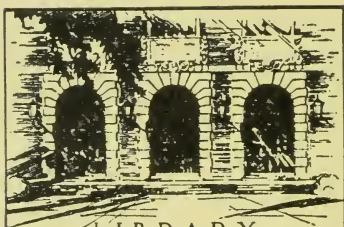


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THE ROCK AHEAD.

LONDON :
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THE ROCK AHEAD.

A Novel.

BY

EDMUND YATES,

AUTHOR OF

'BLACK SHEEP,' 'KISSING THE ROD,' 'THE FORLORN HOPE,' ETC.

'The Gods are just ; and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to scourge us.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18 CATHERINE ST. STRAND.

1868.

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To M. F—D. FORGUES.

MY DEAR SIR,

Although I have not the pleasure of your personal acquaintance, I venture to ask you to accept the dedication of this book, in slight acknowledgment of the admirable manner in which you have reproduced two of my previous stories (*Broken to Harness* and *The Forlorn Hope*) in the pages of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and of the flattering way in which you have frequently referred to my writings in that excellent periodical.


Faithfully yours,

EDMUND YATES.

London, April 1868.

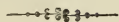
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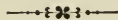


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THE ROCK AHEAD.



Prologue.

CHAPTER I.

WHISPERED.

HOT in Brighton, very hot. The August sun reflected off white-chalk cliff and red-brick pavement, and the sea shining and sparkling like a sapphire; the statue of George the Fourth, in its robe of verdigris, looking on in blighted perspiration at the cabmen at its base, as though imploring a drink; the cabmen lolling undemonstratively on the boxes of their vehicles, not seeking for employment, and—partly by reason of the heat, but more, perhaps, in consequence of the money received recently at the races—rather annoyed than otherwise when their services were called into requisition. For the Brighton races had just taken place,

and the town, always so full, had been more crammed than ever. All the grand hotels had been filled with the upper ten thousand, who moved easily over from Chichester and Worthing and Bognor, where they had been staying for Goodwood, which immediately precedes Brighton; and all the lodgings had been taken by the betting-men and the turfites,—the “professionals,” with whom the whole affair is the strictest matter of business, and to whom it is of no interest whether the race is run at Torquay or Wolverhampton, in blazing sunshine or pouring hailstorm, so long as the right thing “comes off,” and they “land the winner.”

It was all right for the bookmakers this time at Brighton: the favourites, against which so much money had been staked, had been beaten, and “dark” horses, scarcely heard of, and backed for nothing, had carried off the principal prizes. So it followed that most of the gentry of the betting-ring, instead of hurrying off to the scene of their next trials of fortune, finding themselves with plenty of money in their pockets, at a plea-

sant place in lovely weather, made up their minds to remain there during the intervening Saturday and Sunday, and to drop business so far as possible until the Monday morning, when they would speed away by the early express-trains.

So far as possible, but not entirely. It is impossible for them to drop business altogether even on this glorious Sunday afternoon, when the whole face of Nature is blandly smiling. See the broad blue bosom of the sea smooth and sparkling as glass, dotted here and there with white-sailed pleasure-boats; see far away, beyond the encircling belt of brick and stone, the broad shoulder of the bare and bushless downs, over which the fresh air careering comes away laden with the delicious scents of trodden turf and wild thyme and yellow gorse; see the brown beach, where under the lee of the fishing-smacks, or making a table of the large flukes of rusty anchors, sit groups of excursionists,—pallid Londoners, exulting in the unwonted luxury of escaping from the stony streets, and more excited by the brisk and revivifying sea air than by the contents of the stone bottle which

stands in the midst of each group, and whose contents are so perpetually going round from hand to hand in the little footless glass; see the Esplanade thronged with its hundreds of foot passengers, its scores of flies and carriages; see the Stock Exchange in all its glory, and the children of Israel gorgeous in long ringlets, thunder-and-lightning neckties, and shot-silk parasols; and see the turf-men standing here and there in little knots, trying to be interested in the scenes passing around them, but ever and again turning to each other with some question of "odds," for some scrap of "intelligence."

The ring is strongly represented this Sunday afternoon on Brighton Parade, both in its highest and its lowest form. The short stout man in the greasy suit of black, with the satin waistcoat frayed round the pockets by the rubbing of his silver watch-guard, who is jotting down memoranda with a fat cedar-pencil in his betting-book, enters freely into conversation and is on an equality with the gentlemanly-looking man whose only visible "horseness" is expressed in his tightly-cut trousers

and his bird's-eye neckerchief with the horseshoe pin. Patrons of the turf, owners of race-horses, commission-agents, book-makers, touts, tipsters, hangers-on of every kind to turf speculations and turf iniquities, are here at Brighton on this lovely Sunday afternoon.

There was one group, consisting of three people, planted on the Esplanade, just in front of the Old Ship Hotel, the three component members of which were recognised and saluted by nearly everyone who passed. One of them was a short square-built man, with keen eyes closely set and sunken, small red whiskers, and a sharp-pointed nose. He was dressed in black, with a wonderfully neatly-tied long white cravat, folded quite flat, with a dog's tooth set in gold for a pin; and he wore a low-crowned hat. The other two were young men, dressed in the best style of what is known as "horsey get-up." They had been talking and laughing ever since they had taken up their position, immediately after lunching at the hotel, out of which they had strolled with cigars in their mouths; and it was obvious that any re-

spect which the elder man might receive was not paid to him on account of his age, but rather in acknowledgment of the caustic remarks with which he amused his companions. These remarks seemed at last to have come to an end. There had been a long silence, which was broken by the elder man asking,

“O, seen anything of Gore—Harvey Gore? Has he gone back, or what?”

“Don’t know; haven’t seen him since Thursday night,” said the taller of the young men.

“Won a pot of money on the Cup,” said the other sententiously; “regular hatful.”

“What did his pal do?” asked the elder man. “Lloyd I mean. Did he pull through?”

“Dropped his tin, Foxey dear. Held on like grim death to Gaslight, and was put in the hole like the rest of us. He tells me he has been hit for—”

“*He* tells you!” interrupted the elder man; “*he* tells you! I’ve known Gilbert Lloyd for two or three years, and anything *he* tells me I should take deuced good care not to believe.”

“Very good, Foxey dear! very nice, you sweet old thing! only don’t halloo out *quite* so loud, because here’s G. L. coming across the road to speak to us, and he mightn’t—How do, Lloyd, old fellow?”

The new-comer was a man of about four-and-twenty, a little above the middle height, and slightly but strongly built. His face would generally have been considered handsome, though a physiognomist would have read shiftiness and suspicion in the small and sunken blue eyes, want of geniality in the tightly-closing mouth visible under the slight fair moustache, and determination in the jaw. Though there was a slight trace of the stable in his appearance, he was decidedly more gentlemanly-looking than his companions, having a distinct stamp of birth and breeding which they lacked. He smiled as he approached the group, and waved a small stick which he carried in a jaunty manner; but Foxey noticed a flushed appearance round his eyes, an eager worn straining round his mouth, and said to his friend who had last spoken, “You’re right, Jack; Lloyd

has had it hot and strong this time, and no mistake.”

The young man had by this time crossed the road and stood leaning over the railing. In answer to a repetition of their salutes, he said :

“Not very bright. None of us are always up to the mark, save Foxey here, who is perennial; and just now I’m worried and bothered. O, not as you fellows imagine,” he said hastily, as he saw a smile go round; and as he said it his face darkened, and the clenching of his jaws gave him a very savage expression, — “not from what I’ve dropped at this meeting; that’s neither here nor there: lightly come, lightly gone; but the fact is that Gore, who is living with me over there, is deuced seedy.”

“Thought he looked pulled and done on Thursday,” said Foxey. “Didn’t know whether it was backing Gaslight that had touched him up, or—”

“No,” interrupted Lloyd hurriedly; “a good deal of champagne under a tremendously hot sun; that’s the cause, I believe. Harvey has a way of turning up his little finger under excitement, and

never will learn to moderate his transports. He's overdone it this time, and I'm afraid is really bad. I must send for a doctor; and now I'm off to the telegraph-office, to send a message to my wife. Gore was to have cleared out of this early this morning, to spend a day or two with Sanderack, the vet, at Shoreham; and my proprietress was coming down here; but there's no room for her now, and I must put her off."

"Do you think Harvey Gore's really bad?" asked one of the younger men.

"Well, I *think* he's got something like sun-stroke, and I *know* he's a little off his head," responded Lloyd. "He'll pull round, I daresay—I've no doubt. But still he can't be moved just yet, and a woman would only be in the way under such circumstances, let alone it's not being very lively for her; so I'll just send her a message to keep off. Ta-ta! I shall look into the smoking-room to-night at the Ship, when Harvey's gone off to sleep." And with a nod and a smile, Gilbert Lloyd started off.

"Queer customer that, Foxey."

“Queer indeed; which his golden number is Number One!” said Foxey enigmatically.

“What’s his wife like?”

“Never saw her,” said Foxey; “but I should think she had a pleasant time of it with that youth. It will be an awful disappointment to him, her not coming down, won’t it?”

“Foxey, you are an unbeliever of the deepest dye. Domestic happiness in your eyes is—”

“Bosh! You never said a truer word. Now, let’s have half-a-crown’s-worth of fly, and go up the cliff.”

A short time after Gilbert Lloyd had left the house in which he had taken lodgings, consisting of the parlour-floor and a bedroom upstairs, Mrs. Bush, the landlady, whose mind was rather troubled, partly because the servant, whose “Sunday out” it was, had not yet returned from the Methodist chapel where she performed her devotions—a delay which her mistress did not impute entirely to the blandishments of the preacher—and partly for other reasons, took up her position in the parlour-

window, and began to look up and down the street. Mrs. Bush was not a landlady of the jolly type; she was not ruddy of complexion, or thin and trim of ankle, neither did she adorn herself with numerous ribbons of florid hue. On the contrary, she was a pale, anxious-faced woman, who looked as if she had had too much to do, and quite enough to fret about, all her life. And now, as she stood in the parlour-window on a hot Sunday, and contemplated the few loungers who straggled through the street on their way to the sea-shore, she assumed a piteous expression of countenance, and shook her head monotonously.

“I wish I hadn’t let ’em the rooms, I’m sure,” said Mrs. Bush to herself. “It’s like my luck—and in the race-week too. If *he’s* able to be up and away from this in a day or two, then *I* know nothing of sickness; and I’ve seen a good deal of it too in my time. No sign of that girl! But who’s this?”

Asking this, under the circumstances, unsatisfactory question, Mrs. Bush drew still closer to the parlour-window, holding the inevitable red-

moreen curtain still farther back, and looked with mingled curiosity and helplessness at a cab which stopped unmistakably at the door of her house, and from the window of which a handsome young female head protruded itself. Mrs. Bush could not doubt that the intention of the lady in the cab was to get out of it and come into her house; and that good-for-nothing Betsy had not come in, and there was nobody to open the door but Mrs. Bush—a thing which, though a meek-enough woman in general, she did not like doing. The lady gave her very little time to consider whether she liked it or not; for she descended rapidly from the cab, took a small travelling-bag from the hand of the cabman, paid him, mounted the three steps which led to the door, and knocked and rang with so determined a purpose of being admitted that Mrs. Bush, without a moment's hesitation,—but with a muttered “Mercy on us! Suppose he'd been asleep now!” which seemed to imply that the lady's vehemence might probably damage somebody's nerves,—crossed the hall and opened the door.

She found herself confronted by a very young

lady, a girl of not more, and possibly less, than nineteen years, in whose manner there was a certain confidence strongly suggestive of her entertaining an idea that the house which she was evidently about to enter was her own, and not that of the quiet, but not well-pleased, looking person who asked her civilly enough, yet not with any cordiality of tone, whom she wished to see.

“Is Mr. Lloyd not at home? This is his address, I know,” was the enigmatical reply of the young lady.

“A Mr. Lloyd *is* lodging here, miss,” returned Mrs. Bush, with a glance of anything but approbation at her questioner, and planting herself rather demonstratively in the doorway; “but he isn’t in. Did you wish to see him?”

“I am Mrs. Lloyd,” replied the young lady with a frown, and depositing her little travelling-bag within the threshold; “did you not know I was coming? Let me in, please.”

And the next minute—Mrs. Bush could not tell exactly how it happened—she found the hall-door shut, and she was standing in the passage,

while the young lady who had announced herself as Mrs. Lloyd was calmly walking into the parlour. Mrs. Bush was confounded by the sudden and unexpected nature of this occurrence; but the only thing she could do was to follow the unlooked-for visitor into the parlour, and she did it. The young lady had already seated herself on a small hard sofa, covered with crimson moreen to match the window-curtains, had put off her very becoming and fashionable bonnet, and was then taking off her gloves. She looked annoyed, but not in the least embarrassed.

“*That* is Mr. Lloyd’s room, I presume?” she said, as she pointed to the folding-doors which connected the parlours, and which stood slightly open.

“Yes, m’m; but—”

Mrs. Bush hesitated; but as the young lady rose, took up her bag, and instantly pushed the door she had indicated quite open, and walked into the apartment, Mrs. Bush felt that the case was getting desperate. Though a depressed woman habitually, she was not by any means a timid one, and had fought many scores of highly suc-

cessful battles with lodgers in her time. But this was quite a novel experience, and Mrs. Bush was greatly at a loss how to act. Something must be done, that was quite clear. Not so what that something was to be; and more than ever did Mrs. Bush resent the tarrying of Betsy's feet on her return from Beulah Chapel.

"*She* would have shut the door in her face, and kept her out until I saw how things really were," thought the aggrieved landlady; but she said boldly enough, as she closely followed the intruder, and glanced at her left hand, on which the symbol of lawful matrimony duly shone:

"If you please, m'm, you wasn't expected. Mr. Lloyd nor the other gentleman never mentioned that there was a lady coming; and I don't in general let my parlours to ladies."

"Indeed! that is very awkward," said the young lady, who had opened her bag, taken out her combs and brushes, and was drawing a chair to the dressing-table; "but it cannot be helped. Mr. Lloyd quite expected me, I know; he arranged that I should come down to-morrow

before he left town; but it suited me better to come to-day. I can't think why he did not tell you."

"I suppose he forgot it, m'm," said Mrs. Bush, utterly regardless of the uncomplimentary nature of the suggestion, "on account of the sick gentleman; but it's rather unfortunate, for I never *do* take in ladies, not in my parlours; and Mr. Lloyd not having mentioned it, I—"

"Do you mean to say that I cannot remain here with my husband?" said the young lady, turning an astonished glance upon Mrs. Bush.

"Well, m'm," said the nervous landlady, "as it's for a short time only as Mr. Lloyd has taken the rooms, and as it's Sunday, I shall see, when he comes in. You see, m'm, I've rather particular people in my drawing-rooms, and it's different about ladies; and—" Here she glanced once more at the light girlish figure, in the well-fitting, fashionable dress, standing before the dressing-table, and at the white hand adorned with the orthodox ring.

"I think I understand you," said the intruder

gravely; "you did not know Mr. Lloyd was married, and you are not sure that I am his wife. It is a difficulty, and I really don't see how it is to be gotten over. Will you take *his* word?—at all events I may remain here until he comes in presently?"

Something winning, something convincing, in the tone of her voice caused a sudden revulsion of feeling in Mrs. Bush. The good woman—for she was a good woman in the main—began to feel rather ashamed of herself, and she commenced a bungling sort of apology. Of course the lady could stay, but it *was* awkward Mr. Lloyd not having told her; and there was but one servant, a good-for-nothing hussy as ever stepped—and over-staying her time now to that degree, that she expected the "drawing-rooms" would not have their dinner till ever so late; but at this point the young lady interrupted her.

"If I may stay for to-night," she said gently, and with a very frank smile, which made Mrs. Bush feel indignant with herself, as well as ashamed, "some other arrangement can be made

to-morrow; and I require no waiting-on. I shall give you no trouble, or as little as possible."

Mrs. Bush could not hold out any longer. She told the young lady she could certainly stay for that day and night, and as for to-morrow, she would "see about it;" and then, at the dreaded summons of the impatient "drawing-rooms," bustled away, saying she would return presently, and "see to" the stranger herself.

Pretty girls in pretty dresses are not rarities in the lodging-houses of Brighton; indeed, it would perhaps be difficult to name any place where they are to be seen more frequently, or in greater numbers; but the toilet-glass on the table in the back bedroom of Mrs. Bush's lodging-house, a heavy article of furniture, with a preponderance of frame, had probably reflected few such faces as that of the lady calling herself Mrs. Lloyd, who looked attentively into it when she found herself alone, and decided that she was not so very dusty, considering.

She was rather tall, and her figure was slight and girlish, but firm and well-developed. She

carried her head gracefully; and something in her attitude and air suggested to the beholder that she was not more commonplace in character than in appearance. Her complexion was very fair and clear, but not either rosy or milky; very young as she was, she looked as if she had thought too much and lived too much to retain the ruddiness and whiteness of colouring which rarely coexist with intellectual activity or sensitive feelings. Her features were well-formed; but the face was one in which a charm existed different from and superior to any which merely lies in regularity of feature. It was to be found mainly in the eyes and mouth. The eyes were brown in colour—the soft rich deep brown in which the pupil confounds itself with the iris; and the curling lashes harmonised with both; eyes not widely opened, but yet with nothing sly or hidden in their semi-veiled habitual look—eyes which, when suddenly lifted up, and opened in surprise, pleasure, anger, or any other emotion, instantly convinced the person who received the glance that they were the most

beautiful he had ever seen. The eyebrows were dark and arched, and the forehead, of that peculiar formation and width above the brow which phrenologists hold to indicate a talent for music, was framed in rippling bands of dark chestnut hair.

She was a beautiful and yet more a remarkable-looking young woman, girlish in some points of her appearance, and in her light lithe movements, but with something ungirlish, and even hard, in her expression. This something was in the mouth: not small enough to be silly, not large enough to be defective in point of proportion; the line of the lips was sharp, decisive, and cold; richly coloured, as befitted her youth, they were not young lips—they did not smile spontaneously, or move above the small white teeth with every thought and fancy, but moved deliberately, opening and closing at her will only. What it was in Mrs. Lloyd's face which contradicted the general expression of youth which it wore, would have been seen at once if she had placed her hand across her eyes. The beaming

brown eyes, the faintly-tinted rounded cheeks, were the features of a girl—the forehead and the mouth were the features of a woman who had left girlhood a good way behind her, and travelled over some rough roads and winding ways since she had lost sight of it.

When Mrs. Bush returned, she found the stranger in the front parlour, but not standing at the window, looking out for the return of her husband; on the contrary, she was seated at the prim round table, listlessly turning over some newspapers and railway literature left there by Gilbert Lloyd. Once again Mrs. Bush looked at her with sharp suspicion; once again she was disarmed by her beauty, her composure, and the sweetness of her smile.

“Mr. Lloyd is not in yet, m'm,” began Mrs. Bush, “and you'll be wanting your lunch.”

“No, thank you,” said Mrs. Lloyd; “I can wait. I suppose you don't know when he is likely to be in?”

“He *said* directly,” replied Mrs. Bush; “and I wish he had kept to it, for I can't think the

sick gentleman is any better. I've been to look at him, and he seems to me a deal worse since morning."

Mrs. Lloyd looked rather vacantly at Mrs. Bush. "Have you a lodger ill in the house?" she asked. "That makes it still more inconvenient for you to receive me."

Mrs. Bush felt uncomfortable at this question. How very odd that Mrs. Lloyd should not know about her husband's friend! They are evidently queer people, thought the landlady; and she answered rather stiffly:

"The only lodger ill in the house, m'm, is the gentleman as came with Mr. Lloyd; and, in my opinion, he's very ill indeed."

"Came with Mr. Lloyd?" said the young lady in a tone of great surprise. "Do you mean Mr. Gore? Can you possibly mean Mr. Gore?"

"Just him," answered Mrs. Bush succinctly. "Didn't you know he was here with Mr. Lloyd?"

"I knew he was coming to Brighton with him, certainly," said Mrs. Lloyd; "but I understood he was to leave immediately after the

aces—before I came down. What made him stay?”

Mrs. Bush drew near the table, and, leaning her hands upon it, fell into an easy tone of confidential chat with Mrs. Lloyd. That lady sat still, looking thoughtfully before her, as the landlady began, but after a little resting her head on her hand and covering her eyes :

“He stayed, m'm, because he was very ill, uncommon ill to be sure; I never saw a gentleman iller, nor more stubborn. His portmanteau was packed and ready when he went to the races, and he told Betsy he shouldn't be five minutes here when he'd come back; and Mr. Lloyd said to him in my hearing, 'Gore,' said he, 'how your digestion stands the tricks you play with it, I can *not* understand;' for they'd been breakfasting, and he had eat unwholesome, I can't say otherwise. But when they come from the races, they come in a cab, which wasn't usual; and, not to offend you, m'm, Mr. Lloyd had had quite enough” (here she paused for an expression of annoyance on the part of her hearer; but no such manifestation was

made); “but Mr. Gore, he *was* far gone, and a job we had to get him upstairs without disturbing the drawing-rooms, I can assure you. And Mr. Lloyd told me he had been very ill all day at the races, and wouldn’t come home or let them fetch a doctor—there were ever so many there—or anything, but would go on drinking; and when he put him in the cab, he wanted to take him to a doctor’s, but he wouldn’t go; and Mr. Lloyd did say, m’m, begging your pardon, that Mr. Gore damned the doctors, and said all the medicine he ever took, or ever would take, was in his port-manteau.”

“Was there no doctor sent for, then? Has nothing been done for him?” asked Mrs. Lloyd, with some uneasiness in her tone, removing her hand from her eyes and looking full at Mrs. Bush.

“We’ve done—Betsy and me and Mr. Lloyd; for no one could be more attentive—all we could; but Mr. Gore was quite sensible, and have a doctor he *would not*; and what could we do? We gave him the medicine out of the case in his port-manteau. I mixed it and all, and he told me how,

quite well; and this morning he was ever so much better."

"And is he worse now? Who is with him?" asked Mrs. Lloyd, rising.

"Well, m'm, *I* think he looks a deal worse; and I wish Mr. Lloyd was come in, because I think he ought to send for a doctor; I don't know what to do."

"Who is with him?" repeated Mrs. Lloyd.

"No one," returned Mrs. Bush. "No one is with him. When Mr. Lloyd went out, he told me Mr. Gore felt inclined to sleep; he had had some tea and was better, and I was not to let him be disturbed. But when I was upstairs just now, I heard him give a moan; and I knew he was not asleep, so I went in; and he looks very bad, and I couldn't get a word out of him but 'Where's Lloyd?'"

"Take me to his room at once," said Mrs. Lloyd, "and send for a doctor instantly. We must not wait for anything."

But the incorrigible Betsy had not yet returned, and Mrs. Bush explained to the stranger

that she had no means of sending for a doctor until she could send Betsy.

“Let me see Mr. Gore first, for a minute, and then I will fetch the nearest doctor myself,” said Mrs. Lloyd; and passing out of the room as she spoke, she began to ascend the narrow staircase, followed by the landlady, instructing her that the room in which the sick man was to be found was the “two-pair front.”

The room in which the sick man lay was airy, and tolerably large. As Gertrude Lloyd softly turned the handle of the door, and entered, the breeze, which bore with it a mingled flavour of the sea and the dust, fluttered the scanty window-curtains of white dimité, and caused the draperies of the bed to flap dismally. The sun streamed into the room, but little impeded by the green blinds, which shed a sickly hue over everything, and lent additional ghastliness to the face, which was turned away from Gertrude when she entered the chamber. The bed, a large structure of extraordinary height, stood in front of one of the windows; the furniture of the room was of the

usual lodging-house quality; an open portmanteau, belching forth tumbled shirts and rumped pocket-handkerchiefs, gaped wide upon the floor; the top of the chest of drawers was covered with bottles, principally of the soda-water pattern, but of which one contained a modicum of brandy, and another some fluid magnesia. Everything in the room was disorderly and uncomfortable; and Gertrude's quick eye took in all this discomfort and its details in a glance, while she stepped lightly across the floor and approached the bed.

The sunlight was shining on Harvey Gore's face, and showed her how worn and livid, how ghastly and distorted, it was. He lay quite still, and took no notice of her presence. Instantly perceiving the effect of the green blind, Gertrude went to the window and pulled it up, then beckoned Mrs. Bush to her side, and once more drew near the bed.

"Mr. Gore," she said, "Mr. Gore! Do you not know me? Can you not look at me? Can you not speak to me? I am Mrs. Lloyd."

The sick man answered her only with a groan.

His face was an awful ashen gray ; his shoulders were so raised that the head seemed to be sunken upon the chest ; and his body lay upon the bed with unnatural weight and stillness. One hand was hidden by the bedclothes, the other clutched a corner of the pillow with cramped and rigid fingers. The two women exchanged looks of alarm.

“Was he looking like this when you saw him last—since I came ?” said Mrs. Lloyd, speaking in a distinct low tone directed completely into the ear of the listener.

“No, no ; nothing like so bad as he looks now,” said Mrs. Bush, whose distended eyes were fixed upon the patient with an expression of unmitigated dismay. “Did you ever see anyone die ?” she whispered to Gertrude Lloyd.

“No ; never.”

“Then you will see it, and soon.”

“Do you really think he is dying ?” and then she leaned over him, shook him very gently by the shoulder, loosened his hold of the pillow, and said again,

“Mr. Gore! Mr. Gore! Do you not know me? Can you not speak to me?”

Again he groaned, and then, feebly opening his eyes, so awfully glazed and hollow that Gertrude recoiled with an irrepressible start, made a movement with his head.

“He knows me,” whispered Gertrude to Mrs. Bush; “for God’s sake go for a doctor without an instant’s delay! I must stay with him.”

The landlady, dreadfully frightened, was only too glad to escape from the room.

For a few moments after she was left alone with the sick man Gertrude stood beside him quite still and silent; then he moved uneasily, again groaned, and made an ineffectual attempt to sit up in his bed. Gertrude tried to assist him; she passed her arms round his shoulders, and put all her strength to the effort to raise him, but in vain. The large heavy frame slipped from her hold, and sunk down again with ominous weight and inertness. Looking around in great fear, but still preserving her calmness, she perceived the bottle in which some brandy still remained. In

an instant she had filled a wine-glass with the spirit, lifted the sufferer's feeble head, and contrived to pour a small quantity down his throat. The stimulant acted for a little upon the dying man; he looked at her with eyes in which an intelligent purpose pierced the dull glaze preceding the fast-coming darkness, stretched his hand out to her, and drew her nearer, nearer. Gertrude bent over him until her chestnut hair touched his wan livid temples, and then, when her face was on a level with his own, he whispered in her ear.

* * * * *

Mrs. Bush had not gone many steps away from her own hall-door when she met Gilbert Lloyd. He was walking slowly, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his head bent, his eyes frowning and downcast, and his under-lip firmly held by his white, sharp, even teeth. He did not see Mrs. Bush until she came close up to him, and exclaimed,

“O, Mr. Lloyd, how thankful I am I've met you! The gentleman is very bad indeed—just

gone, sir,—and I was going for a doctor. There's not a moment to lose."

Gilbert Lloyd's face turned perfectly white.

"Impossible, Mrs. Bush," he said; "you must be mistaken. He was much better when I left him; besides, he was not seriously ill at all."

"I don't know about that, sir, and I can't stay to talk about it; I must get the doctor at once."

"No, no," said Lloyd, rousing himself; "I will do that. Where is the nearest? Tell me, and do you go back to him."

"First turn to the right, second door on the left," said Mrs. Bush, with unusual promptitude. "Dr. Muxky's; he isn't long established, but does a good business."

Gilbert Lloyd hurried away; and Mrs. Bush returned to the house, thinking only when she had reached it, that she had forgotten to mention his wife's arrival to Gilbert Lloyd.

* * * * *

When Lloyd entered the sick man's room, bringing with him Dr. Muxky, as that sandy-haired and youthful general practitioner was

called by his not numerous clients, he saw a female figure bending over the bed. It was not that of Mrs. Bush; he had passed her loitering on the stairs,—ostensibly that she might conduct the gentlemen to the scene of action, really because she dared not reënter the room unsupported by a medical presence. The figure did not change its attitude as they entered, and Dr. Muxky approached the patient with a professional gliding step. He was followed by Lloyd; who, however, stopped abruptly on the opposite side of the bed when he met the full unshrinking gaze of his wife's bright, clear, threatening eyes.

“May I trouble you to stand aside for a moment?” said Dr. Muxky courteously to Gertrude, who instantly moved, but only a very little way, and again stood quite still and quite silent. Dr. Muxky stooped over his patient, but only for a few seconds. Then he looked up at Gilbert Lloyd, and said hastily,

“I have been called in too late, sir; I'm afraid your friend is dead.”

“Yes,” said Gertrude quietly, as if the doctor

had spoken to her; "he is dead. He has been dead some minutes."

Gilbert Lloyd looked at her, but did not speak; the doctor looked from one to the other, but said nothing. Then Gertrude stretched out her hand and laid her fingers heavily upon the dead man's eyelids, and kept them there for several moments amid the silence. In a little while she steadily withdrew her hand, and without a word left the room.

On the drawing-room landing she found Mrs. Bush. That practised and cautious landlady, mindful of the possible prejudice of her permanent lodgers against serious illness and probable death in their immediate vicinity, raised her finger, as a signal that a low tone of voice would be advisable.

"Go upstairs; the doctor wants you," said Gertrude, and passed quickly down to the parlour. A few moments more, and she had put on her bonnet and shawl, opened the hall-door without noise, closed it softly, and was walking swiftly down the street towards the shore.

CHAPTER II.

PONDERED.

THE sandy-haired slim young man, whose name was Muxky, who was a member of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, and who amongst the few poor people of Brighton that knew of his existence enjoyed the brevet-rank of doctor, found himself in anything but a pleasant position. The man to see whom he had been called in was dead; there was no doubt of that. No pulsation in the heart, dropped jaw, fixed eyes—all the usual appearances—ay, and rather more than the usual appearances: “What we professionally call the *rigor mortis*—the stiffness immediately succeeding death, my dear sir, is in this case *very* peculiarly developed.” Mr. Muxky, in the course of his attendance at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, had seen many deathbeds, had inspected in an easy

and pleasant manner many dead bodies; but he had never seen one which had presented such an extraordinary aspect of rigidity so immediately after death. He approached the bed once more, turned back the sheet which Mrs. Bush had drawn over the face, and kneeling by the side of the bed, passed his hand over and under the body. As he moved, Gilbert Lloyd moved too, taking up his position close behind him, and watching him narrowly. For an instant a deep look of anxiety played across Gilbert Lloyd's face, the lines round the mouth deepened and darkened, the brows came down over the sunken eyes, and the under jaw, relaxing, lost its aspect of determination; but as Mr. Muxky turned from the bed and addressed him, Lloyd's glance was perfectly steady, and his face expressed no emotions stronger than those which under the circumstances every man would be expected to feel, and no man would care to hide.

“This is rather an odd experience, my dear sir,” said Mr. Muxky; “called in to see our poor friend, who has, as it were, slipped his cable

before my arrival. Our poor friend, now, was a—well—man of the world as you are—you will understand what I mean—our poor friend was a—free liver.”

Yes, Gilbert Lloyd thought that he was a man who ate and drank heartily, and never stinted himself in anything.

“Nev-er stinted himself in anything!” repeated Mr. Muxky, who had by this time added many years to his personal appearance, and entirely prevented the bystanders from gleaning any expression from his eyes, by the assumption of a pair of glasses of neutral tint—“nev-er stinted himself in anything! Ah, a great deal may be ascribed to that, my dear sir; a great deal may be ascribed to that!”

“Yes,” said Gilbert Lloyd carelessly; “if a man will take as much lobster-salad and Strasbourg pie as he can eat, with as much champagne and mcselle as he can carry; and if, in spite of the remonstrances of his friends, he will sit without his hat on the top of a drag, with the August sun beating down upon him—”

“Did he do that, my dear sir?—did he do that?”

“He did, indeed! Several of us implored him to be careful; but you might as well have spoken to the wind as to him, poor dear fellow. We told him that he’d probably have a—a—what do you call it?”

“General derangement of the system? Flux of blood to the—”

“No, no; sunstroke—that’s what I mean; sunstroke. Perigal, who was out in India in the Punjaub business—he was on our drag when poor Harvey was taken bad, and he said it was sunstroke all over—regular case.”

“Did he, indeed?” said Mr. Muxky. “Well, that’s odd, very odd! From the symptoms you have described, I imagined that it must have been something of the kind:—brain overdone, system overtaxed. In this railway age, Mr. Lloyd, we live such desperately rapid lives, concentrate so much mental energy and bodily fibre into a few years, that—”

“I’m glad you’re satisfied, Mr. Muxky,” said

Gilbert Lloyd, pulling out his purse. "It's a satisfaction in these melancholy cases to know that everything has been done, and that there was no chance of saving the poor fellow, even if—"

"I scarcely say that, Mr. Lloyd. A little blood-letting might, if taken at the exact moment—in *tempore veni*; you recollect the old quotation—might have been of some use. There's a prejudice just now against the use of the lancet, I know; but still— For me?" taking a crisp bank-note which Lloyd handed to him. "O, thank you, thank you! This is far too munifi—"

"The labourer, Mr. Muxky, is worthy of his hire," said Gilbert Lloyd; "and it is our fault—not yours—that you were summoned too late. But, as you just now remarked, it is impossible in these cases to know what is impending, or how nigh may be the danger. I was very much struck by that remark. And now good-afternoon, Mr. Muxky. I must go out and find my poor wife, who is quite upset by this unfortunate affair. Good-afternoon—not another word of

thanks, I beg; and any of the usual formalities in these matters—I don't know what they are—but certificates, and that kind of thing, we may look to you to settle? Thanks again. Good-day."

And Gilbert Lloyd shook hands with the overwhelmed Mr. Muxky, whose eyes gleamed even through the neutral-tinted glasses, and whose pale face burst into a pleased perspiration, as he crumpled the crisp bank-note into his waistcoat-pocket, and followed Mrs. Bush down the stairs.

"A sensible man that, Mrs. Bush," said he when he reached the first landing; "a very sensible, kind-hearted, clear-headed man. Under all the circumstances, you're very lucky in having had such a man in the house. No fuss, no preposterous excitement—everything quite proper, but thoroughly business-like."

"You're right, Dr. Muxky," responded the sympathetic landlady. "When I saw as clear as clear that that poor creature was going the way of all flesh—which is grass, and also dust and

ashes — and knew I'd got those Miss Twillows in the drawing-rooms, you might have knocked me down with a feather. Nervous is nothing to what the Miss Twillows is; and coming regular from Peckham for the sea-bathing now five years, regular as the month of July comes round; and giving no trouble, through bringing their own maid; and stopping on all September,—without perambulators in the passage, and children's boots, which after being filled with sand will *not* take the polish,—their leaving would be a loss to me which—”

Mrs. Bush stopped suddenly in her harangue, as the drawing-room door, by which they were standing, was cautiously opened, and an elderly female head was slowly protruded. It was a large head, and yet it had what is called a “skimpy” character. What little hair there was on it was of a mixed pepper-and-salt kind of colour, and gathered into two large roll-curls, one on either side of the head, in front, and into a thin wisp behind. In this wisp was stuck a comb, pendent from which was a little bit of black lace. The

features could not be defined, as the lower part of the face was entirely hidden in a handkerchief held to the nose, exhaling pungent vinegar. Mr. Muxky stared a little at this apparition—stared more when the head wagged and the mouth opened, and the word “Doctor?” was uttered in interrogative accent. Then Mr. Muxky, beginning to perceive how the land lay, said in his softest tones: “Yes, my dear madam, I *am* the doctor.”

The head dropped again, and again the lips opened. “Fever?” was what they said this time, while a skinny hand at the end of a skinny arm made itself manifest, pointing upwards.

“Fever,” repeated Mr. Muxky, “that has removed our poor friend upstairs?—nothing of the sort, my dear madam, I can assure you; nothing but—”

“Not smallpox?—don’t say it’s smallpox!” This from another voice, the owner of which was in the background, unseen. “O, Hannah, does he say it’s smallpox?”

“He don’t say anything of the kind, Miss

Twillow," interposed Mrs. Bush; "knowing that in the midst of life we are in death, specially sitting in hot suns without our hats on the tops of stage-coaches, and to say nothing of too much to drink. You've never been inconvenienced since you've been in this house, have you, m'm? and you won't be now. It isn't my fault, I'm sure; nor yet Dr. Muxky's; and, considering all things, not a great put-out, though doubtless upsetting to the nerves."

"That's just the point, Mrs. Bush," said Mr. Muxky, who was not going to lose the chance; "nothing to fear; but yet, some temperaments so constituted that—like the Æolian harp—the—the slightest breath of fright has an effect on them. If my poor services now could be of any use—"

"Yes, now do," said Mrs. Bush, "Miss Twillow, Miss Hannah; just see the doctor for a minute. You've had a shock, I'll allow, and it's natural you should be upset; but the doctor will put you right in a minute."

Thus Mr. Muxky secured two new patients; not a bad day's work.

While these matters were in progress in the house Gertrude had left, and the subdued bustle inevitably attendant upon the necessary care and the unavoidable household disorganisation which succeeds a death, even when the dead is only a stranger in the house where the solution of the enigma has come to him,—she was sitting on the shore close by the foamy edge of the waves, and thinking.

Gertrude had gone down to the shore across the broad road, now crowded with people out for the bright summer afternoon; with carriages and gigs, with vehicles of the highest elegance, and with such as had no pretence to anything but convenience; with pedestrians of every class, assembled with all sorts of objects, hygiene and flirtation being predominant. She had gone away down the slope, and on to the strip of pebbly sand; and where one of the wooden barriers marked out a measured space, she sat down on a seaweed-flecked heap of shingle, and began to think. The long line of the horizon, where the blue sea met the blue sky, parted only by a

narrow verge of light, broken white clouds, was before her—between it and her absent, troubled eyes lay the wide expanse of sea. A short space only parted her from the moving, restless, talking crowd upon the Esplanade; but her sense of solitude was complete. The ridge of the slope hid her; the soft splash of the sea, with its monotonous recurrence, soothed her ear, and deadened the sound of wheels and the murmur of voices; her eyes met only the great waters, across which sometimes a boat glided, on which sometimes a sea-bird's wing rested for an instant. As Gertrude sat there, with her arms extended and her hands tightly clasped together, with her head bent forward and her eyes fixed upon the distant line of the sea and sky, her thoughts obeyed her will, and formed themselves, consecutive, complete, and purposeful. The girl—for she was but a girl, after all—had brought thither a heavy trouble; to be taken out, looked at, weighed, examined. She had brought there a half-developed purpose, to be thought into maturity, to be fully fashioned and resolved upon. Before she should leave that

place she would have done these things; and when she should leave it, a new phase in her life would have begun. Ineffable sadness was in her brown eyes — grief and dread, which did not seem newly born there, but constant dwellers, only that to-day they had been suddenly awakened once again from temporary repose. If there had been anyone to see Gertrude, as she sat by the edge of the waves, and to note her face, with its concentrated and yet varying expression, that person, if an acute observer, would have been struck by the contrast between the eyes and the mouth. The character of the look in the eyes shifted and varied; there was fear in it, grief, weariness, disgust, sometimes even horror; and these expressions passed like the lights and shadows over a fair landscape. But the mouth did not vary; firm, closely shut,—so compressed that its tightness produced a white line above the red of the upper lip,—it expressed power and resolution, when that long process of thinking—too purposeful to be called a reverie—commenced, and it expressed power and resolution when at

length Gertrude rose. Hours had passed over her unheeded, as she sat by the sea; the afternoon had lengthened into the evening; the crowd of loungers had dispersed. She had heard, but not heeded, the church-bells ringing for evening service; and now silence was all around her, and the red flush of sunset was upon the sky and the sea. When she had risen from her seat of shingle, Gertrude stood for some minutes and looked along the shore, where her solitary figure seemed doubly lonely. Then she turned and scanned the long line of the houses and the road, on which a few scattered human beings only were moving. A strange reluctance to move possessed her; but at length she shook it off, and with a slight shudder turned her back upon the sea, fast becoming gray as the sun went down, and walked steadily, though not quickly, back to the lodging-house where she had left her husband.

As she drew near to the house, Gertrude looked up at the window of the room in which she had seen Harvey Gore die. It was open; but the green blind was closely drawn. Looking

upwards at the window, she did not perceive till she was close upon it that the house-door was slightly ajar; but as she raised her hand to the knocker, the door was opened widely by Mrs. Bush, and Gertrude, going into the passage, found Gilbert Lloyd there. The sudden sight of him caused her to start for an instant, but not perceptibly; and Mrs. Bush immediately addressed her with voluble questions and regrets.

Where had she been all this time? She had gone out without her lunch, and had she had nothing to eat? How uneasy she and Mr. Lloyd had been about her! (Mr. Lloyd had evidently secured by this time a high place in the good graces of Mrs. Bush.) Mr. Lloyd had been waiting and watching for her ever so long; and she, Mrs. Bush, as soon as ever the poor dear dead gentleman upstairs had been "put tidy,"—which was her practical mode of expressing the performance of the toilet of the dead,—had been also watching and waiting for Mrs. Lloyd's reappearance. Suspicion and scanty civility had given place in the manner of the worthy landlady—who was infi-

nately satisfied with the proper sense of what was due to her in the unfortunate position of affairs exhibited by Gilbert Lloyd—to anxiety for the comfort of the young lady whom she had so unwillingly received.

During the colloquy between Mrs. Bush and Gertrude, Gilbert Lloyd had been standing, awkwardly enough, in the passage, but without speaking. But when a pause came, and Gertrude approached the parlour-door, he spoke.

“Where have you been, Gertrude?” he asked sternly.

His wife stood still and answered, but did not look at him.

“I have been sitting by the sea-shore.”

“You must be cold and hungry, I should think.”

“I am neither.”

“I suppose you know you cannot remain here?”

“Why?”

He seemed a little at a loss for an answer; but replied, after a moment's pause :

“A death in the house is sufficient reason. Mrs. Bush can't attend to a lady-lodger, under the circumstances. You can go back to town in the morning; for to-night I shall take you to the nearest hotel.”

“Very well.”

She never looked at him; not by the most fleeting flicker of an eyelash did she address her face to him, though he looked steadily at her, trying to compel her glance. She went into the parlour, through the folding-door into the bedroom, collected the few articles which she had taken out of her travelling-bag, and returned, carrying it in her hand. Evidently all arrangements had been made by Gilbert Lloyd with Mrs. Bush: no more was said. Gertrude took a friendly leave of the landlady, and went out of the house, walking silently by her husband's side. He did not offer her his arm, and not a word was spoken between them until the door of a private sitting-room at the George had closed behind them. Then he turned savagely round upon her,

and said, in a thick low voice, "The meaning of this foolery?"

This time she looked at him—looked him straight in the face with the utmost calmness. There was not the least flush of colour in her pale face, not the slightest trembling of her lips, not the smallest flutter of her hands,—by which in woman agitation is so often betrayed,—as she said calmly, "You are polite, but mysterious. And I suppose the journey, or something, has rendered me a little dull. I don't quite follow you. What 'foolery' are you pleased to ask the meaning of?"

She had the best of it so far. She stood erect, facing the light, her head thrown back, her arm outstretched, with nothing of bravado, but with a good deal of earnestness in her manner and air. Gilbert Lloyd's head was sunk on his breast, his brow was knit over his frowning eyes, his lips tightly set, and his under-jaw was clenched and rigid. His hands were plunged into his pockets, and he had commenced to pace the room; but at his wife's question he stopped, and said, "What

foolery! Why, the foolery of your conduct in those lodgings this day; the foolery of your coming down, in the first place, when you weren't wanted, and of your conduct since you came."

"I came," said Gertrude, in a perfectly calm voice, and still looking him steadily in the face, "in pursuance of the arrangement between us. It was your whim, when last I saw you, to wish for my company here; and you settled the time at which I was to come. My 'foolery' so far consists in having exactly obeyed you."

"Your obedience is very charming," said Gilbert Lloyd with a sneer; "and no doubt I should have enjoyed your company as much as I generally do. Few men are blessed with wives embodying all the cardinal virtues. But circumstances have changed since we made that arrangement. I couldn't tell this man was going to die, I suppose?"

She had purposely turned her face away when her husband began to sneer at her, and was pretending to occupy herself with opening her travelling-bag; but as these words fell upon her

ear, she drew herself to her full height, and again looking steadily at him, said, "I suppose not."

"You suppose not! Why, of course not! By heavens, it's enough to drive a man to desperation to be tied for life to a white-faced cat like this, who stands opposite him repeating his words, and shows no more interest in him than— By Jove," he exclaimed, shaking his clenched fist at her, "I feel as if I could knock the life out of you!"

To have been struck by him would have been no novel experience on Gertrude's part. More than once in these paroxysms of temper he had seized her roughly by the arm or shoulder, leaving the livid imprint of his hand on her delicate flesh; and she fully expected that he would strike her now. But as he spoke he had been hastily pacing the room; and it was not until he stopped to menace her that he looked in her face, and saw there an expression such as he had never seen before. Anger, terror, misery, obstinacy, contempt,—all these passions he had often seen mirrored in Gertrude's features, but never the

aversion, the horror, the loathing which now appeared there. The look seemed to paralyse him, for in it he divined the feelings of which it was the reflex. His extended arm dropped by his side, and his whole manner changed, as he said, "There! enough of that! It was hard enough for me to have the trouble of poor Gore's illness to fight against, without anything else; and when you did come, Gertrude, I thought—well"—pulling himself together, as it were, he bent forward towards her, and with a soft look in his eyes and an inexpressible tenderness in his voice, whispered, "I thought you might have brought a word of cheer and comfort and—and love—to your poor old Gilbert, who—"

While speaking he gradually drew near to her, and advanced his hand until it touched her waist. Gertrude no sooner felt his clasp than, with a short sharp cry as if of bodily pain, she withdrew herself from it.

"Don't touch me!" she exclaimed, in a voice half choked with sobs. Her calmness was gone, and her whole system was quivering with emotion.

“For Heaven’s sake keep off! Never lay your touch on me, in kindness or in cruelty, again, or you will find that the ‘white-faced cat’ has claws, and can use them.”

Gilbert Lloyd stared for an instant in mute astonishment at his wife, who stood confronting him, her eyes sparkling like glowing coals in the midst of her pale face, her hair pushed back off her forehead, her hands tightly clasped behind her head. He was cowed by this sudden transformation, by this first act of overt rebellion on Gertrude’s part, and thought it best to temporise. So he said, “Why, Gertrude darling, my little lady, what’s all—”

“No more of that, Gilbert,” she interrupted, calming herself by a strong effort, unlocking her hands, and again confronting him. “Those pet names are things of the past now—of the past, which must be to us even more dead and more forgotten than it is to most people.”

The solemnity of her tone and of her look angered him, and he said shortly, “Don’t preach, please. Spare yourself that.”

“I am not preaching, Gilbert, and I am not—as you sometimes tell me—acting; but I have something to say which you must hear.”

“Must, eh? Well, come down off your stilts, and say it.”

“Gilbert Lloyd,” said Gertrude, “this day you and I part for ever. Don’t interrupt me,” she said, as he made a hasty gesture; “hear me out. I knew that this would be the end of our hasty and ill-advised marriage; but I did not think the end would come so soon. It *has* come now, and no power on earth would induce me to alter my determination.”

“O, that’s it, is it?” said Lloyd, after a minute’s silence. “And this is my wife, if you please; this is the young lady who promised to love, honour, and obey! This woman, who now coolly talks about our parting for ever, is one who has hung about my neck a thousand times and—”

“No,” exclaimed Gertrude, interrupting him, “no! This” (touching herself lightly on the breast) “is your wife indeed—is the woman who bears your name and has borne your caprices;

but" (again touching herself) "this is not the woman that left London this morning. I wish to heaven I were—I wish to heaven I were!"

She uttered these last words in a low plaintive tone that was almost a wail, and covered her face with her hands.

"This is mere foolery and nonsense," said Lloyd, after a momentary pause. "You wish you were, indeed! If you're not the same woman, what the devil has changed you?"

"Do you want to know?" she asked suddenly, looking up at him,—not eagerly, boldly, or defiantly, but with the expression of horror and loathing which he had previously noticed.

"No!" he replied with an oath; "why should I waste my time listening to your string of querulous complaints? You want a separation, do you? Well, I am not disposed to say 'no' to any reasonable request; but if I agree to this, mind, it's not to be the usual business."

Finding he paused, Gertrude said, "I scarcely understand you."

"Well, I mean that 'parting for ever' does

not mean coming together again next month, to live in a fool's paradise for a week, and then hate each other worse than ever. If we part, we part for ever, which means that we never meet again on earth—or rather, that we begin life afresh, with the recollection of the last few months completely expunged. We have neither of us any relations to worry us with attempts at reconciliation; not half-a-dozen men know of the fact of my having been married, and none of them have ever seen you. So that on both sides we start entirely free. It is not very likely that we shall ever run across each other's path in the future; but if we do, we meet as entire strangers, and the fact of our having been anything to one another must never be brought forward to prejudice any scheme in which either of us may be engaged. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly."

"And does what I propose meet your views?"

"Entirely."

"That's right. Curious," said Lloyd, with a short, sharp laugh,—“curious that just as we are

about to part, we should begin to agree. However, you're right, I suppose; we could not hit it; we were always having tremendous rows, and now each of us can go our own way; and," he added, under his breath, as he glanced at Gertrude's expressive face and trim figure, "I don't think I've had the worst of the bargain."

After a moment's silence, Lloyd said, "What do you propose to do?"

"I have no schemes at present," Gertrude replied; "and if I had, you have no right to ask about them."

"You've not taken long to shake off your harness, by Jove!" said Lloyd bitterly. "However, whatever you do hereafter, you must have something to start with now." He took out a pocket-book, and counted from it some bank-notes. "I've not done so badly as people thought," said he; "and here are two hundred pounds, all my available capital. You shall have half of this—here it is." He pushed a roll of notes towards her. She took it without a word, and placed it in her travelling-bag. "You'll sleep here to-

night, I suppose; and had better clear out of this place early to-morrow. I shall have to stay until after the funeral. And now, I suppose, that's about all?"

"All," said Gertrude, taking up her travelling-bag and moving towards the door.

"Won't you—won't you say 'good-bye'?" said Lloyd, putting out his hand as she passed him.

Gertrude made him no reply; but she gathered her dress tightly round her, as though to preserve it from his touch; and on glancing at her face Gilbert Lloyd saw there the same look of horror and loathing which had paralysed him even in the midst of his furious rage.

CHAPTER III.

PROPOSED.

WHEN Gertrude left her husband's presence, without giving him any clue to her intentions for the future, something like bewilderment fell upon her for a little. It was not grief—no such sentiment had any place or share in the tumult of her mind. The arrangement which had been made, the agreement that had been come to, was a distinct and positive relief to her. It would have been a relief even before the late occurrences which had brought things to a crisis, and Gertrude neither denied nor lost sight of that fact. It had become a positive necessity, not to be avoided, not to be deferred; and it was done. When the door closed behind her, as she trod the narrow passage which divided the sitting-room in which their last interview had taken place from the bedroom in which

she was to pass the night, Gertrude knew that she was relieved—was even, in a dull, hardly-ascertained sort of way, glad, and yet she was bewildered. There was more horror in her mind than sorrow. For the hope and happiness of her own life, thus early blighted in their first bloom, she had no sentimental pity; she could not afford to think about them, even if she had had time, which she had not. The circumstances of her life had aided the natural disposition and habits of her mind, and brought her to look steadily at facts rather than feelings, at results and actions rather than at influences and illusions of the past. As a matter of fact, her life in all its great meanings was past, and the best thing she could do was to banish it from memory, to dismiss it from contemplation as completely and as rapidly as possible.

Gertrude had been for many hours without food, and had undergone much and various mental agitation. She was conscious that the bewilderment which pervaded her mind was in a great degree referable to physical exhaustion, and she resolved to postpone thought and action until the

morning. She rang a bell, ordered a slight meal to be served to her in her room, and having eaten and drank, went to bed so completely overpowered by the fatigue and restrained excitement of the day, that she fell asleep immediately. The calm summer night, unvisited by darkness, passed over, and witnessed only her unbroken rest—a grand privilege of her youth.

Gilbert Lloyd remained for some time in the room where Gertrude had left him, walking to and fro before the windows, lost in thought. The passion and excitement of the day had not been without their effect on him also, and certain components mingled with them in his case which had no existence in the sum of Gertrude's suffering—doubt, dread, suspense, uncertainty. What did Gertrude mean? What still remained hidden, after that terrible interview in which so much had been revealed? What was still unexplained, after all that dreary and hopeless explanation? These questions, which he could not answer, which it was his best hope might never be answered, troubled Gilbert Lloyd sorely. That the agreement

which had been made between him and his wife was highly satisfactory to him he knew as clearly as Gertrude knew it; but in the way in which it had been brought about, in the manner of its decision, the advantage had been Gertrude's. Gilbert Lloyd did not like that, though this parting was so utter and so final that he might well have dismissed all such considerations, and turned his back upon the past, as he had proposed to do in reality, and as he did not entertain a doubt that Gertrude would do in downright real earnest, never bestowing so much thought or memory on him again as to produce the smallest practical effect upon her future life. He knew that he had achieved a great success that day; that this final separation between himself and Gertrude was an event in every way desirable, and which he would have hailed with satisfaction at any period since he had wearied of her and begun to regard marriage as the very worst and stupidest of all mistakes;—a mental process which had commenced surprisingly soon after he had made the blunder. But, somehow, Gilbert Lloyd did

not taste the flavour of success. It was not sufficiently unmingled for the palate of a man of despotic self-will, and the ultra intolerance of complete callousness and scoundrelism. At length he checked himself in his monotonous walk, and muttering, "Yes, I'll go back; it's safest," he rang the bell.

His summons was not obeyed with remarkable alacrity—waiters and chambermaids had had a hard time of it at the George of late; but a waiter did at length present himself. By this time the news of a "sporting gent's" death in the immediate vicinity had reached the George, and the man looked at Lloyd with the irrational curiosity invariably excited by the sight of anyone who has been recently in close contact with crime, horror, or grief.

"I rang to tell you I shall send my traps down from Pavilion-place, but I shall not sleep here," said Lloyd; "I shall come up to breakfast in the morning, though."

"Very good, sir," said the man; and Gilbert Lloyd took up his hat and walked out. He called

for a minute at Pavilion-place, and spoke a few words to Mrs. Bush, who gave him a latchkey, then went away again; and the morning hours were well on when he let himself quietly into the lodging-house and threw himself on the bed in the back parlour.

The window of the "two-pair front" was open, and the fresh breeze, sea-scented, blew in through the aperture, and faintly stirred the drapery of the bed. Presently the sun rose, and before long a bright ray streamed through the green blind, and a wavering bar of light shimmered fantastically across the sheet which decently veiled the dead man's face.

Gertrude Lloyd went down to the railway station early on the following morning, and before Gilbert had made his appearance at the George. She had not passed unnoticed at that hostelry. In the first place, she was too young and handsome to pass unnoticed anywhere during a sojourn of sufficient duration to give people time to look at her, if so disposed. In the second place, there

was something odd about her. She was evidently the wife of the gentleman who had brought her to the hotel, and had then changed his mind about staying, and gone away so abruptly. Here she was now going away without seeing him; calling for her bill and paying it, "quite independent like," as a chambermaid, with a very proper reverence for masculine superiority, remarked; setting off alone, perfectly cool and comfortable. "There's been a tiff, that's it, and more's the pity," was the conclusion arrived at by the waiter and the chambermaid, who agreed that Gertrude was very pretty, and "uncommon young, to be sure, to be so very off-handed."

Mrs. Bush, too, did not omit to inquire for the handsome young lady who had got "the better" of her so very decidedly. "She's off to London, first train in the morning," said Lloyd. "There was no good in her staying here for all this sad affair. *I* can't avoid it, of course; but she is better out of it all." After which explanation, Mrs. Bush thought, sagaciously, that leaving one's husband in an unpleasant position, and get-

ting safe out of it one's self, was not a very affectionate proceeding; and that Mrs. Lloyd, if she really was very fond of her husband, at all events did not make the fact obtrusively evident.

But Gertrude Lloyd had not gone to London. Her mind had been actively at work from an early hour in the morning, and strengthened and refreshed by rest, she had been able to employ it to good purpose. Her first resolve was not to go to the lodgings she and her husband had occupied in London any more. She had no wish to embarrass his proceedings in any way. She desired to carry out their contract in both letter and spirit, and to disappear at once and completely from his life. So she left a note for Gilbert Lloyd at the George, containing the words: "Please have everything belonging to me sent to Mrs. Bloxam's;" and then took her way to the station, and her place in an early train for Worthing. Gertrude was alone in the carriage, and she profited by the circumstance to tear up and throw out of window a letter or two, and sundry bills on which her name, "Mrs. Lloyd," appeared. Her

initials only were stamped on her travelling-bag. The letters disposed of, she drew off her wedding-ring, and without an instant's hesitation for sentimental regret, dropped it on to the rails. Then she sat still and looked out at the landscape. Her face was quite calm now, but the traces of past agitation were on it. The first person to whom Gertrude Lloyd should speak to-day would not be struck by the contrast between her assured, self-possessed manner and her extreme youth, as Mrs. Bush had been impressed by it only yesterday.

Arrived at Worthing, Gertrude had no difficulty in securing quiet and respectable lodgings, away from the sea, and not far out of the town. It was in a small house, forming one of a row of small houses, with climbing roses about the windows, and common but fragrant flowers in a lili-putian strip of garden-plot on either side of the door. On the opposite side of the road was a row of gardens corresponding to the houses, remarkable for numerous arbours of curiously small dimensions and great variety and ingenuity of construction; likewise for the profusion and lux-

uriance with which they grew scarlet-runners and nasturtiums. In one of these houses Gertrude engaged a sunny parlour and bedroom for a week certain; and then, having explained to the woman of the house that she was a governess, and was about to enter on a new situation, but was not certain when she would be required to proceed to the house of her employers, she set herself to the carrying out of the plans she had formed that morning, and, as a first step, wrote the following letter:

“7 Warwick-place, Worthing.

“Monday.

“MY DEAR MRS. BLOXAM,—You will probably be very much surprised to receive a letter from me, and I am not less astonished to find myself writing to you. Though you were kind to me, after a fashion, while I lived at the Vale House, the circumstances under which I quitted your protection, and the events which have since occurred, were of a nature to render me unwilling to open up any communication with you, and to make it extremely improbable that I should ever

be called on to do so. I retain some pleasant and grateful recollections of you and of my childhood, when I was, on the whole, happy; and I remember in particular, and with especial gratitude, that you put down, with the high hand of authority, the very natural inclination of the other girls to ridicule and oppress me, because I had no relations to give me presents, take me out, and beg half-holidays for all the pupils on the strength of their visits, and because my holidays were always passed at school. You will wonder what I am coming to, and why, if it be anything important, I should recall these seemingly trivial things by the way; but I do so in order to remind myself, and to gain courage in so doing, of the only protection and friendship I have ever received from a woman,—now, when I need protection and friendship very, very much, and am about to ask you to extend them to me.

“When I left you as I did, and married the man who had induced me to deceive you as I did (do not suppose I want to extenuate my own share in the matter, or throw the blame on him

because I mention him thus), you told me, in the only letter you ever addressed to me, that I had made a bad mistake, and should inevitably find it out sooner or later. You were distinctly and unerringly right. I did make a bad mistake—a worse mistake than anyone but myself can ever know or guess; and I have found it out sooner instead of later. I have known it for a long time; but now circumstances have arisen which oblige me to act on my knowledge, and a separation has taken place between my husband and myself. Not a separation in the ordinary sense, with the tie repudiated and yet retained; but a separation by which each has undertaken to cease to exist for the other. I have no relations, so far as I know. If I have any, you and you alone are aware of the fact, and know who they are. I have no prejudices to offend, no position to forfeit. Gilbert Lloyd and I have parted never to meet again, as we both hope; never, under any circumstances, to recognise or interfere with one another. I have no friends, except I may venture to call you a friend; and to you alone can I now

turn for assistance. I would say for advice, but that the time for that is past. There is nothing to be done now but to act upon the resolution which has been taken.

“My plan for the future is this : I have 100*l.*, and a voice whose quality you know, and which has improved since I was at the Vale House ; so that I know it to be of the best kind, and in the best order, for concert-singing at least, perhaps ultimately for opera. I intend to become a public singer ; but I must have more teaching, and the means of living in the mean time ; so that the small sum in my possession may be expended upon the teaching and training of my voice. From many indications, which I perfectly remember, but need not enter into here, I have reason to believe that I was a profitable pupil to you ; that from some source unknown to me you received sums of money for my maintenance and education of an amount which was very well worth having. I do not say this in any way to disparage the habitual kindness with which you treated me, and which I have always acknow-

ledged gratefully, but because I am about to propose a bargain to you, and wish to assure myself that I have some grounds for doing so, and for counting upon your acquiescence.

“ Will you receive me at the Vale House for one year free of charge, in the capacity of a teacher for the junior classes, and giving me sufficient time to enable me to take music-lessons and practise singing? If you will do this, and thus enable me, if I find my voice fulfils my expectations, to earn a livelihood for myself in an independent fashion, I will undertake to repay the cost out of my earnings. Possessing, as you do, the knowledge, if not of my parentage, at least of some person who became voluntarily responsible for my support during several years, you may perhaps be able, unless I am considered to have sacrificed all claim on my unknown connections by my marriage, to procure from them a little more assistance for me; but you must not make any attempt to do so if such an attempt should involve the revelation of my secret. I presume, if anyone exists whom it concerned, you made

known my marriage. That circumstance is the last to be known about me ; henceforth Gertrude Lloyd has no more existence than Gertrude Keith.

“If you should accede to my request, it will be necessary for me to know whether any of the girls now under your charge were at the Vale House when I left it, also whether you have any servants now likely to recognise me. I shall await your answer with much anxiety. Should it be unfavourable, I must endeavour to devise some other method of carrying out the fixed purpose of my future life ; and at present no possible alternative presents itself to my mind. In conclusion, I beg that you will decide quickly. I shall be here only one week ; that expired, if you do not answer me, or if you answer me unfavourably, I must face the problem to which just now I see no solution. Address Miss Grace Lambert.—Yours sincerely,

“GERTRUDE LLOYD.”

CHAPTER IV.

SETTLED.

THE Vale House, Hampstead, was admirably suited in point of size and situation for a boarding-school or "establishment" for young ladies. It stood in its own grounds, which, though not really extensive, had been made the most of, and contrived to look as if there were a great deal more of them than there really was; and it commanded an extensive prospect from the upper windows, well elevated above the jealous walls which guarded the youth and beauty committed to Mrs. Bloxam's charge from contact with the outer world. Occasionally, or at least in one instance, as will presently appear, the security had not been altogether so inviolable as might have been desired; but, on the whole, the "establishment" at Vale House maintained and deserved

a high character. A heavy, square, roomy, red-brick mansion, with its windows cased in white stone, and a coat-of-arms sculptured in the same material, but now nearly undecipherable, inserted over the heavy mahogany hall-door,—the Vale House belonged to a period of architecture when contract-building was unknown, when the art of “running-up” houses was yet undiscovered, and a family mansion among the middle-classes meant a house in which fathers and sons and grandsons intended to live and die, unbeguiled by “splendid opportunities” into constant migrations and rapid changes in their style and manner of living.

The Vale House had, however, suffered from the changes and innovations of the age; and the grandson of its last hereditary inhabitant now dwelt in splendour in a west-end “place,” forming an “annexe” to a square of ultra-fashionable pretensions and performances, and looked and spoke as though he had never even heard the name of a locality more northern or more distant from the centre of civilisation than the

Marble Arch. If the Townleys were oblivious of the Vale House, so was the Vale House of them. Except among such of the inhabitants of Hampstead as were careful and religious conservators of tradition, the origin and history of the Vale House had been forgotten; and a general notion prevailed that it had always been a school. The pupils—with the exception of such as were of a romantic turn of mind and given to the association of all old houses having plenty of room in them with the *Orphan of the Forest* and the *Children of the Abbey*—hated the place, and believed that it must always have witnessed the incarceration of unoffending girlhood. The ancient and much-effaced armorial bearings awakened no compassionate respect in the minds of these haughty young creatures, but rather a lively scorn. “Old Bloxam was only a sea-captain, and she was a governess in some old lord’s family, and they set her up in the school, and she gives herself airs as if she was a lady,” they would remark, under the influence of irritation, arising from causes gastronomic or otherwise; and the

caricaturing of these armorial bearings was a favourite *jeu d'esprit* among the livelier and cleverer section of Mrs. Bloxam's pupils.

The school at the Vale House had been of late years a very prosperous undertaking. Mrs. Bloxam's connection was among the rich and respectable mercantile community, not the shop-keeping, be it known: she observed with the utmost strictness the distinction between wholesale and retail trades, and especially affected the learned professions. In Gertrude's time, two daughters of a Scotch baronet had effectively represented the real aristocracy; but they were "finished" long since, and had returned to the land of their birth, having learned to braid their sandy locks, and to tone down their hereditary freckles, and equally hereditary accents, to the admiration of all Glen Houlaghan. The real aristocracy was quite unrepresented at the Vale House, but the "British-merchant" element flourished there. Mrs. Bloxam had prospered of late years, and was now in circumstances which permitted her to contemplate retiring from the

labours of school-keeping, — in which she had never pretended to herself to find a congenial occupation,—as a not impossible, indeed not even a very remote, contingency.

Mrs. Bloxam was not at all like the conventional schoolmistress; she as little resembled the Pinkerton as the Monflathers type; and despite the contemptuous comments of her pupils was very ladylike indeed, both in appearance and manners. She was a tall slight woman, very fair of hair and complexion, with blue eyes, which were a little hard in expression, and a little shifty; with an inexpressive mouth, a graceful figure, and a good deal of character and decision in her voice, gestures, and movements. She had purchased the Vale House from its former proprietor, a distant relative of her own and, like herself, a schoolmistress, on highly advantageous terms, when she was a new-made widow, and a very young woman; and now she hoped, after a year or two, to dispose of it on terms by no means so advantageous to the purchaser. But this hope Mrs. Bloxam had not spoken of to anyone. She

was of silent and secretive temperament, and liked to make up her mind completely, and in every detail, to any plan of action which she contemplated before making it known to any friend or acquaintance. Her man of business was Mrs. Bloxam's sole confidant, and even he knew no more of her affairs than was indispensable to their safe and profitable conduct.

Mr. Dexter would have been as ignorant as any mere acquaintance of Mrs. Bloxam's—as any of the young girls asleep in the white beds, standing in long ranges in the “lofty and well-ventilated dormitories” which formed so important a feature in the prospectus that eloquently set forth the advantages of the Vale House “establishment”—of the nature of the contents of a bundle of letters which Mrs. Bloxam set herself to peruse, late on the same evening on which Gertrude Lloyd's letter reached her well-shaped hands. Only one individual in the world besides Mrs. Bloxam knew that the letters which she was now engaged in reading had ever been written; and their writer would probably have

been surprised—as they did not contain any guarantees for the payment of money—had he known that they were still in existence.

Gertrude's letter had reached Mrs. Bloxam just at the hour at which the concluding ceremonial of the school-day routine was about to be performed. She laid it aside until prayers and the formal leave-taking for the night insisted upon at the Vale House as essential to the due inculcation of good breeding had been gone through; and then, in the welcome retirement and solitude of her own sitting-room, seated before her own particular bureau, and with her own particular supper in tempting perspective, Mrs. Bloxam read, not without sympathy mingling with her astonishment, the letter of her quondam pupil.

Mrs. Bloxam read the letter once and laid it down, and thought very profoundly for some minutes. Then she took it up and read it again, and once more fell into a fit of musing. The bureau before which she had seated herself had a number of small drawers at the side. One of

these Mrs. Bloxam opened, and selected from among its neatly-arranged contents a packet, tied with green ribbon and docketed: "Lord S——, from 185- to 186-." The parcel contained twenty letters, and Mrs. Bloxam read them all through. The task did not occupy much time; the writing was large and clear, her sight was strong and quick. When she had read the letters, she replaced them in the order which she had temporarily disturbed, retied the packet, and locked it away in the drawer whence she had taken it. Then she arranged a sheet of paper on the blotting-pad before her, took up a pen, and began to write with a rapid hand what was evidently intended to be a long letter.

But in the middle of the third page Mrs. Bloxam changed her mind. "Safer not, better not," she muttered to herself; "the written letter remains. Witness these;" and she inclined her pen-handle towards the drawer in which she had just replaced the packet of letters; "time will show whether she had better know, or not know."

Then Mrs. Bloxam tore the sheet, the third

page of which she had begun to write on, into fragments sufficiently minute to defy the curiosity and the ingenuity of the most prying and ingenious of housemaids, and replaced it by another, on which she wrote the following words :

“ The Vale House, Hampstead.

“ Tuesday night.

“ MY DEAR GERTRUDE,—I have your letter. I accede to your request, and will make arrangements in reference to the proposal which you have submitted to me. None of the girls now here have any recollection of you. There are several younger members of the families whose older girls were here ; but your change of name prevents that being of any consequence. The servants were all changed at the Easter Term. Let me know when it will suit you to come here ; and believe me yours sincerely,

“ ELINOR BLOXAM.”

When she had read this brief note over, addressed it to Miss Grace Lambert, and placed it in the appointed spot for all letters to be

despatched by the morning post, Mrs. Bloxam sat down to her solitary supper with a well-satisfied expression of countenance.

It was nearly eleven years since Gertrude Keith, a handsome, intelligent, and self-willed child of eight years old, had been confided to the care of Mrs. Bloxam and the advantages, educational and otherwise, of the Vale House. The letters which Mrs. Bloxam had read, that summer night, formed the greater part of all the correspondence which had been addressed to her by the individual who had placed the child under her protection, and whose confidence Mrs. Bloxam had won, and to a certain extent undeniably deserved. It had been stipulated that Gertrude Keith was to be kept in ignorance of her parentage, and of the circumstances under which she had been placed in Mrs. Bloxam's establishment; and this condition the schoolmistress had conscientiously observed. Gertrude knew nothing of her own origin. She was believed by her companions, and she believed herself, to be an orphan girl, without any living relatives.

Gertrude Keith was the natural daughter of Lord Sandilands, a nobleman whose wild youth had given place to a correct and irreproachable middle age, which stage of life he had now passed, and was beginning the downward descent. He had placed the child under the care of Mrs. Bloxam, who had been formerly a governess in the family of his sister, Lady Marchmont, and who retained the confidence and regard of her former employers, after she had made the adventurous and unsuccessful experiment of matrimony. Certain circumstances connected with the little girl's birth and the early death of her ill-starred mother made Lord Sandilands shrink from seeing her, with strange and strong aversion; and one of the conditions to which he had required Mrs. Bloxam's consent and adherence was, that his name was never to be spoken to the child, and that, except in the event of her illness or death, he was to be spared all communications respecting her, except at certain stated intervals. These conditions had been scrupulously observed; and Gertrude's childhood

had been as happy as any childhood passed under such exceptional conditions could be. She was a handsome, healthy, brave, independent-spirited child, who did not give much trouble, and who held her own against the envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness of that world in miniature—a girls' boarding-school. As for Mrs. Bloxam, she liked the handsome, sturdy child, and she liked the stylish graceful girl, who developed herself so rapidly from that promising childhood. Then Gertrude was not a troublesome, while she was a very lucrative, pupil; and there was an agreeable certainty about the very liberal payments made on her account by Lord Sandilands, and an equally agreeable uncertainty about the period of the girl's removal from the Vale House, which formed an exception to the rule in general cases; and Mrs. Bloxam highly appreciated both these advantages. A portion of the correspondence which Mrs. Bloxam had read on the evening on which she had received Gertrude's letter referred to the time when she should have attained to womanhood, and her school-days

should be over. It was Lord Sandilands' wish that the arrangement made for her in her childhood should continue; that Mrs. Bloxam should act as her protectress; that the girl should remain with her, until she should feel indisposed to stay at the Vale House any longer, or should decide upon some manner of life for herself. "In any of these cases," said Gertrude's unknown father in one of his letters, "on your communicating the facts to me, I will make the best arrangement for Gertrude within my power."

It was not very long after this had been written, though much before the time at which either her father or Mrs. Bloxam had contemplated the probability of any change in Gertrude's life, or of the girl's taking her destiny into her own hands, that an accident made her acquainted with Gilbert Lloyd. She had not shared any of the early romance and follies of her companions: the "young gentlemen" of Dr. Waggle's "establishment" had had no charm, singly or collectively, for her; the doctor, the chemist, the

music and drawing masters, even the Italian signor, who made singing-lessons a delight, and was so fascinating, though he used his hair-brush sparingly, and his nail-brush not at all,—each and all were perfectly without attraction or danger for the young girl, who seemed to ignore or despise all the petty flirtations and manoeuvrings of her schoolfellows.

Of and for not one of the young girls under her care had Mrs. Bloxam less fear or anxiety. Gertrude was proud and stately, and though tall for her seventeen years, and firm as well as graceful of outline, and though she had made fair progress with her education, and in her musical studies was notably in the van, there was something childlike about her still, something which kept Mrs. Bloxam in a happy condition of unsuspecting tranquillity.

But all Gertrude Keith's childlike peace and passionless calm vanished when she met Gilbert Lloyd, at a house where Mrs. Bloxam was in the habit of visiting during the vacations, and whither she brought Gertrude, in order to avoid

leaving her to the portentous solitude of the Vale House, in the absence of her companions. The girl fell in love with the young man—who paid her quiet, stealthy, underhand attentions—with a suddenness and a vehemence which would have alarmed anyone who loved her, for the future of a woman endowed with so imaginative, sensitive, and passionate a nature. All the dormant romance, of which no one had suspected the existence in Gertrude's nature, whose awakening no one perceived, when the time came was aroused into force and action, and the girl was transformed. Now was the time at which the instinct, the care, the love, the caution of a mother, would have been needed to guide, direct, and save Gertrude from her own undisciplined fancy, from her own untaught impulses. But Gertrude had no such aid extended to her. Mrs. Bloxam, a good woman in her way, and of more than average intelligence, had no feelings towards the girl which even bordered on the maternal; and the habitual authority of the schoolmistress was naturally in

some degree abrogated by the fact that it was vacation-time. She was not of a very confiding or unsuspecting disposition; but she had, unconsciously to herself, to deal in Gilbert Lloyd with one who knew well how to lull suspicion, and he in his turn found an apt pupil in Gertrude. They met again and again; the girl's beauty, freshness, and daring had a strong charm for a man like Lloyd; and for the first time since he had had to calculate life's chances closely, and to rely upon himself for the indulgences and luxuries which alone made life worth having to a man of his temperament, he committed the blunder of gratifying feeling at the expense of prudence. He did not fall in love with Gertrude quite so precipitately or so violently as she fell in love with him, but the second meeting did for him what the first had done for her; and in Gilbert Lloyd's case, to form a desire was to resolve to achieve it, at whatever cost to others, at whatever sacrifice of personal honour, provided it did not entail public disgrace, such gratification might necessitate or involve.

The vacation enjoyed by the pupils, and not less enjoyed by the proprietor, of the Vale House, was within three days of its expiration, when a housemaid belonging to the establishment reported Miss Gertrude Keith "missing;" and the search and anxiety consequent on the intelligence were terminated by a letter from the fugitive, informing Mrs. Bloxam that she had been married that morning to Gilbert Lloyd by special license, and was then about to start for a short continental excursion.

Mrs. Bloxam was very much shocked, and very much annoyed, in the first place, that the event should have happened at all; in the second, that Gilbert Lloyd, of whom she knew something, and cordially disapproved what she did know, should be the hero of an affair certain to bring her into discredit with Lord Sandilands, and likely, if she did not contrive to hide it very skilfully, to bring her school into discredit with the public. She had no doubt as to the veracity of Gertrude's story, no doubt that Lloyd had really married her—a copy of the certificate of the marriage was

enclosed in her letter; but she bitterly regretted her own blindness and negligence, and, to do her justice, felt not a little for the girl's probable fate.

Mrs. Bloxam rapidly perceived the advantage to be derived from the circumstance that the untoward event of Gertrude's elopement had taken place during the vacation. She summoned all the servants, informed them that Miss Keith had left the Vale House under certain unpleasant circumstances which it was not necessary to explain; that any indiscreet reference to the circumstance made to the other pupils on the reassembling of the school would be visited by condign punishment in the forfeiture of the offender's place; and then dismissed them, to assemble downstairs in their own domain and learn all the particulars from the housemaid, who was in Gertrude's confidence, and had been liberally bribed by Gilbert Lloyd to facilitate and connive at all the preliminary meetings which had resulted in the elopement.

To this proceeding succeeded a period of

reflection on the part of Mrs. Bloxam. Should she inform Lord Sandilands of the events that had taken place? Should she tell him how much sooner than she had calculated upon, Gertrude had taken the decision of her fate into her own hands? Should she tell him that the time to which she had looked forward as an eventuality, which might come about in a couple of years, had already taken place, and that now was the opportunity for fulfilling the intentions which he had continuously, if vaguely, expressed in his letters to her? Mrs. Bloxam debated this question with herself, and self-interest loudly and persistently advised her to silence. Lord Sandilands had never seen the girl, had never even hinted at seeing her, had indeed distinctly disclaimed any intention of ever seeing her. Nothing could be more improbable than that he should find out what had occurred. If she should continue to apply to his solicitor for the money which he was authorised to pay her at certain intervals, no suspicion of any change in the state of affairs could arise. And the money would be very welcome to her. By

resorting to the simple expedient of holding her tongue, she might avoid scandal, avoid doing herself the injury which she must necessarily inflict upon her school by the admission of an elopement having taken place from within its walls, and secure a sum of money which would be both useful and agreeable. To be sure, the day of reckoning must come, but not yet; and if ever she should have it in her power to do any service or kindness to the poor misguided girl, who would certainly inevitably come, or she (Mrs. Bloxam) was much mistaken in Gilbert Lloyd, to need service and kindness before much time should have gone over her, she pledged herself, to herself, to show her all the kindness in her power, unreservedly and heartily. Thus did Mrs. Bloxam make the devil's bargain with herself; and very successfully did she pursue the line of conduct which she had determined to follow, from the period of Gertrude Keith's elopement to that evening on which she had received the no-longer-deluded girl's letter, two years and a half later.

With the fatal facility which results from

impunity, Mrs. Bloxam had almost ceased to remember Gertrude, and had quite ceased to feel uneasiness regarding the concealment she had practised towards Lord Sandilands, and the appropriation of the sum of money which he paid to her yearly. But with the perusal of Gertrude's letter the subject again arose in her mind, and, as was Mrs. Bloxam's habit, she faced it steadily and considered it maturely. Gertrude's proposition was not an entirely pleasing one. There was a certain responsibility attaching to assuming the charge of a young woman so strangely situated; and the present acceptance of the trust might involve Mrs. Bloxam in difficulties and dilemmas to which she was by no means blind or insensible. But, on the other hand, she saw in Gertrude's return a perfect security against the divulgement of her decidedly unpleasant secret. Should Lord Sandilands now make any inquiry about Gertrude, she should experience no difficulty in satisfying him or any representative he might send. Even should the change of name become known—a contingency which a little well-timed manœu-

vering might prevent—Mrs. Bloxam could afford to trust to her own ingenuity to find a reason for that proceeding which should satisfy all querists. Gertrude's own interest and safety were now concerned in preserving the secret of her elopement, her marriage, and the duration of her absence from the Vale House; while the offer of her services as teacher to the junior classes was sufficiently valuable to leave Mrs. Bloxam still a gainer to the full extent of the annual stipend, even when Gertrude's maintenance and needful expenses should be taken into account—a calculation which Mrs. Bloxam made very accurately and minutely, and which was very much in her line.

The result of the cogitations to which Mrs. Bloxam gave herself up after she had read Gertrude's letter has already appeared. On the following day she received from Mrs. Lloyd a few brief lines of acknowledgment and thanks; and the Saturday of the week which had begun with the death of Harvey Gore and the final parting between Gilbert Lloyd and his young wife witnessed

the installation of a new inmate, holding an anomalous position—partly parlour-boarder and partly pupil-teacher — at the Vale House. This new inmate was known to her companions and pupils, in short to all concerned, as Miss Grace Lambert.

END OF THE PROLOGUE.

Book the First.

CHAPTER I.

ROWLEY COURT.

THE traveller of thirty years ago, whom pleasure or business took through the heart of Gloucestershire, and who had the satisfaction of enjoying the box-seat of the admirably-appointed mail-coach which ran through that district,—if he had an eye for the picturesque and a proper appreciation of the beauties of nature, exhibiting themselves in the freshest turf, the oldest trees, the loveliest natural landscape-gardening combination of grassy upland, wooded knoll, and silver stream,—seldom refrained from inquiring the name of the owner of the property which was skirted by the well-kept road along which they were bowling, and was invariably informed by the coachman that all

belonged “to the Challoners, of whom you’ve doubtless heard; the Challoners of Rowley Court.” By his phrase, “of whom you’ve doubtless heard,” the coachman expressed literally what he meant. He and his compeers, born and bred in the county, were so impressed with the seignorial dignities of the Challoners of Rowley Court, that they ignored the possibility of the position of the family being unknown throughout the length and breadth of the land. That they were not what they had been was indeed admitted, that the grand old estate had somewhat diminished, that the family revenues had decreased, that the present members of it were to a certain extent impoverished, that the hand of poverty was one of the many objectionable hands which had an unpleasant grip upon the old Squire,—all these were facts which were tacitly admitted in privileged regions—such as the servants’-hall at the Court, or the snuggerly at the Challoners’ Arms—but which were never hinted at to passing strangers. So jealous, indeed, of the honour of the family were its retainers—among whom the mail-driver was to be

classed, as he was doubtless connected with the tenantry by family or marriage—that if “the box” ventured to comment on the evident want of attention to the property, manifested in broken hedges, unmended thatch, in undrained fen or unreclaimed common, he received but a short answer, conveying an intimation that they knew pretty well what was right down in those parts, the Challoners did; at all events, as well as most cockneys: the biting sarcasm conveyed in this retort having generally the effect of closing the conversation, and reducing the fee given to the driver at the journey’s end to one-half the sum originally intended.

There are no mail-coaches now, and the traveller by rail has no chance of getting a glimpse of Rowley Court, save a momentary one in the short interval between a cutting and a tunnel which are on the extreme border of the park. The Court itself stands towards the centre of the park on low ground encircled by wooded hills, towards which, in the good old times, avenues of stately oak, elm, and lime trees extended in long

vistas. But under the dire pressure of necessity the woodman's axe has been frequently at work lately in these "cool colonnades," and the avenues are consequently much shorn of their fair proportions. The house is a big incongruous mass of two distinct styles of architecture—a grafting of Inigo Jones's plain façade and Corinthian pillars on a red-brick Elizabethan foundation, with projecting mullioned windows, octagonal turrets, quaintly-carved cornices, and ornamental doorways. Round the house runs a broad stone terrace bounded by a low balustrade, and flanked at each of the corners by a large stone vase, which, in the time of prosperity, had contained choice flowers varying with the season, but which were now full of cracks and fissures, and were overgrown with creeping weeds and common parasites. The very stones of the terrace were chipped, moss-edged, and grass-fringed; the black-faced old clock in the stable-turret had lost one of its hands, while several of its gilt numerals had become effaced by time and tempest; the vane above it had only two points of the compass remaining for

the brass fox, whose bushy tail had gone in the universal wreck, to point at; the pump in the stable-yard was dry; the trough in front of it warped and blistered; a piece of dirty oil-cloth had been roughly nailed over the kennel, in front of which the big old mastiff lay blinking in the sunshine; and a couple of cart-horses, a pair of superannuated carriage-horses, the Squire's old roan cob, and "the pony" (a strong, rough, under-sized, Welsh-bred brute, with untiring energy and no mouth), were the sole tenants of the stables which had once been occupied by the best-bred hacks and hunters of the county.

They were bad times now for the Challoners of Rowley Court—bad times enough, Heaven knew; but they had been great people, and that was some consolation for Mark Challoner, the old Squire, as he stiffly returned the bow of Sir Thomas Walbrook, ex-Lord Mayor of London, carpet-maker, and millionaire, who had recently built an Italian villa and laid out an Italian garden on a three-hundred acre "lot" which he had purchased from the Challoner estate. They had

been the great lords of all that district. Queen Elizabeth had lodged for some time at Rowley Court on one of her progresses; and Charles the First and Henrietta Maria had slept there, the royal pair finding "all the highways strewed with roses and all manner of sweet flowers," as was recorded in a worm-eaten parchment manuscript kept among the archives in the old oak-chest in the library. There was no sign then of the evil days in store; evil days which began in 1643, when Colonel Sands' troopers pillaged the Court, and sent off five wagons loaded with spoil to London.

It is the custom of the Challoners to say that then began that decadence which has continued for ever since; and in truth, though there have been many vicissitudes of fortune undergone by the old family, the tendency has been for ever downward. The final blow to their fortunes was dealt by Mark Challoner's immediate predecessor, his brother Howard, who was one of the ornaments of the Prince Regent's court, and who gambled and drank and dived and drabbed with the very

finest of those fine gentlemen. It was in his time that the axe was laid to the root of the tree ; that Sir Thomas Walbrook's father, the old carpet-maker, made the first money advances which resulted in his ultimate purchase on easy terms of the three hundred acres ; and that ultimate ruin began decidedly to establish and proclaim itself at Rowley Court. When providence removed Howard Challoner from this world by a timely attack of gout in the stomach, long after his beloved king and patron had been gathered to his fathers, it was felt that there was every chance of a beneficial change in the family fortunes. The godless old bachelor was succeeded by his brother Mark, then a clear-headed, energetic man in the prime of life, a widower with two remarkably promising boys—the elder a frank, free-hearted, jovial fellow, fond of country sports, a good shot, a bold rider, “a downright Englishman,” as the tenantry delighted to call him ; the younger a retiring, shy lad, wanting in the attributes of popularity, but said to be wondrous clever “with his head,” and to know more than people double his age, which in itself

was something bordering on the miraculous to the simple Gloucestershire folk. And, for a time, all went very well. Mark Challoner was his own steward, and almost his own bailiff; at all events, he allowed no one on the property to be more thoroughly master of its details than he. Without any undue amount of niggardliness he devised and carried out unsparing retrenchments; thriftless tenants, after warning, were got rid of, and energetic men introduced in their places; a better style of farming was suggested, and all who adopted it were helped by their landlord. The estate improved so greatly and so rapidly that vacant farms were largely competed for, and rents were rising, when suddenly Mark Challoner withdrew himself from the life into which he had plunged with such eagerness, and in which he had succeeded so well, and became a confirmed recluse, a querulous, moody, silent man, loving solitude, hating companionship, shutting out from him all human interest.

A sudden change this, and one which did not happen without exciting remarks from all the little

world round Rowley Court, both high and low. The Walbrooks and their set (for during the few later years there had been frequent irruptions of the plutocracy into the old county families, and the Walbrooks were now the shining centre of a circle of people with almost as much money and as little breeding as themselves)—the Walbrooks and their set shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders, and secretly rejoiced that the old man from whom they never received anything but the sternest courtesy, and who so pertinaciously repelled all attempts at familiar intercourse from them, had at last come upon the evil days in store for him, and would no longer twit them by his aristocratic presence and frigid behaviour. The more humble classes—the old tenantry, who had been rejoicing at the better turn which things on the estate had undoubtedly taken, and who were looking forward to a long career of good management under the reign of Mark Challoner and his sons—were wofully disappointed at the change, and expressed their disappointment loudly amongst themselves, while taking due care that it should

never reach the master's ear. No one, however, either among the neighbours or the dependents, seemed to notice that the change in Mark Chal-loner's life—that his fading from the hearty Eng-lish squire into the premature old man, that his abnegating the exercise of his tastes and pleasures, and giving up everything in which he had hitherto felt the keenest interest—was contemporaneous with the departure of his younger son, Geoffrey, from the paternal roof. In that act there was nothing to create surprise: it had always been known that Master Geoffrey's talents were des-tined to find exercise in the great arena of Lon-don, and now that he was eighteen years of age, it was natural that he should wish to bring those talents into play; and though nothing had been said in or out of the house about his going, until one morning when he told the coachman to bring round the dogcart and to come with him to the station, there was no expression of surprise on the part of any of the household—beings to whom the expression of anything they might feel was of the rarest occurrence. The old butler, indeed, a

relic of the past, who had been Howard Chalonner's body-servant in his later years, and who was almost superannuated, remarked that the Squire sent for his eldest son immediately after his younger son's departure; that the two were closeted together for full two hours (a most unusual thing at Rowley Court, where, in general, all matters were discussed before the servants, or, indeed, before anyone that might be present); and that "Master Miles" came out with pallid cheeks and red eyes, and in a state which the narrator described as one of "flustration."

Seven years had passed since Geoffrey Chalonner's departure,—seven years, during which his name had never been mentioned by his father or his brother; seven years, during which the old man, wrapped in the reserve, the silence, and the moodiness which had become his second nature, had been gradually, but surely, breaking in health, and wending his way towards the trysting-place where the Shadow cloaked from head to foot was in waiting for him. That meeting was very close at hand just now. So thought the servants, as

from the ivy-covered windows of the office they peered occasionally at their master, propped up by pillows in his bath-chair, which had been wheeled into a corner of the stone terrace where the light spring sunshine fell fullest; so thought Dr. Barford, the brightest, cheeriest, rosiest little medico, on whom all within the Cotswold district pinned their faith ungrudgingly, and who had just sent his dark green gig, drawn by that flea-bitten gray mare, which was known within a circuit of fifty miles round, to the stables, and who approached the invalid with a brisk step and an inquiring, pleasant smile.

“Sitting in the sunshine,” said the Doctor aloud (having previously said, *sotto voce*, “Hem! —hem! much changed, by George!”), “sitting in the sunshine, my dear old friend! And quite right too—

‘The sunshine, broken in the rill,
Though turned astray, is sunshine still,’

as somebody says. Well, and how do we feel to-day?”

“Badly enough, Doctor; badly enough!” re-

plied the Squire, in a low thick voice. "I'm running down very fast, and there's very little more sunshine for me—" here an attack of coughing interrupted him for a moment; "so I'm making the most of it."

"O, you mustn't say that," said Dr. Barford cheerily. "While there's life there's hope, you know; and you've gone through some baddish bouts since we've known each other."

"None so bad as this," said Mark Challoner. "Your skill, under Providence, has kept me alive hitherto; but though you're as skilful as ever, and as kind—God bless you for it!—you've not got Providence working with you now. I'm doomed, and I know it. What's more, I don't repine, only I want to make the most of the time that's left me; and, above all, I want to see Miles again."

"Miles? O, ay! He's staying in town, is he not?"

"Yes, with my old friend Sandilands, who loves him as if he were his own son. Poor Miles, it's a shame to drag him away from his enjoyment to come down to a poor, dull, dying old man."

“You would not hurt his feelings by saying that before him,” said the Doctor shortly, “and you’ve no right to say it now. Has he been sent for?”

“Yes, they telegraphed for him this morning.”

“Well, there can be no harm in that, though I won’t have you give way to this feeling of lowness that is coming over you.”

“Coming over me!” the old man repeated wearily. “Ah, Barford, my dear friend, you know how long it is since the light died out of my life, and left me the mere shell and husk of man that I have been since; you know, Doctor, how long it is ago, though you don’t know the cause of it.”

“Nor ever sought to know it, Squire; bear me witness of that,” said the little Doctor. “It’s no part of my business or of my nature to seek confidences; and though perhaps if I had been aware of what was troubling you—and at the first I knew perfectly well that *animo magis quam corpore* was the seat of your illness—and though, being unable to ‘minister to a mind diseased,’ as somebody says,

I was labouring, as it were, at a disadvantage,—you will do me the justice to say, that I never for a moment hinted that—hum! you understand?” And Dr. Barford, who would have given the results of a week’s practice to know really what had first worked the change in the old man, stopped short and looked at him with a confidence-inviting glance.

“Perfectly,” said the Squire; “but it could never have been. My secret must die with me; and when after my death the closet is broken open, and people find the skeleton in it, they will merely come upon a lot of old bones jumbled together, and, not having got the key of the puzzle to fit them together, will wonder what I can have been afraid of. Why do you stare so earnestly?”

“A skeleton, my dear Squire!” said the little Doctor, on tiptoe with eagerness; “you said a skeleton in a closet, and a lot of old bones jumbled together—”

A smile, the first seen for many a day, passed across Mark Challoner’s wan face as he said, “I

was speaking metaphorically, Barford ; that is all. No belated traveller was ever robbed and murdered at Rowley Court—in my time at least, believe me.”

Dr. Barford laughed a short laugh, and shrugged his shoulders as though deprecating a pursuance of the subject, but he evidently did not place entire credence on his friend's assertion. However, he plunged at once into a series of medical questions, and shortly afterwards took his leave. As he passed the hall-door, which was open, on his way to the stables, he saw a neatly-dressed middle-aged woman pacing quietly up and down the hall ; and recognising her as the nurse from London, who for some time past had been in nightly attendance on the old man, he beckoned her to him.

“Coming out to get a little breath of fresh air, nurse?” he said pleasantly, as she approached. “You must need it, I should think.”

“Well, sir, it is warm and close in the Squire's room now, there's no denying ; and what it'll be

when the summer comes on I often dread to think."

"No you don't, nurse," said the Doctor, eyeing her keenly. "You know better than that, with all the practice and experience you've had. No summer for the Squire, poor fellow, this side the grave."

"You think not, sir?"

"I *know* it, nurse, and so do you, if you only chose to say so. However, he's gone down so very rapidly since I was here last, and his tone is altogether so very low and depressed, that I imagine the end to be very close upon us; so close that I think you had better tell Mr. Miles—the son that has been telegraphed for, you know, and who will probably be down to-night—that if he has anything special to say to his father he had better do so very shortly after his arrival. What's that?" he asked, as a dull sound fell upon his ear.

"That's the Squire knocking for Barnard to fetch his chair, sir; see, Barnard has heard, and is going to him."

"O, all right! Poor old Squire! poor good old

fellow! Don't forget about Mr. Miles, nurse. Good-night;" and the little Doctor, casting a kindly look towards the spot where the figure of the old man in the chair loomed hazily in the dim distance, hurried away.

When Mark Challoner's servant had reached his master's chair, and, obedient to the signal he had received, was about to wheel it towards the house, he found that the old man had changed his intention, and was desirous of remaining out on the terrace yet a few minutes. On receiving this order Barnard looked over his shoulder at the nurse, who was still standing at the hall-door; and as she made no sign to him to hasten his movements, he concluded that his master's wish might be obeyed, and so, after touching his hat respectfully, he returned to the genial society of the gardener and the stable-lad. And Mark Challoner was once more left alone. The fact in its broadest significance seemed to become patent to him as he watched the retreating figure of his servant, and two tears coursed down his wan cheeks. Mark Challoner knew that his last illness was then upon

him ; for weeks he had felt that he should never again shake off the lassitude and weakness so stealthily yet so surely creeping over him ; but now, within the last few minutes, the conviction had flashed across him that the end was close at hand—that he had arrived at the final remnant of that originally grand strength and vitality which, slowly decaying, had enabled him to make head against disease so long, and that he was taking his last look at the fair fields which he had inherited, and in the improvement of which he had at one time—ah, how long ago !—found his delight. It was this thought that made him dismiss Barnard. The old man, with the new-born consciousness of his approaching end fresh in him, wanted to gaze once more at his diminished possessions ; and for the last time to experience the old associations which a contemplation of them never failed to revive. There, with the westering sun just gilding its topmost branches, was the Home Copse, where he had shot his first pheasant, to his old father's loudly-expressed delight. Just below it lay the Black Pool, out of which, at the risk of his own

life, he had pulled Charles Gammock, a rosy-faced boy with fair hair—Charles Gammock! ay, ay, they buried him a year ago, and his grandson now holds the land. There, bare and attenuated now, but as he first remembered it young and strong and full of promise, was the Regent's Plantation, so called in honour of the illustrious personage who, staying for the night with Howard Chalonier, had honoured him by planting the first tree in it. Beyond it, Dirck's land, now—and as that thought crossed him the Squire's brow became furrowed, and his wan colour deepened into a leaden hue, for Dirck was one of the moneyed interest, one of the manufacturers who had come in Sir Thomas Walbrook's wake, and were bent on the acquisition of all the county property which might come into the market. Beyond it lay Thurston Gap, the surest place for finding a fox in the whole county, old Tom Horniblow used to say. Old Tom Horniblow! Why, there had been three or four huntsmen to the Cotswold since him: he must have been dead these forty years, during which time the Squire had not thought of him a

dozen times; and yet then, at that moment, the stout figure of the old huntsman mounted on his famous black horse, just as he had seen him at the cover-side half a century ago, rose before his eyes. This reminiscence turned Mark Challoner's thoughts from places to people; and though his glance still rested on the landscape, his mind was busy recalling the ghosts of the past. His father, a squire indeed of the old type—hearty, boisterous, and hot-headed: it was well—and a faint smile dawned on Mark Challoner's cheek as the thought crossed his mind—it was as well that his father had died before the irruption of the Walbrooks, Dircks, and such-like; it would have been too much for him. His brother, the dandy with the high cravat and the buckskin breeches and hessian boots, ridiculed by his country neighbours, and regarding his estate but as a means to supply his town dissipation. His wife—she seemed more dim and ghost-like to him than any of the others; he had known her so short a time, so much of his life had been passed since her death; since the gentle little woman, whose wedding-ring he had

worn on his little finger until it had eaten into the flesh, glided out of the world after having given birth to her second son. And, with the train of thought awakened by the reminiscence of the career of that second son, from his birth until the morning of his abrupt departure from the ancestral home, surging round him, the old man's head sunk upon his breast, a fresh access of feebleness seemed to come over him ; and when the watchful Barnard sallied from his retreat and advanced towards the chair, he found his master in a state bordering on collapse, and made the utmost haste to get him to his room, and place him under the professional care of the nurse.

In the course of a very few minutes, however, the Squire, aided by stimulants, revived ; and his senses rapidly returning, he ordered his desk to be brought to the side of the bed into which he had been moved, and commenced listlessly sorting the papers therein. They were few and unimportant ; the old man's illness had not been sudden ; he had always been a thoroughly methodical man, and he had had plenty of time and

opportunity to attend to his correspondence. Propped up by the pillows, he was leisurely looking through the orderly bundles of letters, neatly tied together and scrupulously docketed, when the sound of a horse's hoofs on the gravel outside, the grating of wheels, the barking of the dogs in the stable-yard, and the almost simultaneous ringing of the house-bell, gave warning of an arrival. Mark Challoner had scarcely time to note these various occurrences when the room-door was thrown open, and in the next instant the old man's wavering and unsteady hands were fast in the grasp of his son Miles.

A tall man, over six feet in height, with a bright red-and-white complexion, large brown eyes, a straight nose too big for his face, a large mouth full of sound white teeth, with dark brown hair curling crisply at the sides of his head and over his poll, with long moustache and flowing brown beard, with a strongly-knit but somewhat ungainly figure, dressed in a well-made but loosely-fitting gray suit, and with large, well-shaped, brown hands, which, after releasing the

first grip of the Squire's fingers, joined themselves together and kept working in tortuous lissom twists: this was Miles Challoner. A faint smile, half of pleasure, half of amusement—something odd in Miles had always been remarked by his father—flitted over the Squire's face, as he said, after the first greeting, "You've come in time, Miles: you received the telegram?"

"And started off at once, sir. All I could do to prevent his lordship from coming with me—wanted to come immensely; but I told him I thought he'd better not. Even such an old friend as he is in the way when one's seedy—don't you think I'm right, sir?"

"You're right enough, Miles; more especially when, as in the present case, it's a question of something more than 'seediness,' as you call it. My time," continued the Squire, in tones a little thickened by emotion,—“my time has come, my boy. I'm only waiting for you, before, like Hezekiah, I should 'turn my face unto the wall.' I have, I hope, 'set my house in order,' and I know

that now 'I shall die, and not live;' but I wanted to see you before—before I go."

The young man leaned quickly forward and looked earnestly in his father's face, as he heard these words; then with a gesture of inquiry elevated his eyebrows at the nurse, who was standing just inside the door. Receiving for answer an affirmative nod, Miles Challoner's cheek for an instant turned as pale as that of the invalid; but he speedily recovered himself, and said in a voice which lacked the cheery ring that should have accompanied the words: "You're a little down, sir, and that's natural enough, considering your illness; but you'll make head against it now, and we shall soon have you about as usual. It was only yesterday Lord Sandilands was saying that though he's some quarter of a century your junior, he should be very sorry to back himself against you at 'anything British,' as he expressed it—anything where strength and bottom were required."

The old man smiled again as he said: "Sandilands has been a townman for so long that he's

lost all condition, and has ruined his health for want of air and exercise. But at least he lives; while I—I've vegetated for the last few years, and now there's an end even to that."

"Why didn't you send for me before, sir? If I'd had any idea you thought yourself so ill, I'd have come long since."

"I know that, my dear boy, and that's the very reason why I didn't send. Why should I fetch you from your friends and your gaiety to potter about an old man's bedside? I would not have sent for you even now, save that I have that inward feeling which is unmistakable, and which tells me that I can't last many days, many hours more, and I wanted, selfishly enough, to have you near me at the last." The old man spoke these words with indescribable affection, and, half involuntarily as it seemed, threw his arm round his son's neck. The big strong frame of the young man shook with ill-repressed emotion as he took the thin hand hanging round his shoulder, and pressed it reverently to his lips. "Father!" he said; and as he said it, both the

men felt how many years had passed since he had chanced to use the term "Father!"

"True, my boy," said Mark Challoner quietly,—"it is a pleasure, though I fear a selfish one. 'On some fond breast the parting soul relies,' you know, Miles; and you're all that's left to me in the world. Besides, the tie between us has been such a happy one; as long as I can recollect we've had no difference,—we were more like brothers than father and son, Miles."

Miles answered only by a pressure of his father's hand. He dared not trust himself to speak, he knew that his voice was thick and choked with tears. His father looked at him for an instant, and then said: "Now, boy, go and get some dinner. How thoughtless of me to keep you so long fasting after your journey!—Nurse, take Mr. Miles away, and see that he is properly attended to. Be as careful of him as you are of me, that's all I ask;" and the old man, half-exhausted, sank back on his pillow.

Miles Challoner left the room with the nurse, and when they were alone, he took the first oppor-

tunity of asking her real opinion as to his father's state. This she gave him frankly and fully, telling him moreover what Dr. Barford had said as to the necessity of not delaying anything which he might have to say to the Squire. Miles thanked her, and then sat down to his cheerless meal. His thoughts were preoccupied, and he ate and drank but little, pausing every now and then, bestriding the room, reseating himself, and leaning his head on his hand with a helpless puzzled air, as one to whom the process of thought was unfamiliar. He could scarcely realise the fact that the presiding spirit of the place, the man whose will had been law ever since he could recollect, "the Squire," who, with diminished possessions and failing fortunes, had commanded, partly through his own style and manner, partly through the prestige attaching to the family, more respect and esteem than all the members of the invading calicocracy put together,¹—he could scarcely realise that this rural autocrat's power was ebbing, and that he himself lay on his death-bed. On his death-bed!—that was a curious

thought: Miles Challoner had never attempted to realise the position, and now, when vaguely he attempted it, he failed. Only one thing came out clearly to him after his attempted examination of the subject, and that was that it would be most desirable to be at peace with all the world, and that any enmity cherished to the last would probably have a most disturbing and uncomfortable effect. Pondering all this he returned to the sick-room. During his absence, the curtains had been closed and the night-lamp lighted. The nurse sat nodding in a large easy-chair by the bedside, and the Squire lay in a dozing state, half-waking now and again as his head slipped off the high pillow on which it rested, or when the heaviness of his breathing became specially oppressive. Miles seated himself on a couch at the foot of the bed, and fatigued by his journey, soon fell asleep. He seemed to have been unconscious only a few minutes, but in reality had slept nearly an hour, when he was awakened by a touch on the shoulder, and opening his eyes, saw the nurse standing by him. "The Squire's calling for you," she said,

adding in a whisper, "he's going fast!" Miles roused himself, and crept silently to the head of the bed, where he found his father gasping for breath. The Squire's dim eyes recognised his son, and between the paroxysms of laboured respiration he again threw his arm round Miles's neck and touched the bowed forehead with his lips. Then the thoughts that had been fermenting in Miles Challoner's heart for so many years, and which had caused him such mental disturbance that night, at length found vent in words. With his father's arm around him, and with his face close to the old man's, Miles said: "Father! one word, only one! You hear and understand me?" A pressure of the hand on his cheeks—O, such a feeble pressure, but still a recognition—answered him. "Father, what of Geoffrey?" A low moan escaped the old man's lips; other sign made he none. "What of Geoffrey?" continued Miles,—“years ago you forbade me ever to ask what had become of him, why he had left us, even to mention his name. I have obeyed you, as you know: but now, father, now—”

“Never!” said the old man in dull low accents. “Your brother Geoffrey is, and must be for ever, dead to you. Miles, my boy, my own boy, listen! Should you ever meet him, as you may do, shun him, I urge, I command you! Think of what I say to you now, here, as I am—shun him, fly from him, let nothing earthly induce you to know him or acknowledge him.”

“But, father, you will surely tell me why—”

The nurse touched Miles on the shoulder as he spoke, and pointed to the Squire, whose swooning had been noticed by her observant eyes. When he recovered himself he essayed again to speak, but his strength failing him he laid his hand in his son’s, and so peacefully passed away.

CHAPTER II.

IN POSSESSION.

“REALLY, hardly sooner than I expected, my dear sir,” said Dr. Barford, when he came to pay his accustomed daily visit at Rowley Court, and found his occupation gone. “A little accelerated by nervousness about your coming home, but very little; not more than a few hours. I quite expected the event; told the nurse as much yesterday, in fact. Ah, well, my dear sir, it is what we must all come to. He was a fine old gentleman, a very fine old gentleman,—has not left many like him in Gloucestershire; more’s the pity;” and Dr. Barford continued to talk on with smooth professional glibness, by no means unconscious of the fact that he was not listened to by Miles Challoner with even a show of attention.

Old Mark Challoner's death was emphatically a "bad business" for Dr. Barford, and he said so (to himself) quite frankly. The Squire had been a very profitable and by no means a troublesome or exacting patient to the worthy doctor for a considerable time, and it was not pleasant to him to know that the attendance which brought much that was agreeable with it, in addition to liberal and regularly-paid fees, was at an end. Dr. Barford looked at Miles Challoner, and a mild despondency possessed itself of his soul. Miles was a model of health and strength; his complexion indicated unconsciousness of the presence of bile in his system, and he looked as little like a man troubled, or likely to be troubled, with nerves, or fancied ailments of any kind, as need be. So Dr. Barford felt his footing at Rowley Court was a thing of the past, and mentally bade it farewell with a plaintive sigh. He was an honest little man, and kind-hearted too, though he did think of the event, as we all think of every event in which we are concerned, from a selfish standpoint; and he was frankly, genuinely sorry for

his old friend ; and Miles recognised the sincerity of feeling in him, and threw off his absence of mind, and shook hands with him over again, thanking him for the skill and care that had availed so long, none the less warmly that it could avail no longer.

Miles Challoner's grief for his father was very deep and poignant. His nature was acutely sensitive, and he had the power of feeling sorrow more intensely than most men, while he lacked the faculty for shaking it off, and betaking himself to the way of life which had been his before the trouble came upon him, which most men possess, and find very useful in a world which affords little time and has not much toleration for sentiment. Loneliness fell heavily upon him, and the society which in the winter would have been within his reach was not available now. The season was well on in London, and most of the people who formed the not very extensive neighbourhood of Rowley Court were in town ; so that Miles Challoner was all uncheered by neighbourly kindness, and his evenings were especially solitary.

Incidental to his position as sole heir to the diminished but still respectable possessions of the Challoners, a great deal of business had to be gone through which was particularly distasteful to Miles. The family lawyer lived in London, of course, but his personal services had not been needed. Old Mark Challoner had set his house very thoroughly in order; no rents were in arrear, the debts were few, and the tenants were orderly and well-behaved. They had liked their old landlord well enough, and had been somewhat afraid of him. They were not quite sure whether they should approve altogether so much of the new one. Not that Miles had done anything to offend his father's people; not that he had saliently departed from, or violently transgressed, the traditions of conduct of the foregone Challoners; not that there was the slightest suspicion of milk-sopism attaching to Miles; but there was an uneasy notion abroad that Miles did not take much interest in the old place, that he cared over-much for books and "Lunnon," and was rather degenerately ignorant in matters appertaining to

agriculture. On the whole, though there was no disaffection among the Rowley-Court tenantry, there was not much enthusiasm. Men who would have thought it a desperate hardship, an entirely unnatural and unheard-of slight indeed, if they had not been, whenever they desired it, immediately admitted to an interview with old Mark Challoner, were perfectly satisfied to transact their business with Mr. Styles the steward, and displayed to the deputy very little curiosity respecting his principal. They talked about Miles a little among themselves, wondering whether he would not marry soon, and supposing, in rather depreciatory accents, that he would bring a lady from "Lunnon."

"Glo'ster won't do for *him*, depend on it," said farmer Bewlay to the buxom wife of farmer Oliver; "he'll be having a fine madam, what'll want to be six months among the furriners, and save all she can at home the other six. Times have changed since the old Squire brought his pretty little wife home, and she shook hands with us all in the churchyard, after morning prayers,

her first Sunday here, and told us how she knew us all already, from her husband's talk."

"I don't remember it myself," said farmer Oliver's buxom wife; "but I've heard Tummas talk of it, and how she looked up at the old Squire when she said, 'my husband,' and smiled just like a summer morning."

"Ay, indeed she did," assented farmer Bewlay; "but he wasn't the old Squire then, but a brave and good-looking gentleman; and she was a pretty girl, was madam, when she came to Rowley Court, and pretty up to the time they carried her out of it. I helped in that job; and the Squire had nowt but his little boys left."

"Has anybody heerd tell anything about Master Geoffrey?" said farmer Oliver's wife, dropping her voice, and looking round her, as people look who are talking of things which are not, or should not be, generally mentioned. "Does Mr. Styles say anything about him? Does Mr. Styles know where he is?"

"Mr. Styles never mentions him. I don't believe he knows any more than we do where he is,

or what has become of him. A handsome child he was, and a handsome boy, though small and sly and cruel in his ways, and no more like the Squire, nor madam neither, than I am. You remember Master Geoffrey, surely?"

"O yes, I remember him. How the Squire changed after he went away! He ran away to sea, didn't he?"

"Some folk said so; but for my part I don't believe it. The sea, from all I've ever heard tell of it, ain't an easy life, nor a gay life, for the matter o' that; and wherever Master Geoffrey run to—and it's certain sure he ran somewheres—it wasn't to sea, in my opinion. I don't know; I only have my own thoughts about it; and I ha'n't no means of knowin'. Anyhow, he went, and Squire was never the same man after; he were always good, and fond of the place, and that he were to the last; but he never had the same smile again, and I never see him talking to the children about, or patting them on the head, or doing anything like what he used."

The honest dark eyes of Polly Oliver filled

with tears. "It's all true," she said, "and more than that. When our Johnny were lying in the measles, and very near his end, the Squire came down one day along with Dr. Barford, the physician, you know. He thought there ought to be someone beside the doctor to see the child; and when Dr. Barford told us—very kind and feeling like, I must say—as the child couldn't be left with us any longer, and I began to cry, as was only natural, and made no difference to me who was there, Squire or no Squire, he says to me, quiet like, but I can hear the words now, 'You won't believe me, Mrs. Oliver, and it would be hard to expect you should; but there are worse things in life than seeing your boy die;' and then he went away. And when Johnny was buried, and I had time to think of anything else, I thought of the Squire's words; and many a time I wondered what was the meaning that was in them, and knew it must be Master Geoffrey's doing somehow, but how I did not know, and I suppose no one knows."

"I don't know about that," said farmer Bew-

lay; "it's likely as Mr. Miles knows, and Mr. Geoffrey; but I'm sure Styles doesn't; and outside them two, and the Squire in his grave, I daresay nobody in this world knows the rights of the story."

While the people over whom Miles Challoner had come to reign in the course of nature thus curiously, but not unkindly or with any lack of feeling, discussed the actualities and the probabilities of his life, and raked up the memory of that mysterious family secret, strongly suspected to be of a calamitous nature, which had long been hidden by the impenetrable silence of the Squire, and now lay buried in his grave, Miles Challoner himself was much occupied with the selfsame subject. The unanswered question which he had asked his father in his last moments,—the unsolved enigma which had disturbed his mind for years, which haunted him now, and made all his life seem unreal, wrong, and out of joint,—rose up before him, and engaged his thoughts constantly, almost to the exclusion of every other matter for reflection except his father's death. The two

linked themselves together in a strong bond of pain, and held him in their withes. This time was a very heavy one to the new master of Rowley Court.

His position was irksome to him. The privileges of proprietorship had no charms for Miles Challoner. He disliked the business details in which it involved him; he shrunk from the keenly painful associations it produced; he suffered much from his loneliness,—from the loneliness of the Court generally. Hitherto, whenever he had been away, he had returned to enjoy the tranquillity—tranquillity which, when it was tasted as a change, he appreciated very highly, but which as the normal state of things wearied him rapidly and excessively. He had had much companionship, in and since his boyhood, with his father, and the blank left by the old Squire's death was indeed complete. Miles Challoner, without deserving precisely the appellation of a student, was fond of books. He was well-educated, not in a very profound, but in a tolerably extensive and various sense; and his taste took a lite-

rary turn early in life, which, wholly unshared by his father, had been encouraged, fostered, and directed by his father's friend, Lord Sandilands. Miles was a man of few intimacies. He liked society; but no one would ever have called him sociable: he had much more the air of frequenting general, in order to keep clear of particular society; and this really was the case. Upon his sensitive disposition the family secret, concerning which he had vainly questioned his father on his death-bed, weighed heavily. It set him apart, and kept him apart from anything like intimacy with young men of his own age, because he felt that they too would be always trying to find out that of which he himself was ignorant; and he was not at ease with the older people, his father's contemporaries and neighbours, because he was not sure whether they had any inkling or certain knowledge of the family secret,—whether they were all in a conspiracy to keep him in the darkness to which his father had condemned him from the period of his brother's disappearance. Would Mark Challoner have at last confided the truth to

his son, had a little more life, a little longer time, been accorded to him? This was the vain question which Miles asked himself as he sat moodily in the library after his solitary dinner, and watched the sun go down in a sea of gold and azure behind the grand old woods of Rowley Court, or strolled about the terrace listlessly, until the night fell. He could never answer it—no one could ever answer it; but this did not keep Miles Challoner from pondering upon it. He felt quite certain that there was but one man in the world who could resolve his doubts, who could tell him the worst,—might it not rather be the best?—of this matter, which so sorely perplexed him. That man was Lord Sandilands. If anyone knew the truth, it was he; but whether Miles would ever hear it from him depended, as he felt, entirely on the terms on which the communication had been made, if it had been made at all, by his father to Lord Sandilands. That the family lawyer knew nothing of it, Miles felt confident; that Mr. Styles, the steward, was as ignorant and as curious, if not as anxious, as himself, he had no doubt whatever.

There was no one to share, no one to aid, his mental inquietude. Was his brother living, or was he the only—the last—one bearing the old name left?

Very shortly after Mark Challoner's funeral had taken place, his son had instituted the strictest possible search among the documents of all kinds which the house contained, for any letters or papers bearing upon the mysterious occurrences which had changed the aspect of affairs at Rowley Court while the old Squire's sons were yet boys, and had shut the younger out from his father's house into banishment and oblivion. This search, which Miles had conducted quite alone, and had been careful to keep from the knowledge of the servants, had been entirely unrewarded by success, and had only revealed to Miles a circumstance which still further deepened the mystery which tormented him, and increased its distressing effect. Not only did there not exist among the Squire's papers any memoranda, letters, or documents of any description bearing upon, or having any reference to, the period at which

Geoffrey Challoner had left Rowley Court, but none existed in any way, directly or indirectly, relating to him. Not a scrap of his writing as a child, though Miles found his own little letters to his father and mother carefully treasured up, with the correct dates noted upon each packet; and his portrait, as a baby of three years old, hung over the mantelpiece of his father's bedroom. But there was no likeness of Geoffrey. By an effort of memory Miles recalled the taking of that little portrait; he remembered how he had sat upon his father's knee, and played with the heavy gold hunting-watch, which was his especial delight—it was ticking away still in a watch-stand in the library—while the artist did his work. He remembered how his hair had been additionally brushed and curled for the occasion; and—yes, now he distinctly remembered that Geoffrey's portrait had also been painted. Where was it? What had been done with it?

All the circumstances returned to Miles Challoner's memory. The two pictures had hung side by side for years. Where was that of the

younger son? The Squire had gone abroad for a short time, and the brothers had remained at Rowley Court under the care of their tutor. They had both written regularly to their father; and Miles found all his own letters of that period carefully preserved, arranged according to their dates, and indorsed, in his father's hand, "My Son's Letters, 18—." But there was no scrap of Geoffrey's writing, there was no trace that he had ever lived, to be found within the walls of Rowley Court. Only when Miles went into the room which had been the brothers' study, only when he entered and looked round the long-unused apartments which had been their nursery and play-room, could he realise that there had been two in that stately old house eleven years ago. The room which had been his wife's had always been occupied by the Squire after her death; otherwise Miles would have hoped to find some little memento of his brother there,—there, where he could dimly remember—or was it fancy, and not memory?—a gentle pale face turned wistfully towards him when, a very little child, he was

brought to see the fading mother who had been early and mercifully taken away from the evil to come. From evil indeed, from terrible and irremediable evil Miles Challoner felt it must have been; else why the hopeless banishment, why the impenetrable silence, why the apparently complete oblivion? He brooded upon these things in the solitude to which the first few weeks of his proprietorship of Rowley Court were devoted, almost to the exclusion of every other subject of thought; and Mr. Styles found him singularly inattentive and indifferent to the details of his property and his squirearchical duties, as that experienced person laid them before him.

“I can’t make him out, and that’s the truth,” Mr. Styles remarked to Dr. Barford one day that the steward met the doctor taking his gig by a short cut through a lane which formed the boundary of Rowley Court on one side,—“I really can’t make him out. He cares for nothing; and it is not natural for a young gentleman like him. I was talking to him this morning about the likely look of the turnips on the Lea Farm, and I’m blessed

if he heard one word in ten; and when I asked him a question, just to rouse him up like, he said, 'O, ah! turnips, I think you said? Of course do as you think best;' which was altogether complete nonsense. Of course he's cut up about the Squire; and very natural and right it is he should be so; but it ain't natural and it ain't right to go on as he's going. And it's my belief," said Mr. Styles, as he removed his hat, took his checked pocket-handkerchief out of the crown, gave his face a desponding wipe with it, and replaced it,—“it's my belief as he don't know the difference between turnips and pine-apples; and there's a fine promise too, such as a man might look to getting some credit along of.”

“That's bad, Styles; that's bad,” said Dr. Barford; “I don't like to hear that my old friend's son is taking to moping. I'll call up at the Court and see him to-morrow. Good-day, Styles;” and the Doctor drove on, thinking gravely of the changes he had seen at Rowley Court, though he knew as little of their origin as everybody else knew.

On the following day, as Miles Challoner and the Doctor walked together upon the stone terrace, Miles stopped on the very spot whence his father had taken his last look at the lands which had called him master so long; and, looking full and earnestly at his companion, asked him: "Dr. Barford, do you know why my brother left his home? Do you know what that grief was which my father had on his mind while he lived, and when he died?"

Dr. Barford hesitated for a moment before he replied to Miles Challoner's question, but his hesitation arose from surprise, not from uncertainty. There was not the least tone of doubt or reserve in his voice and manner as he answered: "No, Mr. Challoner, your question surprises me very much; but I can assure you most positively I know nothing of the matter."

"Did my father never mention it to you? Never, even at the last, when he knew—for he told me so—he was dying?"

"Never," said Dr. Barford; then he added, after a momentary pause, "he did say something

to me, on the last occasion when I had any talk with him, which may have had some reference to your brother; but if it had any, it was only incidental, and quite unexplained. He said something about his sharing in the common lot—having a skeleton in the cupboard; but that was all. Nothing more explicit ever passed his lips to me.”

“Then, or at any time?” asked Miles.

“Then, or at any time, Mr. Challoner,” repeated Dr. Barford gravely; and the two fell into silence, which lasted for several minutes.

At length Miles spoke:

“You really advise me to leave Rowley Court?” he said.

“Certainly I do; if not as a physician—in which capacity you do not require my services, happily—as a friend. You are not naturally of a very active temperament; and moping about here, in a place which is necessarily gloomy just now, and where you have no congenial occupation, will not improve you in that respect. Go up to town for the remainder of the season, and then go

abroad for a few months; and you will find that you will come back wonderfully reconciled to being master of Rowley Court."

"I like your advice," said Miles with unusual briskness of tone; "and I think I will take it; at least I will take it so far as going up to town is concerned. As for the rest—"

"As for the rest, you can think of it when the time comes," said the Doctor. "And now I must bid you good-bye, and be off. I have to call at Dale and Stourton before I go home to dinner."

As Dr. Barford drove down the wide smooth avenue, between the ranks of tall stately elms which bordered the well-kept road, he thought: "That's a fine young fellow, but of rather a gloomy turn of mind. I hope he may fall in love and marry up in London, and bring a new mistress to the Court."

Miles walked up and down the terrace long after the Doctor had left him, and his face wore a brighter and more serene expression than it had been used to wear of late. He had remained at

Rowley Court long enough; he knew how his affairs stood now; he had really nothing to keep him there. He could only learn what he most desired to know, if indeed it were possible to learn it at all, from Lord Sandilands, who was just then at his house in London. He would go and stay with Lord Sandilands. Having come to this decision, he turned into the house with a brisker step, and felt the evening which ensued the least dreary through which he had lived since the Squire died.

Had Mark Challoner been of a less autocratic disposition it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, for him to have carried into execution the absolute taboo under which he had placed the subject of Geoffrey's disappearance. But the Squire had been a man of inexorable determination of character; and as he was not at all capricious, and exerted this resolution only when and where it was necessary, he had never met with rebellion on the part of his elder son. What the story of the younger had been, no one knew; no one had any certain indication by which to guess.

The tutor to whom the education of the two boys had been intrusted was absent from Rowley Court when the separation intended by Mark Challoner, and destined by Providence, to be final, had taken place; and there was no reason to suppose that Mr. Mordaunt had ever received any information concerning his former pupil from the Squire. Had Miles Challoner been either older or younger at the time of the occurrence, he might have been unable to observe his father's peremptory command with the reluctant obedience he had manifested until the end, when his pent-up anxiety had found vent in his useless appeal to the dying Squire. But he had outlived the restless irrepresible curiosity of the child, and he had not reached the calm deliberative reasoning of the man. Now that the latter mode of thought had fully come to him, he suffered keenly, as only such sensitive natures have the gift to suffer, from his helpless ignorance of his brother's fate. The thought haunted him. As children, he and Geoffrey had loved each other well enough, after the childish fashion which includes any amount of

quarrelling and making-up again; but as boys they had never got on very well together. They were essentially different, with the difference which makes discord, not with the contrast which produces harmony. Miles had always had an unacknowledged consciousness that Geoffrey cared very little about him, and this had had its influence upon the sensitive boy, an influence even stronger than that of the want of accord in the tastes and pursuits of the brothers. As Miles had advanced into manhood, he had come to understand all the appalling gravity of such a sentence as that which his father had passed upon his brother when he forbade the mention of his name in the house where he had been born and bred. With this comprehension came an intense yearning to know the meaning of the sentence,—to be enabled to estimate its justice; a kind of revolt on behalf of the banished brother, in which affection had less share than an abstract love of right, happily strong in the nature of the young man. And now there was no means of satisfying this yearning; the secret had to all appearance

died with the Squire, but its consequences remained, to become an almost intolerable burden to Miles Challoner.

Lord Sandilands received his young friend's letter with sincere pleasure. He liked Miles; he liked his ideas and "ways;" he liked his society. The young man had a happy faculty for creating this kind of liking among his fellows. He was large-minded and unselfish, and so he did not neglect or trample upon the feelings of other people, or try their tempers much or often. He was not a brilliant person, and therefore could afford to be good-natured and unaffected; and though he possessed rather more than an average amount of information upon most subjects of general interest and importance, there were few men less inclined to display their knowledge than Miles Challoner. He was disposed to accord to everybody his or her fair share of conversation, and had an acquiescent uncritical way with him which made friends for him, particularly among women. Without being in the least deserving of that truly opprobrious epithet, a lady's man, Miles had strong

partisans among "the conflicting gender;" and women who found him a very impracticable subject for flirtation were ready to acknowledge that his notions of friendship were peculiarly exalted and practical. People who knew him, but had never troubled themselves to think about him particularly, would nevertheless have answered promptly to any question respecting him, that he was a fine honourably-minded fellow, and rather clever than otherwise; and the few who knew him well would have said substantially the same thing in more numerous and perhaps stronger words. The truth is, it was about all that could be said of Miles Challoner at the important period of his life which witnessed his father's death and his own succession to the family property, with its penalties and privileges of squirehood. He had reached man's estate some years before; but there had been nothing in the course and manner of his life previously to develop his character strongly,—to bring its good or evil traits into prominence. It had been an even, prosperous, happy life, on which he had entered with all the

advantages of high animal spirits and unblemished health. Whether he had in him the stuff which either defies or moulds destiny, the courage which is matured in suffering, the truth and steadfastness of character which are at once weapons and armour in the strife of human existence, it was for time to tell.

Time did tell.

“I’m uncommonly glad you have made up your mind to come to town,” wrote Lord Sandilands to Miles Challoner; “it is the best thing you can do; and so far from being disrespectful to your father’s memory, it is your best way of avoiding what might even appear disrespectful to those who are no doubt watching you pretty closely. You have not a taste for the things the Squire (God bless him!) delighted in, and you cannot affect to have; because, in the first place, it is not in you to affect, and, in the second, you would certainly be found out by Mr. Styles. (Ceres and Pomona! shall I ever forget a dialogue between your father and him about the best crop for the Bayhamsfields?) You will of-

pend your new people much less by absence than by indifference, depend upon it. Then you can thoroughly depend on Styles; and you can always put agricultural enthusiasm on paper. So come up, my dear boy; and the sooner the better."

Miles Challoner went to London, and very soon after he arrived there "time" began "to tell."

CHAPTER III.

CARABAS HOUSE.

CARABAS HOUSE is in Beaumanoir-square, as most people know. Long before the smart stuccoed residences—with their plate-glass windows, their conservatoried balconies, their roomy porticoes—sprung up, like Aladdin's palaces, at the command of the great wizard-builder, Compo, who so recently died a baronet and a millionaire; when the ground on which Beaumanoir-square now stands was a dreary swamp, across which our great-grandmothers, in fear of their lives, were carried to Ranelagh, Carabas House stood, a big, rambling, red-bricked mansion, surrounded on all sides by a high wall, and looking something between a workhouse, a lunatic asylum, and a gaol. To the Marquis of Carabas of those days it mat-

tered little what was the aspect of his ancestral home, as he, from the time of his succession, had resolutely declined to see it, or any other part of the domain whence his title and estates were derived, preferring to spend his life on the Continent of Europe, in the society of agreeable men and women, and in the acquisition of a splendid collection of pictures, statues, and other *objets d'art*, which at his lordship's lamented demise were sold in Paris at a world-famous sale extending over many days, the pecuniary result of which was hailed with the greatest satisfaction by his lordship's heir. For Mr. Purrington, his lordship's cousin, who succeeded to the title and estates, wanted money very badly indeed, he had been speculating for a very long time on the chances of his succession, and he had to pay very dearly for these speculations. He had contested his county in the Tory interest four separate times, at a cost known only to himself, his wife, and his head-agent. He had married the daughter of an Irish peer; a lovely woman full of talent, affectionate, loyal, energetic, and thoroughly under-

standing her position as a county member's wife, but with a number of impecunious relations, all of whom looked for assistance to the heir to an English marquise. He was a crack shot, and always paired about the 25th of July for the remainder of the session, having, according to his own account, the great luck of having one of the best Scotch moors "lent to him" for three weeks from the 12th. He was a capital judge of a horse, a keen rider to hounds, and the invariable occupant of a little box near Egerton Lodge, with a stud sufficient to see him "out" four days a week; but this, as he pathetically put it, was his "only expense." In the season, Lady Fanny had her Wednesday-evening receptions, when a perpetual stream of fashionables, political people, and the usual ruck of young men who are met everywhere, would filter from ten till one through her little drawing-rooms in Clarges-street; and her Saturday dinners of eight, which were very good and very enjoyable, and where pleasant people in various social circles met together without the dread of seeing their names announced in the

fashionable journals. But all these things cost a great deal of money; and when Mr. Purrington became the Marquis of Carabas, he was very nearly at the end of his tether.

The marquise of Carabas, however, was by no means an empty title, a grand position lacking means to support its proper state, than which it is impossible to fancy anything more painful. During the late lord's lifetime the revenue had very far exceeded the expenditure, and the Parisian sale had left a very large balance at Coutts's; so that the new people entered upon their estate with great comfort, and were enabled to carry out their peculiarly extensive views of life without embarrassing themselves in the slightest degree. It was shortly after their accession that the big brick screen-wall was replaced by a light and elegant bronze railing; that the rambling red-bricked mansion was transformed into a modern stone house; that the Marchioness of Carabas took her position as a leader of *ton*, and in Carabas House, so long black and desolate and abandoned, chimneys smoked, and lights blazed, and music re-

sounded, and the best people in London found themselves gathered together three times a week.

The best people? The very best.

It was the fashion in certain circles to talk of "the mixture" which you met at Carabas House; and the young Duchess of Taffington (whose father was old Bloomer the banker of Lombard-street, and whose grandfather was old Bloöm the money-lender and diamond-merchant of Amsterdam) and old Lady Clanronald, with whom her husband, then the Hon. Ulick Strabane, fell in love, from seeing her looking over the blind in her father's (the apothecary's) window in Drogheda,—both these great ladies shrugged their very different pairs of shoulders whenever the Marchioness's receptions were alluded to before them; but neither of these leaders of fashion could deny that princes of the blood, royal dukes, stars and garters, ambassadors, belles of the season, Foreign-Office clerks, and all the great creatures of the day, were blocked together, week after week, on the staircase at Carabas House; or that the Marchioness herself took *pas* and precedence, according

to her rank, and was one of the most distinguished and most highly-thought-of guests wherever she chose to go.

“That’s so!” as Jack Hawkes, of the F. O., would remark to his familiars; “neither the Duchess nor old Clanronald can get over that, and that’s what makes them so wild; and as to the mixture they talk about, that’s lions. She’s in great form, don’t you know, Lady Carabas is, and quite fit, but her weakness is lions; and I’m bound to say that you meet some people at Carabas House who are quite out of the hunt. If any fellow get’s talked about, no matter what he is—writing fellow, painting fellow, fiddling fellow—I’ll lay odds you’ll find him there. There’s what’s his name?—Burkinyoung: man who made a stir last year with his poems; they had him down there, sir, at their place on the river—Weir Lodge—and he used to sit on the lawn under the trees with Lady Carabas pouring eau-de-cologne on his head, and some of her lot—Maude Allingham, and Agnes Creswell, and that lot, don’t you know?—fanning him and keeping the flies off

while he composed; no one was allowed to come near, for fear of disturbing him. Give you my honour, heard it first-hand from Chinny Middleton of the Blues, who pulled up from Windsor in his canoe, and was going to land, as usual, and got warned off, by George, as though he'd got the plague on board!"

There was a good deal of truth in Mr. Hawkes's remarks, Lady Carabas being Mrs. Leo Hunter on a very superior scale. Her passion was that everyone distinguished not merely in her own rank in life but in every other should be seen in her rooms; and from her position and by her fascinating manner she generally managed to attain her object. The pilot of the state ship, at a period when opposition winds were howling loud and the political horizon was black with threatened storm, would find time to pass a few minutes at one of Lady Carabas's receptions, however haggard his looks, however burning his brain. The right honourable gentleman the leader of the Opposition, who for the last month had been gathering himself together for a tiger-

like spring on the state pilot, might have been seen, on the night before he made his grand onslaught, jammed into a corner of the staircase at Carabas House, looking like the Sphinx in evening dress, and pleasantly bantering Mr. Mulvaney, the celebrated "special correspondent" of the *Statesman*. Anyone talked of in any way; the *belles* of 'the season; pretty women, presentable of course, but quite out of the Carabas set; dawning lights in politics, no matter of what party; artists, young and old—of everyone whom you saw at Carabas House you would learn that they had done something special; indeed, Jack Hawkes, an invaluable *cicerone*, could talk for two hours on a grand night, and not get through his list. "Who are all these strange people that one sees nowhere else? Well, everybody's somebody, and it's difficult to know where to begin. Let's see. That short, stout, common-looking man is Vireduc, the great engineer and contractor—builds bridges, railroads, and those kind of things, don't you know?—horrible fellow, who's always telling you he came to London with eightpence in

his pocket, and rose from nothing, as though one couldn't see that. Woman sitting this side the ottoman is Mrs. Goodchild; writes novels—pretty good, they say. I don't read; I haven't any time. Her husband's somewhere about; but he's nobody—only asked because of his wife. The little man talking to her is Bistry the surgeon—have your leg off before you can say “knife;” and the brown-faced man, who looks so bored, is Sir Alan Tulwar, Indian-army man, made K.C.B. for something he did out there—Punjaub, don't you know? The little man with the big head is Polaski the flute-player; and the fat man with the red face is Ethelred Jinks, the Queen's Counsel. That pretty little fair girl is Miss Wren, who shot the burglar down in Hampshire three years ago; and the little boy in black, as you call him, is Jules Brissot, the Red Republican, who was blown off a barricade on the 4th of December, and settled down here as a—what do you call it?—tutor.”

This will suffice as a specimen of Mr. Hawkes's conversation, which, on such occasions,

had the singular merit of having a substratum of truth.

But though lions of all kinds were to be found roaring during the season at Carabas House, none were so welcome as the musical lions, both native and foreign. In her younger days, Lady Carabas had had a pretty little voice herself, and even in Clarges-street she had always managed to secure some of the best professional talent at a very much less expense than any of her friends; and when once Lord Carabas had succeeded, "musical mossoo," as Jack Hawkes was accustomed to call all foreigners who played or sung professionally, had his head-quarters in Beaumanoir-square. Heinrich Katzenjammer, who, being a native of Emmerich on the Lower Rhine, thought proper to advertise in the English newspapers in the French language, had not been "de retour" many hours before his limp glazed card was on the hall-table at Carabas House. Baton, the *chef d'orchestre*, would as soon have thought of being absent from his conductor's stool on a Saturday night as from Lady Carabas's luncheon-table on a Sunday after-

noon. There the most promising pupils of the Academy of Music made their *débuts* in cantatas or operettas, written by distinguished amateurs, and thereby considered themselves entitled ever after to describe themselves as “of the nobility’s concerts;” and there, on festival nights, could you check off the principal singers and players whom London delighted to honour, with the amateurs, the *dilettanti*, and the *cognoscenti*, who always follow in their wake.

It was a soft bright night in early summer, and Beaumanoir-square was filled with flashing lamps and whirling carriages, and stamping horses, and excited drivers, and roaring linkmen. It was a grand night at Carabas House, and all London was expected there. The police had enough to do to make the vehicles keep in line; and when some of the royal carriages familiarly used the royal privilege and dashed through here and cut in there, the confusion increased a thousandfold; and it was with the greatest difficulty that the crowd surging round the door were thrust back right and left to allow the visitors to enter, or

were prevented from casting themselves under the wheels of the carriages as they drew up, with the recklessness of Juggernaut victims. Halfway down the line was a perfectly appointed brougham, in which sat Miles Challoner and the friend with whom he was staying. Lord Sandilands was in every respect a remarkable-looking man; tall and upright, with a polished bald head slightly fringed with snow-white soft hair; thin clean-cut features; gray eyes, from which most of the fire had faded; and small carefully-trimmed gray whiskers. His appearance and manners were those of a past age; now in his evening dress he wore a high stiff white-muslin cravat, an elaborately got-up cambric shirt-frill, a blue coat with brass buttons, white waistcoat, black trousers fitting tightly round the ankles, silk stockings and shoes. His voice was particularly soft and clear, as, replying to some remark of his companion, he said: "No, indeed; I think both you and I are perfectly right; you in consenting to come, I in having persuaded you; besides, I should have scarcely dared to present myself to

Lady Carabas without you. Her ladyship's dictum is that you require rousing, and to-night is to be the first experiment in rousing you."

"Her ladyship is very kind to interest herself in me," said Miles. "I have no claim upon her thoughts."

"My dear fellow," said Lord Sandilands, "you will very soon see that Lady Carabas interests herself about everybody and everything. That is her *métier*. She will talk to the Bishop of Boscastle about the Additional Curates' Fund, and to Sir Charles Chifney about his chance for the Leger. She knows what price Scumble got for his Academy picture; and can tell you the plot of Spofforth's five-act play, which is as yet unwritten. She could tell you what the Duke of Brentford said to Tom Forbes, who arrived late on escort-duty at the last Drawing-room—she couldn't quote the Duke's exact words, which were full-flavoured; and could give you the heads of the charge which Judge Minos will deliver on the great libel case; and with all that she dresses as well as Lady Capisbury herself, and bears the

whole weight of that household on her own shoulders. There's no estate in Britain better managed than Carabas, and her ladyship is her own agent, steward, bailiff,—everything."

"She must be a wonderful woman."

"Wonderful! there's nothing like her! Lord Carabas thinks of nothing but shooting and fishing. Her eldest son, the Earl of Booterstown, is a religious monomaniac; and her youngest, Lord Grey de Malkin, is one of your political new lights, lecturing at mechanics' institutes, and making speeches to working-men. You know the kind of fellow. Now, here we are!—Tell Fisher to wait, James,"—to the footman,—“we sha'n't stay very long.”

The hall was filled with people, all of whom the old gentleman seemed to know, and greeted with somewhat stately courtesy. “A regular Carabas crush,” whispered he to Miles, as they commenced the ascent of the staircase. “Everybody here! The Lord Chancellor next to you, and the Bishop of Boscastle coming down the stairs. He has evidently dined here, sweet old

thing; and is going away before the worldly music begins.—How do you do, my lord? I trust Mrs. Shum is well?—Deuced fine woman, by the way, is Mrs. Shum, my dear Miles.—Ha, Ellenbogen! you in London, and I've not seen you? Only arrived last night, eh? Come to me to-morrow, eh? *Au revoir!*—That is the famous German violinist; nothing like his touch in the world—so crisp, so perfectly sympathetic. There's Lady Carabas at her post, of course. Brave woman, breasting this surging ocean of visitors. Gad, how glad she must be when it's all over!"

Following his friend's glance, Miles looked up and saw Lady Carabas stationed at the head of the staircase. A tall handsome woman of fifty, with all the look and bearing of a *grande dame*, a little softened by the frank geniality of her manner. She received Miles Challoner, on his presentation to her, with something more than mere graciousness—with cordiality; then, turning to Lord Sandilands, said, "She's here."

"Is she, indeed?" said the old gentleman with equal earnestness.

“Yes, and in excellent spirits: I have not the least doubt of her success.”

“That is delightful;” and they passed on. When they had gone a few steps, Miles asked his friend who was the lady of whom he and Lady Carabas were speaking.

“My dear fellow,” said Lord Sandilands with a little chuckle, “I haven’t the remotest notion. Dear Lady Carabas is always giving one half-confidences about people she’s interested in, and ’pon my life I’m too old to open my heart indiscriminately, and make myself partaker of the joys and sorrows of half the world. So, as she’s a dear good creature, and I would not offend her for the world, I nod my head, and grin, and pretend I know all about it; and I find that answers very well.”

Miles laughed at the old gentleman’s evident satisfaction, and they entered the rooms. A large movable platform, so slightly raised as to give the performers sufficient altitude above the spectators without disconcerting them by any pretensions to a stage, occupied one end of the spacious apart-

ment, a recent erection built specially for concert-giving purposes, and with all the latest acoustic improvements. Opposite the platform, bristling with seats for the instrumentalists, stood the conductor's desk. To the right of this were a few benches for the most distinguished guests, and behind it were the seats for the general company. All the seats were unoccupied at present, and the company were grouped together about the room, chatting freely. It was early in the season at present; and that frightful lack of conversation which necessarily falls on people who have naturally very little to say, and who, having seen each other every night for three months, have exhausted that little, had not as yet made itself felt. Miles Challoner, as he looked round on the beautiful women so exquisitely dressed, the brightly-lighted room, the inexpressible air of luxury and elegance which pervaded the entire scene, as he thought that for the future he might, if he so chose, have similar pleasant resorts at his command, felt the oppressive thoughts, the dull, dead level of world-weariness and vapidness, gradually slipping from

him. His eyes brightened, he looked round him eagerly, and his whole demeanour was so fresh and spirited and youthful as to seriously annoy several *blasé* young men of two or three-and-twenty, who had long since used up all signs of youth, and who inquired of each other who was the rustic, gushing person that old Sandilands had brought with him.

Lord Sandilands had himself noticed the change in his friend's manner, and was about to rally him on it, when the musicians came trooping into the room and took their places. Sir Purcell Arne, the well-known amateur composer, who was to conduct, rapped the desk in front of him; the foreign professionals who had settled themselves modestly in the back rows, uttered profound sounds of "Hsh—sh!" and the company generally seated themselves. Lord Sandilands and Miles were proceeding with the rest, when the former saw himself beckoned by Lady Carabas to the place of distinction by her side, and he took his young friend with him.

The overture ought to have been very well

played, for it was very much applauded at its conclusion, though, as Jack Hawkes remarked to the young lady sitting next to him, that might possibly have been because they were so glad it was over. It is certain that during the performance several of the more excitable foreigners ground their teeth, and covered their ears with their hands, while at its close Sir Purcell Arne addressed two recreant members of the orchestra—the second cornet and the first clarionet, being respectively a young gentleman in the Coldstreams, and an old gentleman in the India Office—in terms of the strongest opprobrium. Sir Purcell's good-temper was restored after his son, a favourite pupil of Ellenbogen's, had played a solo on the violin; and during the applause consequent thereon, he crossed over to Lady Carabas's seat, and whispered, "She's quite ready; shall I bring her in?" Lady Carabas, too much excited to speak, gave him an affirmative nod; and the enthusiasm had scarcely subsided, to be renewed with tenfold force as Sir Purcell returned leading by the hand a young lady, whom, with one of his best bows, he

left facing the audience while he went back to his conductor's desk.

The young lady stood perfectly unmoved by the storm of applause which hailed her arrival, the only sign of emotion which she betrayed being a slight contraction of her thin decisive lips; and this was only momentary. She was a decidedly pretty girl, Miles thought; with rich brown eyes, and well-formed features, and slight though rounded figure. In her dark chestnut hair, which was banded close round her head, and gathered into a large knot behind, she wore one white rose, and another in the front of her plain white-silk dress. Other ornament had she none, save a gold locket with a horse-shoe in turquoises on her neck, and a bracelet, a band of plain gold, on one arm. Who was this handsome and distinguished-looking girl who was received with so much *empressement*? Miles Challoner took up a perfumed programme that lay beside him, and read her name—Miss Grace Lambert.

CHAPTER IV.

BREAKING COVER.

MISS GRACE LAMBERT! Who was she? The programme, of course, told nothing but her name, and when Miles Challoner turned to his companion for the purpose of inquiring further, he saw that his brows were knit, and his lips tightly clenched. Miles looked at Lord Sandilands in surprise, but forbore to question him. It was evident that the people in his immediate vicinity were equally unable to assuage his curiosity, as they were all talking and chattering together, and throwing glances towards the occupant of the platform, who stood totally unmoved. Then Sir Purcell Arne, looking round with a half-anxious, half-triumphant air, gave the customary three taps on his desk, and with a wave of his baton led the orchestra into the prelude. It was

a simple English air—very simple—with a pathetic *refrain*, and out from the harmonious *ensemble* of the musicians came a soft sweet bird-like voice, beginning mellowly and low, then rising into a clear pure treble, a volume of lark-like utterance, a continuous ripple of sound, such as is seldom heard in human voice. Few notes had been uttered before their effect became visible on the whole assemblage—amongst the foreigners first; on the back benches, where were gathered the hirsute professionals honoured with the *entrée* to Lady Carabas' concerts, there was an immediate movement, a simultaneous pricking of ears and elevation of eyebrows, culminating into a general impossible-to-be-suppressed "A—h!" of intense delight. Then the enthusiasm spread. Impressible young girls, with the *nil-admirari* breeding scarcely yet habitual to them, looked timidly towards their *chaperones*, as though pleading, "For Heaven's sake, let us for one moment be natural, and give vent to the delight with which this girl has inspired us." Said *chaperones*, with some faint reminiscence of nature unbusked

and unsteeled by conventionality, sought relief in faintly tapping their kidded palms with their fans. Old boys, dragged away from after-dinner naps, or cosy house-dinners at the clubs, to do family duty, and expecting nothing but driest musical classicalities, expressed their gratitude in strident "bravas." Even the gilded youth of the period, surprised out of its usual inanity into a feeble semblance of life and earnestness, condescended to express its opinion of the singer, that she was not "half bad, don't you know?" And its component members inquired of each other, "who the devil is she?" On Lady Carabas' handsome face the hard-set look of anxiety had softened into the blandest smile of triumph; old Sir Purcell Arne's blond moustache bristled with delight; and at the conclusion of the ballad, when the singer, rising to the occasion, had sent a flood of melody surging through the room, now dying away in softest trills and most harmonious cadences, the enthusiasm could no longer be restrained, and amidst sonorous applause breaking forth from every side, the amateur instrumen-

talists leading the van, and Lady Carabas herself, regardless of appearances or of the value of three-buttoned gloves, clapping her hands with the ardour of the most zealous member of a professional *claque*,—Miss Grace Lambert, perfectly composed, and with the slightest bow in recognition of her triumph, laid her fingers daintily on Sir Purcell Arne's tremblingly-proffered arm, and disappeared from public view. Ten minutes' interval now, much needed. Impossible, after such a display, to keep the coterie quiet, and it breaks up at once into twenty little knots, all with the same *refrain* of praise, differently expressed: "*Das ist aber 'was Schönes!*" "*Tiens, tiens, Jules! v'là donc un rossignol charmant!*" "That's what I call good singing, for an Englishwoman, that is, *Veluti! Capisco, signor!*" "Tell you what it is, old fella; since poor Bosio, you know, never heard anything like that, don't you know? It's A I, don't you know?" Frank testimonies these, from the male sex; chiming in with "Dearest Lady Carabas, O, how I congratulate you! Where did you find such

a treasure? Charmin', quite charmin'; so lady-like, and all that kind of thing. Quite a nice-looking person, too!" from the female portion of the audience.

She had vanished, and Miles Challoner remained mute and dazed. Of beauty he had always had a keen appreciation—that is, beauty as he understood it—showing itself in tolerable regularity of feature, in grace and aristocratic *tournure*. Red-and-white women, were they duchesses or dairymaids—and it must be owned that when Nature alone is depended upon they are generally the latter—found no favour in Miles's eyes. He used to say he liked a "bred"-looking woman; and here was one who, so far as appearance went, might have been a Plantagenet. And her voice—good Heavens!—was there ever heard anything so completely enthralling! The blood yet danced in his veins with the delight excited when that low tremulous utterance, gradually rising into trills of lark-like melody, first stole upon his ear. No wonder that all in the room were talking loudly in her praise.

All? No. Rapt in his own delight, Miles had forgotten to speak to Lord Sandilands, to whom he partly owed the pleasure he had just experienced, and he turned to repair his neglect.

Lord Sandilands was sitting "quiet as a stone." He had recovered his gloves, and his long shapely white hands were tightly clasped together on his knee. Despite the tight clasp, the hands twitched nervously, and on the old man's well-cut features Miles noticed a worn pinched look, such as he had never before observed. Lord Sandilands' eyes, too, were down-cast, and he did not raise them even when Miles addressed him.

"Was there ever anything so charming as that young lady?"

"She has a very sweet voice."

"Sweet! it is perfectly entrancing! I had no idea such sounds could be produced by human throat; and then her appearance so thoroughly lady-like, and such an exquisite profile! Why, even you, who go in so strictly for the classical, must have been satisfied with the profile!"

“I scarcely observed her.”

“Scarcely observed her! Why, my dear old friend, that is very unlike your usual habit when a pretty woman is in question, unless, indeed, you were so enthralled by her voice that you cared for nothing else.”

“Ye-es; that was it, I suppose—I—”

The conversation was interrupted by the return of the other guests, who, summoned by Sir Purcell Arne's preliminary taps, came back to their seats to hear the rest of the concert. All rustle and talk and chatter still. “Never was anything like it. I'm sure I can't tell where you pick up these wonderful people, dear Lady Carabas. And what comes next, dear Lady Carabas? O, now we're to have Mr. Wisk's operetta—for the first time; never was played anywhere before. You know Ferdinand Wisk? clever creature! there he is, comin' to conduct it himself. Sh—h!”

That clever creature, Mr. Ferdinand Wisk, who was supposed to be a scion of the aristocracy, but whose real mission in life seemed to

be to devote himself to the affairs, [public and private, of every member of the musical world, English or foreign, advanced rapidly through the room, and took the baton which Sir Purcell handed to him amidst general applause. Mr. Wisk's operetta needs but little mention here; it was bright and sparkling, and would have been more original if the overture had not been cribbed from Auber, and the concerted pieces from Offenbach; but as it was, it did remarkably well, affording opportunities for two young ladies and two young gentlemen to sing very much out of tune; for the funny man of the company to convulse the audience with his drolleries; and for the audience generally to repay themselves for their silence during Miss Grace Lambert's ballad, by chatting without stint. Perhaps the only two persons in the room who did not avail themselves of this opportunity were Lord Sandilands and Miles Challoner. The former, having glanced at the programme, and noticed that Miss Lambert's name did not appear again therein, made a half-muttered apology to Lady Carabas

about the "heat," and left the room very shortly after the commencement of Mr. Wisk's performance; while the latter could not shake off the spell which held him, and which, during all the comic gentleman's funniments and all the others' bad singing, gave but Grace Lambert's voice to his ears, her face and figure to his eyes.

To supper now, foreigners first,—making great running and leaving everyone else far behind; leaping on to edibles and dashing at potables with such vigour as to cause one to think they had not dined, as indeed many of them had not. And now, more congratulation amongst visitors, more "Did you evers?" a perfect whirlwind of "Don't you knows?" and "only to think of dear Lady Carabas being so fortunate, and such a wonderful acquisition even to *her* set!" Ferdinand Wisk, a little depressed at being thrown into the background by the superior attractions of Miss Lambert; and the funny man of the company feeling himself not sufficiently appreciated, and thirsting for Miss Lambert's blood—both, however, consoled by old Piccolo, the fashionable

music-master, who is popularly supposed to have been allied with Auber and Offenbach in writing Mr. Wisk's operetta, and who tells them that Miss Lambert's triumph is a mere *succès d'estime*, and that she will "go out like that—pouf!" Piccolo snapping his fingers and blowing out an imaginary candle in explanation. Foreigners having been fed, and a proper quantity of champagne and seltzer-water having been duly drunk, it enters into the minds of some of the younger guests that dancing would be a pleasant pastime for the remainder of the night, such exercise being sometimes permitted at the concerts, when Lady Carabas is in specially good temper, which is the case to-night apparently, for servants are instructed to clear the concert-room, a band is improvised, and the floor is soon covered with whirling couples.

On these dancers Miles Challoner stood gazing with an abstracted air. At the conclusion of the concert he had moved with the rest, and on passing Lady Carabas had addressed to her a few words of compliment on the success of her even-

ing; words which, although Miles did not remark it, were pleasantly received, for though Lady Carabas had come to that time of life when she was called an "old thing" by very young ladies, the epithet having "dear" or "horrid," according to the speaker's tastes, attached to it, she still delighted in the admiration of men if they were clever or handsome, and purred under their praises with ineffable satisfaction. Whether Miles Challoner was clever, Lady Carabas had yet to learn; but she knew that he was undeniably handsome, and that he was a credit to her evening. Many other people in the rooms had thought so too; and though strange faces were more frequently seen at Carabas House than in any other frequented by the same set, Miles's tall figure and frank face had excited a certain amount of languid curiosity, and the "new importation," as he was called by people who had been twice to the house, made a very favourable first impression.

He was not the least conscious of it, though, nor, had he been, would he have particularly

cared. When Lord Sandilands' brougham drew up under the portico of Carabas House, when Miles, after climbing up the staircase,—a unit in the throng of pretty women and distinguished men,—was presented to Lady Carabas, the young man felt that he was entering on a new and entrancing sphere of life, in which he was henceforth to move; and his thoughts, in the little time he allowed himself for thinking, were of a roseate hue. He had sufficient money to live easily with those people amongst whom Lord Sandilands' introduction would give him position, and place him at his ease. Emerging from the dull country-squire life to which he at first had imagined himself relegated, he should now mix on excellent footing with that society which he had always thought of with envy, but never thoroughly comprehended. In a word, when Sir Purcell Arne left the room for the purpose of fetching the new singer, there was not in England, perhaps, at that moment, a more thoroughly happy young man than Miles Challoner. But ever since Grace Lambert's voice had fallen on his ear, he

had been a different man. As he listened to her, as he gazed upon her handsome face and elegant figure, he sat enthralled, spell-bound by her charm. And when she had gone, her voice remained ringing in his ears, her face and figure remained before his eyes, while a total change—to him entirely unaccountable—had come over his thoughts. What had sent his mind wandering back to the early days of his childhood? What had suddenly brought to his recollection his brother Geoffrey as he last saw him, a bright, bold, daring boy, persistent in carrying through whatever might be uppermost in his mind, and undeterred by fear of his tutor, or even of his stern father? He had just decided with delight upon the course of life which he would pursue in future; but now he wondered whether he had decided rightly. Ought he not, in his position as head of the Challoner family, to live down at the old place, as all his forefathers, save his uncle Howard, who was universally hated, had done? Was it not his bounden duty to be there, ready, when called upon, to give advice and assistance to his tenantry and poorer

neighbours? And that thought of Geoffrey! Ought he not, even in spite of all his father had said, to have taken some steps to trace his brother's career from the time of his leaving home, at all events to endeavour to ascertain the reason of the fatal sentence of banishment which had been pronounced against him? Ought he not—and then he found himself wondering what connection Miss Grace Lambert's voice and face had with these thoughts, and then he roused himself from the reverie into which he had fallen, and things material took their proper shapes and forms to his eyes: he returned from the dim past to the bright present—from the play-room at Rowley Court to the ball-room of Carabas House.

It was getting rather late now for the outer world and common people in general, but not for Carabas House, where the meaning of the word was unknown. The great hall-porter in his younger and slimmer days must have served his apprenticeship as boots at a railway hotel, the only position in which he could have acquired his faculty of sleeplessness. Men constantly spent

what they were pleased to call the early part of the evening at Carabas House, went on to other balls which they "saw out," and returned, certain to find "someone left." The latest loungee at Pratt's, the most devoted attendant at the Raleigh, knew that during the season he should always be able to get his glass of sherry and seltzer in Beaumanoir-square, no matter what time of night it might be. The linkman, whose light had long since paled its ineffectual fire and gone out, seldom left before the milkman arrived, and the pair interchanged confidence about the house and its owners, as is the custom of such people.

The dancing was not quite so animated as when Miles had last looked at it. Careful men who called themselves seven-and-twenty, and who were really five-and-thirty, mindful of all the out-ings they had before them during the season, had gone home to bed. Those who remained were very young men, and very determined girls, whose wearing *chaperones* sat blinking round the room, or solaced themselves with stabbing each other, and

tearing to pieces the reputation of their common friends, on the landing. But Lady Carabas was not with these; she was standing at the far end of the room, surrounded by half-a-dozen men, with whom she was holding an animated conversation. One of them, to whom she appeared to pay particular attention, had his back turned to Miles, but seemed to be young and of a slight wiry figure. Miles noticed this man specially, partly from the evident enjoyment which Lady Carabas took in his conversation, and partly from a peculiarity in his appearance, so far as it could be gathered from a back-view, in the horsey cut of his clothes, and the slang attitude, rounded shoulders, and hands plunged deep into his trousers-pockets, in which he stood conversing with his hostess. Miles had not noticed this gentleman before, and was wondering who he was, when a valseing couple, looking tired and out of breath, stopped immediately in front of him.

“That was a grand spin,” said the gentleman; “the room’s splendid just now. Got rid of all those awful people who can’t dance a bit, don’t

you know? and do nothing but get in your way. You're in great feather to-night, Miss Grenville."

"Thanks very much," said the young lady, smiling; "a compliment from you is quite the most charming thing possible; perhaps because it's so rare, Mr. Ashleigh."

"'Gad, I don't know!" replied the gentleman, who was two-and-twenty years of age, and who might have been two-and-sixty for calm self-possession and *savoir faire*. "I'm rather a good hand at saying nice things, I think."

"When you don't mean them, perhaps?"

"No, no. Now you're down upon me too sharp, Miss Grenville; 'pon my word you are; and I can never say anything, nice or not nice, at this time of night. Let's finish the *valse*."

"I'm afraid I must not stay any longer, Mr. Ashleigh! Really, it's quite too cruel to poor mamma; and we've two dances to-morrow night that we must go to. Besides, Lady Carabas is dying to get rid of us."

"Don't look as if she was, does she, Miss

Grenville? Laughing away; look at her. Wonderful woman, Lady Carabas!"

"Who is the gentleman she is talking to?"

"That? O, that's a man that's everywhere about."

"I'm as wise as I was before. What is his name? where does he come from?"

"His name! 'pon my word, Miss Grenville, I forget. I'll go and ask him, if you like. Ah, I know he's a great friend of Ticehurst's. You know Ticehurst?"

"I have met Lord Ticehurst."

"Met him! O ah, yes; always know what ladies mean when they say they've 'met' anybody; mean they hate 'em. Well, if you don't like Ticehurst, I don't think you'd like that man; they're very much alike, specially Pompey, don't you know? Bad egg, and that kind of thing."

"You are enigmatic, but sufficiently expressive, Mr. Ashleigh. I think I comprehend you, at least. But if he is that kind of person, why is he admitted here?"

"Dear Miss Grenville, it's exactly because he

is that kind of person that they're glad to see him here. He's somebody in his line, don't you know; though it's a bad line. His name, which I forget, is always mentioned in *Bell* and the sporting-papers, and that kind of thing; and he's a—what do you call it?—notoriety on the turf. By Jove! Coote is just going to make those fellows leave off. Do let's finish the *valse*."

The couple whirled away to the last bars of the music; and Miles, who had perforce overheard this conversation, glanced across the room at the subject of it, who was still standing with his face averted, talking to Lady Carabas. "A pleasant man that, if all my dancing friend said of him is true," said Miles to himself. "I wonder what Lord Sandilands would think of him? Pshaw! he'd take it like a man of the world; and—eh? there is the old gentleman, making his way over here; where can he have been all the evening?"

Whatever doubts Miles Challoner may have felt as to the line of conduct which Lord Sandilands would adopt towards the gentleman on whom Miles had bestowed so much observation,

they were destined to be speedily set at rest. As Lord Sandilands passed the group at the other end of the room, Lady Carabas beckoned to him; and by the way in which he and the unknown bowed to each other, Miles easily divined that the ceremony of introduction had taken place. With a half-smile at the incongruity just perpetrated, Miles was making his way across the room, when a servant came up to him and said: "I beg your pardon, sir, are you Mr. Lloyd?" Miles had scarcely time to reply in the negative, when the groom of the chambers, a very solemn-looking personage, who was passing at the moment, and who heard the inquiry, said, "That is Mr. Lloyd talking to her ladyship, James. What is wanted?"

"Only Lord Ticehurst, sir, told me to tell Mr. Lloyd he couldn't wait any longer;" and the man proceeded on his mission. Meanwhile Lady Carabas' quick eye had spied Miles approaching, and she advanced to meet him. "Mr. Challoner," said she, with a gracious smile, "I'm afraid you've had a horribly dull evening; been dreadfully bored, and all that kind of thing. O, don't deny

it; I'm sure of it. But the fact is I thought Lord Sandilands would tell you who people were, and introduce you, and all that; and now I find he has been poked away in the library all night, looking at some horrid old political caricatures. Ridiculous of him, I tell him, to strain his eyes over such nonsense. He looks quite pale and worn. You must come and help me to scold him. By the way, I must introduce you to a very charming friend of mine, who fortunately is still here.—Mr. Lloyd," touching him with her fan, "let me introduce Mr. Challoner."

The young man addressed wheeled round when he felt the touch on his arm, and before the last words were uttered he confronted Miles Challoner as Lady Carabas pronounced the name; and at that instant the light died out of his small and sunken blue eyes, his cheeks became colourless, and his thin lips closed tightly under his long fair moustache. Simultaneously a bright scarlet flush overspread Miles Challoner's face. Both then bowed slightly, but neither spoke; and immediately afterwards Miles turned sharply on his heel,

and wishing Lady Carabas a formal "good-night," hurried from the room.

"My dear boy," said Lord Sandilands—they were in the brougham going home—"you must pardon my saying that your treatment of Mr. — Mr. Lloyd was *brusque* to a degree. Supposing him even to be a highly objectionable person, the fact that you were introduced to him by Lady Carabas should have assured him a—well, a more gracious reception, to say the least of it. You—why, what the deuce is the matter, Miles? you're dead-white, and your hand shakes?"

"Nothing, dear old friend. I shall be all right again directly. That man—was I rude to him? I scarcely knew what I said or did. That man is one whom it was my father's most urgent wish I should never meet or know."

CHAPTER V.

MEMORY-HAUNTED.

HAD Lord Sandilands been less preoccupied by certain thoughts, and less disturbed by certain associations and recollections, suddenly aroused by the incidents which had just taken place, and of a painful and distracting kind, he would have been more strongly moved by Miles Challoner's abrupt and extraordinary communication. But the old nobleman's mood just then was a strange one; and the scene which had passed before his eyes, the words which his young friend had spoken, affected him but slightly and vaguely. There had been some unpleasantness for Miles in the meeting with that clever-looking fellow, Lloyd; and he was sorry for it. That was all. Old Mark has desired Miles to avoid this man, had he? The Squire had been very odd latterly, and

had taken strong dislikes, and entertained strong prejudices all his life, but especially since that bad business about his son; and in the midst of his personal preoccupation and abstraction, Lord Sandilands had time for a shudder at the thought of his old friend's great grief, and a sort of pang of thankfulness that it had come to an end, even though a life he valued dearly was finished with it. But his mind was full of his own concerns, and before he had reached the seclusion of his own particular sanctum—a small room within the library—he had almost forgotten the occurrence.

Lord Sandilands sighed heavily as he sat down in a deep leather chair by the window, which opened into a small verandah, with trellised walls well clothed with creeping plants, and tiled with cool quaint-patterned porcelain. A light iron staircase led thence to the garden, which, though unavoidably towny, was cool, pretty, and well-cared for. The summer air passed lightly over the flowers, and carried their fresh morning breath to the old man. But he did not meet its perfume gladly; it had no soothing, no refreshing influence

for him. He moved uneasily, as though some painful association had come to him with the scented breeze; then rose impatiently, and shut the window down, and paced the room from end to end. "A wonderful likeness," he muttered; "quite too close for accident. There is more expression, more power in the face, but just the same beauty. Yes, it must be so; but why have I not been told?"—He stopped before a table, and tapped it with his fingers. "And yet, why should I have been told? I made the conditions, I defined the rules myself; and why should I wonder that they have not been broken? What beauty and what talent! Who would have thought it of poor Gerty's child!—for her child and mine, Grace Lambert is, I am certain. What a strange sudden shock it was to me! I wonder if anyone perceived it—thought I was ill, perhaps. The room was hot and over-crowded, as usual; and Lady Carabas cackled more unbearably than ever; still, I hope I did not make a fool of myself; I hope I did not look upset."

Thus, Lord Sandilands, true to the ruling

principles of his order and his age, was disturbed in the midst of greater and deeper disturbance, and even diverted from his thoughts of it, by the dread so touchingly proper to every British mind, that he had been betrayed into emotion, into any departure from the unruffled and impassive calm which British society demands.

At this stage of his soliloquy Lord Sandilands looked at himself in the chimney-glass, passed his aristocratically slender fingers through his aristocratically fine silver hair, and assured himself that his outward man had not suffered from the internal perturbation and surprise which he had experienced. This critical examination concluded, he resumed his walk and his soliloquy, which we need not follow in form. Its matter was as follows :

In Grace Lambert, Lord Sandilands had recognised so strong a likeness to the mother of the little girl whom he had placed under Mrs. Bloxam's care, and towards whom he had never displayed any fatherly affection beyond that implied by the punctual and uninterrupted discharge of the pecuniary obligations which he had contracted

towards that lady, that he entertained no doubt whatever of her identity with Gertrude Keith. This discovery had agitated him less by reason of any present significance which it possessed—the girl was clever, and had achieved in his presence a success of a kind which was undeniably desirable in such a position as hers—than because it had touched long-silent chords, and touched them to utterances full of pain for the old man, who had been so thoroughly of the world, and whom the world had, on the whole, treated remarkably well. But Lord Sandilands was growing old, and was naturally beginning to yield just a little to the inevitable feeling, of being rather tired of it all, which comes with age, to the best-treated among the sons of men, and had come perceptibly to him, since Mark Challoner's death had done away with the last of the old landmarks. Things might have been so different; he had often thought so, and then put the thought from him hurriedly and resolutely. He thought so to-day, and he could not put the thought from him; it would not go; but, as he paced the room, it

grew stronger and stronger, and came closer and closer to him, and at last looked him sternly and threateningly in the face, demanding harbour and reply; and Lord Sandilands gave it both—no more expelling it, but taking counsel with himself, and repeating to himself an old story of the past, which, with a different ending, might have set all his present in another key;—which story was not very different from many that have been told, and not difficult to tell.

Lord Sandilands had not succeeded early in life to his old title and respectable but not magnificent estates. The Honourable John Borlase was much more clever, agreeable, and fascinating than rich, when, having left the University of Oxford after a very creditable career, he began to lead the kind of life which is ordinarily led by young men who have only to wait for fortune and title, and who possess sufficient means to fill up the interval comfortably, and sufficient intellect to occupy it with tolerable rationality. The dilettanteism which was one of Lord Sandilands' characteristics developed itself later in life; while he

was a young man, his tastes were more active, and he had devoted himself to sporting and travel. In the pursuit of the first he had made Mark Challoner's acquaintance; and the *camaraderie* of the hunting-field had strengthened into a strong and congenial tie of friendship, which had been broken only by the Squire's death. In the pursuit of the second, John Borlase had encountered many adventures, and made more than one acquaintance destined to influence his future, either sensibly or insensibly; and among the many was one with whom we have to do, for a brief interval of retrospection.

John Borlase did not affect "Bohemianism" (the phrase had not then been invented, but the thing existed); but he liked character, and he liked Art,—liked it better than he understood it, selected the society of those who knew more about it than he did; and though he by no means restricted himself to the society of artists, he certainly frequented them more than any other class. It was at Berlin that he fell in with Etienne Gautier, an eccentric and very clever Frenchman, ex-

iled by the cruelty of fortune from his native paradise, Paris, and employed by the French Government in some mysterious commission connected with the Galleries of Painting and Sculpture at Berlin,—a city which he never ceased to depreciate, but where he nevertheless appeared to enjoy himself thoroughly. Etienne Gautier was a dark, active, restless man; vivacious of speech; highly informed on all matters appertaining to Art; a liberal in politics and religion—of a degree of liberalism very unusual at that period, though it would not be regarded as particularly “advanced” at present; an oddity in his manners; evidently in poor circumstances, which he treated with that perfect absence of disguise and affectation which is so difficult for English people to comprehend, so impossible for them to imitate; and devotedly, though injudiciously, attached to his beautiful daughter, Gertrude. The girl’s mother, an Englishwoman, had died at her birth, and her father had brought her up after a completely unconventional fashion, and one which would have horrified his own countrymen in particular.

She was allowed as much freedom as "bird on branch," and her education was of the most desultory description. Gertrude Gautier was very handsome, very wilful, and totally destitute of knowledge of the world. She was her father's companion in all places and at all times; and when the Hon. John Borlase made Etienne Gautier's acquaintance and took to frequenting his society, he found that it included that of one of the handsomest, cleverest, and most spirited girls he had ever met. John Borlase was not quite a free man when he first saw Gertrude Gautier. Had her position in life been such as to render his marrying her a wise and suitable proceeding, he could not have offered to do so with honour, though the engagement, if so it could be called, which bound him to the Lady Lucy Beecher, was of a cool and vague description, and much more the doing of their respective families than their own. But he had carried the not unpleasant obligation cheerfully for a year or more; and it was only when he fully and freely acknowledged to himself that he had fallen in love with Gertrude

Gautier, and felt a delightful though embarrassing consciousness that she had fallen in love with him, that he grumbled at his engagement, and persuaded himself that but for its existence he would certainly have married Gertrude, and boldly set the opinions and wishes of his family at defiance. It was a pleasing delusion: there never existed a man less likely to have done anything of the kind than John Borlase; but he cherished the belief, which nothing in his former life tended to justify. He was a proud man in a totally unaffected way; and only his fancy—not for a moment his real practical self—regarded the possibility of the elevation into a future British peeress of a girl whose father was a painter, of the Bohemian order, and in whose maternal ancestry the most noteworthy “illustration” was a wholesale grocer. As for Gertrude, she loved him, and that was enough for her. The untaught, undisciplined, passionate girl thought of nothing beyond; and her father, who was as blind as fathers usually are to the fact that his daughter was no longer a child, but with all the charm and beauty of

womanhood had entered upon all its dangers, gave the matter no consideration whatever. This state of things lasted for several months, and then came a crisis. Etienne Gautier fell from a height, in one of the Berlin galleries, and died of the injuries he had received, after recovering consciousness for just sufficient time to commend his daughter to the care and kindness of John Borlase.

“Send her to Leamington,” said the dying man; “her mother’s uncle lives there. She knows his name.”

There is little need to pursue the story of Gertrude Gautier further. She never went to Leamington; she never saw the prosperous grocer, her mother’s uncle. The story is not a new one, but at least it ended better than many a one like it has ended. Gertrude was happy; she had no scruples; she knew no better. She had no friends to forfeit; she had no position to lose. Her lover was true to her, and all the more devoted that he had many stings of conscience of which she had no suspicion, in which she never shared. He brought her to England,

and the girl was happy in her pretty suburban house, with her birds, her flowers, and his society. But a time came in which John Borlase had the chance of testing his own sincerity; and he applied the test, and recognised its failure. When the institution of the suburban house was a year old, and when he had frequently congratulated himself upon the successful secrecy which had been maintained, John Borlase found a letter to his address awaiting him at his father's town-house. The letter was from Lady Lucy Beecher, and it contained the intelligence of her marriage. "I knew you did not care for me," said the fair and frank writer, "in any sense which would give us a chance of being happy together; but I did not make a fuss about the family arrangement before it became necessary to do so. That necessity arose when I found myself deliberately preferring another man to you. I do so prefer Hugh Wybrant, and I have married him. My people are very angry, of course—perhaps yours will be so also; but you will not care much about that; and I am sure you will heartily thank me for

what I have done. We shall always be good friends, I hope; and if we had married, we could never have been more, and might easily—indeed should very certainly, I am convinced—have been less.” John Borlase was much relieved by the intelligence contained in this characteristic letter. Lady Lucy had troubled his mind, had been a difficulty to him. Under the circumstances he would not have married, he would not have done so doubly dishonourable an action; but he was very glad the ostensible breach was of her making and not his. He derived a pleasant self-congratulatory conviction that he was rather a lucky fellow from this fortunate occurrence; and he answered Lady Lucy’s flippant letter by one which was full of kindness and good-humour, and accompanied by a set of Neapolitan coral.

Then came the question which would make itself heard. Should he marry Gertrude? He could do so without risk of her antecedents being discovered; the only odium he would have to bear would be that of her foreign birth and insignificant, indefinite origin. The girl’s own

feelings, strange to say, counted but little with John Borlase, in the discussion he held with himself, and which need not be pursued further. If he had decided in her favour, he felt that a first and important preliminary would be that he should explain to her the degradation of her present position, and the immense advantages to her of the compensation which he should offer her by marrying her. Their life would be changed, of course; and what had such a change to give him? He reasoned entirely as a man of the world; and the upshot of his deliberations was that he did not marry Gertrude Gautier. It made no difference to her; she did not know that the subject had ever occupied him; she had never heard Lady Lucy's name. Her calm, happy, guilty love-dream went on for a little longer, and then it ended. The doom of her mother was on Gertrude; and John Borlase came home one day, as Etienne Gautier had come home, to find a dead woman and a helpless infant where he had left youth and health and beauty in the morning. The blow fell heavily

upon John Borlase, and remorse as well as sorrow was for a long time busy at his heart. During this period he was extremely restless, and the world was quite concerned and edified to see how much he had taken Lady Lucy's defection to heart. Who would have thought a man could possess so much feeling? And then, the generosity with which he acted, the pains he had taken to show how completely he was *sans rancune*; how could Lady Lucy have done such a thing! But everybody flocked to see Lady Lucy, for all that; and as for Captain Wybrant, never was there anyone so charming. John Borlase did not hear all the talk, or if he did, he did not heed it. He was not a sentimental man, and he was sufficiently unscrupulous; but Gertrude's death was more than a racking grief and loss to him. Alongside of her shrouded figure he saw her father's; and now, too late, he was haunted by the unfulfilled trust bequeathed him by the dead. Deceiving himself again, he tried to persuade himself that only the suddenness of Gertrude's death had pre-

vented his marrying her; he tried to throw the blame, which he could not ignore, on circumstances. At first he succeeded, to a certain extent, in this—succeeded sufficiently to deaden the acuteness of the pain he could not escape from. Then, after a time, he knew better; he no longer indulged in self-deception; he acknowledged that the wrong was irreparable, and the self-reproach life-long; and he bowed to the stern truth. John Borlase was never afterwards talked of as a marrying man; and Lady Lucy Wybrant, whose sources of social success were numerous and various, enjoyed that one in addition, that the inexorable celibacy of Lord Sandilands was ascribed to his chivalrous fidelity to her. She knew that this was a fiction, as well as he knew it; but as it was a gleam of additional glorification for her, and such a supposition saved him a great deal of trouble, and preserved him from match-making mammas, each acquiesced in the view which society chose to adopt, with most amiable affability. Captain Wybrant laughed at the theory of Sandilands'

celibacy, as he laughed at most other theories; and said (and believed) that if a man must be fool enough to wear the willow for any woman, his Lucy was the best worth wearing it for, of all the women in the world. And though the whole thing was a myth, Lord Sandilands never cordially liked jolly Hugh Wybrant—perhaps no man ever yet did cordially like the individual in whose favour he has been jilted, though he may not have cared a straw for the fickle fair one, but have honestly regarded her inconstancy as a delightful circumstance, demanding ardent gratitude.

For several years after Gertrude Gautier's death, the Hon. John Borlase indulged in frequent and extensive foreign travel; and during this period the infant girl who had inherited her beauty, apparently without her delicacy of constitution, was well cared for. The child's father cared little for her, beyond scrupulously providing for her physical welfare. She was an embodied reproach to him, though he never said so to himself, but persuaded himself his indifference

to the little girl whom he saw but rarely and at long intervals, arose from his not naturally caring about children. When she was eight years old, and the memory of her mother had almost died out, though the indelible effect of the sad and guilty episode in his life with which she was connected remained impressed upon him, Lord Sandilands placed the little girl under Mrs. Bloxam's care, with the conditions already stated and the results already partially developed. He had provided ample funds to meet the exigencies of her education; he had made due arrangements for their safe and punctual transmission to Mrs. Bloxam; he had but vague notions concerning the requirements and the risks of girlhood: his dominant idea was, that in a respectable boarding-school the girl must be safe; he did not want to see her; she must not know him as her father; and he had no fancy for playing any part, undertaking any personation,—in short, having any trouble unrepresented by money,—about her. John Borlase had been unscrupulous, and a trifle hard in his nature; and despite the

conflict in his breast which had ensued on Gertrude Gautier's death, and which for all his impassive bearing had been fierce and long, Lord Sandilands was not much more scrupulous, and was decidedly harder. If the girl married, or if she died, he should be made acquainted with the circumstance; and as a matter of fact—fact, not sentiment, being the real consideration in this matter—either was all he need know. As time went on, this frame of mind about his unknown daughter became habitual to Lord Sandilands; and of late he had never remembered Gertrude's existence, except when an entry in his accounts, under a certain appointed formula, recalled the fact to his mind.

These were the circumstances on which Lord Sandilands mused, as he paced his room in the early morning, after he had seen Grace Lambert at Lady Carabas' concert. The girl's face had risen up before him like a ghost,—not only her mother's, but that of his own youth; and in the proud, assured, but not bold glance of her splendid brown eyes a story which had no successor

in the old man's lonely life was written. This beautiful, gifted girl was his daughter. She might have been the pride of his life, the darling, the ornament of his home, the light of his declining years, the inheritor of his fortune, if—he had done right instead of wrong, if he had repaired the injury he had done to her, whose grave lay henceforth and for ever between him and the possibility of reparation.

“How very handsome she is!” he thought; “and how fine and highly cultivated her voice! If I had known she possessed such a talent as that!” And then he thought how that talent might have been displayed in society, in which the possessor might have mixed on equal terms. A long train of images and fancies, of vain and bitter regrets, came up with the strong impression of the girl's grace, beauty, and gifts. Of her identity there could be no doubt. As Gertrude Gautier had looked out from the garden-gate, where she had bidden him the fond and smiling farewell destined to be their last, so this girl, as beautiful as his lost Gertrude, and with something

of grandeur in her look, which Gertrude had not, and which was the grace added by genius, had looked that night, as she calmly, smilingly, received the applause of her audience. As he recalled that look, and dwelt on it in his memory with the full assurance that his conviction was correct, an idea struck him. He was a known connoisseur in music, a known patron of musical art; everyone who was anyone in the musical world sought an introduction to Lord Sandilands. In the case of Miss Grace Lambert, his generally extended patronage had been especially requested by Lady Carabas for her *protégée*. Here was a fair and legitimate expedient within his reach for securing access to Miss Lambert, without the slightest risk of awakening suspicion, either in her mind or in that of sharp-sighted observers, that he was actuated by any particular motive in this instance. He must see her, he must know her! How bitterly he lamented now, and condemned himself for the indifference which had kept him for so many years contented that his child should be a stranger to him! How

ready he was, now that he saw her beautiful and gifted, to accord credence and attention to the voice of nature, in which he had never before believed, and which under other circumstances would have found him just as deaf as usual! Then he resolved that he would write to Mrs. Bloxam, and prepare her for a long-deferred visit to her charge, stipulating in his letter that Gertrude should know nothing of the intended visit, and that Mrs. Bloxam should receive him alone. "She shall tell me my child's history," he said; "at least it has been a bright and happy story hitherto." And Lord Sandilands sighed, and his face looked old and worn, as he arranged his note-paper, and dipped his pen in the ink, and then hesitated and pondered long before he commenced his letter to Mrs. Bloxam.

The letter consisted of but a few lines, and Lord Sandilands put it in another cover, addressed to Mr. Plowden, his solicitor, and the medium of his payments to Mrs. Bloxam. It was not until he had retired to rest, after sunrise, and had been for some time vainly trying to

sleep, that his thoughts reverted to Miles Challoner and the incident which had taken place just before they parted.

Miles Challoner, also wakeful, was thinking of it too, and debating with himself whether he should mention the matter again to Lord Sandilands. He shrank from reviving a subject so full of pain. The man whom he had met evidently had an object in concealing his identity, or he would not have been so reticent by a first impulse. They were not likely to meet again. So Miles Challoner took a resolution to keep his own counsel; and acted upon it.

CHAPTER VI.

LLOYD'S LUCK.

WE have found Gilbert Lloyd the centre of an amused circle at Carabas House. Let us see what has been his career since he parted with his wife at the George Inn at Brighton.

He was free! That was his first thought when he began to ponder over the probable results of the step he had taken,—free to come and go as he liked, to do as he listed, without the chance of incurring black looks or reproaches. Not that he had had either from Gertrude for a very long time. When her faith in her husband was first shattered; when she first began to perceive that the man whom in her girlish fancy she had regarded as a hero of romance—a creature bright, glorious, and rare—was formed of very ordinary clay, Gertrude was vexed and annoyed

by the discovery. She was young, too, and had a young woman's belief in the efficacy of tears and sulks; so that when Gilbert stayed out late, or brought home companions to whom she objected, or went away on business tours for several days together, Gertrude at first met him with sharp reproaches, dissolving into passionate fits of weeping, or varied with sufficiently feeble attempts at dignity. But Gilbert laughed these last to scorn, and either took no notice of the reproaches, or with an oath bade them cease. And then, the glamour having utterly died out, and the selfishness and brutality of her husband being fully known to her, Gertrude's manner had entirely changed. No sighs were ever heard by Gilbert Lloyd, no red eyelids, no cheeks swollen by traces of recent tears were ever seen by him. If the cold cynical expression on his wife's face had not been sufficient, the bitter mocking tones of her voice never failed to tell him of the contempt she felt for him. That she was no longer his dupe; that she bitterly despised herself for ever having been fooled by him; that she had gauged

the depth of his knavery and the shallowness of his pretensions,—all this was recognisable in her every look, in her every word. No brutality on her husband's part—and his brutality sometimes found other vent than language—no intermittent fits of softness towards her such as would occasionally come over him, had the smallest effect on her face or on her voice. She bore his blows silently, his caresses shudderingly, and when they were over she looked up at him with the cold cynical face, and replied to him with the bitter mocking voice.

Gilbert Lloyd's friends—by which expression is meant the men of the set in which he regularly lived—saw little of Mrs. Lloyd, who was popularly supposed by them to be next to a nonentity, Lloyd being a man who “always had his own way.” And indeed, so far as those words were ordinarily understood, Gilbert Lloyd's acquaintances were right. For months and months his comings and goings, his long absences, his conduct while at home, had been uncommented upon by Gertrude, save in the expression of her face and in

the tone of her voice. But these, even at such rare intervals as he was subjected to them, were quite enough to goad a man of his temperament, by nature irritable, and rendered doubly petulant by the exciting life he led; and the knowledge that he was free from them for ever, came to him with immense relief. He was "on his own hook" now, and had the world before him as much as he had before he committed the ridiculous error of letting his passion get the better of his prudence, and so binding a burden on to his back. A burden! yes, she had been a burden—a useless helpless dead-weight—even when his fleeting passion for her began to wane, he had hopes that after all he had not done such a bad thing in marrying her. To a man who looked for his prey amongst the young and inexperienced, a pretty woman would always prove a useful assistant, and Gilbert Lloyd at one time thought of using his wife as a lure and a bait. But any hopes of this nature which he may have entertained were speedily uprooted. "Right-thinking" Gertrude Lloyd certainly was not; of mental obliquity in the

matter of distinguishing between good and evil, she had her full share; but she was as proud as Lucifer, and her pride stepped in to her aid where better qualities might not have interfered. Her natural quickness enabled her at once to see through her husband's designs, and she told him plainly and promptly that he must seek elsewhere for a confederate; nay more, when Lloyd would have insisted on her presiding at his table, and making herself agreeable to his friends, her resistance, hitherto passive, became active; she threatened to make known some of his proceedings, which would have seriously compromised him in the eyes of persons with whom he wished to stand well, and neither entreaties nor commands could alter her resolution.

She had been a burden, and he was rid of her. The more he thought it over, the more he congratulated himself on the step which he had taken, and felt that he had the best of the arrangement just concluded. He had never loved anyone; and the *caprice*, for it was nothing more, which he had once felt for Gertrude had long since died away.

He was free now to pursue his own career, and he determined that his future should be brighter and more ambitious than he had hitherto hoped. Now was his chance, and he would take advantage of it. Heretofore he had lived almost entirely in the society of the Ring-men—among them, but not of them—despising his associates, and using them merely as a means to an end. He had had more than enough of such companionship, and would shake it off for ever. Not that Gilbert Lloyd intended quitting the turf and giving up his career as a betting-man. Such a thought never occurred to him; he knew no other way by which he could so easily earn so much money, while its Bohemianism, and even its chicanery, were by no means unpleasant ingredients to his fallen nature. All he wished was to take higher rank and live with a different section of the fraternity. There were betting-men and betting-men; and Gilbert Lloyd knew that his birth and education fitted him more for the society of the “swells” who looked languidly on from the tops of drags or moved quietly about the Ring, than for the com-

panionship of the professionals and welchers who drove what was literally a "roaring" trade outside the enclosure. There was, moreover, considerably more money to be made amongst the former than the latter. Opportunity alone had been wanting; now he thought that had come, and Gilbert Lloyd determined on trying his luck and going for a great *coup*.

He had a hundred pounds in hand and a capital book for Doncaster, so he made up his mind to leave the last to the manipulation of an intimate friend, who would watch the alterations in the market, and report them to him at Baden, whither he started at once. Here he established himself in a pleasant little bedchamber in the bachelor's wing of the Badischer Hof, and proceeded to commence operations. The language, the appearance, the manners of the regular turfite he at once discarded, though an occasional hint dropped in conversation at the *table d'hôte* or in the Kursaal, at both of which places he soon made many promiscuous acquaintances, conveyed a notion that the *arcana* of the Ring were, or had been,

sufficiently familiar to him. At the tables he played nightly, with varying fortune it was thought, though those who watched him closely averred that he was a considerable winner. His pecuniary success, however, affected him very slightly; he was glad, of course, to have been able to live luxuriously during a month, and to leave the place with more money than he took into it; but Gilbert Lloyd had done far better than merely winning a few hundred louis—he had made his *coup*.

He made it thus. Staying at the Badischer Hof was the Earl of Ticehurst, a young English nobleman who had recently succeeded to his title and estate, and who, during the previous year, had caused a great deal of talk in London. He was a big, heavy-looking young man, with a huge jowl and a bull neck, coarse features, and small sunken eyes. At Eton he had been principally noticeable for his cruelty to animals and his power of beer-drinking. At Oxford these charming qualities were more freely developed, but whereas they had been called by their proper names by Viscount

Etchingham's school-fellows, they became known as "high spirits" to the college dons and the tuft-hunting tutors. It is probable, however, that even these long-suffering individuals would have had to take notice of his lordship's vivacious proceedings, had not his father died during his first year of residence; and on succeeding to the earldom of Ticehurst, Lord Etchingham at once left the University and entered upon London life. This means different things to different people. To the nobleman just interred in the family vault at Etchingham, in the presence of the Premier and half the Cabinet, it had signified the commencement of a brilliant political career. To his son, who had succeeded him, it meant the acquisition of a stud of racers, the sovereignty of the coffee-room at Rummer's, the well-known sporting hotel, and the obsequious homage of some of the greatest scoundrels in London. The young man delighted in his position, and felt that he had really come into his kingdom. His name was in everyone's mouth, and people who scarcely could distinguish a racer from a towel-horse had heard of

young Lord Ticehurst. The names of the horses which he owned were familiar in the mouths of the most general of the "general public," the amount of the bets which he won or lost was talked of in all classes of society, and by the "sporting world" he was looked upon as the great revivalist of those pastimes which are always described by the epithets "old" and "British." The fighting of mains of cocks, the drawing of badgers, the patronage of the rat-pit and the P.R. ("that glorious institution which, while it exists among us and is fostered by the genial support of such true Corinthians as the E— of T—, will prevent Englishmen from having recourse to the dastardly use of the knife," as it was prettily described by Snish, the fistic reporter of the *Life*), the frequent fuddling of himself with ardent spirits, the constant attendance at night-saloons, and the never going home till morning—came into this category. Elderly Haymarket publicans and night-cabmen began to think that the glorious days of their youth had returned, when they witnessed or listened to the pranks of Lord Tice-

hurst; and in his first London season he had established a reputation for gentlemanly black-guardism and dare-devilry quite equal to any in the records of the Bow-street Police-court.

Needless to say that with Lord Ticehurst's reputation Gilbert Lloyd was perfectly familiar, and that he had long and ardently desired the opportunity of making the acquaintance of that distinguished nobleman. To use his own language, he had "done all he knew" to carry out this desirable result; but in vain. There are hawks and hawks; and the birds of prey who hovered round Lord Ticehurst were far too clever and too hungry to allow any of the inferior kind to interfere with their spoil. Not that Gilbert Lloyd was inferior in any sense, save that of mixing with an inferior class. Lord Ticehurst knew several men of Lloyd's set—knew them sufficiently to speak to them in a manner varying from the *de haut en bas* style which he used to his valet to the vulgar familiarity with which he addressed his trainer; but it would not have suited Gilbert Lloyd to have been thrown in his way, and he had care-

fully avoided being presented or becoming known to Lord Ticehurst in an inferior position.

When Gilbert arrived at the *Badischer Hof*, the first person he saw at the late *table d'hôte* was Lord Ticehurst; the second was Plater Dobbs, who acted as his lordship's henchman, Mentor, and confidential upper servant. A stout short man, Plater Dobbs (his real name was George, and he was supposed once to have been a major in something, the nickname "Plater" attaching to him from the quality of the racehorses he bred and backed), with a red face, the blood strangled into it by his tight bird's-eye choker, a moist eye, a pendulous under lip, a short gray whisker and stubbly moustache of the same colour, a bell-shaped curly-brimmed hat, and a wonderful vocabulary of oaths. Plater Dobbs was one of the old school in everything—one of the hard-drinking, hard-riding, hard-swearing, five-o'clock-in-the-morning old boys. A sportsman of the old school, with many recollections of Pea-green Hayne, and Colonel Berkeley, and the Golden Ball, and other lights of other days; a godless

abandoned old profligate, illiterate and debauched, but with a certain old-fashioned knowledge of horse-flesh, an unlimited power of drinking without being harmed by what he drank, and a belief in and an adherence to "the code of honour" as then understood amongst gentlemen, as he had proved in person on various occasions at home and abroad. He had taken entire sway over Lord Ticehurst, bought racers with the young nobleman's money, and trained and ran them when he chose; went with him everywhere; and was alternately his Mentor and his butt—acting in either capacity with the greatest equanimity.

Now, above all other men in the world, Lloyd hated Plater Dobbs. He had long envied the position which the "vulgar old cad," as he called him, had held in regard to Lord Ticehurst; and when he saw them together at Baden, his rage was extreme, and a desire to supplant the elderly Mentor at once rose in his breast. Not that Gilbert had any feeling that the counsels or the example given and shown to Lord Ticehurst by Plater Dobbs were wrong or immoral. All he

felt about them was that they were *rococo*, old-fashioned, and behind the mark of the present day. The appointment of, "confederate" to such a man as Ticehurst, was one of the most splendid chances of a lifetime; and it had now fallen to the lot of a senile debauchee, who was neither doing good for himself nor obtaining credit for his pupil. If Ticehurst were only in *his* hands, what would not Gilbert Lloyd do for him and for himself? Ticehurst should be in his hands, but how? That was the problem which Lloyd set himself to solve. That was the thought which haunted him day and night, which dulled his palate to M. Rheinbolt's choicest *plats*, which even made him sometimes inattentive to the monotonous cry of the *croupiers*. To secure Plater Dobbs' position would be to land a greater stake than could be gained by the most unexpected fluke at *trente et quarante*. Let him only hook Ticehurst, and—
rien ne va plus!

An ordinary sharper would have taken advantage of the frequent opportunities afforded by the *table d'hôte* and continental life generally, have

spoken to Lord Ticehurst, and managed to secure a speaking acquaintanceship with him. But Gilbert Lloyd was not an ordinary sharper, and he saw clearly enough how little that course would tend to the end he had in view. He foresaw that Plater Dobbs' jealousy would be at once aroused; and that while the acquaintance with the bear was ripening, the bear-leader would have ample opportunity of vilifying his would-be rival. He put it to himself clearly that success was only to be gained by adventitious chance, and that chance came thus.

Among the frequenters of the Kursaal was a French gentleman of some thirty-five years of age, black-bearded, bright-eyed, and thin-waisted. André de Prailles was this gentleman's name, Paris was his nation, and, to carry out the old rhyme, the degradation of England and her children was apparently his vocation. In private and in public he took every opportunity of saying unpleasant things about *la perfide Allion*, and the traitors, native and domiciled, nourished by her. He had, for a Frenchman, an extraordi-

nary knowledge of English ways and manners of life—of life of a certain kind—which he amused himself and certain of his immediate friends by turning into the greatest ridicule. He played but little at the tables; indeed those who had watched him narrowly avowed that there was a certain understanding between him and the *croupiers*, who discouraged his attendance; but be this as it might, he frequented the promenade and the baths, lived in very fair style at the Hotel Victoria, and was “a feature” in the society of the place. M. de Prailles’ Anglophobia had contented itself with disdainful glances at the representatives of the land which he detested, and with muttering with bated breath at all they said and did, until the arrival at Baden of Mdlle. de Meronville, the celebrated *ingénue* of the Vaudeville, with whom M. de Prailles had an acquaintance, and for whom he professed an adoration.

Mdlle. de Meronville was a bright lithe little woman, with large black eyes, an olive complexion, and what Lord Ticehurst called a

“fuzzy” head of jet-black hair; a pleasant good-natured little woman, fond of admiration and *bonbons* and good dinners and plenty of champagne; a little woman who played constantly at the tables, screaming with delight when she won, and using “strange oaths” when she lost—who smoked cigarettes on the promenade, and gesticulated wildly, and beat her companions with her parasol, and, in fact, behaved herself as unlike a British female as is possible to be imagined. Perhaps it was the entire novelty of her style and conduct that gave her such a charm in the eyes of Lord Ticehurst, for charm she undoubtedly had. A devotion to the opposite sex had never hitherto been classed among the weaknesses of that amiable nobleman; but he was so completely overcome by the fascinations of Eugénie de Meronville, that no youth ever suffered more severely from “calf-love” than this reckless roisterer. He followed her about like her shadow; when in her company, after he had obtained an introduction to her, he would address to her the most flowery compliments in a curious *mélange* of

tongues; and when absent from her he would sit and puff his cigar in moody silence, obstinately rejecting all efforts to withdraw him from his sentimental abstraction. Plater Dobbs regarded this new phase in his pupil's character with unspeakable horror, and was at his wits' end to know how to put a stop to it. He endeavoured to lead Lord Ticehurst into deeper play; but unless Mdlle. de Meronville were at the tables the young man would not go near them. He organised a little supper-party, at which were present two newly-arrived and most distinguished beauties: an English grass-widow whose husband was in India, and a Russian lady, who regarded the fact of her liege lord's being ruined, and sinking from a position of affluence into that of a hotel-keeper, as quite enough to excuse her leaving him for ever. But Ticehurst sulked through the banquet, and the ladies agreed in voting him *bête* and *mauvais ton*. The fact was that the man was madly in love with Eugénie de Meronville, and cared for nothing but her society.

What one does and where one goes and with

whom one passes one's time is, of course, very easily known in a small coterie such as that assembled in the autumn at Baden; and it is not to be wondered at that M. André de Prailles suffered many a bad quarter of an hour as he witnessed and heard of the amicable relations between his fair compatriot and one of the leading representatives of that nation which he detested. What added to M. de Prailles' anger was the fact that whereas in Paris, where he was known to be the friend of certain *jeuilletonistes* with whom it was well for every actress to be on good terms, he had had cause for believing himself to be well thought of by the *ingénue* of the Vaudeville, at Baden, where no such inducement existed, he had been completely snubbed by Eugénie, and treated with a *hauteur* which set his blood boiling in his veins. M. de Prailles resented this after his own fashion. First, he addressed a passionate letter to his idol, reproaching her for her perfidy. To this he received a very short, and, to tell truth, a very ill-spelt, answer, in which the goddess replied that it was

not his "*afair*," and that she would behave herself "*come je voulais*" wheresoever and with whomsoever she pleased. Then he took to a more open course of defiance—following on the trail of Mdlle. de Meronville and Lord Ticehurst, standing behind them at the table, occupying adjacent seats to theirs in the Kursaal or on the promenade, and enunciating, in by no means a hushed voice, his opinion on Englishmen in general and Lord Ticehurst in particular. But Lord Ticehurst's comprehension of the French language was limited, his comprehension of the English language, as spoken by M. de Prailles, was still more limited; and the strongest comment with which he favoured his opponent's ravings was a muttered inquiry as to what "that d—d little Frenchman was jabbering about."

At last, one night, the long-threatened explosion took place. A sudden storm of wind and rain swept down from the Black Forest, and the curious vehicle attached to the Hôtel d'Angleterre was sent for to convey Mdlle. de Meronville from the Kursaal to her rooms. The little actress had

been playing with great ill-luck, and had been duly waited upon by Lord Ticehurst; but at the moment when the arrival of the droschky was notified to her, he had been called into another part of the room by Plater Dobbs, and only arrived in time to see her, mortified and angry, being conducted to the carriage on the arm of M. de Prailles. Rushing forward to make his excuses, Lord Ticehurst caught his foot in the train of Mdlle. de Meronville's gown, and, amid suppressed burst of laughter from the bystanders, pulled her backwards and fell forward himself. He had scarcely recovered himself when the roll of the departing vehicle was in his ears, and M. de Prailles was standing before him uming.

“An accident? nothing of the sort! *Exprès! tout à fait exprès!*”

A crowd gathered at the ominous words and at the tone of voice in which they were uttered: Plater Dobbs and Gilbert Lloyd foremost among the concurrents, the one flushed and excited, the other cool and collected; Lord Ticehurst, very

pale, and with an odd twitching in the muscles of his mouth.

“It was no accident, that tumble!” shrieked M. de Prailles. “It was a studied insult offered to a lady by a barbarian! *Exprès, entendez-vous, messieurs, exprès?*”

Then, seeing that his opponent stood motionless, the little Frenchman drew himself on tiptoes, and hissed out,

“*Et il ne dit rien? Décidément, milor, vous êtes un lâche!*” and he made a movement as though he would have struck Lord Ticehurst with his open hand.

But Plater Dobbs, who had been puffing and fuming and gasping for breath, caught the angry Frenchman by the arm, and called out,

“Holla, none of that! We’ll produce our man when he’s wanted. We don’t want any rough-and-tumble here! *Ally, party, mossoo!*”

“*Au diable, ivrogne!*” was all the response which M. de Prailles chose to make to this elegant appeal; but he turned to some of his compatriots, and said, “*Regardez donc la figure de ce*

milor là !" And in truth Lord Ticehurst was almost livid, and the chair against which he was leaning trembled in his grasp. At that moment Gilbert Lloyd stepped forward.

"There's no question of producing any man on this occasion, except a *gensdarme*," said he, addressing Plater Dobbs.

A hush fell on the little crowd—the Englishmen silenced by what they heard, the foreigners by the effect which they saw the words had produced. Only Dobbs spoke, and he said, "What the devil do you mean?"

"What I say," replied Lloyd; "it's impossible for Lord Ticehurst to fight this fellow," with a contemptuous wave of the hand at De Prailles. "I've long thought I recognised him; now I'm sure of it. I don't know what he calls himself now, but he used to answer to the name of Louis three years ago, when he was a billiard-marker at the rooms over the Tennis-court, just out of the Haymarket."

"*Tu mens, canaille !*" screamed M. de Prailles, rushing at him; but Gilbert Lloyd caught his

adversary by the throat, and with every nerve in his lithe frame strung to its tightest pitch, shook him to and fro.

“Drop that!” he said; “drop that, or by the Lord I’ll fling you out of the window. You know the height you’d have to fall!” and with one parting shake he threw the Frenchman from him. “I’m glad my memory served me so well; it would have been impossible for your lordship to have gone out with such a fellow.”

M. André de Prailles left Baden very early the next morning: but the events of that night affected more than him. Although he was not of a grateful or recognisant nature, Lord Ticehurst felt keenly the material assistance which Gilbert Lloyd afforded him at what in his inmost heart his lordship knew to have been a most critical and unpleasant time, and he showed at once that he appreciated this assistance at its proper value. He made immediate advances of friendship to Gilbert, which advances Gilbert received with sufficient *nonchalance* to cause them to be repeated with

double ardour. At the same time he by no means declined the acquaintance which Lord Ticehurst offered him, and in the course of various colloquies contrived to indoctrinate his lordship with a notion of his extraordinary 'cuteness in things in general, and in matters pertaining to the turf and to society in particular. The world, as viewed through Gilbert Lloyd's glasses, had to Lord Ticehurst quite a different aspect from that under which he had hitherto seen it, and he raged against opportunities missed and stupid courses taken while under the tutelage of Plater Dobbs. To rid himself of that worthy's companionship and to instal Gilbert Lloyd in his place was a task which Lord Ticehurst set himself at once, and carried out with great speed and success. He found little opposition from the Plater. That worldly-wise old person had seen how matters stood—"how the cat jumped," as he phrased it—from the first, and was perfectly prepared to receive his *congé*. Nor, indeed, was he altogether displeased at the arrangement. His good qualities were few enough, but among them was the

possession of personal pluck and courage, and a horror of anyone in whom these were lacking. "I always knew Etchingam was a duffer, sir," he would say in after-days—"a pig-headed, obstinate, mean duffer—but I never thought he was a cur until that night. He was in a blue funk, I tell you—in a blue funk of a d—d little Frenchman that he could have swallowed whole! I don't complain, sir. He hasn't behaved badly to me, and I hope he'll find he's done right in holding on to Master Lloyd. A devilish slippery customer that, sir. But him and me couldn't have been the same after I saw he funk'd that Frenchman, and so perhaps it's better as it is." So Major Plater Dobbs retired on an allowance of three hundred a year from his ex-pupil to the cheerful city of York, and this history knows him no more.

When Gilbert Lloyd returned to England in time to accompany his patron to Doncaster, where they witnessed the shameful defeat of all Lord Ticehurst's horses, which had been trained under the Dobbs' *régime*, he felt that he had made his

coup; but he did not anticipate such success as fell to his lot. By an excellent system of tactics, the mainspring of which was to make himself sought instead of to seek, and to speak his mind unreservedly upon all points on which he was consulted, taking care never to interfere in cases where his opinion was not asked, he obtained a complete ascendancy over the young man, who, after a very short time, made him overseer, not merely of his stable, but of his house, his establishment, and his estates. And excellently did Lloyd perform the functions then allotted to him. He had a clear head for business, and a keen eye for "a good thing," and as a large portion of all Lord Ticehurst's luck and success was shared by his "confederate," it was not surprising that Lloyd employed his time and brains in planning and achieving successes. Not a little of his good fortune Lloyd owed to keeping in with his former allies the Ring-men, who were treated by him with a frank cordiality which stood him in excellent stead, and who were delighted to find that one of their own order, as they judged him, could

climb to such a height without becoming stuck-up or spiteful. The old trainer, the jockeys, and all the Dobbs' satellites were swept away as soon as Gilbert Lloyd came into power, and were so well replaced that Lord Ticehurst's stud, which had previously been the laughing-stock of Tattersall's, now contained several animals of excellent repute, and one or two from which the greatest things were expected.

Nor was the change less remarkable in Lord Ticehurst himself. Of course his new Mentor would have lacked the inclination, even if he had had the power, to withdraw his pupil from turf-life; but to a certain extent he made him understand the meaning and the value of the saying "*noblesse oblige.*" It was understood that henceforward Lord Ticehurst's horses were run "on the square," and that there was to be no more "pulling," or "roping," or any other chicanery. And after a good deal of patience and persuasion Gilbert Lloyd succeeded in indoctrinating his patron with the notion that it was scarcely worth while keeping up the reputation of being "British"

with a small portion of the community at the expense of disgusting all the rest; that if one had no original taste in the matter of costume, and needs must copy someone else, there were styles not simpler perhaps, but at all events as becoming as those of the groom; and that all the literary homage of the *Life* scarcely repaid a gentleman for having to associate with such blackguards as he met in his patronage of the prize-ring, the cock-pit, and the rat-hunt. The young man, who being young was impressionable, was brought to see the force of these various arguments; more easily, doubtless, because they were put to him in a remarkably skilful way, without dictation and without deference—simply as the suggestions of a man of the world to another worldling, the force of which he, from his worldly knowledge, would perfectly understand and appreciate. And so, within a year after submitting himself to Gilbert Lloyd's tutelage, Lord Ticehurst, who had been universally regarded as a "cub" and a "tiger," was admitted to be a doosid good fellow, and his friends laid all the improvement to Gilbert Lloyd.

Amongst those friends, perhaps the warmest of Lloyd's supporters was Lord Ticehurst's aunt, Lady Carabas. Lady Carabas had always delighted to have it thought that she was a *femme incomprise*; that while she was looked upon as the mere worldling, the mere butterfly of fashion, she had a soul—not the immortal part of her system which she took notice of once a week in St. Barnabas's Church, but such a soul as poets and metaphysical writers spell with a large S,—a Soul for poetry, romance, love, and all those other things which are never heard of in polite neighbourhoods. The Marquis of Carabas was quite unaware of the existence of this portion of his wife's attributes, and if he had known of it, it is probable it would have made very little difference to him: it was nothing to eat, nothing to be shot at or angled for, at least with a gun or a rod, so had no interest for his lordship. But there was always someone sufficiently intimate with Lady Carabas to be intrusted with the secret of the existence of this Soul, and to be permitted to share in its aspirations. Lady Carabas had married very early in

life, and although she had two large and whiskered sons, she was yet a remarkably handsome woman; so handsome, so genial, and so winning, that there were few men who would not have been gratified by her notice. And here let it be said, that all her friendships—she had many, though never more than one at the same time—were perfectly platonic in their nature. She pined to be understood—she wanted nothing else, she said; but people remarked that those whom she allowed to understand her were always distinguished either by rank, good looks, or intellect. The immediate predecessor of Gilbert Lloyd in dominion over Lady Carabas' Soul, was an Italian singer with a straight nose, a curling brown beard, and a pair of luminous gray eyes; and he in his turn had supplanted a Prince of the Blood. Gilbert Lloyd was prime favourite now, and was treated accordingly by the "regulars" in Beaumanoir-square. It was Lady Carabas' boast that she could be "all things to all men." Thus while her Soul had gushed with the regal romance of Arthur and Guinevere in its outpourings to the Prince—an

honest gentleman of limited intellect and conversation restricted to the utterance of an occasional "Hum, haw, Jove!"—it had burned with republican ardour in its conference with the exiled Italian; and was now imbued with the spirit of Ruff, *Bell*, Bailey, and other leading turf-guides, in its lighter dalliance with Gilbert Lloyd. And this kind of thing suited Lloyd very well, and tended to secure his position with Lord Ticehurst.

At the time of Gilbert Lloyd's introduction to Miles Challoner at Carabas House, that position was settled and secured. Not merely was Lord Ticehurst, to all appearance, utterly dependent on his Mentor for aid and advice in every action of his life, but Lloyd's supremacy in the Ticehurst household was recognised and acquiesced in by all friends and members of the family. It was so recognised, so apparently secure, and withal so pleasant, that Lloyd had put aside any doubt of the possibility of its ever being done away with; and the first idea of such a catastrophe came to him as the old name, so long unheard, sounded once more in his ears, and as in the handsome

man before him he recognised his elder brother. Miles Challoner, as we have seen, sought safety in flight. Gilbert Lloyd, the younger man, but by far the older worldling, soon recovered from his temporary disquietude, so far as his looks were concerned, and gazed after the vanishing figure of his brother with eyebrows uplifted in apparent wonderment at his *gaucherie*. But in the solitude of his chamber, before he went to bed that morning, he faced the subject manfully, and thought it out under all its various aspects.

Would Miles betray him? That was the chief point. The blood surged up in his pale face, and the beating of his heart was plainly audible to himself as he thought of that contingency, and foresaw the unalterable and immediate result. Exposure! proved to have been living for years under an assumed name and in a false position—A slight ray of hope here. The real name and the real position were incomparably better than those he had assumed. Had he not rather lost than gained by—Dashed out at once? Why did he hide his name and position? Forced to. Why?

O, that story must never be given up, or he would be lost indeed. And then his thoughts digressed, and he found himself picturing in his memory that last night in the old house—that farewell of Rowley Court. Good God! how he recollected it all!—the drive in the dog-cart through the long lanes redolent of May; the puzzled face of the old coachman, who knew young Master was going away, and yet could not make out why old Master, and Master Miles, and the household had not turned out to wish him “God speed;” the last glimpse which, as he stood at the station-door, he caught of the dog-cart thridding its way homewards through the lanes, almost every inch of which he knew. Would Miles betray him? No, he thought not—at least wilfully and intentionally. If the Miles of to-day had the same characteristics as he remembered in the boy, he had an amount of pride which would render it impossible for him to move in the matter. Impossible! Yes, because to move in it would be to announce to the world that he, the Squire of Rowley Court, was the brother of

Mr. Lloyd the turfite, the "confederate" of Lord Ticehurst, the—and Gilbert cursed the pride which would make his brother look down upon him, even though to that pride he principally looked for his own safety. But might not Miles unintentionally blunder and blurt out the secret? He had been hot-headed and violent of speech as a boy, and his conduct at Carabas House on the introduction had proved that he had no command over his feelings. This was what it was to have to do with fools. And then Gilbert Lloyd recollected that, on the only other occasion in his life when the chance of compromising his future was in the hands of another person, it was his wife to whom the chance was allotted; and he remembered the perfect security which he felt in her sense and discretion. His wife! He had not thought of her for a very long time. He wondered where she was and what she was doing. He wondered whether she had altered in personal appearance, whether anyone else had—pshaw! what the deuce did it matter to him? Nevertheless, he angrily quickened the step with which he was pacing the

room as the thought crossed his mind. O no, Miles would not betray him! There were other reasons why he should not. Did he not—perhaps it was a mistake after all his having broken with Gertrude in that manner? She would have been in his way here and there, perhaps; but she was wonderfully accommodating, even in letting him have his own way so far as coming and going were concerned; and how shrewd and clear-headed she was! So good-looking, too! He found himself idly tracing her profile with his finger on the table in front of him. Strange girl—what an odd light there was on her face that—that night when they parted! And Harvey Gore—O, good Lord! what had started that vein of thought? That confounded meeting with Miles had upset him entirely. Harvey Gore!—did Gertrude suspect?—she knew. He was certain she knew, and that was what— It was for the best that he had got rid of her; for the best that he was on his own hook—only himself to consult and rely upon, and no one else with a chance of selling him. All women were unreliable, and in-

terfered with business. By the way, what was that Ticehurst was saying as they came away in the brougham about some woman who had sung in the early part of the evening, before he got to Carabas House? Ticehurst was wonderfully enthusiastic for him—such a face, such a figure, such a lovely voice! These raptures meant nothing serious, Gilbert supposed; at all events he intended to take care that they should mean nothing serious. That affair of Eugénie de Meronville, when Ticehurst's admiration very nearly brought him under an infuriated Frenchman's fire, had been of infinite service, Gilbert reflected with a grin, in cooling his lordship's love ardour, and indeed had kept him very much aloof from the sex. It was better so; if Lord Ticehurst married, more than half Gilbert Lloyd's influence would be gone, if indeed the turf were not abandoned, and the "confederate" *chasséd*; and any other arrangement in which a woman might be concerned would be equally unsatisfactory. Fancy his having seen Miles, and heard the old name too! How much did Miles know? He turned

on his heel as if—and yet the old man would never have told him. *His* pride would have prevented that; at all events nothing could be gained by keeping awake now. He had thought it out, and decided that, for several reasons, his brother would not betray him; and so Gilbert Lloyd turned into bed, and slept as peacefully and as easily as the darkest schemers often do, despite all the romancists say to the contrary.

Next day he was walking through the Park with his patron, on their way to Tattersall's, when, just as they crossed the Drive, a brougham dashed rapidly by them. Lord Ticehurst clutched his companion's arm, and said eagerly, "Look, Gilbert—quick! there she is." Gilbert Lloyd looked round, and said in a tone of irritation, "What? Who?" "The girl who sang last night at Carabas's. The stunner I told you of." "Then I wish the stunner had gone some other way," said Lloyd. "I didn't even have the satisfaction of seeing her; and I was just totting-up how we stood on the Ascot Cup, and you've startled all the figures out of my head."

CHAPTER VII.

THE LINNET'S CAGE.

MRS. BLOXAM had had no reason to regret the assent which she had given to the proposition made to her by her ex-pupil Gertrude Lloyd. The arrangement had turned out successfully, and the far-seeing astute lady, who had had quite enough of schoolkeeping considerably before she saw her way to the abandonment of that uncongenial occupation, soon began to see visions and dream dreams of a very different and much more enjoyable kind of life in the future. For a calm person, not to be taken in by appearances, and habitually distrustful of first impressions, Mrs. Bloxam may be said to have been astonished when she beheld her former pupil, after the lapse of two years and a half, during which Gertrude had been learning expe-

rience in a school which, though always severe, was sufficiently varied; and Mrs. Bloxam, when she remembered the girl at all, thought of her only as the clever and handsome pupil, who had outwitted her indeed (but that was a feat which she was not likely to overrate—she never imposed any magnified notion of her own vigilance upon herself), but who was not likely to turn out in any way remarkable. Gertrude's letter had struck her rather forcibly as being out of the common way; apart from the unusual nature of the circumstances which had given rise to it, its coolness, firmness, and business-like precision were not common in the schoolmistress's experience of feminine correspondence; and there was nothing in her previous knowledge of Gertrude's intellect and character which would have naturally led her to take such a manifestation of those qualities for granted. Mrs. Bloxam thought a good deal about Gertrude's letter in the interval between the receipt of it and the arrival of its writer. It occurred to her that the girl who took her life into her own management,

after the clear cool-headed fashion in which it was plain that Gertrude was acting, must have been rather a difficult wife to manage, and not a particularly safe one to deceive and injure. From thinking of Gertrude as the wife and the enemy of Gilbert Lloyd, it was an easy transition to think of Gertrude as possibly her (Mrs. Bloxam's) enemy—easy, not pleasant—and significantly encouraging to that lady, in the resolution she had formed, to treat Gertrude in all respects well, and with loyalty. Mrs. Bloxam conceived, in the course of her cogitations, a very reasonable certainty that Gertrude had developed into a kind of person, who, if she made up her mind to discover the secret of her birth, parentage, and previous position, would inevitably do so, or make herself extremely disagreeable in the process of failure. When this notion associated itself with the recollection of the comfortable sums of money which she had continued to receive for Gertrude's benefit, when Gertrude was absent and her fate unknown, Mrs. Bloxam congratulated herself on the course she had

adopted, and made such virtuous resolutions that she would advance Gertrude's interests in every way within her power, that she soon succeeded in compounding with her conscience for the—indiscretion.

When Gertrude made her appearance at the Vale House, Mrs. Bloxam's anticipations were more than fulfilled. The young woman's easy and assured grace of manner, the calmness with which she inducted herself into the place which she had assigned to herself in the establishment, and the conviction with which she inspired Mrs. Bloxam that, if she desired to possess her confidence, she must patiently await the time and manner of her accordance of it, at her own will, were simply inimitable. The schoolmistress contemplated the girl with wonder and secret admiration. She had seen so much of the vapidness, the frivolity, the dependence, and the littleness of feminine human nature, that (as she did not care for Gertrude sufficiently to be alarmed by the dangerous side of her complex character) it was a positive pleasure to her to observe a

disposition so exceptional. In person she was also changed and much improved, though Mrs. Bloxam was not slow to notice the discordant expression which occasionally deprived her face of its youthfulness by lending it an intensity beyond her years.

Gertrude Lloyd had been settled at the Vale House for more than a week, and had entered on her duties with a grave alacrity which surprised Mrs. Bloxam, whose recollection of her as a desultory pupil had left her unprepared to find the girl an active and conscientious teacher, before she accorded to Mrs. Bloxam any more confidence than that which her letter had conveyed. When so much time had elapsed, she informed Mrs. Bloxam that she intended to commence her singing-lessons, and invited that lady to be present at the trial of her voice. The masters who attended at the Vale House were all of a superior class, and Gertrude was satisfied to abide by the opinion which Signor da Capo should express concerning her musical capacity. The testimony of that dark-eyed and sentimental

exile was most reassuring; he had rarely heard such a voice as Miss Lambert's, and it was perfectly fresh and uninjured, susceptible of the highest training. He could conscientiously assure Miss Lambert no concert-singer in London possessed a finer organ, not even Mademoiselle Roulade, who was just then making such a sensation at the private concerts of the nobility—she was quite the rage at Carabas House in particular.

Miss Grace Lambert was not interested in Mademoiselle Roulade, and cut the worthy signor's raptures rather unceremoniously short; but he produced a second edition of them for the benefit of Mrs. Bloxam, when Miss Lambert had left the room, and evinced so much curiosity concerning Miss Lambert's future plans, throwing out hints of the advantage to be derived from the judicious promulgation of reports as *avant-coureurs* of a *débutante*, that Mrs. Bloxam felt convinced of his sincerity, and forthwith began to form a pleasant scheme for the future in her fancy.

On the same evening Gertrude requested audience of Mrs. Bloxam in her private sitting-room; and having been cordially welcomed, briefly expressed her appreciation of the kindness with which she had been received at the Vale House, and asked Mrs. Bloxam's opinion of what Signor da Capo had said. Mrs. Bloxam thought nothing could be more satisfactory, nothing more encouraging; and if Gertrude really intended to become a public singer—

“I do intend it,” interrupted Gertrude, with a slight expressive frown; “understand this once for all, Mrs. Bloxam, my mind is quite made up. I may succeed, I may fail; but at least I will make the attempt; and I feel that I *shall* succeed. I am confident this will not be a losing speculation for you.”

“My dear girl,” said Mrs. Bloxam,—and she said it quite sincerely, with true interest: there had been a fascination for her about the girl since her return, a charm partly arising from the uncommonness of her disposition and manners, and partly from the elder woman's dim

perception of the pitifulness of her story,—“ I am not thinking about that. I am thinking about you, and of what you must have suffered, to have made you turn your back so resolutely on your past life. You are so young, Gertrude.”

“ Grace, if you please,” said the younger woman, and she touched Mrs. Bloxam’s hand for a moment. In the slight caress there was a little softening, and the other took advantage of it.

“ You may trust me, my dear, you may indeed,” she said. “ I don’t pretend to be disinterested in many of the occurrences of my life; I could not afford to be so—no woman can who has her bread to earn—and I have not acted disinterestedly towards you; but I will if you will trust me.”

An unusual expression of gentleness was in Mrs. Bloxam’s face, and her shallow shifty blue eyes grew almost deep and almost steady under the influence of unwonted feeling.

Gertrude sat still before her, with downcast

eyes. A little interval of silence passed, and then she looked up, and spoke.

“I will trust you, Mrs. Bloxam, as much as I can ever trust anyone in this world. I am separated for ever, of my own free will, by my own irrevocable decision, from my husband. I cannot tell you why in more than general terms. Gilbert Lloyd is a bad man—I am not a particularly good woman; but I could not live with him, and I trust I may never see him again. My life is at my own disposal now; I have no friend but you.”

There was no tremor in her voice, no quiver through her slight frame, as this young girl gave so terrible an account of herself.

“But if he claims you?” said Mrs. Bloxam.

“He will never claim me,” replied Gertrude; and there was that in her voice and in her look which carried conviction to her hearer’s mind. “He is more than dead to me—he is as though he had never lived.”

“My poor child, how wretched you must be!” exclaimed Mrs. Bloxam, almost involuntarily.

“I am not wretched,” said Gertrude; and again she frowned slightly, and again her face looked old, and her voice sounded hard. “I feel that there has been a chapter of misery and of degradation in the story of my life; but I have closed it for ever. I will never speak of it again, I will never think of it again, if by any effort of my will I can keep my mind clear of it. I am young, strong, clever, and ambitious; and I am not the first woman who has made a tremendous mistake, and incurred a dreadful penalty, in the outset of her life; but I daresay few, if any, have had such a chance of escape from the consequences as I have. I will take the fullest advantage of it. And now, Mrs. Bloxam, we will talk of this no more. Let that man’s name be as dead to you and me as all feeling about him is dead in my heart for ever; and help me to make a new line in life for myself.”

Mrs. Bloxam looked at her silently, and sighed. Then she said:

“You are a strange young woman, and have

suffered some great wrongs, I am sure. It shall be as you wish, my dear, and I will try to forget that you ever were anything but Grace Lambert. And now let us talk of affairs—yours and mine, if you like; for I have something to tell you, and to consult you about.”

Gertrude looked round her, and smiled. The scene of their interview and its associations were strangely familiar to her. It seemed as though it were only the other day she had sat in that same room, summoned to a consultation with Mrs. Bloxam about the expenditure of her quarter's allowance, and the fashion of her summer costume. The same bureau lay open, disclosing a collection of tradesmen's books and bills of well-known aspect. Gertrude knew in which of the little drawers the reserve of prospectuses, in which the innumerable and incomparable advantages of the Vale House were set forth, was kept. A low chair, with a straight, upright, uncompromising back, whereon a very frosty-looking bunch of yellow dahlias had been worked in harsh worsted by a grateful pupil, stood in the position it had

always occupied within Gertrude's memory, beside the bureau. It was known as "the client's chair." Moved by a familiar impulse, Gertrude rose and seated herself in this chair, and looked up at Mrs. Bloxam, with the old look so completely banished from her face, with so exactly the same girlish smile which she remembered, that Mrs. Bloxam started.

"You might have never gone away," she said, "for all the change there is in you now. What a chameleon you are, Gertrude—"

"Grace!" said Gertrude once more; and then the consultation, whose details there is no need to follow, as they will be made plain by their results, proceeded without interruption.

* * * * *

Signor da Capo was right in his judgment of Miss Lambert's voice. Her industry in the study of her art, her unflinching labour, and her great talent were alike conspicuous. After the interview with Mrs. Bloxam, Miss Lambert did not make her appearance very often in the school-room, and it was rumoured that she was not going

to be exactly a teacher. This report proved to be correct. She gave a few occasional lessons, but only in a casual way; and it was understood among the pupils that not only did Miss Lambert receive lessons of preternatural duration from Signor da Capo, but that she went very often into London, and took instruction from a still more eminent professor of music, a beatified creature, glorious on the boards of the Italian Opera. It was even said, and with truth, that Miss Lambert's singing was beginning to be talked of outside the precincts of the Vale House; and that great ladies with coronets on their carriages and pocket-handkerchiefs had questioned Signor da Capo about his gifted pupil, and even called on Mrs. Bloxam. When these rumours had been for some time in circulation, and Grace Lambert's appearance in the school-room had become an event so rare as not to be looked for more than once in ten days or so, another report, and one of a startling nature, disturbed the small world of the Establishment for young Ladies. This tremendous *on dit* fore-

told an event of no less moment than the relinquishment of the "Establishment" by Mrs. Bloxam, and that lady's retirement into the genteel tranquillity of private life. The Vale House had been disposed of; so ran the rumour; and Mrs. Bloxam was communicating with the "parents and guardians," and making over her interest and "connection" to her successor. The announcement would be made at breaking-up time. Much excitement prevailed. Most of the young ladies entertained a lively hope that their parents would not feel unreserved confidence in the successor, and that thus they should gain an indeterminate addition to the vacation. Those who had no such hope rather liked the novelty of the substitution. They "didn't mind old Bloxam;"—but anything new must be welcome. For once rumour was not mistaken. When breaking-up time came, Mrs. Bloxam took leave of her dear young charges in a touching speech, and consigned them, with many expressions of interest, to the care of the Misses Toppit, who were henceforth to preside over the Vale House.

It was generally understood that Mrs. Bloxam's retirement had taken place under pecuniary conditions of a satisfactory character, and that Mr. Dexter had acted in the matter with becoming zeal for the interests of his client. A few days after the departure of her "dear young friends" for their several homes, Mrs. Bloxam left the Vale House. She was accompanied by Grace Lambert, who remarked, as they drove away, "It must be painful to you, after all, to leave a place where you have lived so long."

"No," said Mrs. Bloxam, "it is not. *I* feel what the girls *fancy* about it: I have had too much work and too little play there, to be able to regret the Vale House."

* * * * *

The carriage placed at her disposal by the Marchioness of Carabas whirled Miss Grace Lambert, after her brilliantly successful first appearance at Carabas House, to a small but remarkably pretty villa at Bayswater. The detached house, intensely modern and white, with the largest possible windows for its size, and the prettiest possible

ornamentation about it—of carved wood in the Swiss style, and curly iron railings and posts and verandahs in the Birmingham style, with neat flower-beds, the colours all *en suite*, in the miniature Tuileries style—was very pretty and very comfortable. Mrs. Bloxam interested herself in every detail of the small establishment, which she had not found any difficulty in “starting” with her own funds, and which she fully expected to be able to maintain most creditably with those which should accrue from the success of Miss Grace Lambert, about which she was assured by competent authorities no reasonable doubt could be entertained.

And now that success seemed to be assured indeed. The little coterie which was wont to assemble almost daily at the villa would rejoice hugely on the morrow of the grand concert at Carabas House, and the grand Carabas Marchioness would no doubt speed the fame of her *protégée’s* success far and wide in the most profitable directions.

The Marchioness had “taken up” Signor da

Capo's favourite pupil, concerning whom the gushing Italian was wont to tell wonderful things, while he was pretending to administer instruction to the Lady Angelica, the beautiful and accomplished daughter of the most noble the Marchioness, who had a remarkably pretty throat, which the singing attitude exhibited in a favourable light, but who possessed about as much talent for music, or indeed for anything, as the favourite Persian cat of the most noble. Signor da Capo was very good-looking, and was one of those who, at a respectable distance, and in a modified sense, "understood" the Marchioness, and she responded to his gushing communications about Miss Lambert's talents and attractions, and the inevitable *furore* which she was indubitably to create, by a vehemently-expressed desire to befriend that young lady, and an amiable determination to bring her out at Carabas House, and so at once serve Miss Lambert, and prevent Lady Lowndes, who was her intimate enemy, and a rival patroness of genius, art, literature, and fashionable religion, from "getting hold of" the promising young

débutante. The pleasure of the honest signor—who was truly interested in his young friend, and who religiously believed every word he had said in her favour—when Lady Carabas announced her intention of making Miss Lambert's acquaintance, was genuine and demonstrative, and he readily gave the pledge which she exacted from him, that he would not let Lady Lowndes know of the existence of this unsunned treasure.

“I cannot answer for the discretion of M—, my lady,” said the signor; “he knows Miss Lambert's genius as well as I do, and he goes to Lady Lowndes' oftener than I do; but there is always the chance for us that M— never thinks and seldom talks of anybody but himself.”

The acquaintance made under such favourable auspices ripened rapidly into intimacy, very flattering, and likely to prove very profitable, to Miss Lambert. The Marchioness was almost as much delighted with the girl as she professed to be; and Miss Lambert, who “understood” the *grande dame* in quite a different sense from that in which she was in the habit of using the word, was quite alive

to the profit and the pleasure to be derived from such exalted patronage. The calmness, the reserve, the unbending self-respect of the girl had a powerful effect on Lady Carabas. They excited her curiosity, and awakened her interest. She had a good deal of the former in her disposition, apropos of everything, and particularly apropos of the love affairs of her friends and acquaintances, and she naturally felt strong curiosity on this subject as regarded Grace Lambert. She arrived, as she thought, at a tolerably accurate knowledge of who Miss Lambert saw, and where Miss Lambert went; but she never came upon the traces of the slightest "tendre."

"How very charming!" said the Marchioness of Carabas to herself, a day or two before the grand concert at Carabas House; "this young creature's heart has evidently never spoken. She will be a *débutante* in every sense."

The heart of the most noble had spoken so frequently, that it might fairly be supposed to be a little hoarse. Hence her admiration of the inarticulatism of that organ in the case of Grace

Lambert. As she drove in the Park that day, she actually meditated upon the expediency of introducing to the special notice of her charming *protégée* a delightful man in the Blues, who had up to a late period "understood" her, but who had had the misfortune to bore her lately, and the bad taste to take his dismissal in dudgeon.

"He knows about music," thought her ladyship; "yes, that will do;" and then she pulled the check-string, and gave the order "home," and had scribbled half-a-dozen notes of invitation to a little dinner *en petit comité* on the following Sunday, before post-hour. One of the half-dozen notes was addressed to Lord Sandilands, a second to the man in the Blues, and a third to Miss Grace Lambert. The destination of the other three is no concern of ours.

When Miss Lambert's page brought her the much-monogramed note which contained Lady Carabas' invitation, she observed that a second missive lay on the salver. It was addressed to Mrs. Bloxam, who was sitting in the same room, at a little distance from the piano before which

Grace was seated. The page crossed the room, and held the salver towards Mrs. Bloxam, who took the letter, and as she glanced at the superscription, turned deadly pale. She held the letter in her hand unopened, and glanced with a strange uneasiness in her usually placid face towards Grace. But Grace had thrown the note she had just read on the floor beside her, and her fingers were scampering over the keys, and her voice was pouring out volumes of sound; she seemed unconscious even of Mrs. Bloxam's presence. Seeing which that lady rose and went to her own room. Having reached that sanctum, and carefully bolted the door, she broke the seal of the letter which had caused her to experience so much emotion, and found, as she expected, that it came from Lord Sandilands. Its contents were brief and business-like. Mrs. Bloxam knew his lordship's style of old. He told her that he wished to see her alone, for a reason which he would explain in person, should he be so fortunate as to procure the desired interview, on calling at the villa on the following day, at three o'clock in the afternoon.

He would take his chance of finding her at home, and, if he should be unsuccessful, would call again.

The receipt of this letter threw Mrs. Bloxam, who had been prevented by indisposition from accompanying Grace Lambert to Carabas House, and was therefore unaware that Lord Sandilands had been present at the concert, into a state of the utmost perturbation. She dreaded she knew not what. It was in vain she asked herself what had she to fear. If, indeed, the design of Lord Sandilands in coming to see her were to inquire after his daughter, he would find her in the care to which he had committed her. With regard to the career which she had chosen, he certainly could not possess the right, nor could she imagine his having the inclination, to interfere. Was he coming to destroy the long-maintained *incognito*, to make himself known to his daughter? Was he coming to demand from her, to whose care he had committed the child, a stern account of her stewardship? Had he any suspicion of the truth? Had any rumour of Gertrude's miserable marriage

reached her father? Was he coming in anger, or in curiosity, or in an access of newly-awakened conscience, of newly-born feeling? She could not tell, and yet she was forced to ask herself these questions, vain though they were; and Mrs. Bloxam acknowledged to herself afterwards that she had seldom passed through more miserable hours than those which elapsed between the receipt of Lord Sandilands' letter, and the page's announcement that Lord Sandilands was awaiting her presence in the drawing-room, on the afternoon of the same day.

At the hour which he had named Lord Sandilands presented himself at the villa. Mrs. Bloxam was alone, and received him with much more composure than she really felt, while he, in his turn, did not betray any symptoms of the unaccustomed mental perturbation which had led him to seek her presence. Years had elapsed since Mrs. Bloxam had last seen Lord Sandilands; years had changed him from a hale middle-aged man to one on whom the burden of age was beginning to tell. Those years had made less altera-

tion in her; and the first desultory thought that occurred to her when she saw him was, how completely the likeness she had formerly traced in his features to those of Gertrude had ceased to exist. Lord Sandilands entered at once on the business of his visit.

“I have come to ask you, Mrs. Bloxam,” he said, “whether I am not right in supposing that the young lady whom I saw at Carabas House two nights ago is the same whom I placed with you under the name of Gertrude Keith?”

“Miss Lambert is that young lady,” replied Mrs. Bloxam.

“I thought I could not be mistaken. I have never seen her since her childhood, as you know, and did not purpose to see her. But I have changed my mind. She is very handsome and very clever, Mrs. Bloxam;” and Lord Sandilands’ voice took almost a pleading tone. “She is a girl who would do credit to such a position as—as I cannot give her now—but I should like to serve her in any way that is open to me; and I have

come to you to ask your advice as to how this is to be done."

"Miss Lambert is in the house now," said Mrs. Bloxam; "but I have not mentioned your name to her, or your intended visit. I fancied you might have some such purpose as you tell me of in coming, and thought it better to wait until I should know more."

"You did very right, Mrs. Bloxam," said Lord Sandilands. "I think it is better I should not see Gertrude now; and I do not think she ought ever to know the truth—to know that I am her father. It could do no good to her or to me; there is no undoing the past; but I see no objection, if you have none, to my being introduced to her in the character of an old friend of yours, interested in her because you are, and anxious to serve her. Do you see any reason why this should not be, Mrs. Bloxam?"

"Certainly not, my lord," replied Gertrude's friend; "it requires little consideration, I think, and I shall be happy to carry out your wishes now as formerly."

Mrs. Bloxam spoke with her usual fluent composure. It had forsaken her for a little while after Lord Sandilands' appearance, but now it was perfectly restored. Things were taking the best possible turn. Lord Sandilands was putting himself into the position of her debtor, making a compact of positive friendship with her. What an escape from the danger she dreaded, the risk she felt she had so duly incurred! He had no suspicion, not the slightest—the terrible episode of Gertrude's disastrous marriage was, then, safely concealed from the only human being whom, beside herself and her husband, it concerned! With steady serenity she turned her attention to what Lord Sandilands had to say to her. Their interview was long and uninterrupted, until, a few minutes after they had heard the sound of carriage-wheels in the little avenue, Grace Lambert entered the room abruptly. She was looking handsome, and in high spirits, and came in saying:

“I beg your pardon—I thought you were alone.”

“This is Lord Sandilands, my dear,” said Mrs.

Bloxam, as the old nobleman rose and bowed. "Lord Sandilands, Miss Lambert. His Lordship saw you the other night at Carabas House, Grace."

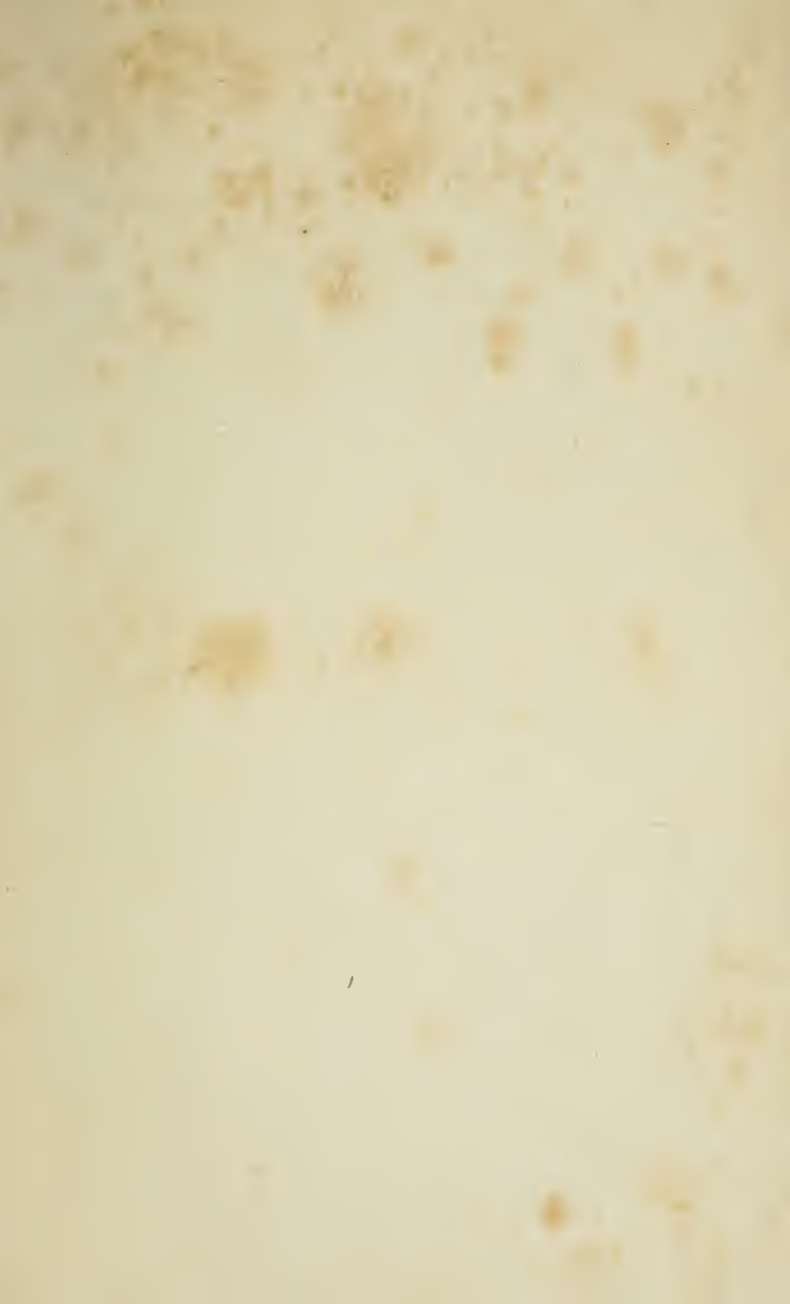
"Indeed!" said Grace, with a perfectly unembarrassed smile. "I am going there now—Lady Carabas has sent the carriage for me—so I came to tell you." Then, with a gesture of leave-taking, she said to Lord Sandilands, "Ah, yes, I remember now, quite well. You were in the front seats, next to a tall young man with a very thick dark beard."

END OF VOL. I.

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