done, we must beg for her story.”

The Professor had just come from England, and told in a few sentences the purport of Dr. Norman's lectures at the Royal Institution, which he had heard, and the great effect produced by them in the scientific world. Then he gave a touching sketch of a certain odd little daughter of Dr. Norman's, a child of eleven or twelve, who could not control her unbounded enthusiasm at the end of his last lecture, and kissed him as he stood among his congratulating friends, much to his embarrassment.

Poor Kitty answered the eager questions put to her in a very bald fashion indeed. For the life of her she could not give an animated account of Dr. Norman and his family. She heard all sorts of kind and sympathetic things said about him; she heard of the “*felicitations des savans et des princes*” that he had received;

she heard his face being praised for its sweet, noble, earnest expression, with cold acquiescence and inward mortification, and was thankful when Lady Adela proposed tea, so that the party broke up.

But she did not forget Dr. Norman's portrait. That he should create such an excitement among fashionable circles, she could not at all understand. She recalled him as she had known him in the old days at Shelley House—prematurely old, a little absent, a little old-fashioned, to her thinking, and quite regardless of appearances. It seemed preposterous that such a man should have anything in common with Lady Adela's set. She cast her eyes about the room, and thought how out of place he would have looked among these fashionable men and women. A certain French prince of the Imperial family had conducted her to the refreshment-room; the lady chatting to her was a peer's daughter, and of the bluest blood in England. Sir George was holding a young Marquis by the button. The reception of Dr. Norman's history by Lady Adela's guests puz-

zled her, and set her thinking. Should she ever meet him? Was there, after all, so little difference between his rank and that of her husband? Had social gradation ceased to exist, as Sir George often declared to be the case in his anti-democratic speeches? It was not that she envied Dr. Norman's success—it was doubt in her own that made her uneasy.

This first experience of fashionable society on a large scale had disappointed her. She wondered whether, as Dr. Norman's wife, she would have found herself of so little account?

Sir George here came up and introduced his friend to her. A walk round the pretty gardens with them dispelled Kitty's grave thoughts for a time; then the little party returned home.

"How well Popham is looking!" Sir George said to Ella. "And did you have any talk with our neighbours, the Vernons?"

"With the Colonel, yes," Ella answered; "but Cecilia was not there, and I don't know the other daughters."

"It was a pleasant party. How did you enjoy it, my dear?" asked Sir George of Kitty.

"It amused me," Kitty said, "but I shall like the next better. One feels a little lost among such crowds of strangers for the first time."

"True, true."

Then Sir George told Ella of other old friends he had met, and Kitty fell into a train of reflections. It was natural that Ella and Sir George should find plenty to say to each other about former acquaintances, yet she could not help taking it amiss, and chafing at her new sense of isolation. Amongst such little circles as they had formed at Fontainebleau, Arcachon, and Malaga, she was ever the moving spirit, and the misgiving for the first time crossed her mind whether her supremacy was not already a thing of the past.

Kitty was like Ulysses. She would rather rule in Ithaca than serve on Olympus. She would rather be first of a small coterie than of little account among crowds.

How would it be in England? She awaited the future, if not as uneasily, at least as ambitiously, as of old.

## CHAPTER XX.

## MRS. PERUGINO "AT HOME."

DR. NORMAN gave his first lecture about a fortnight after Laura's return home. The brilliant success of which Mr. Tyrrell had spoken came later, but his opening paper was far too novel and telling to meet with a lukewarm reception. He felt anxious that his little Laura should share the good things of fortune that might fall to him, and determined to call on his way home. Putting Prissy under the protection of a friend, he took a cab to Fortescue Terrace—so pretentiously was the little street called—arriving thither soon after ten o'clock.

It happened that Dr. Norman had forgotten the number of the house, though he remembered its physiognomy perfectly well. So he dis-

missed his cab at the top of the street, and looked out carefully for the particular little garden with its miniature rock-work, for the antique lamp with which Mr. Perugino had adorned his hall, and for other signs familiar to him.

“What noisy neighbours Laura has!” thought Dr. Norman, as he walked along very slowly. “I hope this quiet little spot will not turn out to be less desirable than we first thought it!”

For a loud chorus proceeded from the lower end of the street, and the burden of the song was one made too familiar some years ago by hand-organs, hurdy-gurdies, and street singers, namely, “Villikins and his Dinah.” Now, if ever a comic song was harmless, it is this said “Villikins and his Dinah,” and yet there is something unspeakably vagabondish and roystering in the “Too-roolo-too-roolo-do” of the refrain.

When the sight of the well-known lamp arrested Dr. Norman’s steps, he was dismayed to find that the noise here reached its culminating point. He paused—he listened. The singing proceeded from Laura’s drawing-room beyond a doubt.

His first impulse was to turn back in sorrow, anger, and shame. Had Perry already broken his promise of forsaking former habits and former friends? Was this the sort of distraction he deemed fit for a refined young wife? And from such a beginning, what might be expected in days to come?

On second thoughts, he determined to enter and judge for himself. Surely, Laura and Perry would wish their home to be freely open to him always! And, after all, there might be no real harm in the mirth which, to him, seemed so offensive.

He knocked, his own familiar knock, boldly, and the door was immediately opened. But by whom?

Dr. Norman naturally felt a little startled by the appearance of a tall and striking-looking Hindoo woman, who wore her native costume, and no insignificant display of trinkets. She looked as if she had just served as a model for some Oriental "subject," and, indeed, such was the case. Since Perry's return from Algiers, he could never be sufficiently reminded, as he gran-



diosely said, of barbaric splendour and Eastern beauty; so the woman—who was a very respectable person, married to one of her own people—had been engaged from Mrs. Cornford's studio to help at Laura's first "At Home."

Perry had insisted upon the necessity of giving Polly Cornford and some of "the fellows" one little supper, adding—

"There is no occasion for us to ask 'em again, but it would be the height of ingratitude not to let 'em see what a wife I have got, and what a snug little house my brick of a father-in-law has given us!"

Thus it came about that Polly Cornford, Crosbie Carrington, Vittoria's unmarried sister Theresina, Vittoria and her husband, and another friend of Perry's, had been invited to Laura's little "At Home."

When Dr. Norman entered the drawing-room, and saw of whom the company was composed, his heart grew lighter.

"I'm afraid we frightened you with our Too—roo—loo—do, Doctor?" said Mrs. Cornford, gaily; "but a comic song is only a ser-

mon turned upside down, you know; and if we must be moral in this world, we may as well be merry over it. Shall we give you another?"

"Papa would like to hear Perry play something of Mendelssohn's best," Laura began, nervously. "Perry, dear, will you play to papa?"

"I must look at Perugino's new picture first," Dr. Norman said, and went up to the easel; for of course Laura's little drawing-room was turned into a studio on Perry's idle days.

"Oh! it is nothing," Perry answered—"a mere *tour-de-force*. I said I would imitate G——" (naming one of our leading painters), "and I did it. I shall begin work steadily next week. But you must see what Laura has done."

"Oh! no, Perry!" Laura cried, shyly.

But Perry persisted in bringing out a little picture of Laura's; and the quietude of the house was again disturbed. "Huzza! Mrs. Neeve!" cried the gentlemen. "Huzza! bravo!"

Laura!" cried the ladies, clapping their hands. Poor Dr. Norman retreated to a chair, stunned with the unaccustomed noise.

Then there was a lull, and Laura talked about the lecture; and Dr. Norman asked her to bring Perry to dinner the next day, to meet some friends. When Perry had played a little, supper was announced. Dr. Norman gave Mrs. Cornford his arm, and the little party descended.

Poor Laura looked across the table, envying Perry's happy unconcern, and dreading every moment lest something should occur to shock her father's sense of propriety. The very supper, too, was so unlike anything to which she had been accustomed at home. What would he think of it? Perry had ordered it himself, and of course Perry knew what his friends liked; but Dr. Norman's taste was another thing.

"We dined early, papa," she said, apologetically, "which accounts for such substantial dishes——"

"Well," Polly Cornford cried, "I'm not

ashamed to confess that when invited out to a supper I can depend on, I go without my dinner. It saves my pocket and compliments my friends."

"Bravo! Polly!" cried Perry, rapping his fingers on the table—"bravo!"

Laura crimsoned; but Dr. Norman did his best to reassure her, by appearing at ease with her visitors.

"I commend your plan, Mrs. Cornford," he said; "but I could not adopt it unless my friends supped somewhat earlier."

"As to the matter of that," said Polly, "there's nothing like Art to give one a handy sort of appetite. We artists never think about our dinners, if we've got a good model or a good light, and feel in painting humour, but just snatch a mouthful and bide our time. I can honestly say that there isn't an hour from twelve in the morning till twelve at night which doesn't perfectly suit me for the business of dinner. But, help the lobster, my good Perry, whilst your wife carves the chickens; and I'll mix the salad——"

"Won't you begin with a bit of chicken, or steak?" Laura asked.

"The fact is," Perry said, comically, "it has just been discovered in the kitchen that we are short of oil and vinegar; and the cook has had to run to Number Nine to borrow the cruet-stand. We lent 'em our Stilton cheese for a luncheon last week, so it is only an interchange of civilities."

"Perry!" cried Laura, looking greatly vexed, "you should not let our guests see what a bad housekeeper I am."

"When the fact is taken into consideration that we've only been housekeeping a fortnight, I think they will be surprised to get a supper at all," Perry said. "But here is the cruet-stand. Now, Polly, for your salad."

"It's a long process, so meantime I'll amuse the company with a story." Polly began—"Once upon a time there was an artist, and that artist was a woman, and putting the two things together, you'll hardly need to be told that she got more kicks than halfpence. Well, to cut a long story short, the kicks came like hailstones,

and the halfpence didn't come at all, and the artist's heart"—here Polly grew warm, and misplaced her H's recklessly—"was heavy within her. Ladies and gentlemen, I am not ashamed to confess that it is my own story I am telling, and that the friend who sent the duns from my door and set me on my legs again, is here among us."

Here Polly clapped Dr. Norman on the back, and added—

"Nay, never be ashamed of having done a kind action, Doctor! When you sent little Laura with twenty pounds to me in my hour of need, I could have cried."

Polly's tears and laughter always kept close company, and as she said this, a real honest tear glistened in her eye. A murmur of applause ran through the little party; then all looked grave, as befitted the occasion. Monsieur Puig, who was the pink of politeness, wiped away an invisible tear, and nudged his wife to do the same. Laura's cheeks glowed with pleasure at the homage her father was receiving, and she clasped his hand for a moment lovingly.

Dr. Norman looked supremely uncomfortable.

“Why, we all look as glum as Quakers saying grace,” Mrs. Cornford added; “but I hope we shall be as merry as grigs by-and-by; and if Perry proposes Dr. Norman’s health, I’ll second the motion.”

“And I shall drink a *boom-pair*,” said Monsieur Puig.

“He means a bumper, I suppose,” Mrs. Cornford said, bluntly; “but Piggy’s English is not everything that could be wished.”

Then the business of the supper began; and it lasted so long, that Dr. Norman was obliged to make his apologies and go in the midst.

“You should have brought Prissy, sir,” Perry said. “She has not yet paid us a visit.”

“I don’t think it would have been well to bring Prissy this evening. What do you say, Laura?” asked Dr. Norman.

“Oh! no, papa,” poor Laura answered, finding a much more vexatious purport in her father’s words than was really intended. “I will fetch her for a long day when we are quite by ourselves.”

Then Dr. Norman went away.

He hardly knew whether to laugh or weep over the experiences of the evening. There was evidently no harm in these guests of Perry's; and some of them, Mrs. Cornford and Vittoria, for instance, he heartily liked. Vittoria's manner was perfectly unobjectionable, gentle, modest, feminine. But with all Mrs. Cornford's good qualities, he confessed that her free and easy behaviour was inexpressibly distasteful to him. He could not support the idea of his little Laura catching her tone in ever so slight degree; and how impossible it is not to catch the tone of one's intimate friends! Who can say, moreover, where bad manners end, and bad morals begin? He determined to have a long and earnest talk with Perry on the subject. Perry was so sweet-tempered, so pliable, and so utterly devoid of anything like self-assertion, that he could but be hopeful as to the result.



## CHAPTER XXI.

## PERRY UNDER DOMESTICATION.

IT is needless to say that Laura was supremely happy. At first the habits of her lord and master were somewhat disconcerting to her orderly notions. For instance, he would often lie in bed till eleven o'clock, and after a hasty breakfast in dressing-gown and slippers, rush off to his studio at Fulham, expecting dinner at any moment he might happen to return. Or, if he stayed at home, he would paint, promiscuously attired, in his little drawing-room, till what with paint-brushes, painting rags, and other artistic paraphernalia, it became so littered as to require an entire cleaning.

It must be admitted that Mr. Perugino stayed at home a great deal. He delighted in his home;

he delighted in the society of his young wife, he delighted to teach her music and painting, or any other accomplishment of which he was master. He delighted, too, in the business of housekeeping. There was hardly a branch of this department, from ordering the dinner to cleaning the plate, that Mr. Perugino did not thoroughly understand. One day he would astonish the proper-minded middle-aged servant Dr. Norman had provided for them, by blacking the boots of the little household, offering to include her own, with the remark—

“Now, Jemima, if ever, is the time to take a walk with the object of your affections, for I was born a shoeblack, and understand my business.”

Dr. Norman sent his son-in-law the present of a small cask of sherry, and over the bottling of it he was as happy as a child over a new toy. Of course, Polly must have a bottle, and Petroffsky a bottle, and Vittoria and Piggy two bottles, and everybody else of his acquaintance a bottle, so that the sherry was finished in no time.

But it was with regard to his manner of

spending Sundays that Mr. Perugino received a series of curtain lectures. Laura's ideas of Sunday were orthodox—morning service, early lunch, and cold dinner; every sign of work put aside, and the indulgence only of quiet amusements. But Perry was very intractable on this head. Again and again he would promise to accompany Laura to church the very next Sunday; but Sunday after Sunday came, and just as the last bell was tolling, Mr. Perugino would put his head out of his little dressing-room, and make excuse. Laura invariably had to go alone. Jemima was a Methodist, moreover; and by way, as Perry said, of giving her a more liberal turn of mind, he would play lively tunes on his guitar, or offer to take her portrait, which, as Jemima said, made her shudder to think of—“yet it was impossible to be angry with the master.”

Such was Perry's conduct under the process of domestication, as naturalists say. No wild young elephant caught in the corrals of Ceylon could show a greater dislike to being tamed than he, and he flew to his old studio as a

refuge, and to his old friend for sympathy.

“If I haven’t a spur in my side,” he said in these days to Polly Cornford, “I’ve a bit in my mouth, and no mistake about it. I’ve heard of mothers-in-law”—here he made a grimace of dismay—“but I’ll be hanged if fathers-in-law are not ten times worse.”

“You are a lucky dog to have Dr. Norman for yours,” answered Polly.

“Oh! yes”—here Perry made another wry face—“but he leads me a terrible life of it, I assure you. I daren’t say my soul is my own.”

“What does that matter? The clothes on your back are, which is much more important.”

“I can see well enough what the doctor is driving at. He wants me to stick to work, and save my money, and become a respectable member of society,” Perry said, indignantly; “but I won’t be driven to anything—I tell you I won’t be driven, Polly!” He added in a doleful voice—“I’ve no longer a spark of ambition in me. When a man loses—you understand what I would say, Polly. Laura and I are as happy as can be, but a little dull some-

times. I'm an ungrateful wretch to say so, but such is the truth. If I could only forget that a woman had never lived of whom one could say —'Time cannot state her infinite variety——'

"Oh! yes, I know what to expect of you," Polly said bitterly. "Laura is an angel, and Kitty was the opposite. Because you are happy, you think how much pleasanter it would have been to be scolded, and sermonized, and quarrelled with, and looked down upon; whereas little Laura worships the very ground you tread upon—the more fool she!"

Perry never got much condolence from Polly Cornford, you may be sure. His prosperity was the crowning satisfaction of her life, and she talked of it by day, and dreamed of it by night. She wrote to Kitty about it—perhaps the only little bit of malice Polly had ever indulged in; but as she said to Vittoria—

"A woman can no more help being spiteful, if injured by another, than a man can help using his fists if affronted by a blackguard."

Perry had, indeed, a bit in his mouth, though it was held by a light and careful hand. Dr.

Norman managed his son-in-law with great skill. In a spirit half of playfulness, half of gentle resistance, he had contrived to make his way into the young man's confidence; and once that victory achieved, the rest was easy. Perry's superficial vagabondage he let alone. If he preferred to breakfast at noon, and go unkempt in his shirt-sleeves for the rest of the day, what did it matter to him? If he liked Artemus Ward and French novels better than any other literature, that was equally Mr. Perugino's own affair.

But since Perry had married a young wife, it was surely his duty to bestir himself a little, and go about the business of life in a manly spirit. Dr. Norman set a hundred little traps of the kind Perry was too blind to see.

For instance, he would send him the following note—

“DEAR PERUGINO,

“Will you bring Laura to dine with me to-morrow at seven o'clock? So-and-so” naming the very person Perry had expressed a

desire to meet) "is coming, &c., &c. ; all of them worth your while to know.

"Yours truly,

"E. N.

"P.S.—I will send my fly-man for you exactly at a quarter to seven, and he shall bring you back."

Of course Perry would take Laura; and the consequences were, that the young artist made plenty of influential friends, and saw himself fairly on the road to fortune. At the house of his father-in-law he met art lovers, who looked upon a new genius as so much treasure-trove; art critics, artists, and cultivated men and women of the world, who took kindly to Perry, as was only natural.

When Polly Cornford heard of the invitations sent to Perry and Laura from houses of the best standing, her eyes beamed with pleasure. She was content to paint clever, ill-paid pictures in her lonely little studio all her life, so long as Perry flourished like a bay-tree. Poor old Petroffsky, whose memory no more retained

what was said to him than a sieve retains water, used to nod at Polly's good news, and smile, and try to hit the right nail on the head, by saying,

“There is nobody like Kitty Silvare—*j'ai dit cela toujours, mon amie.*”

He thought Perry had married Kitty all the time!

Perry, therefore, prospered against his will. When his picture was hung on the line at the Academy, and obtained flattering notices in the newspapers, and he was pointed out as the next A. R. A. to be elected, and fortune smiled upon him, do you suppose he was as grateful as it behoved him to be? Do you suppose in his secret heart he called himself a lucky fellow? Oh! stern moralists, look into your own hearts and forgive! Which of us does not think he could improve upon Providence now and then? We are like big children at a lottery, and would fain change our prizes, were they the very ones we have coveted.

Perry was sure to enjoy life very much. With his loving, gifted nature, anything like



moroseness was impossible. He merely felt a little dull sometimes, as he had said to Polly Cornford—

“Ah! what days those were when we all lived together without a care and without a sixpence,” was the sentiment this ungrateful young cynic would utter. “A bottle of champagne was a bottle of champagne then.”

“Which wasn’t often,” Polly answered.

“And a song was a song when I was a young harum-scarum,” Perry added. “I’m a proper sort of person now. I’ve no debts. My position improves every day; but on my soul, Polly, I couldn’t sing to a merry tune if it were to save my life.”

But it must be said on Perry’s behalf, that he did not fall into a moralizing mood very often.

Laura thought herself the happiest person in God’s beautiful world. Whether Perry were idle or industrious, sad or merry, devoted to her happiness or addicted to solitude—for Mr. Perugini had alternate fits of asceticism and sociability—were all one. He was her husband, her joy, her darling. She wondered whether other

women loved their husbands as much as she did, and whether such love made them as happy.

On the whole, then, Dr. Norman had reason to be thankful. Laura loved Perry too fondly to take his shortcomings to heart; and, so long as Perry were under his eye, they could not take much harm. Of course the young couple got into difficulties now and then, for Perry adhered to the maxim dear to Bohemia—"take no thought for the morrow." They would occasionally wake up to find themselves without money. Perry would shock Laura by buying some rare old oak cabinet with the money she had been saving up for the quarter's butcher's and baker's bills. Or they would determine upon the most rigid economy in eating and drinking, in order to buy a bit of tapestry Perry had taken a fancy to, till both fell ill from sheer want of proper food.

Amongst Dr. Norman's boys Perry reigned supreme; and Prissy liked him sincerely. But Prissy had only one hero, who was her father. She clung to him more and more as time wore

on, and gloried in his distinction as Laura gloried in Perry's.

What Dr. Norman's life would have been without the love of his little daughter he dared not think; and it seemed to brighten the future, as a distant ray of sunlight brightens some far-off field.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE RETURN HOME.

THE Bartelottes returned to England in May; and Sir George and Kitty went straight to Akenholme Park, till the house in Clarges Street should be got into order. Ella stayed with friends in London. Kitty had never been into the Eastern counties before, and found it dreary. There was the departure from Shoreditch Station to begin with. What can be more conducive to a suicidal state of mind than the long, tortuous winding of the train over the squalid, smoky districts of Stepney and Stratford? No sunshine brightens, no breeze penetrates those dusky regions of London, which look more fit for the habitation of Cyclops and

ghouls than of civilized men and women.

When at last the train was speeding amid bright green fields and trim villages, they left off regretting foreign lands, and grew cheerful. Kitty was dying to see Akenholme Park, and to take her place as mistress of it. She felt so sure she should be happy there.

"We shall have to rough it a little till we get back to London," Sir George said. "I told Dawson not to hire more than one or two servants, as our plans are so uncertain."

"You and I are fortunately not so fastidious as dear Ella," Kitty answered, smiling.

Akenholme Park was a pretty place enough, as far as natural advantages went, possessing soft green slopes, and noble oaks, and a garden capable of developing into something really enticing. The house was well-built and comfortable. There were a few good pictures on the walls, a little choice old furniture, collections of china, coins, &c., and the usual heirlooms of a house, if not ancient or splendid, at least of respectable age, and moderate wealth. The great treasure of Akenholme Park was one

which Kitty could appreciate very little, namely, a small but choice library of rare old books.

What troubled Kitty was the shabbiness of the place. The carpets were threadbare, the colours of the curtains faded past recognition, the papers on the walls discoloured with age. The garden was utterly run to waste. The stables were empty. The old family carriage dilapidated past mending.

She tried to coax Sir George into a little lavishness, by all womanly, wifely arts.

“Dearest,” she would say, making him look at this or that piece of faded upholstery, “you shall have no rest till you let me go to Ipswich and order the new furniture for the drawing-room.”

Whereupon Sir George would only shake his head and chuckle at Kitty’s supreme *naïveté* and overweening ambition. As if the furniture that had been good enough for Ella was not good enough for a young lady brought up in Paradise Place, forsooth! He would merely say—

“We must see what the reparations in Lon-

don come to first, you know. Do, for the present, leave off bewailing the furniture, and help me with my books."

Poor Kitty had to pay dearly in these days for the interest she had formerly affected to take in old books.

Sir George was never tired of re-arranging and re-cataloguing his treasures, and why should not Kitty help him, since she was so conversant with the subject of bibliography, and so fond of it, too!

Morning after morning was spent in the monotonous work of writing, from Sir George's dictation, the names and dates of musty old Plutarchs and Horaces, and Facciolatis and Chaucers, and making lists of Aldine additions, and other editions, in which she took not the slightest interest.

If she grew pale and weary, Sir George had the shabby little pony-carriage put to, and would drive her to see his farms, or the nearest post town to get his letters.

"We won't call upon anyone till we return from London," he had said; and as they effect-

ally hid themselves from observation, Lady Bartelotte received no visits.

Sometimes she went into the village to play the Lady Bountiful; but how much more difficult it was to be the Lady Beautiful of Akenholme Park than of Shelley House! In Dr. Norman's house a store of wine and meat was always at hand for the sick or aged poor; in Sir George's there never seemed anything to give away.

Dawson, the housekeeper—by no means the traditional housekeeper in black silk and widow's cap Kitty had expected—but a homely old soul, who had been chosen by Sir George for her thrift and pliability of disposition, used to answer her mistress's questions thus—

“Lors! my lady, there's no sort o' use in yer ladyship listening to them folks. They'll make a lady like you believe a sucking-pig is a red herrin', with their artful talk. Sir George gives away coals and meat to the good church-goers at Christmas, and a sovereign to all the lying-in women on his estates, and five shillings extra to them as have boys; and what more would



they have? There's no gratitude in poor folks, as yer ladyship will soon find out."

Kitty proposed to Sir George that she should take an interest in the Sunday-school; but he cautioned her against pledging herself to anything very serious.

"It is all very well to hold with the clergyman of your parish, and attend church, and that sort of thing. I'm a good Conservative, and I would do as much for Church and State as anybody. But, my dear, you don't know what it is to be hand and glove with a county rector. First he wants money for repairing the church, then for the schools, then for a new organ, then for the choir, till what with one thing and another, your hand is always in your pocket."

So Kitty was compelled to receive the friendly invitations of the Rector's family with polite frigidity; and to give up the idea of reigning supreme in the parish.

"We shall see a little of our neighbours in the autumn, I suppose?" she said to her husband one day.

"My dear, I don't think you would care for

our neighbours. We shall interchange calls and personal visits, of course; but they are richer than we, and it is better not to get too intimate. We must be economical, and think of what need of economy the future—under God's blessing—may bring."

Kitty wondered how she should continue to spend the days at Akenholme Park without Ella; for Ella had bound herself over to share Mr. Tyrrell's home one day. There was a piano, there was a flower-garden, there was a pony-carriage; but little else upon which she could count for amusement. Without the prospect of occasional visits to London and Ella, her future looked dull enough. For in spite of all that had threatened to estrange them, and had, in truth, marred the first sweetness of their friendship, Kitty clung to Ella as of old. What the lives of some women would be without the friendship of other women, is only known to God and themselves. Kitty was fain to make much of the only friend left to her of so many!

Matters mended as soon as they reached London. The house in Clarges Street had been

repaired and embellished. Ella had engaged a respectable staff of servants. A pretty open carriage was indulged in; and the household arrangements were put on a comfortable footing. To Sir George's intense satisfaction in the prospect of Ella's wealthy marriage—Mr. Tyrrell was, moreover, heir to a baronetcy—much of this liberality was owing. He loved Ella as dearly as ever, but his own marriage had altered the course of things, and naturally he wanted to have Kitty as much as possible to himself. For Kitty seemed to him to grow more bewitching every day.

Kitty's dreams, therefore, had come true at last—the dreams of wealth, of elegance, of refinement. She was presented at Court; she was invited to sumptuous houses; she drove in the parks, as she had longed to do in the days of her scheming, sulky, and yet how well-beloved, girlhood!

It was very pleasant; and she would have liked the "season" to last all the year round. The late hours, the dazzling lights, the round of

formal calls, never wearied her, as they soon wearied Ella. She attended morning concerts, and as she leaned back in her velvet chair on the first row, recalled the old days with a smile. Then she used to sit with Perry in the orchestra, and he amused himself during the intervals by cracking nuts for her, or drawing caricatures of the performers on his programme. Ambition was silent within her for awhile, and she only cared to enjoy. These bland, soft-minded ladies and gentlemen she met night after night, did not frighten her, as she had expected they would do. There was no occasion to shine or seem clever. It sufficed to look agreeable, and do nothing.

One evening Kitty and Sir George attended a brilliant soirée at the South Kensington Museum. The place was crowded to the last inch with well-dressed people, who trod on each other's toes, jostled each other, and elbowed each other with graceful apology. There was a band of good music, and a refreshment-room, to which Sir George, who always liked refreshments, took Kitty.

Whilst sipping their tea, a tall, dark-browed, much-bearded man, entered, with a fair-haired, round-cheeked, languid-looking lady on his arm. Kitty did not know that Myra and Captain Longley were again in England, and started. Before she had time to whisper their names in her husband's ear, they approached, and were in the act of sitting down, when Myra recognised her friend. Kitty, without thinking, smiled, and was about to advance; but Myra turned away, and Captain Longley followed. It was evidently intended for a dead cut!

Kitty coloured a little.

"I had forgotten how angry I made Myra two years ago," she said. "She must do as she pleases about forgiving me."

"Confound their impertinence!" said Sir George. "The idea of Mrs. Longley cutting you is preposterous; but she never quite knew what etiquette was. And camp life in India has not taught her, it seems."

Myra had treated the matter much more seriously, and was quite pale with excitement.

"I hoped I might never, never see her again,"

she said to her husband. "No one knows how I loved her, and how she deceived me."

"And I have little cause to be grateful to Miss Silver—I beg her pardon—Lady Bartelotte," Captain Longley rejoined. "She did me an ill turn when I first paid court to you."

"Was she well-dressed? Did she look happy?" asked Myra.

"I really never noticed her dress or her looks; but they are still there, and I will take a survey on the sly." So saying the Captain put up his glass and eyed the pair. "Yes, I should say she is well-dressed."

"Do they appear pleased with each other's company?"

Again Captain Longley took a survey.

"I should say," he said, slowly, "that she is a little bored; and no wonder, for I always looked upon Sir George as the most consummate little prig on the face of the earth."

Kitty appeared to treat the matter lightly, but she did not forget it. Why could not Myra let by-gones be by-gones? Had she no recollection of human devotion? If the one had

been lavish in worldly things, the other had been profuse in gifts of a rarer kind. They might surely cry quits now and be friends. Myra's conduct disconcerted her. It was vulgar on grounds of etiquette, and high-flown as a matter of sentiment.

Kitty, in homely phrase, wanted to have her cake and eat it; to use her friends as best suited her, and retain their friendship. But friendship is a garden of flowers, to be cultivated with tenderest love and care; not a plot of common ground, to be rudely *exploité*, according to its marketable value.

So, in time, Kitty found out.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## MORE OLD FRIENDS.

IT was now July and summer in earnest. The sun had scorched all the colour out of the parks. The trees in the squares looked like autumn. The red-hot faces of the omnibus drivers blazed from Camberwell Gate to Hammersmith Broadway, as the watchfires of old from Ida to the Arachnæan hills when Troy was taken. Yet the rich and pleasure-loving stayed on; and Kitty, for whom awaited the cool glades and over-arching bowers of Akenholme Park, dreaded the very word "departure" as a sentence.

Sir George used to say to her again and again, not imagining that his Elysium could be her Hades—



“My dear child, when Ella runs away from us we can winter at Akenholme. Only think of the comfortable, undisturbed life it will be; and I really see no reason why we should not let the London house for a time.”

Poor Kitty! She determined to shut out this idea of the comfortable, undisturbed winters at Akenholme Park, and enjoy the present whilst it lasted. She hardly dared to speak to Ella on the subject of her marriage, so greatly did she dread what she knew would follow. One day Ella happened to say—

“Mr. Tyrrell wants me to marry him this autumn, and proposes to take me to Egypt for my wedding trip.”

“And have you consented?” asked Kitty, almost breathlessly.

“Oh! no,” Ella answered, laughing. “He must have a little patience. There is time enough.”

“How dreary it will be when you are gone—how dreary!” Kitty said, sighing.

“I hope not, dear Kitty. You must rouse papa, and make him see how necessary a little

change is for you. Why should you not take the Nile journey with us—or, at any rate, part of it?"

But Kitty knew in her secret heart that she could not rouse Sir George. If she roused him at all, it must be by sheer force of will and temper; and to exercise will and temper now would be changing herself from an angel into a virago. Sir George doted on the angel, but he ruled her with a rod of iron; he would hate the virago, but she knew that he would fear and obey her. Any happy medium did not exist. Her simple Yea and Nay could never carry weight as Ella's did, because she had hitherto taught Sir George that his will was hers. She could not turn round and play the shrew whilst the singing of the siren was fresh in his ears.

Goethe has said, "Der augenblick ist Ewigkeit!"—The present moment is eternity. And Kitty's present satisfied her as if indeed it were to last for ever. The most trifling accessories of every-day existence delighted her. The most trifling dignities of her new position filled her with childish enjoyment.

Just before the London season came to an end, Lady Adela gave a magnificent reception. Kitty moved from room to room, lost in admiration of the brilliant lights, the costly flowers, the stars and orders, the diamonds, the satins, the lace.

Amongst the crowd of Lady Adela's guests, numbering a foreign prince or two, peers and peeresses, bishops, statesmen, generals, and what not, Kitty and Sir George were not naturally of much account. A man who spends his best years abroad simply for his own good-will and pleasure, and then presents himself in England, has no right to feel disappointed if he stands at a disadvantage. What has he done for society that society should do him homage? Again, if he brings home a young wife, of whom the world knows nothing, what right has he to take offence at her apparent insignificance? In Lady Adela's world, Lady Bartelotte was supremely insignificant, and the truth dawned upon Kitty when the first flush of her enjoyment was over. She knew a few people, and had been introduced to some strangers, but

there anything like sharing in the universal sociality was at an end. Ella never attended late parties, or matters would have been better. Looking on the gay scene by her husband's side, Kitty felt almost as much out of place as if she had been transported thither fresh from the poverty and inexperience of Paradise Place years ago. A few minutes before she had wished that Mrs. Cornford and Vittoria could see her moving amid these splendid crowds, "with all her bravery on," but now the child-like wish was recalled.

"I suppose we shall be going soon?" she said to Sir George—"it is already late."

"As you please—exactly as you please, my dear. Oh! here is Tyrrell. Let us hear what he has to say."

"Are not these rooms superb?" asked Mr. Tyrrell of Kitty, after a little talk. "They have been re-decorated since Lady Adela was last in England. Her taste is faultless."

Then he drew Kitty's attention to some exquisite wall-painting, and the general harmony displayed throughout the room.

“By-the-by,” he said, after a time, “I have just seen an old friend of yours, Lady Bartelotte. I got Lady Adela to introduce me—no easy matter, I assure you. He happens to be the one person everybody wants to know, and is certainly most delightful. I mean Dr. Norman.”

“Dr. Norman here?” Kitty asked, greatly astonished.

“You may well look astonished, for he is almost a hermit; but Lady Adela persuades people against their wills. He is just talking with the Lord —, one of the most enthusiastic admirers of Dr. Norman’s scientific speculations.”

“Suppose we go and look for him?” Sir George said, tickled at the idea of encountering his old antagonist and rival. “What do you say, Kitty?”

“Just as you please, dear,” Kitty said, and they went.

“You never mentioned to us,” Mr. Tyrrell went on, “that Dr. Norman’s daughter was married to Perugino Neeve, the young artist

whose pictures have been so talked of lately—and such a pretty daughter, too !”

Kitty was getting more and more out of her depth. She said, with quite a bewildered look, “They, too, here ?” feeling as much surprised as if Mrs. Cornford’s presence had been announced.

“Lady Adela adores genius, you know, and there is very little doubt of Mr. Neeve being a genius.”

Then Mr. Tyrrell went on to say how Perry had been introduced to So-and-so, and So-and-so, and how he and his young wife were said to be the handsomest people in the room—with a few exceptions, he put in parenthetically, adding—

“It must be very pleasant to have genius. Like a golden key, it unlocks all the treasure-stores of the world. I have heard”—here he dropped his voice—“that this very Perugino Neeve, whom Lady Adela’s guests are praising and lionizing, used to live in an attic among a company of the veriest Bohemians that ever were. But there’s Dr. Norman ! He is still in

the heat of his discussion, so we will just pass on."

They approached slowly, and Kitty had time to look well at her old friend and faithful lover. He appeared younger, rather than older, to her thinking, the natural effect of a more elaborate toilette and better-trimmed beard; for Dr. Norman, like Ulysses, and all frail mortals, owed a good deal to outward adornment; and his expression was animated, eager, almost joyous, as he debated on some favourite topic.

Without being at all a striking-looking or handsome man, Dr. Norman could bear comparison with the more physically favoured of his fellows. His presence was simple and yet full of dignity, his brow noble, his smile sweet, his voice clear and musical.

As they went by, he looked up, and recognizing Kitty in all her dignity of pink satin and diamonds, bowed coldly and let her pass.

There was not a vestige of a smile on his lips, not a shade of friendliness in the look with which he greeted her, not a sign of anything like the reconciliation Kitty had expected from him. It

is so easy to convey irrevocable meanings with a glance of the eyes, a smile or a hand-clasp, and she had always hoped for perfect forgiveness at Dr. Norman's hands; and a token of it, whenever, if indeed they might ever chance to meet. What so easy for him now as to have stepped forward and said a friendly word?

Kitty, who had always given her friends stones when they had asked for bread, could not understand, could not pardon them for doing the same.

Dr. Norman's conduct was hard, cruel, unjustifiable, she said to herself, and it was with much ado she could keep the angry tears from rising to her eyes. Why were men so hard upon weak women? If she had wronged him, had she not atoned for her wrong long ago by keen self-reproach? Poor Kitty! As if passive self-reproach of itself can atone for wrong!

She felt, moreover, a little natural mortification at the conviction of her husband's insignificance. Even Perry, poor despised, neglected, absurd Perry had made a better figure at this noble lady's house than he! What was Sir George Bartelotte to society, that it should



trouble itself to smile upon him? And as Sir George Bartelotte's wife, she must, of course, share his insignificance. She wished and intended from her heart of hearts to be true and good and loyal to him, who had chosen her for his wife. This, if anything, must be her salvation in the future.

"How did you enjoy the party, my love?" asked Sir George, after settling himself comfortably in a corner of the carriage.

"It was magnificent!" Kitty said.

"What an odd coincidence that we should meet Dr. Norman at Lady Adela's, above all places! He's a gentlemanly fellow, though surly as a bear—and I've nothing to say against Lady Adela's receiving him. But what was Tyrrell telling you about your old protégé—the painter?"

"He is married to Dr. Norman's daughter, and they were both there," Kitty answered calmly.

"The deuce he was! But I thought you described him as a sort of Bohemian, one of those delectable persons one meets with in Balzac's or Münger's novels?"

“ He was very poor once, and the society he lived in called itself Bohemian.”

“ Then all I can say is, that English society is getting so damnably democratic (excuse me, my dear), that I think we had better give it up altogether, and go abroad again. How thankful you must be that you married me, and washed your hands clean of your old friends—eh, Kitty?”

“ But it does not seem as if my old friends were anything to be ashamed of,” Kitty said, laughing a little bitterly. “ They received twice as much homage as you or I did.”

“ Pshaw!” said Sir George. “ Lady Adela is a lion-hunter. That is all. She would invite the King of the Cannibal Islands if he came to London. Take my advice, my dear Kitty, and look upon yourself as a lucky woman to have married a respectable man instead of any of your high-flying geniuses.”

And thereupon the worthy Baronet began to doze, and by the time the carriage stopped in Clarges Street, was sound asleep.

Ella had gone to bed long ago, but little Francine was waiting to undress her mistress.

“*Mon Dieu ! que Miladi est belle ce soir !*” she said again and again as she took off the pink satin dress and the diamonds, and unbraided Kitty’s long dark hair.

But Kitty smiled no response upon the little thing as she had done many and many a time before.

“What does it matter ? *Qu’est que cela fait !*” she said impatiently, and that was all. She was bewildered with the event of the evening. The splendour of the scene, the sense of her own and her husband’s insignificance, nay, isolation, the chance meeting with Dr. Norman, the fact of Perry’s presence—all these things perplexed her as painfully as mathematical problems perplex a student in the deliriums of fever.

And Dr. Norman’s look, so stern, so steadfast, so retributive, haunted her as she lay wakeful on her soft pillows.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## KITTY'S LAST APPEARANCE IN BOHEMIA.

AT last the London season came to an end. Mr. Tyrrell had overruled Ella's objections to a speedy marriage; so that all prospect of a winter abroad was over, and Kitty was making preparations for a long stay at Akenholme Park.

Three months were to intervene before the marriage took place; after which, Mr. Tyrrell proposed that they should carry out his first plan of a Nile journey. To this, also, Ella had consented. She was so much stronger now than of old, and had ever longed to see the Pyramids. She saw, moreover, how utterly impossible it was for her to interfere success-

fully on behalf of Kitty. Once she had attempted to convince Sir George that Kitty would find Akenholme a dreary home in winter—and he had said—

“My darling, a woman must live where her husband likes. It is surely a little late for Kitty to come to the conclusion that my house is a dull one.”

And then he went straight to Kitty, and asked her angrily if she had wished Ella to be a go-between, and if indeed she was so unreasonable as to have fancies about this or that place being dull. Because, if so, he added, the sooner she got accustomed to the dulness the better. It was a pleasant prospect for a man, forsooth! if such a home as Akenholme Park could not satisfy his wife a few months after a marriage, etcetera, etcetera.

Kitty listened, meek as a lamb; and confessed, with penitent tears and insinuating words, that the thought of losing Ella had made her dread a winter at Akenholme. But Sir George was not easily pacified. She had to cry *Peccavi, Peccavi!* a hundred times, to cover her head with

dust and ashes, to crave for pardon in humbled tones before he forgave her. Then, condescending to bestow a kiss upon her pale, tear-wet cheek, he went away, and punished her—as he thought—by being a little cold, a little dictatorial and extremely exacting for a day or two.

Ella, seeing how matters stood, wisely held her peace for the future, and Kitty banished the word “dull” from her vocabulary. Sir George congratulated himself upon the way in which he was training his young high-spirited wife. He had always resolved upon being an angel of goodness to her, but on the condition of her unquestioning obedience only. When that was withheld, he considered any amount of harshness justifiable, and indeed expedient.

Marriage had not improved the Baronet's character ; and it had marred the one admirable trait in it, namely, his unselfish love for Ella. Between him and his child, as was certainly natural, just a shade of mistrust, just the merest suspicion of coldness, had grown up since the day on which Ella discerned that he and Kitty were secretly leagued against her.

But Ella loved her father too dearly to be quite happy whilst such unhappy feelings lasted, and it was this reason that had induced her to favour Mr. Tyrrell's plan. She thought a temporary separation would surely set matters straight; and would also put her relationship with Kitty on a safer footing.

The journey into Suffolk was determined upon early in August. There was a great deal of shopping to do meanwhile, on Ella's account; and Kitty, who loved to be busy, was driving about all day long.

It happened on the last day before departure, that she had to transact some business with a certain seedsman and florist at Fulham. Sir George was fond of arboriculture, and had deputed her to procure some seeds of the *Eucalyptus Globulus*, an Australian tree, which was just then much discussed in the newspapers.

Chance therefore led Kitty into the well-known haunts of her girlhood. She passed the little so-called Brompton lanes, through which she and Perry had strolled—ah! how many a Sunday evening! talking lovers' talk, laughing,

sporting, like the happy vagabonds they were ! She passed the West Brompton Cemetery, where Perry's father lay buried—thanks to Polly Cornford's goodness, and other " friends of Bohemia," whose bones, but for Polly, would have been " only a pauper's, nobody owns !" And she thought of her own grave—Lady Bartelotte's, in the family vault at Akenholme Church. How state-ly, how far away from those of her early friends and lovers it would be ! Life seemed so strange, could death be stranger ? Then she came to those lonely old granges, so ghostly, so deserted, so weird, that still stand amid tangled gardens, and give this part of London the picturesque, old-world look it wears.

She had often here come with Perry on a painting expedition, and remembered every feature of the landscape so well. Here was a pariah apple-tree he had pillaged for her. There was a bench on which they sat to eat the contents of his wallet. A little farther on was an inn, where they were picked up when rain came on by a town-traveller, who obligingly gave them a ride home.



Kitty for the nonce lost sight of the discomfort of that early time, and recollected only how loving, and merry, and free-hearted it had been. And how true! Then, indeed, out of the fullness of the heart had the mouth ever spoken!

Amid these retrospections she had longings—not immortal, like Cleopatra's, but longings that were human, wistful, childishly loving! She felt as if she must see an old familiar face, and hear an old familiar voice once more.

She had, as it were, parted with her youth in a sudden vindictive mood; but now she repented of her sullenness, and wished to say a late but tender adieu.

Why should she not go to Paradise Place?

The servants were to be dismissed next day; and, even in any case, how could a visit to Polly Cornford scandalize her? She should not tell Sir George; but if Sir George discovered it, he could hardly be angry. There was, surely, no more harm in stopping at Paradise Place than at the seedsman's who lived within a stone's throw? If the neighbourhood were a disreput-

able one, Sir George should not have sent her thither.

She gave the order; and, to the intense amazement of the little colony, an open carriage and pair stopped at Polly Cornford's door.

"Ask if Mrs. Cornford is within," she said to the man; "if not, leave this."

So saying, she slipped a ten-pound note into an envelope, scribbled inside—"For Papa Peter, from K. B.," and put it in the man's hand.

But Mrs. Cornford was within. Kitty descended, and followed the little maid-of-all-work indoors.

"Put on a clean apron, Mary Hann, and say, 'Please will your ladyship take a seat,'" Polly had said on recognising her visitor from a front window. Then she proceeded hastily to array herself in her best cap, and threw a silk shawl over her shoulders by way of showing Kitty respect, and further impressing the mind of pert Mary Hann.

Kitty waited in the dingy little sitting-room. How familiar it looked—how unchanged! There was the little bookcase with its greasy Byrons

and Shakespeares, and Waverleys and Sues, from which Perry had read aloud many and many a winter's evening. She remembered that the very arm-chair on which she sat had been mended by Perry again and again. And the table before her—as if in a vision—became surrounded with old friendly faces. And the little garden behind seemed on a sudden alive with old familiar voices. Were Perry and the children really watering the borders of nasturtium and mignonette, or was she dreaming?

“How d'ye do, my dear?” said Polly, holding out her hand with as much formality as she was capable of. “I hope I see you well.”

But Kitty put her arms about her old friend, and kissed her cordially, and reiterated—

“I am so glad to see you again, Polly—so glad!”

“I'll take you at your word for once,” Polly said smiling, and forgetting the resolutions she had just made not to shock Lady Bartelotte with undue familiarities, she stroked her lace mantle, and viewed her silk dress, and costly little parasol admiringly.

“My! my dear,” she cried with childish admiration; “do you wear such beautiful clothes every day?”

Kitty made some vague sort of response, then said—

“Tell me of yourself, dear Polly. Are you prosperous? And the children and Papa Peter, are they well?”

“Oh! as for myself,” Polly answered, “I’ve my ups and downs—six of one and half-a-dozen of t’other, pretty regularly, and that’s what I take most people’s lives to be. You’re one of the lucky ones, and know most about the ups.”

But Kitty was determined not to talk of herself.

“And the chicks and Papa Peter?” she repeated.

“Oh! the chicks are in the country. They’re a sad lot, but the house is dull without ’em now. I ’prenticed Mimi to Emilia Bianchi to learn photography, and she ran away! Old Petroffsky is very well—you must see him before you go. I suppose you’ve been leading a gay life of it lately?”

"We are going to be very quiet now in the country," Kitty said, drawing lines on the carpet with her little lace-bordered parasol.

"Oh dear! it does seem odd that things are as they are," Polly said, striving to be gay. "I'm as puzzled as a rat who has lost his tail. It's just four years ago, isn't it, this month since you started off to go to Shelley House? Who would have thought of your coming back Lady Bartelotte!"

"I've been very ungrateful to you all along, Polly," Kitty said, looking on the ground; "but I know you forgive me."

"Twiddle-dum-dee!" cried Polly; and seeing Kitty still look grave, added—"Hoity-toity-tum! Don't moralize, my dear."

Kitty did not seem to hear, and continued in the same voice—

"I often wonder at myself for having behaved to you as I have done; and yet I know if I came to you years hence, a beggar and in rags, you would take me in."

"Pray don't talk in that proper sort of strain, Kitty. It makes me feel quite bad to hear you.

Let by-gones be by-gones, I say; if I were riled with you once for Perry's sake, it couldn't last for ever. Let's go upstairs and see Petroffsky, by way of enlivening us a bit."

Kitty followed Polly up the narrow little staircase, Mary Hann watching her aghast with surprise.

"He's always prating about his beautiful Katherine, poor old soul!" Polly said; then, heightening her voice, added—"Here's Lady Bartelotte come to see you, my dear—our Kitty that was, you know."

"Enfin!" the old man said, looking up with the bewilderment of paralysis—"Enfin! welcome, bel enfant!"

He would have kissed her hand, but Kitty, moved by the sight of his age and helplessness, leaned forward and kissed him on the brow. Petroffsky was perhaps the only friend of her childhood whom she had never wronged by a selfish, unkind act.

He wiped his eyes, looked at her again and again, shy, joyful, puzzled.

"Que vous êtes belle!" he said, surveying her

from head to foot. "And Monsieur Perugino, is he in good health? Ah! Monsieur Perugino never comes to play cribbage with me now!"

"He always persists in thinking Perry is married to you," Polly whispered. "Don't contradict him."

"Et votre chapeau," he said, after a pause, recalling the bonnet he had earned for her years ago, by dint of French lessons. "Votre chapeau? Etait-il beau? But that demoiselle had a head of wood. She never achieved the verb être—never!"

Kitty smiled though tears were in her eyes. The bonnet was very pretty, she said. Then he begged Madame Cornford to present his beautiful Katherine with the neck-ribbons that had been the fruits of further lessons to the demoiselle with the head of wood.

"He's been saving these for you all these years," Polly said, in an under-tone. "Say you're pleased."

Of course Kitty took the neck-ribbons, and said she was pleased. The old man again wiped his eyes.

“Mais que vous êtes en grand tenue, bel enfant!” he said. “Monsieur Perugino doit être bien riche alors. Ah! why do you come so seldom? Is it because my poor violin is broken, and I can no longer play to you? My fingers have no music in them now,” he added, looking down at his poor helpless hands, “and my violin was too polite to survive them. Voilà tout!”

“Kitty lives too far off to come often,” cried out Polly. “That’s why she can’t come.”

Then she nudged Kitty, who made her adieux as best she could, and they left him.



## CHAPTER XXV.

## CONCLUSION.

“**N**OW for another old friend,” Polly said; and before Kitty had time to collect her thoughts, she was standing on the threshold of Perry’s studio, face to face with Perry. He came forward and shook hands, saying never a word. Kitty mastered herself by a great effort.

“I did not know that you came here to paint now,” she said, quite calmly.

“My new studio will not be finished till the spring. Do sit down.”

Then he placed a chair for her, but she said she would rather not sit down, adding—

“I want to look at your new picture.”

“My pictures all go home as soon as they

are ready," Perry said. "There is only this sketch on the easel."

They stood before the easel and talked a little while. Kitty asked after Laura. Perry asked after her husband. There were no artificial smiles or words; each reading the other's naked heart too well.

"The studio is not much changed, is it?" he asked. "The last time you were in this room we figured as Antony and Cleopatra. Do you remember? There are the wreaths of paper-roses we wore, hanging about the lamps still."

"I remember it all," she answered, looking at the faded flowers festooned about the gas-lamps.

"What a farce it was!" he said, with a ghastly smile—"I mean, what a tragedy!"

They were alone now, standing side by side, and some inexplicable sympathy, born of memory, of love, of sorrow, and of the ineffable passion of youth, drew them in spirit near to each other. For a moment they clasped hands and looked into each other's tearful eyes. It was as if a wand had touched them, and they were young and fond and free again.

"Tell me," Perry said, with almost inquisitorial eagerness, part savage, part tender, "are you happy?"

"What is happiness?" Kitty answered, with all the cynicism, and more than the bitterness of Pilate.

Perry dropped her hand. The spell was broken. She seemed in those words to have explained the riddle of her own life, and the mystical sorrow of his. What indeed was happiness to her?

He felt as if he had seen a black chasm under a flash of lightning, and drew back horrified.

What was he, what was any one to her? She did not know the meaning of happiness; or, if she did, despised alike the idea and the thing itself.

The Kitty of old must be a dream!

When Polly returned, they were talking of Perry's proposed trip to Italy and the East in a year or two, and of Kitty's journey to Akenholme Park, with cold, even voices. Kitty, glancing out of the window, saw the carriage waiting for her, and trembled. Was she in a vision?

“Come, Perry,” Polly said, “tell Kitty all the news. He’s on a fair way to fame and fortune now, Kitty; that last picture of his was a trump card, and no mistake.”

And she rattled on by way of covering the embarrassment of the others, till at last Kitty said she must go.

Perry did not offer to see her into her carriage. “Good-bye,” he said on the threshold. “God bless you!”

“Good-bye,” she answered. Remembering Dr. Norman’s stern look, she dared not to add, “Give my love to Laura.”

When alone in the passage with Polly Cornford, she brought out her gift for Papa Peter. “You must let me help him. It makes me so happy,” she pleaded, adding with a dreary smile, “I never behaved badly to him, you know.”

“Oh! I’ll take your ten-pound note, and welcome,” Polly said, blithely. “It’s good for your soul to be generous; and Petroffsky and I are not proud.”

Kitty kissed Polly; and, as was natural, they both cried a little.

“I wish I had been good to you,” Kitty whispered; then she drew down her veil and turned away.

Mary Hann opened the door wide, and dropped a curtsy; the footman helped her in, and all Paradise Place watched the departure of Polly Cornford’s magnificent guest in wonder and admiration.

“God bless you, Kitty!” soliloquized Polly, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. “There’s good in the worst of us, in spite of what the parsons say. And I for one am no saint that I should be dirty particular!”

Then she went upstairs, to have a long talk with Perry.

Kitty, leaning back on her soft cushions, fell into deep thought. She would not, perhaps, have recalled the past, but it weighed upon her spirits like a nightmare. She felt that there was something better in the world than the crest on her husband’s carriage—something that was hers once, but was lost now for ever and ever.

One by one the ghosts of her murdered friend-

ships rose up before her innermost vision ; and she quailed at the sight. It was a sort of Macbeth's banquet ! Which of all her friends and lovers had not suffered martyrdom for her sake ? There was Perry, the passionate adorer, the faithful worshipper ; there was Polly, who had been father and mother in one, the Providence, so to say, of her childhood ; there was Dr. Norman, of the staunch soul and manly tender heart ; and Myra, as generous and warm a friend as woman ever had ; and sweet, high-souled Ella. All these had given her affection without stint or spare, and what else they had to give of worldly things.

And how had they been requited ?

Kitty possessed a soul, and it troubled her. She knew exactly what she had gained and what she had thrown away ; and she could not forget the pain she had caused. Would any chance of atonement be given ? Should she be able in the future to compensate those whose hearts she had well-nigh broken ?

This seemed the only possible consolation ; but would it ever be hers ? How far away she

had drifted from all her old friends now! Excepting Polly Cornford, which of them cared for her friendship? Oh! how she longed that some happy mediation of Heaven would restore the old sweet friendships of the past intact, or give others as tender and dear and lasting. She would be so true!

Here the story of Kitty Silver properly ends. A French author has said—"In the close of one romance is sure to lie the germ of another;" and the fortunes of Lady Bartelotte may yet be chronicled for the curious. *Quit sait?*

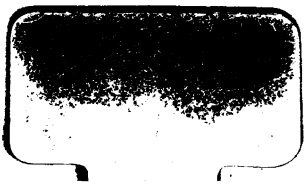
THE END.











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