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# THREE WIVES.

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BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“MARGARET AND HER BRIDESMAIDS,”

“THE VALLEY OF A HUNDRED FIRES,”

&c. &c.

“Heaven witness  
I have been to you a true and humble wife,  
Ever in fear to kindle your dislike;  
Yea, subject to your countenance, glad or sorry  
As I saw it incline. Sir, call to mind  
That I have been your wife in this obedience  
Upwards of twenty years.”

SHAKESPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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## CHAPTER I.

### BEHIND A RED CURTAIN.

“I will throw off this dead and useless past  
As a strong runner, straining for his life,  
Unclasps a mantle to the hungry winds.”

ALEX. SMITH.

**A**T last! at last! the hour has come. I have drifted into the position that, like a rock ahead, I have dreaded and avoided—and yet I knew it would—it must be so. What other end could I expect for a life such as mine has been—purposeless, wayward, bereft at its sunniest age of the motives and spurs for thought and action?

And yet I must think now. I am in a predicament. How can I lift myself up out of it, and yet still remain the honourable gentleman I pride myself on being? How fulfil hopes and wishes newly born, thrilling and rapturous, yet stained on the first blush with crime? I must think. And how wearisome—perplexing—vain is all this thinking! No sooner do I surmount my

predicament, and prove it nothing, than it suddenly assumes a gravity and importance that makes it everything. In vain I smooth difficulties, in vain prove my fears fallacious. I jump at the conclusion I wish to make, and find myself over head and ears into my predicament again.

Come, I will write it all down—I will face the whole thing in black and white—spread it plainly before me. I will describe what I am, what I want, and what it appears I cannot have.

What I am! Well, in sooth, a young—no, not so—a middle-aged—no, no—to the devil with this thinking and writing down! I cannot even describe what I am. At least I must acknowledge to one thing, I am thirty-two years of age. Thirty-two years have I lived in this world, and I cannot recall anything in particular that I have done, but that I have drifted—against my reason, against my conscience, if I have one, against all laws, human and divine—into a predicament.

But to go on. My name is Osman Beaudepré; ancient blood flows in my veins, for I am the seventeenth baronet. I am handsome—so the world says, so I say myself; why should I disown that I think the world possesses few such handsome fellows as Sir Osman Beaudepré? I have been



told so often enough since I was born, and no one has told me the fact so often as myself. I conclude, therefore, that I am vain. Vanity is not a mean vice, neither is indolence. I hardly know if I am more vain than indolent, or more indolent than vain. These seem my greatest sins, unless it be that I am selfish. Naturally, I have a good heart, but I hate trouble. Indolence has made me selfish; vanity has thrust me into my predicament. After all, perhaps vanity and indolence, if not mean vices, may prove great sins. It behoves me to think of this.

My father died when I was two years old. I feel certain I owe a good deal of my predicament to him. He was musically mad; and, making due allowance for indolence, I am musically inclined. It was all owing to my love of music that I got into this predicament.

My mother was a Frenchwoman. Ah! my mother, can I mention your hallowed name, with my heart full of folly, levity, perhaps crime? No, let me pause a moment, and bring you before my mind's eye. A small, fragile creature, standing by my little bed, radiant with jewels, beautiful in lace and satin. Before I could speak, my little baby heart thrilled with wonder and love at the

sight of you, my mouth eagerly responded to your soft kisses. As I grew older and read the mother's love in your eyes, mine grew in proportion. Never was such love as between me and my mother. Can there be any stronger? Well, well, 'tis of another sort—I do not desire to compare, to mix up my love for you, mother, with that of any other. Never, until I see some one like you—as sweet, as gentle, as full of noble thought, as refined, as intelligent, and to me as loving. She never left the house that her sweet lips did not linger over my brow, murmuring prayers and blessings on me until she returned; and when once more I was by her side, again would her soft kisses steal over my face as she whispered her thanks to heaven. Thus my love to God and my mother were blended together, and the music of her voice and words awoke in me my love of harmony.

She was very fragile. She gradually began to talk to me as of living in the world without her. It seemed to me that she was always preparing me for that time. In the midst of all the love and happiness showered on her, I perceived that I formed her chiefest delight. Thus she never had to reprove me; she moulded me into being exactly what she wished. And I listened to her wishes

for to the future, as a man listens to the dying commands of his superior. At the same time I was conscious I only did so from love, and not from the fear of losing her.

Of course I had a grandfather—sixteenth baronet. I have taken the trouble to notice that all people who are somebodies, and who have ancient blood in their veins, have also family peculiarities and whimsies in which they pride themselves as much as in their ancient names. My grandfather was completely made up of old family habits. “The Beaudeprés always do so,” he would answer, when expostulated with on some oddity. “This is the Beaudeprés habit. The Beaudeprés are firm—they say a thing and do it.”

The earliest impression of the manners and customs of the Beaudeprés led me to consider them as the most obstinate, pig-headed, bigoted set of people it was anybody’s chance to meet. I feel sure my opinion was a just one, and would be fully endorsed by all who lived with my grandfather, Sir Austin Beaudeprés. He disliked me, partly because my mother was a Frenchwoman; partly because my name was Osman, not Austin; partly because my father chose to die, and make me the seventeenth, instead of the eighteenth

baronet, as I ought to have been. But chiefly he disliked me because I was a boy. Why he disliked boys, I have no further clue to than that perhaps it was a *Beaudepré* habit, and therefore to be kept up. He had had three sons of his own, but no daughter. My father had only one child—myself. How could I help being a boy?—and if I had not been a boy, there would not have been even a seventeenth baronet.

But how long I am getting to my predicament.

When I was about ten years old, I came from France, where I usually lived with my mother and her relations, to attend the funeral of my last uncle. He had married a very desirable wife—ordered to do so by his father, fortunately to suit his own inclinations (so different from me, and the real cause of my predicament), and they were all very happy, until she died, after the birth of a little girl, and he followed her as soon as he possibly could. Having declared he would not survive her, being a *Beaudepré*, he kept his word.

This was my first visit to *Beaudepré*, and I distinctly remember to this day the impression it made upon me. I was half asleep as we drove through the lodge, but was awakened by the peculiar sound of the horses' feet as they trotted fast under an

avenue of trees. Such trees—every one a separate study. It appeared to me as if we were driving through a colonnade of the most matchless size and grandeur, and that we drew up under a *porte cochère* of equal magnitude. The row of well-dressed, quiet servants, the size and beauty of the hall, the noble staircase, all more or less impressed me, as much from a sense of dignity, as from beauty. My boyish heart, hitherto moved by nothing greater than some new childish pleasure, dilated with a sort of pride. I was the heir of all. One day it would be mine.

In spite of the melancholy occasion that brought me there, and which, truth to say, I could not be expected to feel, I roamed about everywhere, with the keenest feeling of enjoyment, admiring the richness and beauty and order without, to the full as much as the richness and beauty within. My grandfather was an austere, cold, haughty man, who seemed to have little affection for anything but the baby-girl, now fatherless and motherless. The fuss he made about this child roused my anger. I should have done it some mischief, but for the good heart of which I say I am possessed. Truly he was so whimsical and vexatious about it, I longed to strangle it, as if it had been a whining

puppy in my way. If I had, I should have escaped this dilemma. I presume I should not have been hanged for it. But as I did not do it, I need not waste further time on the matter.

I went back to France, and without losing the remembrance of the impressions made upon me by Beaudepré, I yet lost much of the sense of them, in the life which I lived with my mother. Her love grew with her weakness. As her strength gradually failed, she was confined to her sofa, her bed. Mother! mother! shall I ever forget the moment when I touched your lips, and there was no answering kiss? I can bear no more—I unnerve myself. Ah! what a longing I have had ever since for the gentle touch of soft fingers in my hair, for the sweet caress, for a little coaxing and petting! Alas! alas!

When she left me (I was seventeen) I was ordered to Beaudepré in Beaudepré fashion. Nothing loth, I went. How different everything seemed to me, except the avenue!—the air was heavy, and damp—my heart as heavy and desolate—no one sympathised with or comforted me. The people, from my grandfather downwards, were all occupied in their own concerns, none of which appeared to me to be the things that a refined and exquisite gentle-

man would care for. I was just at the foppish age of being exquisite. Indolent, sorrowful, somewhat supercilious, I only exerted myself to indulge in music. My passion for music was rather strong, for one so idle. As for being born for any other purpose than to please myself, now that my mother had left me, I might have been, but it did not occur to me to inquire what. Indeed, had any duty been put before me as incumbent on me to do, I should have declined undertaking it.

Doubtless I was spoilt; the truth of this was as well known to me as any one about me. I did not remember the time when I was not petted and adored by everyone. I was considered the handsomest creature born, and was constantly told so. My picture had been taken in every attitude—asleep, awake; I had sat for a statuette of Cupid, and was only waiting for some down on my chin to be modelled for Adonis. I am surprised, when I think of it, that I was not infinitely vainer and more fantastic. Whatever I had of these qualities received a severe shock from the hands of my grandfather. Nevertheless, being a *Beau-de-pré*, the more he tried to take the conceit out of me, the more I aggravated him, by a superb indifference to his opinion, and by an indulgence of

my own whims. Nevertheless, in one thing he sorely tried me again, through his grand-daughter, now a precocious, pert, forward chit of eight.

This child never left his side. She made his breakfast, wrote his letters in her large childish hand, rode out with him, gave her advice, and helped him in everything he did. Even at our late dinner her chair was placed at his right hand, and though not allowed to eat anything, he addressed the chief part of his conversation to her. She was an ugly little mite of a thing, and seemed sickly. No wonder, brought up as she was by my grandfather. She had huge eyes, out of which gleamed looks very unlike a child's, grave, searching, and at times mournful, as if her brain was over-taxed; which I am sure it was.

Her manner to me bordered on the childish desire to have a playfellow, of all things in the world the most galling to me. Serious and thoughtful with her grandfather, if by chance she and I were alone, she was the wildest little romp imagination could fancy. And yet I was obliged to confess, it was simply the joyous heart of the child, breaking out from the stern boundary in which she was kept by her grandfather. Yet she loved him with a devotion extraordinary in one so young.



It is needless to say I hated her, with as strong a feeling as my indolence would permit. And the dislike of a would-be young man, for a precocious girl, is particularly great, I fancy. However, this my second visit to Beaudepré, was so far from pleasant to me, that I began to be doubtful if it was worth while to be heir to it, to be so bored.

The heart of the youth was so much wrapped up in himself and his sorrow, he ceased to care for the things that had so roused his boyish admiration.

I do not think I should have submitted to stay there the time I did, had it not been for another relation. She and her sister lived in what was called the "Hunting Lodge," a pretty, secluded, half castellated building, which was so placed as to have an entire view down the avenue I have mentioned. The precise relationship she bore to my grandfather I know not. He called her cousin, and she called me cousin. My grandfather was not only very good to these two Miss Beaudeprés, but excessively attached to Ermine, the eldest. Anne, the younger one, was an invalid, and much deformed. She probably was quite as amiable as her sister, but one had not the same opportunities of knowing it.

My cousin Ermine was a gentlewoman in the

fullest, finest expression of the word. Though forty years of age and more at this time, her excessive beauty was enough to make every young girl envious. And yet her beauty was not more rare than her exquisite refinement. A most beautiful bloom, peculiar, I was told, to the Beaudeprés, rose as freshly on her cheek as when she was sixteen. A quantity of fair, slightly grey hair was as smooth as the finest silk. Her eyes, still youthful and sparkling, showing what a fine spirited heart she had, were of true violet colour. Her figure was almost perfection ; she was above the middle height. When I say she had pretty hands and feet, I feel that I am not doing justice to the grace of the one, and the smallness of the other.

Heigh ho ! I am becoming exhausted with the feeling of excitement. Ah ! here is Pelham. "Pelham, I am exhausted—bring me something."

I will say this, that though I am so unfortunate as to be in a dilemma, I am so fortunate as to have the best servant in the world. He seems intuitively to know exactly what I require. Seltzer water and a dash of cognac—just the thing.

"Thank you, Pelham ; what o'clock is it?"

"Twenty-two minutes and three-quarters to five, Sir Osman."

Heavens! and Lady Dunargent is to be here at five, to settle the preliminaries of my intended marriage, and I have not yet faced my position.

“Pelham!”

“Sir Osman.”

“Pelham.”

“Sir Osman.”

I had thoughts of consulting Pelham, but I could not tell how to set about it. Seeing that I was in this predicament, Pelham, as he had often done before, thinking it his duty not to let his master confess that he did not know what to say, considerately left the room. Yet I wished I could find out how to make Pelham settle this dilemma for me.

I feel much in want of rest. Besides, I have forgotten where I was. Ah! how fortunate that I decided to write down my ideas! I was writing about my cousin Ermine Beaudepré. She was very good to me. She said to my grandfather one day, when he was unusually spiteful to me,

“Of all the handsome men belonging to the handsome Beaudepré race, Osman is the handsomest.”

My grandfather took no notice of this, but replied in his old-fashioned politeness,

“As you, my fair cousin, were once the loveliest of all the Beaudepré maidens.”

The dear old thing blushed like a girl, as she answered in her little prim, maidenly pride,

“Then ’tis fit that I take his part. Osman has an excellent disposition. He will never disgrace his name.”

“A poppinjay,” growled my grandfather; but his habitual respect for the fair sex restrained his tongue before my fair old maiden cousin Ermine.

She was as good as her word, and befriended me on every occasion, except when I railed at the child I hated—my girl cousin.

Though Miss Beaudepré professed to love me—and her loyalty to her house and home was only second to her duty as a Christian—I felt she loved this little creature a thousand times more.

“She is a wonderful child, Osman; nothing your grandfather can do to her spoils her. Though he makes her his constant companion, consults that child, confides in her, as he does in no one else, she is still, when out of his company, nothing more than a sweet-tempered little girl.”

“She is so ugly.”

“I grant she has none of the Beaudepré beauty, and will, I fear, scarcely obtain their bloom, owing

to the extraordinary manner in which her grandfather brings her up."

"He does not appear to think of giving her the education of a girl."

"No, he hates music, and he cannot bear the child out of his sight, so that she has no time to learn anything but what he teaches her."

"Teaches her!" echoed I in scorn. He taught her to be utterly obnoxious to me. Ah! me, how fatiguing it is to get into a pet!

"What a name she has, Cousin Ermine. I wonder my grandfather gave her a man's name."

"It was her mother's maiden name, and her poor father would have it. I allow Dewborough is a strange name for a girl, but shortened into Dew, I like it."

But I must make haste, or my Lady Dunargent will pop in upon me, and fluster me beyond the slightest hope of getting out of my dilemma.

I remained at Beaudepré long enough to be disgusted with everything in and about it, excepting my cousin Ermine. I was not recalled again for some time, and then I evaded the command; it was nothing else. It would have been positive madness to leave my delicious life for the annoyances of Beaudepré. I believe I had one or two of these

peremptory orders. I usually put them into the fire, and thought no more of them, until at the lapse of nine years my cousin Ermine wrote me a hurried, agitated letter, entreating me to come home, as my grandfather was dying. I was thinking about obeying her, when a private messenger arrived from my grandfather, with orders to bring me back whether I would or not.

I thought to kick a little, after the manner of the Beaufortés, but my good heart interfered. I had so far been living a life that, between love of the arts and love of flirting, like Louis XIV., I was almost stranded. So unlike the life my mother had pictured for me, and which I knew was the life I should love best; but which could not be mine until my grandfather's death. I was also a little tired of the perpetual monotony of broad, flaring sunshine. I was thinking of the woods and verdure of Beauforté rather kindly, especially of the avenue. It was astonishing how my thoughts always reverted to the coolness and beauty of that avenue. They do so now. Five o'clock striking. I must be speedy, or I shall have no time to sum up. I went to Beauforté. My grandfather was not only alive, but more possessed by Beauforté obstinacy than ever.

“Osman,” was his first greeting to me, “prepare to marry your cousin Dewborough this day week.”

I am pleased with myself when I remember the energy with which I said,

“I’ll be damned first !”

However, when I came to understand that he had the power to leave everything to her, and nothing to me, I thought the damning part of the business would begin too soon.

“She is such a darling!” whispered Cousin Ermine to me, tears in her soft violet eyes.

“There is nothing like her !” murmured my cousin Anne, between her shoulders.

They spoke to the winds, as regarded moving my abhorrence to such a marriage. Once or twice I had carried my flirtations to the verge of matrimony, and each time congratulated myself on escaping from the annoyance and fatigue of having a wife attached to me for ever, who did not realize my mother’s picture of the woman who was to take her place. Now I began to rail at fate that I was not already bound to a wife, so as to escape the one my grandfather designed for me. Let me describe her. A slight, pale girl, all her hair drawn from her face, and bound up to the rigidity of marble in a knot at the back of her head. She had a

small head, well shaped, but, to my critical eyes, it ought to have been a pumpkin to bear that huge knot of hair behind, and the broad forehead in front. Her eyes were too large, and had, as I before observed, a strange, serious, searching look in them, wholly unbecoming in a childish face; for all her other features were insignificant, only redeemed from ugliness by being so small. She was always dressed in the primmest, most obsolete fashion, and no other expression was better suited to her than the slang word—she looked “a guy.”

And I was to marry her, this wretched-looking little being, half educated, with not an idea beyond Beaudepré, without the slightest knowledge of or love for any of those things which made existence happy to me. I who might have selected a wife *à la grand seigneur*. Truly the Beaudepré obstinacy was exerting itself with a vengeance. Under the pressure of it I found myself in a worse dilemma than now.

I laugh when I recall one thing that vexed me. No wonder I laugh—the thing was so hugely inconsistent. Hating the child, abhorring the marriage, and determining it never should take place, I yet found myself both angry and mortified on discovering that my little cousin was as much



disgusted at the insane obstinacy of her grandfather as I was.

“Cousin,” she said to me one day, looking more a guy than ever, from swollen eyes and sleepless nights—“Cousin, be firm, do not give way. I will restore everything to you again when I am of age.”

To be refused, rejected, scorned by that chit! I felt for the first time in my life a strong fit of *Beaudep re* temper, one of their peculiarities being to do exactly what anyone desired them not to do. I felt inclined to marry her and beat her, the more so when we discovered her intentions were useless. She was left no power to be just to her poor disinherited cousin—to give him up his own estates, if he was of so poor a nature as to take them. By the powers, I am in a passion—how my heart beats, my pulse throbs, and, stay, is not that a knock at the door? My Lady Dunargent to keep her appointment, and I have not yet faced my dilemma.

“Enter, dear Madam.”

“My de-e-are Osman!”

My Lady Dunargent has a kindly heart. When much roused, she becomes gushing. I saw she meant to honour her intended son-in-law with a maternal salute. I felt the awkwardness that would follow, should it so happen she did not

become my mother-in-law. I took her hand—as her maternal cheek neared mine, I bowed profoundly, escaped the cheek, and kissed the hand. The grace of the act pleased her, and made up for any little sense of foolishness that might naturally have affected her, in offering a favour that was not accepted.

“My dear Osman, I have left my darling child so joyous. This long-expected happiness has at length fallen upon us. I foresaw from the first how it would be. Your offer of this morning was all that was requisite to be done. Every other thing is arranged in my mind.”

My Lady Dunargent was, as I said before, impulsive—once started upon a subject of which her heart was full, I knew she must disburthen it.

There was no need for me to listen to her raptures. I would take the opportunity once more to face my dilemma. My offer of this morning! Did I make an offer? If I did, I must, in stern justice, style myself a—but stay; before I call myself names, not hitherto coupled with the name of Beaudepré, let me recall what happened.

Lady Emma—who I may as well state is the “happy child” mentioned by Lady Dunar-

gent, and who is also the most beautiful person and the most accomplished lady I have yet met in my pilgrimage of life, whose love of music equals my own, and whose knowledge of it exceeds mine—Lady Emma was singing with me in her boudoir. Out of the large open windows we looked down through vistas of avenues of orange and lemon trees—different statues contrasting with the rich foliage. An oblong fountain was enclosed with pedestals of rough stones, over which the water plashed with a soothing sound. Beyond was the mountain, where the ruins of Fresoli still remain. This scene impressed me. I had awakened in the morning unusually stirred by some inward emotion. Dreams of Beaudepré, of its matchless avenue, of my desultory, wayward life, had haunted me all night. I rose with the intention of making some change, of doing some deed; but what it should be I could not define.

I went as usual to the Palazzo Ridolfi. For upwards of three months I had done the same thing every day. We generally spent our mornings in the study and practice of music—"us" meaning Lady Emma and myself.

Moved, as I have described, by some throbbings of heart, I was unusually animated. I sang my

best—so did she. Enraptured by her exquisite melody I exclaimed,

“Ah! Lady Emma, I never knew happiness until I knew you.”

She blushed—hesitated; her head sank on my shoulder. She murmured, “Nor I, until I knew you.”

That was my offer, and the cause—the whole cause of this unfortunate dilemma. Lady Dunargent speaks—

“You are not listening, my dear Osman! Are your thoughts so wrapped up in your present happiness that you cannot bestow a few moments to very necessary realities? I have already told you that there is no necessity to delay; my only—my most anxious wish is to unite two hearts so formed for each other, as speedily as possible. My desire is to set the lawyers to work at once upon the settlements. With a man like yourself, so honourable——”

“I am afraid I have not been honourable—there is an impediment——”

“Believe me, Osman, I have that opinion of you, it can be nothing that will weigh with us. For nearly a year now have we known you, and never have I heard you say what I wish unsaid,

or do what I could have desired undone. No, as my child has often said to me, he is as superior to most of the young men that we now see as light to darkness—such a contempt for their rude and boisterous sports—such a love of divine art !”

“Still, dear madam, it is an impediment——”

“If it <sup>is</sup> money, dear Osman—the want of power to make a settlement, believe me that weighs nothing with me. My Emma’s happiness——”

“Is as absolute with me as you, madam ; and that is why I regret most deeply——”

“Ah ! Osman, is it—can it be ?—an entanglement ?”

“It is, madam.”

“You are so honourable !—so good ! Young men will be young men ! We can trust you. Break it for good and all.”

“I wish I could, dear Lady Dunargent. The fact is—I only recollected it too late—I am already married !”

## CHAPTER II.

## BEHIND A BLUE CURTAIN.

“And is there care in heaven? And is there love  
 In heavenly spirits to these creatures base  
 That may compassion on their evils move?  
 There is;—else much more wretched were the case  
 Of men than beasts.”

SPENCER.

“OH! heavens!” It is not my habit to make  
 exclamations, still less so in the presence  
 of my poor dear Anne, whose long sufferings and  
 stricken frame require the tenderest, most judicious  
 care.

“Ermine!” she exclaimed in her turn, the slight  
 quivering of her eyelids just betokening a jar on her  
 sensitive nerves.

“’Tis nothing, Anne, my dear—nothing but joy.  
 Osman has at last written to me.”

Anne raised herself eagerly from her pillows.

“I will read it aloud, so lie down again. I foresee that you and I shall have a very serious busi-

ness to discourse on. Anne, my dear, I think we are going to have an anxious time of it. I shall need all your help."

My dear Anne laid herself down, and smiled her sweet smile of content. She loved to think herself of use, and as for me, I loved to make her smile.

"I must find my spectacles, Anne. It is somewhat humiliating to find these vastly extolled eyes being reduced to spectacles—is it not, my dear?"

Anne gave me one of her fond looks, that spoke more to me than all the love and admiration of younger days. I prized them then the most. I prize them still, and care for none other. Having adjusted my spectacles, I proceeded to read our young kinsman's letter aloud.

"To my dear, well-remembered cousin Ermine, still, I am sure, as when I saw her five years ago, the admiration of all who behold her, I, her unworthy kinsman, Osman, send warm greeting.' (Ah! me, Anne, at what age will vanity cease to have power over the female heart? I feel a tingle of pleasure at this boy's—boy, indeed!—why, Osman must be thirty-two. I won't regard his absurd compliments!) 'I do not believe it is the habit of the *Beaudeprés* to acknowledge a fault,

nevertheless, I confess at once I am unworthy of being your cousin even in a remote degree, because for five years I have foregone the inestimable pleasure of being near you. I would say something in excuse, but you know as well as myself the unhappy circumstances of my last visit to Beaudepré, and that in banishing myself from my home I punished myself more than any other person. Five years have not improved me, my fair old cousin ; but my case is not, I trust, hopeless as yet. I would fain make an effort to retrieve the past.’”

“Ermine, Ermine, he will do our little Dew justice at last !”

I shook my head. I knew more of the Beaudepré temper than my dear Anne.

“ ‘ I write to you, instead of ’—(what a blot!)— ‘ Lady Beaudepré, to say that it is my intention to be at Beaudepré on the 5th of next month, accompanied by some friends—Lady Dunargent, her son the young Earl, her daughter Lady Emma, and one or two more. They have been my dearest friends for more than a year, and it is by the advice of Lady Dunargent that I once more visit my home. It is contrary to my nature to conceal anything, so I confess at once to you my reason



for returning is not so much to recognise the unfortunate tie between myself and young cousin, as to break it, if possible. I leave it to your judgment, my dear kinswoman, to tell her this or not, as you think fit. I only request you will make it quite clear to her mind (if she still lives at Beau-depré) that my feelings as regards our unfortunate marriage remain as strong—nay, they are a thousand times stronger, than five years ago. It will be an infinite gratification to me if I find the tie is as irksome to her as it is to me. Our meeting will, of course, be very awkward, but I can rely on the well-known kindness of my cousin Ermine to make it as little so as possible. It is absolutely necessary that we meet, so may I beg you to counsel her not to avoid it. Under all and any circumstances, believe me, Cousin Ermine, your grateful and attached kinsman,

‘OSMAN BEAUDEPRÉ.’”

“Not a word of you, Anne.”

“He is right—I might be dead.”

“Anne, you are angry, as I am, at this letter.”

“Yes, ’tis a hard Beau-depré letter. I could almost fancy his grandfather had risen up to write it.”

“He meditates a divorce—on what plea, I wonder?”

“This Lady Dunargent is some great, overbearing, powerful woman of the world. She anticipates some benefit to herself.”

“Quite right, Anne—she is going to marry him to her daughter. I wish I was a big, blustering man.”

My Anne laughed. Truly I had nothing manly about me.

“It is terrible that two poor maiden ladies like ourselves, who have lived for so many years out of the world, should suddenly have to face a lady of this sort. She will sweep us away, and all our wishes and hopes, with one whisk of her train.”

“Ermine, I am not conscious of a greater share of uncharitableness in my heart than other people” (poor dear Anne, she was made up of charity and love), “but I have taken a dislike at once to this Lady Dunargent and her daughter.”

“The daughter will, of course, be very unlike Dew?”

“Oh! our sweet little Dew, what will she do?—how will she bear it?”

“That is what is filling my heart with unknown fear, Anne. The child, with all her gentleness and

prettinesses to us, is a thorough Beaudepré, as haughty and obstinate as any one of them. She may say she won't meet him."

"Then she will keep her word—let him say what he will."

"Also she may be as determined to do so. She is so innocent—will she suspect what we suspect about this Lady Emma?"

"I make no question about that, especially if you show her his letter."

"I thought to tell her of it, and leave it to her to read or not, as she chose."

"Quite right—I never knew her judgment at fault yet."

"She will never consent to a divorce—not so much because she cares to keep her position here, as because she will hate the scandal and notoriety of the thing. She is so sensitive of the family honour."

"Now, the thing we want to consider is, what shall be our position? What sort of answer shall you return to that hard, cold letter? How do you mean to meet these people when they come?"

"We have but one position to take, Anne, and that is a dignified and reserved one. My answer shall be short, but affectionate. He shall not be

thrown upon others for love and sympathy. And as for his visitors, why, retired though we may be from the world, we are not out of humour with it, but, on the contrary, are ready to credit it, and its votaries, with as many virtues as we think we have ourselves, until we know the contrary. So, as to his visitors, Anne, I think to be extremely civil to them."

"I believe you are right. Nothing bad ever followed courtesy and politeness. We must leave them nothing of which to complain, even though we know the reason of their coming."

"Anne, Anne, it will be pitiful work—remember all our prayers, our hopes."

"We will not despair; perhaps this visit may bring about the very thing we most desire. For, if you recollect, at the last moment, Osman only consented to marry his cousin because he could not bear to see his grandfather die in such grief. He has, or had, a good heart."

"We will hope he still has it, and then, when he sees Dew, he will remember how much she also suffered at that time. How nearly her grandfather cursed her when she so resolutely refused to marry her cousin against his will. The innocent abandonment of herself, as she said, 'Be firm, cousin—

I can bear this, anything, rather than blight your life! Such a child, too, as she was. Oh! surely he will remember all this, and his good heart will conquer once more."

"If Dew had only a share of your beauty, Ermine."

"She has a grace and prettiness of her own that, as you know, makes everyone love her. Nevertheless, I know how it will be. She will knit that little brow of hers, she will bear the haughtiest head, she will resolutely hide all the treasures of that sweetest, purest heart—in short, she will vex me every hour of the day with her Beaudepré pride."

"Let us hope not; you know, she is sensible and prudent to an extreme degree. If she cannot bear the idea of any notoriety or divorce, she will adopt the best mode of preventing it. Perhaps we shall see her bend that little haughty head, perhaps she may permit her eyes to speak love to her husband. She will certainly know and feel as we do, that now, and now only, will she win or lose him."

"See, is she not coming up the avenue? . She is—oh! Anne! Anne!"

What an avenue it was! What histories it re-

called to us! Gazing down through the half oriel, half castellated window, which had held my dear Anne's couch for so many years, we looked through an avenue of beech-trees that for beauty, size, age, and matchless symmetry were unrivalled. The long vista of noble arches had a peculiar beauty at certain times of the day, and still more so at different seasons. In summer's richest, darkest foliage, they looked like the long aisle of some holy place, cathedrally over with an architectural grandeur that bore no trace of mortal handling. When golden sunbeams gladdened the world long rays of light gleamed aslant like pathways through the dark foliage, tinging the tracery of the branches with immortal gilding, and setting all aglow the tender young leaves. In winter they interlaced their hoary heads with a network of beauty marvellous to behold.

No two days was the avenue alike. Sometimes hazy with early morning dews, sometimes shadowless, with a cool autumn breeze rustling through the branches—always beautiful, and rarely without moving life in or near it. In these misty mornings, out of the ghostly distance a stately stag would emerge, sauntering on, rubbing his antlers against the boles of the trees, stamping his foot, as

if to assert his seigneurship over land and hind ; or a group of gentle hinds, daintily nibbling here a blade of grass, there a fragment of moss, careless of all things but the little fawns nestling by their sides. Later on, the mists floating up like departing spirits, sturdy labourers passed to and fro to their work, young girls came and went with milk-pails, for the cows of the neighbouring village were pastured in the park. In the full noontide sun the village children clustered in with many a joyous cry. Beneath these grand old trees what wondrous play-grounds they found, what rare games of hide-and-seek could be played, what pretty cradles for the babies in the gnarled old roots, little sister nurses watching gravely by, scarce more than babies themselves. What merry shouts echoed through the branches, what sports and pastimes went on in different groups ; a painter might fill his books with picture after picture of silvan and childish beauty.

There is a little quiet maiden reading her book ; in a warm sunny nook of the old roots lies her charge, the baby, wrapped in a gay-coloured shawl. At the next tree to her there is a merry group of players, who call her to join them, but she is not to be enticed away from her charge. There are

two or three sprites swinging on the branches, and singing clear above all other sounds. There is a fair pale girl, her knitting on the ground, gazing down the avenue, and thinking of she knows not what. A noble play-ground in truth, never to be forgotten by these children in after years, scattered though they may be to the furthest bounds of the earth.

When evening shadows lengthen on the grass, the children are all gone, the echo of their laughter no longer rings through the arched branches. Quiet figures take their places, sometimes one, anon two side by side. They pace gently to and fro, or they sit on the mossy roots. In their busy cottage homes there is no chance of peace or quiet. A few turns up and down the darkening avenue give them the rest they require, and they return to the bustle and hurry of life all the more eagerly for these moments of peace.

Perhaps some sorrow has to be whispered to God, and is borne up through the arches to heaven. Perhaps to them are given the first whisper of the old, old story. Outpourings of high hopes, most fittingly uttered under this grand work of the Almighty; or the light silvery laughter of girls telling their little gossips to each other.



The shadows deepen, evening fades into twilight, the avenue is now a solemn grand cathedral; the moon is the lamp that burnishes every branch with silver; quiet figures wander in and out of the luminous rays—they are the worshippers saying their prayers, telling God of that which they dare not whisper to men.

Oh! beautiful avenue, how we loved you! But never did you appear so lovely to us as when a distant speck, coming nearer and more near, showed us the face and form of our sweetest Dew.

I must describe this darling of both our hearts—this little fragile creature, who gained the respect and love of all far and near—for bearing a sad fate with so touching a grace.

A little thing perfectly formed—delicate and fair as the most pure china. Not much colour usually, but now, partly from riding, partly, perhaps, from excitement, though not acknowledged by her, she had a bloom as lovely as any *Beaudepré* had ever shown. A little too much hair for so small a head—a little too much forehead for so tiny a face; eyes that would have been overpowering, but for the gentle expression in them—a wistful look, as if beseeching love and kindness.

She had one or two *Beaudepré* characteristics.

Her head was well placed on a most shapely throat, and her little hands and feet were wonders of symmetry and beauty. Thus stood my darling, her sweet, soft eyes fixed on mine, as I essayed to tell her of what was coming. As I hesitated, she said,

“Pray, dear Aunt Ermine” (she always called us her aunts), “answer my cousin’s letter, and say Beaudepré is quite ready to receive his guests; there is room for all, and more besides—he seems to have forgotten the size of his house.”

“Who told you, Dew?”

“Mr. Thorne brought me a letter from my cousin to him, wherein he gave him orders about carriages and horses, and proper servants.”

“Shall you stay at Beaudepré?”

“I think so, Aunt Ermine. It is my rightful place.”

“Will you read his letter to me?”

“No, Aunt Ermine. Let us meet without prejudice.”

“Have you ever heard of these people, Dew?”

“Yes, when I was at Castleton; they spoke of Lady Emma Dunargent as singularly beautiful, and possessed of wonderful musical talent.”

I shuddered. Though I prided myself on being

out of the world, yet was I now feeling as any worldling—full of resentment, of fear—nay, of most evil thoughts concerning these unknown people. Had we waited so patiently—prayed so earnestly for the final union of the two beings dearest to us in the world, only to find that a too pretty face, a manœuvring mother, and Beaudepré pride, had separated them for ever? In my anger and disgust I was guilty of the cruel thought that these people were unfit for the company of our innocent darling. Perhaps my face said as much, for suddenly Dew kissed me, and said,

“My aunt Anne joins with me in hoping the pride of both our hearts—the loveliest, sweetest, and best of all the Beaudepré race, will assist me to receive the guests of the head of our house in a proper manner.”

“She has just said she would, to me, Dew.”

“Then is she a darling.”

“Ah! my child, I find, not for the first time in my life, what a difference there is between saying and doing.”

“There is none in this instance. My cousin has guests—he desires us to entertain them. Surely that is a lesson no Beaudepré has ever to learn?”

“But, Dew, if it should prove—if it should

chance that these guests are not friendly to you—may, in short, prove dangerous enemies?”

When Dew smiled, it was a lovely sight. Sunshine and sweetness, goodness and gladness, beamed from every feature.

“We will make them our friends,” she answered.

“We are so powerless, Dew; he may bring whom and what he pleases. Shall we consult Mr. Vincent?”

Dew’s smile was replaced by a haughty gesture.

“It will be for the first time, Aunt Ermine, that one Beaufort ever doubted another. Let us say no more on the subject of my cousin’s guests. A great wrong was done him five years ago. If it has chanced that he has found friends who will endeavour to repair that wrong, we must give them every opportunity of doing so. Whatever the result” (her lip quivered), “it is not right that Sir Osman Beaufort should be exiled any longer from his home. Let us so act he cannot choose but stay.”

And in a moment it became clear to my mind, and to Anne’s at the same moment, that this little creature divined all, and more than we did—that in the magnanimity of her soul she intended to

forget herself, and, at any cost to her own happiness, make his.

“Anne,” I said, after she had left us, “we have but one thing left, after appealing to the merciful interference of God, and it is this. There is a similarity in the characters of Dew and Osman. They have the same lofty ideas of goodness and honour. I remember being peculiarly struck with his extreme punctilio in regard to truth and fine feeling. And in the many conversations we had about his mother, when he was at Beaudepré after her death, it seems she had remarked this in him, and told him she had no fears that he would replace her love by one less pure and exalted.

“I only reason from your words, Ermine, that if this is the case, and our surmises about Lady Emma are correct, we have the more to fear. She must be some faultless being, for whose sake he is ready to outrage every other tie or affection.”

“My hope is that, brought into contact with a nature like Dew’s, all others must seem feeble and commonplace.”

“Alas! Ermine, we alone know the extreme beauty of it, and may we not have suffered our affection for her to blind our eyes a little?”

“We are not alone in our adoration. The Vin-

cents, our neighbours, her servants, the smallest child on the domain—oh! Anne, Anne, what a wilderness will our beloved Beaudepré appear to us without the sweet darling who has so brightened our lives.”

“Write your answer, Ermine, and think no more. Women-like, we have suffered our imaginations to leap a far way. Let us bring them back to the sober realities of the present hour. Let us think of nothing, as Dew says, but how to welcome Osman home, so that he will never willingly quit it again.”

My Anne was becoming exhausted. I sent for Belle, our faithful old maid, who came and read her to sleep. I retired to my own room, with Osman’s letter in my hand. Before I answered it, I looked down the long archway of the avenue. Once before a Beaudepré had sacrificed all worldly grandeur and position for another Beaudepré. Did she repent? I trow not. That I could answer. With erect head, a glowing cheek, a grateful heart—with all these warm and high, I answered my young kinsman’s letter. Would any other eyes see it besides his? They might—I gave them leave.

## CHAPTER III.

## BEHIND THE RED CURTAIN.

“We inherit nothing truly  
But what our actions make us worthy of.”

I HAVE obeyed my Lady Dunargent! We landed in England last night. Since I have given up my conscience into her keeping, I appear to have lost my reason. The few senses I can muster gather themselves together for the moment when I shall receive an answer to my letters from Beaudepré. Lady Dunargent was not altogether pleased that I wrote to my fair old cousin Ermine so frankly.

“We ought to have taken them by storm, Osman; now they will be in a manner prepared to resent anything on our parts.”

“I think not, dear Madam; we trust each other just as if we all had one heart, we Beaudeprés. I have no fear of that kind. I the rather fear they may cast me off altogether.”

“And a very proper thing to do. Then we shall have something to go upon.”

Since the unhappy moment when Lady Dunargent learnt my unfortunate position, she has been kindness itself. I made every apology for the baseness of my conduct, and she herself found the excuse in the loveliness of her daughter and the wonderful similarity of our tastes.

“It is not in the power of any man to withstand her attractions, my dear Osman. I make every excuse for you. I am—I was surprised that you resisted so long, and am only too thankful it has come to a crisis. Of course, the thing is not to be disputed. You marry a child in her pinafore, leave her immediately, and never see her again. That is, in my opinion, a case for a divorce at once. Not a judge in England would forbid it.”

“I am not so sanguine as you, dear Lady Dunargent. I fear there must be some tangible reason.”

“Yes, of course—incompatibility of temper, though, by-the-by, you have never met to quarrel—too near a relationship, coercion. By-the-by, have you ever heard of any flirtation?—has she given any cause for just the most trifling degree of scandal?”



“By no means,” I answered, a little ruffled.

It appeared to me that, however great the happiness to which I aspired—however irksome my thralldom—I cared for neither, if bought at the expense of the fair fame of one of my race.

“Ah! pardon me, I forgot your sensitiveness. But, Osman, one thing I feel sure can be done; the—the child, the girl can obtain a divorce at once, on the plea of desertion by you. You will not mind that, will you?”

“Certainly not. I have already arranged it with myself that all odium, all trouble—in short, whatever there may be to bear—must be borne by me alone.”

“Excellent fellow! Ah! my dear Osman, every hour increases my esteem for you—every moment adds to my despair.”

“Dear Lady Dunargent, at this moment I scarcely know whether to call myself a man of honour or a vile rascal. I am tempted, by a growing sense of the iniquity of what I have done, to beseech you to cast me off altogether; it would be but a fitting punishment for one who has grieved you by acting basely towards her you love better than myself. Had I been free within a week of knowing her, I should have placed my

happiness in the hands of Lady Emma. A moment of ecstasy led me to say more than I ought to have done. Let me atone by withdrawing myself from your friendship. • Could I be assured I was the only sufferer, I would remain the patient slave of an ill-starred fate, and make-believe I was happy. I would be forgotten by God and man.”

“Osman, Osman, do not break my heart by such a proposal. It is not so much the thought of my darling child as the misery of your position that grieves me.”

“It is indeed now, Madam, that I find it most miserable.”

“And therefore it is that I interfere. You have no mother—you start—I will be your mother.”

“Nay, dearest lady, I will accept no love, nothing at your hands at present. My nature was not originally a bad one; and in my heart still glows a sentiment of honour. I was nurtured in a love so pure, so lavishly poured forth, that hitherto I have lived upon the remembrance of it, and almost felt content. But now, five years of an indolent, selfish life, five years of an utter forgetfulness of all duty to others, has swept me on into a course which naturally I abhor. I feel myself base. My conscience is deadened, my moral

instincts appear to me now to be nothing more than an indulgence in habits and thoughts arising from entire self-love. I stand on the verge of crime, without the slightest idea the precipice was so near."

"Let me understand one thing, Osman—you did not love this young person?"

"No; and I can declare emphatically I never shall."

(Remembering the *Beaudepré* obstinacy, I ventured to make this asseveration. Not if the wife forced on me proved the most attractive, adorable of human creatures, could I care for her. No, thrust on me, it was due to my name and race to love the whole of her sex, ere I gave her even a look of approbation. Scorn and hatred I perceive lie hidden in every heart, ready to sprout on the least provocation. The strength of the plant in mine surprised me. I did not know I had so fair a share of the *Beaudepré* blood).

"It may be, my dear Osman, that she mourns her situation as much as yourself."

"I wish I could be assured of this."

"Let us go to England. Where does she live?"

"I know not."

"Have you heard nothing of her?"

“My agent, Mr. Thorne, mentions in his letters that my lady has ordered so and so, and done so and so. I never read his letters with her name written in it, if I can avoid it. Really, I know nothing of or about her.”

How strong the *Beaudépré* prejudice rose in me. I felt, yes, I positively hated this creature.

“Ah! my dear Osman, all you say only confirm my first impression. You must be rid of so uncongenial a tie.”

“I would be rid of it, Madam, gladly. Now, it seems to me, I cannot live longer under its pressure. I thought so but a few moments ago, but our conversation has roused an uncontrollable emotion in my heart. That abhorrence of being a spectacle for the world to moralize on, gives way before the prospect of being what I am, and what I might be.”

“You will be guided by me. We will go to England. You know my heart, ’tis not an unkind one. It will not outrage any feeling. I will act but as a mother would, for the benefit and welfare of a loved son. Say you will be guided by me.”

“I feel it is the only reparation I can make, Lady Dunargent. Do as you will. I was, I fear, somewhat impious awhile ago. Let me acknow-

ledge that the Almighty, in giving me many things, has, in common with every mortal, not made my life so perfect as to make me feel independent of His laws. I desire a change. I desire freedom from the galling thought that in nothing am I performing the duties of my life."

"Excellent fellow! Ah! my Emma, but for this one dreadful circumstance, how happy we might all have been!"

"I have tried, dear Madam, to think virtue was a stiff and angular old maid, and that conscience listened to often does a great deal of harm. I now feel lighter and happier from the thought that, without regard to the promised reward in view, I may perchance see a way by which I can rid myself of the uncomfortable feeling of hatred in my heart. Should it so happen that our uncongenial marriage should be as jarring to her as it is to me, that she welcomes as I will its dissolution, that for the first time in our lives we agree in the manner of accomplishing it, why, then, indeed, Madam, I feel that my heart will expand to the last of my race, and that I will gladly love as my cousin one whom I hate and scorn as my wife. And to enable me to do so, you will perceive that I shall not like to outrage any feeling. I should

wish to meet her amicably—to let her see, if she has the perception, what I may lose, if we cannot agree to dissolve our marriage. I would meet her fairly, honourably, giving her my confidence, as I would beseech hers.”

“My dear Osman, you picture my ideas perfectly. Write at once to her, or your agent, or anybody you please, and say that you are coming home, and that we accompany you. More we cannot do at present—we must be guided by future events. I must now go—I do not disguise how painful it will be to me—I must tell my child.”

I felt half inclined to mix my tears with Lady Dunargent’s, when I recalled the sweet gentleness of Lady Emma’s nature. I was, however, much inclined to hope that her placidity, which is her greatest charm to me, would prevent any violence. Vain fool, and worse than fool! Notwithstanding all the fine sentiments I poured forth to Lady Dunargent, I found myself weak, wavering, and absurd. Never before, since our marriage, had I spoken so much of her who—pshaw! why hesitate, why stumble over her name? She has one—she must have one! That of wife I forbid her. It is sacred to the love which is to restore to me that of my mother. Lady—well, be it so—Lady Beau-

depré! it is her title at present. Never have I thought of her, spoken of her so much in all these five years as I have done in the last half hour. And what has it roused within me? Every bad feeling. I feel as if I hated her, and, what is the worst feeling of the two, that I rather desire to be rid of her, for the riddance sake, than for the hope of being able to claim Lady Emma. This is monstrous. I am like the man taken possession of by the seven evil spirits—I abhor myself. In good time has Pelham knocked at the door.

“I desire paper, pens, Pelham.”

“Yes, Sir Osman.”

“Get in my bills—I am going away.”

“You owe none, Sir Osman. Do you start to-morrow?”

“I cannot say—I am going to England—I am going to—I am going home.”

Pelham for once in his life showed signs of amazement.

“By-the-by, go and inquire for me, of her maid, how the Lady Emma Dunargent is.”

I desired to think to whom I should write. I decided it should be to my fair old Cousin Ermine. Also to Thorne, about servants, carriages, horses. It will not do to take the Dunargents to a wild

wilderness. They must get things into some sort of order somehow. If not, we must rough it. How shall I address Ermine?—what shall I say? I will not appear before her in a false position. I cannot suffer that Lady Beaudepré should fancy—again full of vanity—why should Lady Beaudepré fancy I am coming home to make it up with her? At all events, I will make it clear to Ermine nothing is further from my thoughts.

After thinking thus, I wrote my letters rapidly. I would not trust myself to read over the one to Ermine after I had finished it. I fancy 'twas a little hard.

Meantime Pelham did not return. I became anxious. I have never yet had to ring the bell for Pelham, he seems always to divine the moment I require him. Shall I ring? Just as I was about to do so, he appeared.

“The Lady Emma?” I exclaimed eagerly.

“Perfectly well, Sir Osman.”

“What made you so long?”

“Her ladyship sent for me.”

“Any reason, Pelham?”

“Yes, Sir Osman; her ladyship was anxious to know all about her ladyship, Lady Beaudepré.”



“Of course you told her you knew nothing.”

“Pardon me, Sir Osman, I have seen her ladyship. I was servant to Mr. Vincent, the rector of the parish, before I entered your service, Sir Osman. I have often told Lady Emma’s maid, Sir Osman, as you had a ladyship at home.”

“Man !”

Pelham vanished. I was glad he did. A sudden passion possessed me. If the maid knew, did she tell her mistress? If the mistress knew, why did she permit me—how was it that she—I am mad—impossible—she did not, could not have known it! Mother, mother, if your spirit is permitted to watch over your son, breathe on me, restore me my reason. Lady Dunargent entered hurriedly, her handkerchief to her eyes.

“She knows it—she has known it for some time. What excuse can I make for her? I am shocked beyond measure. Her principles so firmly planted, her ideas of honour, of religion, so thoroughly instilled, and that love should make her forget all—all that I have been so careful to inculcate.”

As a captive comes from a dungeon into the broad day, my passion fled from my heart, and my eyes, flooded with light, made me see in a moment

it was all love—all love. How venial seemed that which approached crime ; how thrilling the sensation of being so beloved !

“Dear Lady Dunargent, you have adopted me for a son, forgiven and blessed me. Grant the same indulgence to her who is so dear to us both. We will not offend again. Rely on my honour.”

Lady Dunargent was, nevertheless, deeply hurt. What was venial in me assumed a very grave aspect when her daughter was the culprit. She is an excellent, worthy woman. I think I have done right to be entirely guided by her. In fact, it was the only reparation I could make. Perhaps if she and I had gone alone—if Lady Emma could have been spared appearing there at all, until the happy moment when I might take her there as mistress. Ha ! my letters ! Absolutely my heart beats. Ermine ! Ermine ! I hope you are true to your nature, your fair appearance ; I hope you have written kindly to me. \*She has.

“MY DEAR YOUNG KINSMAN,—

“Your letter has given us inexpressible happiness, as we only desire to see you to have every wish gratified. You will find Beau-depré in good order for you and your guests.

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There is a great desire to give you a public reception, but we are so anxious that your welcome home should belong only to us, that we have requested no steps may be taken to that effect, until you make your own wishes known. The sooner you come the better, as we may not, perhaps, be able to stay the joy of the people. Take them by surprise, my good cousin. At no time can you arrive too soon to your loving kinswomen

“ERMINE, ANNE, AND DEW BEAUDEPRÉ.”

Kind creatures! This ignoring of the past, this tacit acceptance of the future, this warm love, opens every pulse of my heart. Away, then, with all this folly and mockery—this mood which makes me appear less in earnest than great in trifling; I will be a true gentleman, a name I prize more than the one left me by my grandfather. To your tender prayers do I owe it, my mother, that I have hitherto been restrained from the inexpressible woe of crime—that I have refrained from loving the Lady Emma, as I feel I could do if permitted. Let me, in return for this, vow that I will enter into the work I am about to do with more regard for the feelings of others than my own. Religiously, scrupulously, with humility, I engage to shape my

conduct so as to deserve my kinswomen's love, if possible. There are but a few of us.

Above all, the little victim of her grandfather's overbearing will shall be my immediate and first care. She (I swear it) shall receive from me the courtesy and affection, if possible, of a kinsman. I will not outrage her feelings by any show of mine, or my secret wishes. It shall be my study to make my guests honour her, even if she was indeed my beloved (ah! what a spasm—this Beau-depré blood—how it rises and boils over!) I should be cruel to myself if I left on my name the least blot or cause for censure in this most embarrassing situation; and cruel to the other victim of my grandfather's obstinacy, if I did not consult and weigh her opinions as well as my own. Then a truce to hatred and malice, my little cousin Dew—I will befriend, not defy you. We will confide in each other. You shall tell me whom you might have loved but for me; and I will tell how I could adore Lady Emma, if I might be permitted to do so.

Eager each to assist the other, there will be little difficulty in so arranging matters that notoriety may be avoided; and the affair so managed that a few weeks may suffice to let the deed be

done, and yet forgotten by all but those most interested in it. I must, however, not forget one thing—my Lady Dunargent sees no difficulty in the obtaining of a divorce. My reason tells me there must be some stain on the one name or the other. Bitter pill as it may be to swallow, that stain must rest on my name—not on hers. This I must make my fixed resolve.

There is an intrinsic value in heart-felt peace that will surmount any anguish. I was a villain some little time ago. I am satisfied with myself now. I would not be one of those whose religious feelings are like a gossamer's web, blown away by a breath or whim. I have always considered I had a decent sort of piety, and I have abhorred great sins. I now find that the smaller sins are only paths to the greater ones—and how often we commit them, from mere carelessness, or vanity!

Really I have moralised to some purpose. I never before endeavoured to be guided by anything so merely respectable as common sense. I must keep it up. 'Tis as well, in a character so listless and vain as mine, that I should be resolute to try and do what is right.

## CHAPTER IV.

## BEHIND THE BLUE CURTAIN.

“Wiser it is to welcome and make ours  
 Whatever of good, tho' small, the present brings—  
 Kind greetings, sunshine, song of birds, and flowers,  
 With a child's pure delight in little things.  
 And of the griefs unborn to rest secure,  
 Knowing that mercy ever will endure.”

TRENCH.

THE fifth of June has arrived. In spite of every effort to the contrary, I can neither control my thoughts nor actions. Each day has appeared to me to bring with it a stronger intuition of the critical, significant period drawing so near. It is not that my life has been uniformly peaceful and serene, or that I am unable to comprehend one of those momentous crises that make or mar one's happiness—no, I have felt such before, for myself. And the remembrance of those pangs—the recollection of a mortal agony seems to me

now as nothing to what I shall feel, if the sweet nature of our darling is not recognised in all its worth—if the ruthless will of the Beaudeprés tramples on the little creature, who is not more loved than honoured—scarcely so idolised as revered.

Dew! Dew! it seems to me that only now do I find how you are twined round our heartstrings—how necessary you are to the happiness of Anne and myself! How blank and cheerless are the days in which we do not see your dear face—hear the soft, joyous tone of your voice! To us you are beautiful—beyond all other beauty—from your sweetness, your vivacity, your fine thoughts, the noble, gentle bias of your mind! Are we fascinated by having nothing else to love? Are we biassed by the illusive faith in kindred? No, no—a thousand times no! You made us love you, as God permits us to love what is good, pure, noble. And such a little creature!

“My poor Anne, I am sure you are suffering.”

“You are right. We ought to think of the happiness of Dew; but truly, Ermine, I am wearying and fretting more for ourselves, if it should chance we lost her.”

“I have been doing the same. In my early

days, as you know, Anne, I cared more for my beauty, because it pleased those I loved. I would I were black as night, if I could shower on Dew all those gifts of face and form that drew such crowds after me. The Beaudeprés are so weak about beauty—and Osman is so handsome himself.”

“Dew reminds me always of an antique gem—so rare and refined, it requires no setting off.”

“But still fashion is such an insolent thing—it knocks down goodness, sweeps virtue out of sight; even beauty itself must bend the knee to her.”

“But our Dew has a style of her own. Simplicity adorns her, as fashion adorns others. She is always to my mind exquisitely dressed.”

“She is, I only remarked to-day, quite sunburnt.”

“I did not think it misbecame her, Ermine; it is just sufficient to give her otherwise too pure complexion a little colour. I thought her as pretty as anything I ever saw when she was telling me this morning of all her preparations.”

“Certainly there are no other eyes like hers in the world—that is one comfort. Yes, I have been down to Beaudeprés. Exquisite as everything is there usually, it is perfection now. The arrange-



ment of the flowers—so natural, yet studied with so much care, the fragrance and freshness, the brilliant masses of roses, relieved by pyramids of ferns, the comforts and luxuries of all the rooms—surely these people, who have been so long abroad, will see a noble English mansion in perfection when they see *Beau-de-pré*. The servants and luggage were all to arrive about three o'clock; and Osman's letter to Mr. Thorne, declining a public welcome, but promising fêtes and rejoicings at no long period, stated that he and his friends would not arrive until just in time for dinner, and desired to be shown at once to their rooms. It is the fashion now, Anne, to have tea before dinner, so there are little tea equipages put in the rooms of the Countess and her daughter. The Countess has the Indian rooms, Lady Emma those adjoining. On the balcony that unites them there is arranged a group of the loveliest, sweetest flowers. There is the greatest excitement among the servants to do their best to welcome home their long-absent master. But, by Dew's advice, Mr. Thorne has forbidden any mention of his return outside the park. He fears the people would not be restrained in their joy—not so much, I fear, for Osman, as for the sake of their darling little lady.

Of course there might be some allusion made—some little speech, alike embarrassing to both. I shudder to think, Anne, of the consequences of some chance word, that, alike rousing her haughty little spirit, and recalling to him his grandfather's obstinacy, might at once make an estrangement between them."

"When and where is the meeting to take place between them?"

"Not until we are all assembled for dinner. It is fit and right that we should support, in our feeble way, the darling we love so well ; so I mean to be there early. And, Anne, my dear, I will take Belle with me in the brougham. She shall go up into the gallery of the banqueting-hall, where, I suppose, we shall assemble, as in former days. From thence she can watch the meeting, and she can tell you not only how it went off, but of my Lady Dunargent—still more, her daughter. She will not be absent an hour, and it will comfort you to know something before I am able to return to tell you."

"Has Dew told you what dress she is to wear?"

"No ; is it not strange that, with our hearts filled with fear and apprehension of what the next

few weeks will bring us, we should still attach so much consequence to our dress."

"But I think a first impression is of consequence."

"I believe I see the child coming on her pony. She has not forgotten that it is the hour she reads to you, Anne."

And, as usual—perhaps a little flushed—our Dew entered.

"I did not expect you to-day, dear," said Anne.

"More to-day than ever—a little quiet reading is a rest that I require."

So she read—no faltering, no wandering thought straying from the page she read. But still there was a something. In her expressive face, in her touching voice, we saw the striving of her heart.

Anne and I exchanged glances—we each read the same thing in each other's eyes. Yes, though all the few pleasures allotted to my poor Anne lay in her orieled window—though the hunting-lodge of the Beaudeprés was the home we hoped to change for none other than heaven—still, if our darling was sent forth to wander over the world, seeking a home, we would go with her. Rejected, displaced, she must be so enshrined in our love as to feel sheltered and content.

When she had finished reading, we both kissed her solemnly, and, with her radiant eyes glowing like holy stars, she left us, to go to prepare to meet, as it were, her fate. As for me, all the time I was dressing for dinner, I found myself wildly and wickedly wondering why accidents to the train were not a little more frequent, or why they could not be so managed as to upset people who had better stay away, and not come where they were not required. At last I went off with Belle in the brougham. I took great pains with my dress, and Anne was pleased to say I ought to be then and there stereotyped for ever, in order to make people in love with old age.

I do not know that I have lived so happy a life as to regret my youth. 'Tis a difficult matter to grow old gracefully, or to live contented, while every day you have to lament a loss. At the same time, 'tis better to anticipate the time, and not let your too youthful heart betray your grey hairs and wrinkles into folly. Every autumn we have an emblem of decay, and in the bare earth and leafless trees we see what we must become, bereft of all outward beauty. But the heart remains, and the soul draws nearer to its home, and together they both strive to render themselves worthy of

that life where there shall be no more decay. There, I shall have no fears such as I have to-day. There—but here I am at Beaudepré.

“Have the guests all arrived, Philips?” I inquired of the old butler.

“Yes, Miss Beaudepré. Sir Osman begged to be informed when you arrived.”

“Has he seen Lady Beaudepré?”

“No, Madam; her ladyship was out late, and went straight to her room.”

“The house looks very nice, Philips.”

“Beautiful, Madam! I am sure Sir Osman was greatly pleased. I heard him tell the Countess, Madam, that he had forgotten Beaudepré was so fine a place, and that he only remembered the avenue.”

I was about to ask Philips what the Countess was like, but I thought better of it; besides, he left me to go and tell Sir Osman I had arrived. How was I to meet him? I had not settled how, when the meeting took place. The handsomest fellow!—such an air!—such a grace, and such good, gentle eyes! Dear, dear, in a minute I loved him just as much as ever. A little superciliousness, or dandyism, or vanity, or what? There was just a something. After the first gush

of the meeting, his warmth of manner, his pretty and earnest compliments to me, he assumed this nameless something. I fancied I could see that, after the manner of the Beaudeprés, he was nerving himself up to persist in doing that his better nature revolted from. He was going to chill, or disgust, or frighten my darling.

I desired greatly to go to her room, see how she had dressed herself, and bring her down, but I did not choose he should see I cared in the least bit about the meeting; and, besides, the child—she is a Beaudeprés, and has her whims. She had a way and a method of her own. Had she wanted her old auntie, she would have sent for her.

“Pelham recommended me to exert myself, and be early, so as to introduce you to my friends,” said Sir Osman, there being now an awkward pause.

“Who is Pelham?” said I, mechanically, caring nothing for the answer; all my faculties were strained in listening for a light foot-fall.

“He is my—my valet.”

“Oh! is that the fashion now?” answered I, all abroad.

“What fashion?” echoed he.

Luckily for me the door opened, and the servant announced—“The Countess Dunargent.”

Osman introduced us, and I could see he was pleased at his friend's surprise at seeing an old *Beau-de-pré* beauty.

There was no doubt about her surprise, and, of course, being still a vain old woman, I was gratified. It very often happens, when people are out of the world, they are apt to fancy that the fortunate ones in the world must be very superior to themselves. I derived much satisfaction from seeing that this fashionable countess was nothing but a large, good-humoured-looking person, finely dressed, but by no means in good taste. Before I had talked to her for five minutes, I further discovered, under her fashionable jargon, she was much more perturbed than myself. Meantime, several other people came into the room, to all of whom I was introduced, and upon all of whom I expended my best manners; and I was pleased to observe with what warmth my young kinsman spoke of me. He was going to honour me, I felt sure, in the sight of all his grand friends. Ah! me, how would he meet my poor little Dew?

The door opened, and old Philips said, sonorously and significantly, "My lady."

And the child entered. A little simple girl, indeed, at the first glance, but a stately, self-possessed

lady at the second. She advanced with that gentle gliding motion so peculiar to her. As I have said, my darling is not pretty, she is singular-looking, and yet it is a singularity that attracts you. She was dressed in white silk, a little row of pearls round her shapely throat, two red roses in her hair; exquisitely refined and simple she looked as she advanced with stately composure, and holding out that tiny hand, said,

“How do you do, cousin?”

He took it in his gently, and held it. He meant to say something, but he only gazed into the pure depths of her soft eyes, and said nothing. She withdrew her hand, and turned to Lady Dunargent.

“Madam,” she said, with her pretty child’s smile, “I am happy to welcome you to Beaudepré, as well as those who have been so kind as to accompany you!” and she made a sweeping curtsy to the company.

I gathered from Lady Dunargent’s face that she was astonished. Was it the possession of so much composure and dignity in one so child-like and simple? I was sure my kinsman Osman was reflecting on the same thing. His little hated cousin



was before him, yet was it possible to hate anything so soft and innocent? Her voice was peculiarly musical, her every attitude graceful. She was completely at her ease—they were not. I own a throb of triumph sent a fine flush to my old cheeks, but ere it faded the door was once more opened, and the Lady Emma Dunargent announced. Ah! me, what loveliness! My heart sank within me; never, even at the boasted age of sixteen, could the now aged Beaudepré beauty have equalled the beautiful creature that stood before us. Clouds of soft drapery softened, and made more lovely, that which was already matchless. And some sprinkling of blue in her hair and dress made one see how much more exquisite was the blue in her eyes. She hesitated for a moment at the door, a pink hue rising to her cheeks. Dew arose from her chair, and looking at Osman, advanced to meet her. He said abruptly, “Lady Beaudepré!” Dew put out her hand frankly and cordially; the blue eyes looked up, looked down, and a hand was placed coldly in the one stretched out. Dew retained it in hers, and led her rival to a seat. The blue eyes had a confused, half-foolish look in them. My darling’s were resplendent, like an angel’s.

If it had not been for us, the two secluded, unworldly, unfashionable Beaudeprés, there would not have been much conversation. I talked to her ladyship with the ease of highest breeding, while Dew resumed her conversation with the young Earl.

On the announcement of dinner, Osman gave one quick glance at his wife. I conclude it was to know if so childish a thing could marshal her company in to dinner. Whether she saw the look or not I cannot tell, but before he reached the doorway with Lady Dunargent on his arm, he must have been satisfied we were all following in proper order. I sat on his left hand. Before the dinner was half over I had appraised the whole company in my mind. They were less to be feared in some things than I expected, being by no means so superior to us in their worldly fashion and rank as might have been expected. Rather we excited their admiration for possessing a refinement and elegance they did not expect so far away in the country. But there was a full satisfied look in the eyes of the Countess, that shadowed forth to me she would be little bound by any scruples that stood in the way of her will. I thought shame of myself to watch, but not by so much as a look did I see anything pass between Sir Osman and

the Lady Emma that the most prudish old maid could cavil at.

The young Earl is not much past the age of boyhood. Evidently he is not as old by some years as his sister. He is pleasant and kindly, yet cannot quite forget the Earl. His heart prompts him to be merry and jolly, like other boys; his education, or his mother, or some instinct, keeps him constantly on the *qui vive*, lest he should do what is unseemly for his exalted position. He has a pedantic, rather false manner, and would have been all the better for having roughed it at some of our English public schools. Nevertheless, I must remember, while I find these faults in him, he is not so much to blame for them. By-and-by, when he is older, more experienced, he will be more natural. He is like his sister—but a plain likeness. And about her. As I said that night to Anne, who was anxiously waiting my return, her beauty was so great, you could not but look and look again. Yet every time I looked, each time acknowledging the perfections of her face and form, each time I felt there was the want of something that, not there, gave one a sense of disappointment. Was it expression? Accustomed to the mobile countenance of Dew, whose soul beams with such pathos

out of her glorious eyes, there was a tameness—it seemed to me almost a want of goodness—in the face of Lady Emma. I asked myself more than once, “Has this faultless face nothing but a commonplace nature to show it off? Can her eyes only languish, look a little peevish, and never beam with the expression of that heaven which is in the colour?” Methinks I could have spared some of the beauty to have had a little more of the woman in her countenance. Looking five or six years older than Dew, evidently she was nothing but a helpless, listless, frivolous creature. Yes, Anne, I thought all this until I heard her sing; then I had to acknowledge, with a heart melted almost to tears by her melody, that her expression under the influence of music, became all that I could wish. I can give you no idea of the exquisite beauty of their voices, blended together with a skill and harmony that nothing but the highest genius and cultivation could achieve.

My little Dew sat at my feet motionless, breathless; and when Osman came towards us, and said, in a stiff, stately manner he assumes whenever he speaks to her, “I understand I have to thank you for having made this old room into a music-hall—it is perfect for the purpose,” she could not reply

or look up. She bowed her head in answer, and when he had turned away, she looked after him, and I saw her eyes were full of tears.

“But, Ermine, do you think his general impression of her was good?—did he seem to warm towards her during the evening?” asked Anne.

“I think he was agreeably—no, I should say he was startled when he first saw her. Several times during dinner he watched her attentively, but he appeared to me to grow more cold and repellent in expression.”

“Perhaps he was beginning to repent that he had not seen her sooner, or returned home; but the spirit of the Beaudeprés bid him hide his remorse under a stern exterior.”

“I do not know, Anne; we are two poor, weak old maidens, very little acquainted with men and their ways. We are powerless—perhaps we shall see slipping away before our eyes the very happiness for which we have so long prayed.”

“Don’t lose heart, my dearest—a good heart has a natural perception of worth and virtue. I hold it impossible for our kinsman to be a week in the house with Dew without seeing the beauty of her character.”

“I am not so sure he has the good heart with

which you credit him. I can see he holds us somewhat in contempt, as knowing little of the world. He once or twice smiled, as in mockery, at a sentiment or two of mine. Truly I do not wish to exaggerate or rail against the world, of which I know so little, but, nevertheless, there is danger the other way. Accustomed to what the world views with indulgence, he may find excuses for that which, bluntly placed before him, he would abhor. Believe me, Anne, we have much more to contend with than my worst fears apprehended."

"There was no fault with the entertainment—the preparations made for them?"

"Nothing. Had Dew been entertaining company all her life it could not have been better."

"I am glad we persuaded her to go out so much the last two years. This sudden call upon her hospitality has not found her wholly ignorant of its duties."

"No. Lady Dunargent complimented me upon the beauty and order of everything—the style and refinement of the dinner, and serving thereof. I simply said I had nothing to do with it—I never went out into society—I was ignorant of the new fashions in vogue, and my habits and

ways only belonged to an old woman whose chief happiness and principal duties lay in the sick-chamber of an invalid sister."

"Sir Osman sent down the necessary people?" she asked.

"By no means," I answered. "My young kinswoman has always felt it her duty to keep his home in the order proper to receive Sir Osman, whenever he chose to return there. She has had no other occupation than to manage his affairs; she knew music was his passion, and finding it fitted for it, she turned the old billiard-room, which had a domed ceiling, into a music-hall. You can judge for yourself it was an excellent arrangement."

"Surely she must have had advisers?"

"I believe the wisest people are those who are open to advice. As far as I know, she does nothing without due consideration; but I cannot call to mind, Lady Dunargent, any period of the life of my young cousin that she required to be told to do a thing differently from what her own heart dictated."

## CHAPTER V.

## BEHIND THE RED CURTAIN.

“All shall come back—each tie  
 Of pure affection shall be knit again ;  
 Alone shall evil die,  
 And sorrow dwell a prisoner in my reign.”

BRYANT.

I WAS not surprised to find myself approaching my home, from whence I have so long exiled myself, with very much the same feelings as when I was a boy. Fear of my grandfather, distaste of everything at Beaudepré, had given me those feelings that oppress idle scholars on returning to school and discipline. I had need to remember the reason that urged me to return, yet even the recollection of her soft feminine attractions failed to console me. All my life long I never had done what I disliked. It was a principle with me not to annoy myself in any way. But the nearer I



approached Beaudepré, the less I cared to see it; and the first step towards the now object of my life made me shrink like a bather about to take his first plunge. For the next month I must endure what would be to me a martyrdom. Mentally and physically I was wholly unfitted to bear any burden out of the common order; and do what I would I foresaw utter desecration of every thought and feeling. I should have to take the leading part in a notorious affair; lawyers and strangers would probe, irritate, and harass me; I should be shown up, to a world I despised, as something more despicable than itself. Good Lord! how I worried myself all the way down, even to the very entrance of my beautiful avenue! beautiful still—more so than ever. As I looked through the long vista of natural arches, and heard the fast trotting of the horses' feet echo up in the branches as if I was driving through a vast hall, a sensation of pride rose in me as before—it was mine! To enjoy it thoroughly it must be mine, without the addition of any alloy.

I reached the house; there was no one to welcome me but Mr. Thorne and the old butler, whose face I remembered well. After sundry complimentary speeches, Mr. Thorne expressed his sor-

row that my return was not welcomed as it ought to be, and as every one desired it to be.

“But me,” I interrupted. “I wished to come home quietly, Mr. Thorne. I will owe my neighbours and tenantry a fête, which they must give me leave to put off for a while. I had forgotten Beaufort was such a fine old place: I am obliged to you for keeping it in such perfect order.”

“It is my lady’s doing, Sir Osman; my lady’s orders are always to keep everything in such exact order that, even if you had come unexpectedly, you would have found the house just as if you always lived here.”

“And your lady, Lady Beaufort—where does she live?”

“Live! Sir Osman; my lady lives at home—here, where she has always lived.”

“Does she know—has she been told I have arrived?”

“Your servant, Sir Osman, told my lady that you, Sir Osman, and your guests, would probably desire to be shown to your rooms on your arrival, it being so late.”

“That is true. I see the other carriages coming—I will retire.”

I was shown into the room that had always been

mine. It was newly and tastefully furnished ; there was a sitting-room attached to it, in which hung a painting of my beautiful mother. I looked at it, and wondered in my heart if she ever anticipated seeing her wayward but most sensitive boy a subject for a divorce case. Emma, my Emma!—ah! insidious pronoun, you have at last betrayed me! She is not mine yet, unless from the feeling that for no other person could I endure the torment of the present time.

For a moment I will dwell on the happiness I could feel in this, my matchless home—for a moment I will lend myself to the idea that she is my wife, mistress of it all, and, as so, the lady and queen of my soul—the wife my mother's prayers obtained for me. For a moment I will realize to myself what I know is blended with every throb and pulse of my heart—the love of this place, this country. Until I came here, I knew not that these feelings were so strong, that I think my past life utterly wasted and lost—that if I have a hope, a longing for the future,—the future! melancholy word!—it has a ring and a toll in it of the past, seeming to say, that as it has been, so will this life always be to me—hopeless, and without end or aim. At thirty-two, to feel that all motive for liv-

ing is over! No! I will think of you, Emma; it will be no crime to do so, if it rouses me to action, if it proves the means of urging me to—— I am interrupted by Pelham, and with reason, too.

“Lady Dunargent’s compliments, and hopes that Sir Osman will be down stairs in good time.”

That is well thought on. The awkwardness of all our most awkward situations must not be made worse by any backwardness on my part. I take upon myself, as my due, all the annoyances that must occur during the next month. If I find myself at the end of it master of my position, Sir Osman Beaudepré of Beaudepré, no longer an exile, no more a waif on the earth, with work for the present, and hope for the future, then shall I find out the truest act of praise with which to thank God for my sufferings now, inasmuch as they proved my only path to happiness. May it prove so. I go.

Twelve o’clock.—The meeting is over. On the whole, I am satisfied. I must acknowledge this first evening, that I dreaded above all, has been more full of pleasure than annoyance. My reception by my fair old kinswoman—not a shadow of reproach did I read in her kind eyes; a tear

glistened in them as she said, in answer to some little mumbling, awkward speech of mine,

“You know, dear Osman, we *Beaudeprés* have many peculiarities—one of the first and strongest is the love we all bear each other. Neither time nor unkindness have power to dissolve it.”

How beautiful she looked, in her rich grey silk and soft, fine lace, like an old picture. I was duly proud of her, and when I introduced her to my *Lady Dunargent*, I felt an irrepressible fit of the *Beaudeprés* love of kindred attack me at that moment. Her ladyship was as much astonished at her remains of extraordinary beauty, as struck with the grace and courtesy of her manner.

As I bethought me of the modes of saluting and greeting of the present day, I was bound in honour to acknowledge my old kinswoman's courtesy surpassed any grace of modern times. If my—if her little cousin—our little cousin had but resembled her even in figure and grace—but, pshaw! let me not be a double-dyed villain, false to both.

I was pleased to see that all my guests—old *Miss Dunargent*, the young men, *Dunargent* himself—were not only taken with my house and their reception, but above everything with my cousin *Ermine*. Her tact, vivacious remarks, and intel-

ligence were not of an ordinary kind—in fact, to us listless, dull, rather heavy-hearted lot, burdened with an intention unknown at present here, I fancy her animation and happiness were all the more fascinating. Under the influence of her charming manner, I forgot to dread the coming of Lady Beaudepré. She was announced with startling and significant emphasis. Did she command this, I wonder, to produce an effect? I think not. She entered naturally and simply—not very different in aspect from the girl I married in the darkness of my grandfather's chamber, as he lay dying. The same amplitude of brow overshadowing a childish face; the same redundancy of hair, now singularly, and not unbecomingly arranged. Her dress simple and elegant; very *petite* in figure, but with the grace and slow movements belonging to our kinswoman Ermine. I conclude she inherits it. She put her hand into mine, without waiting for any movement on my part. For a moment I was astonished at the beauty of her eyes, and the wistful, half-sad look in them. If I mistake not, the hereditary love of kinsfolk belongs to her as much as to any of us. I half read a soft and tender glance in them. But she turned away perfectly self-possessed, reminding me at once of

the little precocious child whom I hated with as much hatred as my heart could muster. There was that same air of pertness—at least, what was pertness in the child, now haughtiness in the woman—that used to aggravate every fibre in my sensitive composition. Not a trace of shyness, not a flush on her pale cheek, not a hurried movement—all she did was in a manner gentle, composed, and entirely self-possessed. Looking still a mere child, which she does, with a most delicate complexion where not sunburnt, no queen ever carried a more haughty head, no beauty ever seemingly was more satisfied with herself.

Upon the entrance of my—no, not again will I permit myself this delicious privilege, until I can do so with perfect honour. On the entrance of Lady Emma Dunargent, this unabashed, self-confident manner was to me distastefully exhibited. The confused, blushing hesitation of the one girl was infinitely more feminine and natural than the greeting of the other. To be sure, one knew what the other did not.

In pursuance of the fixed purpose of my heart, I paid no more than the commonest attention to Lady Emma. Lady Dunargent had agreed with me that a whole week must elapse of mutual inter-

course before the settled purpose of my heart should be broached. I do not know where Dew, let me call her (for, on my honour, little cousin, if you were not my wife, you would find me as fond a kinsman as ever was known among the *Béau-deprés*)—I do not know where this young thing learnt the art of entertaining. I could find no fault. In fact, the luxuries, riches, and comforts of my home surpass my most sanguine expectations, and I must seem in Lady Dunargent's eyes as one that mocked her, apologising, as I have been doing, for bringing her to an out-of-the-way, uncivilized place.

It was so to me formerly. Who has made the change? And that music-room! I have some faint remembrance of singing there once, and discovering the capabilities of its proportions for a music-room; but as for mentioning this fact to my grandfather, or having any hopes on the matter, I am perfectly assured, if I had done so, the room would have been razed to the ground, rather than my wishes carried out. But I cannot expect to find out everything at once. Let me be satisfied that the first evening is over, and, in spite of the embarrassing position of all parties, I am not only pleased but jubilant.



In a sort of gratitude for this unexpected good, I will lay myself out to please everybody. I must, I suppose, give my tenantry a ball or fête. I will consult my cousin Ermine; no, I must consult the self-sustained, all-powerful "my lady"—I mean my little cousin Dew—as to the propriety of entertaining my neighbours.

Let me think for a moment. Will it be most polite for me to endeavour to make myself popular now, or after this important business that brought me here? Will it be right for me to intrude myself among them, make them friendly and neighbourly, and then shock them by a divorce case? Do they love my—the present Lady Beaudepré, or do they regard her—as I do—as a singular, haughty little personage? It would make a great difference if they did the latter. They will welcome one so different cordially and frankly. They will as much rejoice in my freedom as they must have pitied me fettered.

And yet somehow I have doubts. Little as I have given myself to thinking during my life, one or two things have forced themselves upon my notice; and a very serious one is, that if I am in any doubt as to what it is most proper and right for me to do, I find that nothing is right on either

side. It must be plain and potent to my comprehension, that one is good, the other bad—one honourable, the other dishonourable. Not to have it in my power to see clearly what is my right course, is, of all things in the world, the most obnoxious to me. And yet as I would do in ordinary instances, dismiss the desire and the doubt together, as not either to be entertained by me under any circumstances, I am unable to do so now. I am the victim of my dilemma. I will confide in mine ancient cousin. I will give her my entire confidence at once, as I mean to do with the younger cousin after a fitting time. She shall decide for me whether I set about making the acquaintance of my neighbours now, doing *mon possible* to conciliate and charm them; or if I shall act the frank and honourable part, fulfilling my intentions, and leaving them to decide whether I am most a victim or a villain.

Gently let me whisper it to myself, I fear I shall not care either way. An indifference to the opinion of the world has long been a sin I have petted and humoured. 'Tis true my desultory life, and absence from anything like home, or home duties, has helped to foster it. I am willing to allow that there rises before me the absolute necessity of a debtor

and creditor account between me and my neighbours, if we are to be neighbours. I know I shall be anxious to be on such good terms, I hope generally to find the balance well in my favour. It annoys me to be worried by little fid-fads, and to have some little quarrel on my mind; it is so small I cannot remember, yet it is enough to be perpetually pricking it. How I do write on! The fact is, I am so lively, so full of spirits, so hopeful, that, like a bottle of soda-water, I keep fizzing out all my thoughts. Why am I so well content? Because, oh! kind fate, this evening has satisfied me about two things—the one, that the wife my grandfather gave me is as utterly distasteful to me as she was five years ago; and the other, that I am, of all men in the world, the least fitted to suit her. Thus my conscience is relieved of a load of apprehension. I feel that in pleasing myself I shall be doing her the greatest service I can in my power.

## CHAPTER VI.

## BEHIND THE BLUE CURTAIN.

“ We will be patient—and assuage the feeling  
 We may not wholly stay ;  
 By silence sanctifying, not concealing,  
 The grief that must have way.”

LONGFELLOW.

ALL doubt is at an end. How am I to bear the disappointment? And poor Anne, who has hitherto relied on me for comfort! Now I have none to give her; and she has not a word to say to me. Last night he told me he should come early in the day to pay his respects to Anne. And he came. Dear Anne was so delighted with him; handsome as he is, so that one cannot take one's eyes off him, he is so courteous, so gentle—just the kinsman we have all been longing to have. And amid all his listlessness and apparent disregard of anything but himself, he saw before I did that the sun was in Anne's way, and drew

down the blind—he listened with such apparent deference and interest to all my insignificant chatter. Every minute we loved him more; and just as my heart was about to overflow, and tell him all that it contained, he began to say that he desired my advice.

Of course, my heart, thus checked, almost burst with surging the other way. I could say nothing.

Anne replied, “She was sure I would only give him the advice of one who loved him dearly.”

“I could not have flattered myself she did,” replied he with the sweetest smile, “unless you had said so, Cousin Anne; now I will not be so ungrateful as to doubt it.”

Said Anne—“I have reason to fear my long ill-health has impaired my mind, as much as my strength; but you may rely upon this, kinsman, that every feeling in Ermine’s heart, and all that is left in mine, is centered upon Dew and yourself.”

“I hope I may do nothing to forfeit such affection. You must tell me if I am in danger of doing so, by the confidence I am about to repose in you. I shall think ill of myself, after asking your advice, if I reserve the least thought of my heart. I fear I should not have returned to Beaudepré—I should still have deprived myself of the boon of

your kindly love, the pleasure of finding my home so much more delightful than I supposed, if it had not been that I came here in the hope of freeing my little cousin and myself from the tie our grandfather so remorselessly made between us. In justice to her, I ought to have thought of this before I entangled myself with a young lady who, I need scarcely tell you, has had as yet no other proof of my affection than an involuntary admiration, the expression of which was, unfortunately, construed into the offer of my hand and heart. While I acknowledge that I was base enough to admire to this extent, I was horrified at the position in which I found myself, and could do no less than at once explain everything to her mother. That mother has a most kind, excellent heart ; and if her love for her children sometimes leads her a little astray, 'tis so little one only sees the love. She professes much the same affection for me, and I sincerely believe in it. She counselled my coming home, and that she should accompany me. The very fact of my complying with her wishes, and bringing the whole family with me, will prove to my cousins that in all things we desire to act in the most open, upright manner. Lady Dunar-gent requested a week to pass before the matter

was openly discussed. At the same time, it was irksome to me to stand in a false position. I have no desire to be welcomed by my neighbours, only to outrage their feelings afterwards. I would not be *fêted* by my tenants, to discover, after all, that I have returned only to cause a scandal among them. It is my fixed determination to procure a divorce, even if I have to smother my good name in a puddle of infamy that my nature abhors the very name of. We Beaudeprés, dear cousins, generally do what we wish at any cost. Say—shall I remain quiet—almost *incog.*—or show myself openly, and be the host and landlord I desire to be?”

“Go out into the world—be at least courageous, and as honest and straightforward as so evil a matter will allow.”

“You speak bitterly, Cousin Ermine.”

“I do. The boasted will of the Beaudeprés seems likely to sacrifice the most innocent of victims.”

“Pardon me, I desire to repair the misdeeds of my grandfather towards her. Surely at her age, during these five years, she has seen someone who—”

“She has seen nothing but her duty, and that was to guard the home, to care for the interests, to

think of the fancies of the husband her grandfather gave her.”

“I thank her for all this—she has shewn herself a true *Beaudepré*, in acting nobly by one who deserved nothing at her hands. But while I regret that, freeing her from the outraged title of wife, I do not give her the same exquisite happiness I anticipate for myself, yet the time may come when she will thank me. You are silent, my cousins !”

“We know not how to answer you. Being but women, never in the world, ignorant of what seas of trouble and obloquy you may have to wade through to obtain your freedom, we can counsel you in nothing, but to be as open and straightforward as it is possible for you to be.”

“I want to find happiness somewhere, dear cousin.”

“I know not if it is to be found in the manner you design to seek it. Mostly I find people in the world ride post haste hither and thither looking for it. Few have the sense to see that it lies in the smallest circle—in their own hands.”

“I hope to find it so, Cousin *Ermine*. Unhappily circumstances force me to act a strange part. I would make it more palatable by the



sanctity of religion, and more defensible by acting with the strictest honour.”

“A sense of religion does not seem to me a fashion among you great people of the world. It certainly adds a lustre to the character of those who may be so happy as to be under its influence. Which does my Lady Dunargent affect the most, religion or honour?”

“Ah! kinswoman, you are severe; she is a good woman at heart—she is acting a mother’s part by me.”

“You must give me leave, Osman, as befits one Beaudepré to another, to keep my own opinion. I should have had a better opinion of Lady Dunargent had she been a mother to you, and no one else, in this matter. And still further would I have given her praise had she shown the good taste to leave her daughter at home, and come alone to spy into the doings and habits of my poor little Dew. She may be felicitating herself at the success of the contrast, but neither in our eyes, nor in the eyes of the world, will it escape notice. We are very helpless, we three women of your race. We have but you to assist us in any difficulty. You might have been certain, cousin, that you would have received nothing at our hands but

truest affection and the utmost desire to please you, had you trusted yourself to our love and confidence.”

“Now you put it in this light, Cousin Ermine, I own it would have been better had I come alone. I have no desire, nor, I am sure, has Lady Dunargent, to take advantage of any contrast.”

“We have nothing now to do but believe you, Osman. It is not our habit to cavil at what is done; neither does beauty blind us so much as to make us wish our little Dew to be other than she is.”

“My confidence in you, my cousins, has at present given me little consolation. I perceive your minds are entirely biassed one way. In confessing this to be the truth, let me bid you not to forget to allow me the same privilege. Meantime, I desire entirely to be guided by your advice in everything but the one—my determination to free myself from my present marriage tie. I ardently desire to settle at home; I wish to be the hospitable, neighbourly squire; I have no desire to shock any one. Believe me, there is no one who will suffer more than myself. Shall I send the Dunargents away, and leave the matter to be settled between Dew and myself?”

“How did you mean to act, Osman?”

“I thought it only right to be guided by the wishes and opinions of Lady Dunargent, whose feelings as a mother perhaps blind those of common sense. As I said before, she decided to come here, and for one week we were to make ourselves acquainted not only with our own position, but that of my enforced wife. There was to be on our parts nothing but good feeling, and the most scrupulous attention to her wishes. After that, supposing she was equally ready with ourselves, Lady Dunargent’s lawyer was to come to Beaudepré; we were to place the whole case before him, and learn the proper course to pursue in order to obtain a divorce. I need not tell my kind, excellent cousins, that whatever of obloquy, of disgrace, that might be necessary to fulfil this purpose, must be borne by me. My little cousin’s name shall stand before the world as dear and unstained as her innocent face and frank eyes deserve. This is all that we have as yet decided on.”

“And suppose there is no case for a divorce?”

“I shall make one, Cousin Ermine.”

Oh! my heart, how it beat—he looked exactly like his grandfather. I saw at once that what the one Beaudepré had willed so arbitrarily, the

other was determined to undo at all costs, even to the forfeiture of his own self-respect—the sully of his spotless name.

“I do not sit here,” I answered, with all the pride of womanhood mantling in my face, “to battle with a wicked will. I desire no more of your confidence, Cousin Osman. Take the advice of your lawyer and Lady Dunargent. I hope I may live long enough to take my poor little Dew into my arms and heart until she requires neither.”

“Pardon me, Cousin Ermine, for reminding you she is not so great a victim as myself. She has not been exiled from her home and country; she has not wandered about the world without aim, almost without hope; she has not suddenly awakened to a knowledge of the bliss and happiness of wedded love, only to be made unutterably miserable by feeling what is open to the meanest of God’s creatures is denied to me.”

“Osman, I should have pitied you more had you made the slightest effort to try if the wife forced upon you might not, after all, have pleased you. Even the last sacred duties to the dead were omitted by you, rather than that you should be supposed to agree in what you did not like. In this I saw

that stubborn will of the Beaufortés ruling you, not those of humanity and honour.”

“It may be you are right, my cousin, as regards my last duty to my grandfather ; but, remember, it was to permit him an easy death, that I consented to be married at all. Concerning Dew, she might have been as faultless as yourself, yet can she never be more to me than the thorn that has festered into my life, the destroyer of all hope, the clog upon all exertion.”

“If such is your confirmed opinion, it does not become us to press her claims upon you further. We women are accustomed to bear ; you shall see that your kinswomen are no whit behind any of their sex. We will consider the subject ended.”

“Let me just say one thing. I am more proud of the two I have shown to my friends, than of any other thing about my beautiful home. Were she not my wife, the sweetness and high breeding of my little cousin, could not fail to make me admire her ; while the intelligence and judgment displayed by one so young commands my highest praise. And now, my kind old cousins, however I may hurt your feelings, let me have your love ; I want it, I can assure you, as necessary to my happiness. I will leave it to you, for I know you will do it as true

women always do, in the kindest, best manner, to tell Dew, and to ask her to give me a sister's love."

"Excuse us, Osman; let Lady Dunargent manage the affair in her own way."

"As you please," he answered; and kissing our hands, with an affection I am sure he felt, he departed.

Anne and I, now alone, wept silently. At last she said,

"Ermine, I must comfort you by saying, no woman placed as you were, could have kept up our dignity as women more properly than you did."

"Alas, Anne, I cannot help thinking we are a couple of prim old maids, who are likely to lose what we most desire, because our sense of decorum will not run the risk of being shocked. But that I thought it only right to be punctilious and somewhat lofty, in all that regarded the child, I could have begged him to pause for one month only."

"It would have done no good, his heart is steeled against her. And now, how do you think she will bear it?"

"I fear that the fate he says has been his, will now fall on her. She has never lived away from here, her heart is bound up in the place, and I cannot help thinking that in the romance of her nature

she has, once married to him, given up every affection she possessed to him. I judge of this by the manner in which she has passed the last five years. Everything, if you look back, Anne, has had reference to him ; all that he liked has been scrupulously carried out. And then her ardour in endeavouring to repair the faults of her education, her devotion to music, and the skill she has acquired—ah ! poor, poor darling, all your fond hopes are crushed, all your bright anticipations gone. You are too much of a Beaudepré to change all this, and begin life anew. The child will fade and die.”

“Not so, Ermine ; have I forgotten the dazzling prize that was held out to you, before you were Dew’s age ; the great and happy life that might have been yours ; the exalted position of being one of the noblest in the land, as you were already the loveliest—all, all foregone, without a murmur, without a sigh, merely to live in the sick-chamber of a feeble sister ?”

“Dear, dear Anne, and I would do it again.”

“And live the happiest, sweetest, most loveable and lovely of old maids. Dew will do the same ; she will rise superior to her fate. She will, may be, outdo herself, and, at the cost of all she most loves, help her cousin to be happy. It is like her

nature. From her earliest infancy she was so self-sacrificing. She loved to hear me tell your story; her beautiful eyes would glisten with the prettiest sympathy, "Ah, Aunt Anne," she would say, "that love is truest which thinks nothing a sacrifice for those one loves."

"God bless and love our darling!" I could only say. And as it was not right to try my poor dear Anne more, who suffered intense headaches after any emotion, I went out into the garden, and whether I would or not, the remembrance of that time to which Anne alluded came vividly to my mind.

I looked down the avenue, whither I had often looked, to see one coming whom I loved. Far in the distance I used to see the slight speck that gradually developed itself into the form of him to whom I was affianced, and whom, after Beaudepré fashion, I worshipped. As Anne said, he was the heir of one of the highest titles in England. If more honours, further titles, greater riches, were desired by the family, none stood in more prominent position to gain them, in consequence of their familiar intercourse with Royalty. But it was said the only thing required was a perfect beauty for their heir; and I was supposed to fulfil their



wishes. Yet do I hope my heart was neither vitiated by vanity, nor hardened by prosperity. In the midst of all, I never forgot the little services so dear to my poor Anne; and no wooer, proud and great though he might be, got so much as a glance of love until I knew that, wherever I was, Anne was to be. Very proud was Anne and our good old servant Belle of the many presents I received, of the beautiful dresses made for me, of the wonderful becomingness of my wedding dress, of all the glory and honour that awaited me.

I was to be married from Beaudepré, and my good cousin, Sir Austin, took all charges on himself, and acted the kinsman's part by me. We were at Beaudepré, and much company had assembled, for the nearness of the marriage day might be counted in hours. As I sat in the blue chamber, resting from the pleasant weariness of being made so much of, my heart glowing, as the heart of a bride should, at the near approach of the time when I might show without shame-face the love in my heart, I heard the voice that was to me sweeter than any music. He was walking below on the terrace. A little irrepressible fit of girlish happiness made me seize a rose, and leaning over the balustrade before my window, I wait-

ed a fair opportunity to throw it at his feet. Suddenly a name smote my ear.

“Anne—poor, unfortunate creature!—I have promised that Ermine shall never be separated from her; but, of course, I do not mean to fulfil that promise,” said my lover.

“Be honourable, then, and confess as much. We Beaudeprés look upon a promise as sacred,” answered Sir Austin.

“I hope we do so also; but even you cannot expect that we can burden ourselves with the care of a person so unhappy to the sight. I could not find it in my heart to refuse my beautiful Ermine’s first request, pleaded by eyes that are matchless; but you must find a home for her sister. It will neither suit my plans, nor the views I have for the future, to let Ermine devote any part of her time to her sister. I am certain of a high place for her about the Court, and I am ambitious to show my English beauty in other countries than our own. No, no; a few weeks in the year, a day or two at a time, I may permit, but no more.”

The rose remained in my hand. Never was it thrown at his feet; but I felt myself a poor, weak mortal. When we love, we Beaudeprés, we do it with all our hearts. The honours, riches, happi-

ness in store for me, I did not find hard to forego; but not to love—not to be loved—how desolate seemed the world!—how impossible now to live without it!

Happily the Almighty was so merciful as to make me see that a worldly love, full of pride and glory, was not like His love for us—pitiful, full of tender care and compassion—the love I felt for my poor stricken Anne.

Our good Belle assisted me that day. I went many miles away, leaving a note behind. It was short, but oh! every word was as inexorable as Fate itself. There was not even the faint shadow of a regret in it. It did the work intended. Mortified pride, vanity deeply stung, had both to be revenged. Within so short a space of time that I care not for his sake to mention it, all England rang with the rejoicings at his marriage. It was somewhat in pitiful scorn that I scrupulously read all the public papers sent to me—sent to me in remorseless numbers, underlined, scored, marked, lest it should chance I overlooked what might hurt me most. Yes, in pitiful scorn I read all, even his speech—his felicitations at possessing an angel (angel he styled her) for his wife. I knew her—alas! I was sorry for him. She was no angel.

But we never met again. I made no inquiries—I would not, if I could, have listened to anything against her. No, my *Beaudep re* will had not been checked. I was in full possession of all my wishes; I was content—nay, I was happy. I have all those papers still. Some little foolish fancy made me keep them. I can read them all over again, and smile, as I did then. I can look down the avenue, and as I look, bless and praise God for a peaceful, quiet life—for a freedom from the hurry and snares of the world; and, more than all, that my care and love has lengthened and blessed the life of my poor Anne.

## CHAPTER VII.

## BEHIND THE RED CURTAIN.

“The humble building rises fair  
 Beneath the cliff above the sea—  
 As if it had grown upward there,  
 A temple for the heart to be.  
 Its quiet beauty blesseth me  
 With thrills of inmost gladness.”

ELBERT.

I THINK my little cousin more to be admired in the broad, garish sun than at night. She is so youthful and fresh, she can bear to be lighted up. I do not dislike the warm shade of sunburning on her otherwise colourless cheek. No, not colourless, her blushes are both vivid and constant. I liked her dress very much. Lady Dunargent says it is of the material that is only used by servants, but I think there must be some mistake about that. We have lived too long abroad to be judges of English dress and habits. I own to have

a prejudice against silk as a garment. Its rustle habitually ruffles me.

I am really glad to find myself looking upon Dew with kindly eyes. It may be the hoped-for freedom, approaching now so nearly, is emancipating my heart from the sore, bitter feeling of wrong and anger. The first night I admired the confusion and blushing consciousness of Lady Emma, in contrast to what I considered the unabashed composure of Dew. This morning I like the little thing in her white frock, sprinkled with rosebuds, flitting about the breakfast-table like a beneficent little fairy. For once, and for once only, I thought Lady Emma's dress not becoming. It was, if anything, too fine.

After breakfast I went to the Hunting-lodge to pay my respects to my Cousin Anne, and to fulfil my over-night intention of asking their advice regarding my neighbours. I confided everything to them. I must forgive them if I thought them a little severe. And all the more, as I perceived, in the midst of their affection and anxiety for Dew, their maidenly decorum was greatly shaken at its base, to say nothing of that hatred of a family scandal, attached to the name of Beaufort. In this feeling I agree to a

painful point. But it must be done. I will think no more on the subject for a week, and yet how can I help it? After my return I went with Lady Emma, as usual, to indulge myself with a little music. She was not in a happy mood. Even in this journal I intend not to claim her as mine until I can do so honourably. It was therefore, to my mind, much more important that I should not, by the slightest word or action on my part, express any of those feelings that would naturally flow forth under happier auspices. Lady Emma does not agree with me in this. She, if I may allow it, rather upbraided me for my coldness and formality. Sweet as it was thus to be taken to task by her, and lovely as she looked in her tears, I besought her not to permit me to swerve from the conduct I had marked out for myself.

“I am by no means an immaculate fellow,” I said; “but there are some things my conscience is very uneasy at. And if I do not pay attention to its warnings, I cannot help fancying I shall not be so happy for the future as I desire to be.”

“I am afraid,” she replied, “I am of a sadly jealous disposition. Now that you are so nearly my own, I begrudge even mamma a look or a word from you.”

“Sober people say that love is in itself an exaggeration, but I conclude they have never been in love.”

“No, never! Ah! Osman, is it not hard that in the first budding of such happiness one has to check the expression of it?”

“It is hard, but we will indemnify ourselves for this forbearance when I am so blessed as to find myself in a position to do so. Think no more, dearest Emma—for once I will call you so—think no more on what we cannot mend.”

“You are too scrupulous.”

“I wish I had come here alone, and spared you all what will be a painful ordeal. I should then have had nothing to mar the happiness of bringing you here.”

She pouted a little at this, but ultimately I succeeded in making her forget the subject, and sing with me. To my surprise I found Dew listening to us.

“I came,” she said, simply, “when I heard you begin to sing.”

“I am glad you like music. All true Beaudeprés do so!”

“You are wholly uneducated?” asked Lady Emma of Dew.



“I do not think so,” was the answer.

“I understood you to say, Sir Osman, she had never been educated.”

“My little cousin is very clever in things not usually learnt by girls; but accomplishments were considered unnecessary by our grandfather—were they not, Dew?”

It was the first time I had called her by name. The little thing blushed, and looked almost pretty. I was pleased to see she really was not the composed, haughty little dame of the evening before.

“I know enough of music to play your accompaniment, if you wish it,” she answered, after a pause.

“Thank you,” answered Lady Emma, somewhat abruptly. “Even a professor cannot play well enough for me.”

I looked at Dew to see how she bore this rebuff, which was only excusable, in my eyes, from the flattering thought it was caused by jealousy. Dew’s eyes have a wonderful power of expression. I read in them she was more amused than hurt. I read the same expression in them once or twice at luncheon, when Lady Dunargent, who I perceived was about commencing the business she had undertaken for me, gave her some advice, and answered

her a little after the manner one rebukes a forward child. If she does not carry it too far, I really fancy Lady Dunargent's mode of treatment will not be without some service to the child. Spoilt as I have been, she has evidently been nursed in flattery and adulation. I feel sure she is possessed with the idea she can do nothing wrong.

After luncheon I took Lady Emma and old Miss Dunargent, with two other guests, a drive. Lady Dunargent went, at her own request, escorted by Dew, to call on my cousins. I cannot tell what occurred between them all, but my lady was not quite in her usual spirits. And there was the sad, wistful expression in Dew's eyes, that I remembered seeing in them when she was a child. Altogether this evening did not pass off so well as the first one, when we had all the excitement of new surprises and pleasant realisations.

It seemed to me as if we were beginning to be a little afraid of each other. It might be, as I have remarked on other occasions, that the Dunargents, keeping the conversation exclusively confined to themselves, and their own recollections, prevented Dew or my Cousin Ermine from participating in it. I essayed once or twice to make it more general, which proves to me that my heart is not a bad one

—for it was a great exertion to make, for the sake of one I still seem to dislike. For each time that Dew assumes her stately airs, each time I find myself annoyed by them. And yet she has that extreme courtesy and grace so conspicuous in my Cousin Ermine—a politeness, I grieve to say, not followed by my guests.

That boy Dunargent, who thinks himself a young Solomon, entered into an argument that was answered by Dew; she had the best of it—in every way—as any one might have, with a little reason and common sense.

He was disconcerted. His mother, true to her maternal instincts, took his part, wondering that he cared for the opinion of a half-educated girl.

“Pardon me,” I interrupted; “my little cousin is the most learned of the two, as you must confess, Dunargent.”

“I do,” he replied frankly, “and I thank Lady Beaudepré for proving me wrong.”

The effect of all this was to make Dunargent discuss learned matters with Dew all the evening; but Lady Emma had another fit of jealousy at my interference, and Lady Dunargent was puzzled and annoyed. The little music that we had was spoilt by the remark of Lady Emma.

“Mamma, do you know this little learned personage actually offered this morning to play my accompaniments for me.”

“Are you serious, my Emma?”

“And I daresay she could do it very well,” said Dunargent, somewhat rudely.

But why write more of this? I have vowed to go through this business, and I mean to fulfil my vow. But I am of my Cousin Ermine’s mind—all the Dunargents ought to have been left behind. These little jealousies and piques are vexatious. They weary and depress me. If they go further, the spirit that Dew most certainly possesses will retaliate. Should she hold it in check—as her Beaudepré breeding may prompt her to do—I must take her part. This new vexation I did not calculate upon. It is astonishing how much I feel it.

The next day was Sunday. At breakfast there was no Dew in her simple white frock, attending to all our wants. Was she offended with the rudeness of the night before? Had she gone to the Hunting-lodge to complain?

Pelham whispered in my ear—

“That I was to make Lady Beaudepré’s excuses to my company, for not being able to breakfast with them.”

“Where is she?” I asked.

“Gone out, Sir Osman.”

I did not like to inquire more, but made the excuse as directed. Excepting the gentlemen, no one heeded it.

Lady Emma took the vacant place by the teapot. How was it I felt a flash of anger? The *Beaudeprés*, I begin to think, are not answerable for their thoughts.

Oh! if only her mother had offered to pour out the tea, or Miss Dunargent—any one rather than Lady Emma! What a fastidious brute I am!—what a most extraordinary, inconsistent animal! On Friday evening I find fault with the woman I dislike, for a too confident assurance; and on Sunday morning I feel angry at the woman I love, pouring out a cup of tea! It was bad taste. Emma! Emma! why did you do it? I suppose I must be a little insane. Let me put down all this absurdity to a touch of monomania.

The church, one of the prettiest country churches to be seen in countrified England, was close to the house. Not altogether cognisant of English habits as regarded bell-ringing, we went there a little too soon. But I did not regret it. My mind calmed itself as I watched through the

simple archway, the simple, countrified people pouring in. Very pretty, very soothing was the scene—the solemn, grave church, ornamented in somewhat barbarous fashion, but still a fit and proper place in which to pray. Its one aisle, its sober light, its quiet coolness, all suggested prayer. While glancing through the porch was the bright sunshine, and beyond, a vista through the avenue, that made the little church seem but a portal to some grand heaven-built cathedral, where angels worshipped—too pure, too holy, too sanctified a place for common mortals. We could not pass the portal yet. I, and the grand company in the great pew, excited much curiosity, which even led to whispers and signs. The three ladies made an imposing appearance, which caused the women to stare open-eyed at them. Many furtive glances were cast on me.

Our pew was on the right-hand side of the reading desk, filling up all the space between that and the wall. On the other side, opposite to it, was a large open place, with a comfortable stove in the middle. I noticed that all aged and infirm people turned into this open space, which led me further to remark it was comfortably cushioned, and well-supplied with stools. It was also a con-

venient place to see and hear the preacher. I conjectured it was prepared on purpose for the aged people that filled it, who, during the winter months, would bask warmly and comfortably round the great stove. I was trying to think if this had always been the custom of our village church, when through the porch, down my fancied cathedral, came in twos and twos a long line of white-robed figures, at least so they seemed in the glancing sunshine. As they passed under the porch, and came into the shadow of the church, I saw they were nothing but little mortals, clad in cotton frocks, white tippets, and bonnets; who, followed by a lot of boys, took their proper places in an orderly and quiet manner.

Two minutes afterwards there appeared, luminous in the sunshine, a slender, white robed figure, that paused a moment in the archway. Rays of splendour seemed to encircle her, as she stood framed in the massive rough old entrance. Behind her was the verdure and richness of the landscape, bathed in a golden sunshine. She came on with a gentle, undulating motion; she advanced—came nearer to the door of our pew. As she passed each pew, the occupants rose, curtsied, or bowed. As she neared the open space,

where sat the old people, all stood up, returning her salutation. In the soft, simple white bonnet and dress I did not recognize Dew. She opened the pew door—I was too much astonished to do so.

As I said before, our party made a goodly show. The three ladies had so spread themselves out, the pew seemed full, but the slightest effort on their part would have made the necessary room for another. They did not move—they looked at Dew as if she was intruding. She turned away, and went and sat among her old people. God forgive me if I swore a little in my heart at the ill-breeding of those people for whom I was about to endure so much. I went immediately to Dew, and brought her back, placing her in my seat, while I stood against the door. The three ladies then made room for me. I signed for one of the other gentlemen to take the place, while I took his, which was next to Dew.

I am not so enslaved by the desire to fulfil my own wishes as to suffer any slight to be put on my little kinswoman. Probably she had sat in this pew all her life long, and no one knew better than myself how one's nature clings to the usages of the past. Neither could I bear it to be seen in so



holy a place as the church, that this poor little harmless creature should be thrust out publicly from the state and position she had so long occupied. It was time enough to think of these things when I was once more free; and even then it seemed to me a Beaudepré should be careful to let no other Beaudepré sit lower than himself. No, my poor little Dew, I will not be your husband at any cost, but I will be your loving cousin and guardian. How pretty she looked in her snow-white frock, her simple bonnet, which became her, and made her small face seem round and lovely! She has splendid eyes!

Being pleased with myself for taking the trouble to do her but justice in the eyes of everybody, I felt very well inclined to attend to the service of the church. I even found myself praying earnestly to do my duty for the future, and the little quaint old church assumed to me the beauty of a shrine, whereon I laid all the sins of the past, and took up new hopes for the future. I think I ought to have been a woman, not a man. I find many small enthusiasms rising in me, just as they rise in the female brain. Perhaps this is owing to my early life, spent always in the company of my mother. Ah, me! my mother, it seems to me

your image is not so present with me as usual ; and yet, for the first time since you left me, I have the hope of replacing you. But stay—I am in church.

I was not only agreeably surprised, but astonished at the singing. My musical ear was charmed with the sweetness and perfect correctness of a voice singing a second to the Psalm. It was Dew. I looked at Lady Emma, to see if she noticed it, and to exchange a glance of pleasure ; we had so often longed for a good second, and here was one exactly to suit us. Lady Emma did not look up ; she was still sitting, and so far from attending to the singing, had not opened her book.

“She is so wholly unaccustomed to village singing,” I thought—“perhaps she is as much astonished at it as I am pleased.”

I must give every credit to the Dunargents, I thought to myself, so long accustomed to foreign habits. What delights me, and makes a warm glow rush from my heart all through my frame, is that these simple manners, these country duties, this primitive worship, are full of a truth and earnestness I have been seeking for all my life. Methinks the listlessness, the apathy of my nature,

has arisen from the hollow, unsatisfying result of all that I have hitherto called pleasure. I am now going to try a life I have never known before.

When the service was over, I was warmly greeted in the churchyard, and found my vanity as well satisfied with all the kind welcomes and praises thrust on me, as ever it had been in my life, with more flattering unction. To be sure there were one or two embarrassing remarks, coupling my name and Dew's together. I introduced Lady Dunargent to Mr. and Mrs. Vincent, the clergyman and his wife, and to other of my near neighbours whom I remembered, and who all crowded round me. I was glad this ordeal was over.

Lady Emma created much outspoken admiration. It was not often so rare a specimen of human loveliness and high fashion shone in this out-of-the-way place.

I went to church again in the afternoon, accompanied by old Miss Dunargent and her young kinsman. Dunargent has the making of a good young fellow in him. Dew appeared again, after her school had passed—to attend which she had not been able to breakfast with us. Again

she seemed like the figure of a luminous angel—again the whole congregation did her reverence. Dear little thing! Some of these days, Dew, you will find no one more ready to do you honour—none more proud of you than your kinsman.

This day has passed happily. Lady Dunargent sees that she must forget her child for a while, and act kindly towards the one who is to be displaced for her.

Now I wonder what insanity I shall commit next?—if my thoughts, when again I write them down, will be as peaceful and content as now, or raging with every inconsistency under the sun?

## CHAPTER VIII.

## BEHIND THE BLUE CURTAIN.

“ We will not tamely give up life, such life !  
 What tho’ the years before, like those behind,  
 Be dark as clouds the thunder sits among.”

OWEN MEREDITH.

I FANCY my young kinsman looks worried. A week it is to-day since he came with his company. Some of them are gone. Osman comes here and sits with Anne by the hour, saying nothing. One day he saw her look down the avenue ; a pleasant smile suddenly illumined her face. I knew what it meant, and placed my darling’s chair, while I also peeped about, happily busy, to welcome her. There is a weary look in her eyes also.

He left abruptly after her arrival, not because he was in a hurry to go, as I saw him loiter down the avenue, examining almost every tree.

“So, Dew, you are rid of some of your guests, only to make way for others.”

“Yes, Aunt Ermine, Mr. Clift Poole comes to-day; he is Lady Dunargent’s lawyer—he brings with him two other gentlemen, both in the same profession.”

I am afraid my face betrayed me. I looked aghast. Three lawyers, to harm my poor little Dew!

“You look frightened, Aunt Ermine, I rather like lawyers—they amuse me.”

“Dew! Dew!”

“Why that cry?—I know why they come.”

“Who told you, child?”

“Lady Emma Dunargent.”

“When?”

“The day after her arrival.”

“Is it this knowledge that has been making you paler than usual?”

“This knowledge has been preparing me for consenting to all that is necessary to secure my cousin’s happiness.”

“Remember, Dew, what you will lose, what you sacrifice—your home, every association. Lady Emma has neither the feeling nor the magnanimity to bear you near her.”

“I must remember that my cousin has been long banished from his home, and that I am the cause.”

“Child, child, be not too romantic! You have now been a week with these people. It is not our habit, even had we the wish, to criticise and disparage the guests we entertain; but ‘do you’ insure your cousin’s happiness by opposing no obstacle to his marrying Lady Emma?”

“We do not see her to advantage. She is sore at heart.”

“Sore at heart! Oh! Dew, are you wilfully blind?”

“I am not blind, Aunt Ermine; but I know this—my cousin has determined on a divorce. Can you hope that a Beaudepré will be deterred from his will?”

“She is right, Ermine; poor, poor darling! Come to our hearts, Dew, we will love you all the more.”

“I must tell him—I will tell him, my opinion of her!”

“No, Aunt Ermine—for my sake.”

“The wickedness of the creature, telling you her horrid secret—the last person to whom she should have uttered it! It was for us, who loved you, to break the first tidings.”

“I cannot but think, aunties, that even had I not been told, I should have divined it ere this. I came to-day to tell you that—I have resolved to make no opposition.”

“Have you no thoughts for the future?”

“None at present.”

“Have you considered that it may be probable, to obtain a divorce, Osman must rely upon your proceeding against him? He has deserted you, but you have done nothing to give him a plea.”

The child shivered, and a weary, wan look came into her face.

After a pause, she said,

“Whatever is to be done, must be borne, no matter by whom.”

“Dew, there is such a thing as self-sacrifice, self-immolation, almost above humanity.”

“I feel capable of performing it, for—” she paused, then hurriedly, softly, the words fluttered from her mouth—“his sake.”

She loved him!

“Anne, Anne,” I murmured, when she was gone, “she loves him!—she will die for him!”

“I fear you are right. Her will to aid him to fulfil his purpose is now as strong as his to obtain



it. By what you said to Dew, I fear Lady Emma's character does not improve upon you."

"In common honesty I must confess that, but for the purpose for which she is here, I should not dislike her. At the same time, I am not without fears she is something of a hypocrite. I think she deceives her mother as much as any one."

"I wish I liked Lady Dunargent better, Ermine, she is so friendly and good to me."

"She is, Anne. She makes me love her for your sake, while I dislike her for Dew's. I think she is sincerely sorry for our darling, but her purpose is as inexorable as Osman's. She told me last night she lived only for her children, and their happiness was a sacred duty with her. We did not calculate, Anne, upon being called upon to like people who are about to injure us so much."

"No ; do you think they affect an interest in us, to further their own views ?"

"I do not like to say so without further proof. At all events, they see nothing pleases Osman so much as attention to us, and that he is more grateful to Lady Dunargent for proofs of affection to Dew than to himself."

"All this only draws the net closer round us. Our hopes are to be lost in delusive clouds."

Anne and I talked until we were tired, and left off just as we began.

In the evening we had a visit from Lady Dunargent. We saw she was going to be confidential. She was.

“I am very happy, my dear Miss Beaudeprés, to find how singularly well we get on together. Having lived so much abroad, and mixing in a society which you will rightly conceive was of the highest, most intellectual character, I was naturally disposed to regard myself as rather a victim on coming to England. The refinements and polish so conspicuous abroad, and which are absolute necessities to a delicate mind, are but little regarded, I thought, in dear, good England. But I am agreeably surprised—most agreeably. I can assure you, with truth, that both my son and myself have serious thoughts of going to Dunargent, to see if it is possible to live there. Poor dear boy! he is so like me, always anxious to do his duty; he told me last night he considered it the proper thing for every man of position to live at home, at least part of the year. He has been going about with—with dear little Dew, and is immensely taken with the various duties belonging to an estate. This place quite enchants me; we have never seen anything

abroad like the beauty—the order of everything here. I am most agreeably surprised, and quite annoyed with Osman, that he did not in some measure prepare me—especially to know and claim as friends people like yourselves. Dear Miss Anne, I think your sister faultless—absolutely faultless. I never look at her without thinking how fortunate it is for my Emma she is not in Dew's place. You know, my dear ladies, what brought us all here ?”

We acknowledged we did.

“Ah! so like my own dear Osman, the most honourable creature in existence. He acted entirely by my advice. He told you a week should pass—that we should frankly come among you all, that you might see and judge us as we are. We felt assured that, having only his happiness at heart, we should meet more than half way. Nothing could have succeeded better. We all like each other immensely, and are all, I feel assured, equally desirous of making him happy.”

“I fear we do not agree in the manner thereof.”

“Yes, we do; you may not think it, but I know we do. You love him, you are devoted to him, as we are, and now nothing remains to be done but to prepare the dear child.”

“If you mean our darling, Lady Beaudepré, she knows it, thanks to your daughter, already.”

“Knows it! My daughter!”

“Yes, Madam. Lady Emma told Lady Beau-depré on the second day of her coming here.”

I must do Lady Dunargent the justice to say she was very much mortified and confused. She cried bitterly, sobbing out,

“I am devoted to my children—all my happiness is bound up in them. I have instilled the highest principles in them. I have ever said, ‘Children, I shall know no happiness in heaven if you are not there!’ Oh! Emma, Emma, why forget your principles?—why deceive your fond mother?”

Said Anne, pitying her, “Lady Emma’s position is a strange one—she has a lover, yet no lover; she was not prepared.”

“I cannot make that excuse for her. This is the second time she has astonished, grieved me. Love is all-powerful, I know, but there is something more in this which I cannot understand.”

“No harm has been done, Madam, as yet; and we are not of that disposition, to wish to expose one of our own sex. Let us be silent on what Lady Emma has done, and pray proceed with what you wish to say.”

“I forget it all—all except that my daughter has not only disobeyed, but deceived me. Only last night I mentioned that to-day I should beg you to tell your Dew—but, perhaps—yes, it must be so—you have been deceived. Who said that my daughter had told Lady Beaudepré?”

“Lady Beaudepré herself.”

“Ah!—hem—my poor dear child! after all she may not be so much to blame. Perhaps it was a little jealousy. Our dear Osman desired a trio, and, I remember, sent for Dew to try if by any possibility she could sing a second—my dear Emma was in despair—he left them together—probably they had a few girlish words—Emma may have said just a little too much; the other was quick to understand, quicker than Emma thought. I see it all. Emma will be as much shocked at the effect of her hastiness as I am. Well, and now to go on. Mr. Clift Poole comes to-day, with two most eminent gentlemen of the bar, accustomed to—to—that sort of thing, you know. They will examine into the case, and see how it is to be arranged. My lawyer, Mr. Clift Poole, says in his letter to me, ‘No lawyer ever made a law he could not unrule.’ Ha! ha!—very clever. You see, he means that the

thing is certain ; and I am sure, like myself, you must rejoice that this most disagreeable state of things is soon to be remedied, and our Osman's happiness secured."

"If he is happy, we must rest content."

"He must be happy. Did you ever see two people more formed for each other in every way than he and my Emma?—both so wonderfully gifted in person and talents—both endued with the same taste—both of those quiet domestic habits that will find all their happiness in home and each other."

"I pray God it may be so."

"Thank you very much, Miss Beaudepré, for your cordial sympathy. As I said to my cousin, Jane Dunargent, 'Jane,' I said, 'what infinite happiness it will be to me to leave my dear Emma in the kind guardianship of those two worthy Miss Beaudeprés. I shall now have leisure to devote myself to my dear Dunargent ; I shall do as he wishes, and go to his home. In course of time he will marry, and I have such faith in his good taste, that I have no doubt he will make an admirable choice ; then, Jane, I shall again be free to come and settle near my darling Emma,

and by this means also have the valued society of those dear creatures the Miss Beaudeprés.’ ”

Lady Dunargent was conscious that she talked to dissatisfied ears, and therefore lost a little of her usual dignified self-respect. I have no wish to describe her otherwise than what she is—a good-hearted, worldly woman, desirous of doing her duty, which she might have done better had she not been so unfortunate as to suffer her love for her children to blind her judgment. Moreover—and who has not experienced the same thing?—she was in the unpleasant position of finding her anticipations totally false. She came to Beau-deprés full of plans that had only to be told, to be fulfilled. She had made her calculations on the supposition that one so excellent and high-minded as Sir Osman could not have left country, home, and wife for five years without the most justifiable reasons for so doing. Her love for himself, and her admiration for his character, caused her to give him credit for every excuse—but the one of pride and temper. She was now paying the penalty of believing him faultless, and ourselves most erring. She came to conquer, and, like Antony, found that her ally (in other words, her

anticipations) had proved false to her. We were, without flattery, her equals; we participated largely in the family virtues she so admired in Osman; and the object of his long aversion and estrangement was the most innocent, almost, she must confess, sweetest creature she had ever met. Under this utter annihilation of all her expectations, no wonder that poor Lady Dunargent lost her head a little.

“We have nothing to do, Anne, but be silent. Our attitude must be that of high-bred women. We may come in contact with ugly details and painful admissions; but we withdraw from them, as things that we do not understand.”

“Would that Osman could see the horror of it all, in time to pause, Ermine, ere it is too late!”

“Pray God, rather, that he may never see it at all, if he persists in obeying his obstinate will. I love him dearly; I cannot love him without pity—pity that for so long he has been cut off from all those ties he so well knows how to appreciate—pity that he has been so long banished from the home he could love so dearly!—pity that he has not yet had the opportunity of performing those duties his kindly heart and generous nature would fulfil so admirably! If Lady Emma is to be



his wife, I pray God she may prove much better than she appears to us at present, and I partly think that this may prove the case.

## CHAPTER IX.

## BEHIND THE RED CURTAIN.

“ If it be a sin to covet honour,  
I am the most offending soul alive.”

SHAKESPEARE.

**I**NTUITION! instinct! presentiment! certainly the human frame is gifted with them. Else why did I anticipate writing down my thoughts again in a different mood from the one in which I left off? I was happy, contented with my progress so far on this most disagreeable matter. I was pleased to find the long-nourished hatred and scorn of my poor little cousin was vanishing under the influence of her gentle ways, her infantine grace of manner.

Now I am chafing like the wildest beast. I am in one of my insane fits—I am beside myself. Emma! Emma! you are the cause! I have need to remember that Dew is as yet ignorant of what

you know, otherwise I might beseech you to imitate her serene composure, her gentle forbearance, so like your own awhile ago. And yet the jealousy that torments us both makes me still more your lover. Your tears, your threats, your unhappiness have hurled me down from the pedestal of honour on which I bravely poised myself, and without thought of the wife still bound to me, I kneel at your feet, kiss away your tears, act the fondest madman in love that history ever painted. Truly man's heart, and woman's heart, throb with different sensations—it seems almost impossible that one can understand the other. I have lost my own self-respect. I am wearied of the false construction put on all my words, my looks. I sigh for that true nobility of spirit which permits not the eyes to delude the heart. Is it possible that reason is unable to reason with sentiment?—that the powers of the one are thrust aside for the claims of the other? Reason is the eye of the soul. My soul is blind!

What a stupendous power is put into the hands of the woman to whom one says "I love!" What a lavish indulgence, a knightly tenderness seems her due! In giving her my heart, I give her my individuality.

And should she be unworthy the gift! My ideas of love have hitherto confined themselves to the conviction that love itself, and the expression of it, are both exaggerations, which in weak heads exposes what is beautiful in it to ridicule. A perfect friendship, as giving one the truest type of peace, has been the love I desired—totally unlike the delirium of passion. But now I feel as if I could be infatuated—as if I was so—as if the mad throbbing of my heart was an ecstasy in itself. And all the while I know I am a fool. I desire to face my position boldly, examine it, tear it to pieces where it neither pleases nor becomes me, and at the first trial I shrink as from the touch of flame. I go to my old cousins and sit there. Methinks I feel better, happier in their quaint, lovely old sitting-room. The sight of one stricken so much of God, lying helpless, beaming holy, peaceful glances at me, as if she was one of the most blest, most fortunate of beings, seems to do me good. And yet she is the pity of everyone who sees her. And that beautiful, prim, stately old maiden, who gave up, as I have heard, the fairest lot in life, merely to be an invalid's nurse. They have romantic natures, that one can see by many little traits; their enthusiastic love for Dew—to be sure, poor old things, she is the only thing they

had to love but themselves—and their delight in nature. “God is our Father, Nature our mother! I adore the one and love the other!” says my Cousin Ermine, her sweet beautiful face all aglow.

It does not appear to me that Anne has ever thought it right to cavil at her fate, or Ermine to murmur at the duty which was so self-sacrificing. Did Ermine permit herself to haggle over the price she paid for performing this duty?—did she falter and hesitate, pandering to the weakness of human will? I should say not. The serenity of a perfect peace beams from her eyes. A serenity I desire to possess, for which I have longed; to obtain which I know there is but one highway, a king’s road, forsooth, trodden down by resolute feet, levelled with hard blows.

At present I am tormented in every shape. My heart is “burning with love—my brain reeling from inconsistency”—my mind feeble and deceptive. Imagination, that subtle and invigorating power, has turned traitor in the citadel she commands; counselling weak, vacillating, humiliating courses. Hitherto I have, but for one thing, enjoyed the life God gave me. I coloured it with tender fancies, which, if I did not enjoy in reality, sufficed for the time. Now, I concluded in my

man's wisdom, that these are about to be realised, and I find in their stead, bitterness, anger, shame. I have never yet felt myself downcast, since the death of my dear mother; and as for despair, I considered I was the last subject on whom it could be exercised.

And yet I feel both. Not the despair of the wretch, the criminal, or the lost; but a despair of extricating myself from a mesh of thoughts and deeds my soul abhors. I am downcast from disgust at myself. I owe this to you, grandfather. If I disgrace my name, let the odium rest on your grave. In the midst of the chaos of my mind, let me be true at least to one person. Poor pretty Emma, so lovely in her loveliness—so bewitching in that innocent abandonment of herself. Yes, to her I will be true—no matter how she chafes my spirit with her fancies.

Mr. Clift Poole has arrived with Mr. Keane and his clerk. How the poor child vexed herself at the cold sternness of the great lawyer's manner!

“Do not let her speak to him,” she entreated me, “otherwise she will prejudice him against me.”

“Nay, love—(love, indeed! how am I fallen! but a week ago, I forbade myself even the use of a

pronoun which implied the right of possession)—nay, love—grim, grey lawyers delight to look on such beauty as yours. Poor little Dew will have scant attention while you are by.”

“But she is so plausible—you know she has already persuaded you to like her—merely by affecting to be so perfect.”

“God forbid that I should do otherwise than like—nay, you must permit me to love so gentle and harmless a being as Dew.”

“Do not call her Dew. I do not like it. Don’t talk of her. I cannot bear it!”

“Dearest, you are unreasonable.”

“I know I am; but you should not upbraid me. I cannot help it.”

What was I to say? Mother, is this the love you bequeathed me? A love, my reason tells me, that will fetter my senses, blind my judgment, and chafe my spirit with its human weakness. “My wife,” you said, “must raise my soul upwards—towards the place where you dwell. What good thought the good God might put into my heart, must be bettered by one in her.” Alas! alas!

But it is the strangeness of her position. How right was Ermine in saying she ought never to have come here, until she came as my wife. What

has jealousy to do with a love such as ours ought to be? Am I not giving her the best proof of my love—thrusting down from her state—driving from her only home—casting forth out into the world—a young creature, whose only happiness hitherto has been that she was here.

Dew! little Dew! in the midst of all this torment of my soul, I look into your grave, truthful eyes, and read the only comfort I have. You do not at present know what I am plotting against you; but every now and then, when my poor Emma forgets herself—you give me a serene look—as much as to say—“I do not heed her—frankly I forgive her.”

To-day, when Miss Dunargent, with a want of tact—a monstrous impertinence, said to you, “Ring the bell, my dear,” how admirably, how exquisitely you rebuked her! With inimitable courtesy you rose.

“I will ring the bell, Miss Dunargent; but I am your hostess, not your dear.”

Lady Dunargent was thoroughly displeased with “old Jane,” as she called her. So was I. When Dew left the room, I told Miss Dunargent if she forgot her place as the guest of Lady Beaudepré, I must request her to leave. Emma took her part.



But why recall this foolish, wretched squabbling?—unless it is to show what little things make one wretched.

Lady Dunargent has had a serious scene with her daughter. Their eyes showed traces of tears. What could it have been about? Does she deprecate, as I do, the change in the gentle, refined Emma? Poor good mother! Do not fear. If I am the cause of the change—it shall be my cheerful work to amend it—when I may. At present I am in no mood for the probing of these lawyers. Even on sunny days of happiness, I dreaded it. How much more now, when I feel so miserable, so utterly unlike myself!

Lady Dunargent desired to be closeted with the lawyers alone. I suggested my cousin Ermine should attend on behalf of Dew. It seemed to me that this was only right. She agreed cordially, but Ermine declined.

“If Dew requested her, she would do so.”

“Dew does not know,” I replied.

“She does,” answered Lady Dunargent, quickly.

“Emma, I mean—that is—nothing; but, at all events, you will find she has discovered everything.”

I looked at Ermine.

"The child knows," she replied.

"Will you go and ask her wishes?"

Ermine returned in a few moments.

"She declines any interference. If Serjeant Deane wishes to see her, she is ready."

While they were closeted together, I went to seek for Emma. I found Dew with her.

"Lady Emma," I said, "who told Dew of the reason that brought us thither?"

"I do not know—do you?" she answered, turning to Dew.

A flush of the deepest crimson flooded Dew's face; ere it faded, she turned and left the room.

"She appears utterly indifferent, you see, Osman. Do you know, I hate your lawyer—his eyes penetrate through one. Osman, I have news for you—Dunargent is in love with Dew."

Poor Emma! her manner was most nervous and excited, so I thought it best to amuse her.

"I have seen this love for some days."

"How nice it will be. Dew will give you to me, and I will give her to Dunargent."

"Do you think she loves him?"

"Oh! Osman, such a little prude as it is! If she is, she will never allow it. I have just been taxing her with it."

“I wish she would—it would make me almost as happy as if I could marry you to-morrow.”

Emma pouted a little.

“It will remove such a weight from my heart, Emma.”

“Why should you think so much more of her than of me?”

“Because she is to be the sufferer.”

“But I am the sufferer now—how much you will not understand.”

“You are so impatient, dear Emma.”

“Would you have me otherwise?”

What witcheries women can use! She succeeded in making me forget for a time the flushed face of poor little Dew.

And yet not poor. At dinner, this little creature, whom I so pitied, was to the last degree dignified and composed. Her reception of the lawyers astonished them all. Whether Lady Dunargent had given them to understand she was something that a man was justified in refusing for his wife, or they had formed their own ideas of a person so treated as I had treated her, I do not know.

The sagacious, penetrating eyes of Serjeant Deane went from Ermine to Dew, from Dew to

Ermine. Emma was so far a true prophetess, that, after the first look, he paid no further attention to her ; and apparently he had had enough of Lady Dunargent's company. It must be confessed that the essences of grace and refinement running with such purity in the veins of my kinswomen, were of the rarest kind. I was proud of them both, proud of the old-fashioned courtesy, the exquisite remains of beauty in Erminé ; and gratified, yes, absolutely gratified with the ease and dignity of Dew. The flush that rose to her cheeks had not left it ; her eyes were no longer soft and wistful, but sparkling with intelligence and spirit. The royal sort of command with which she held in check the boyish admiration of Dunargent, was not more bewitching in her than the simple but arch manner with which she talked to the lawyer. Always with a mobile face, I saw on it a new expression, caused by the knitting of her brows, not in astonishment or discomposure, but, as it were, from earnestness. It gave her extraordinary intelligence. For the first time I admired the breadth of her forehead.

Will she love Dunargent ? I was ashamed, as I looked at her, that I had even asked myself the question. The blood running in her veins gave

life to mine. While I felt how utterly I was unworthy of it, I honoured it in her. Honoured it so much, that I forbade myself the mention of such an idea at present—yes, at present. Oh! Emma, if you only knew how I adore this exquisite sense of virtue and honour—but, stay, Emma loves—I will think no more of comparison.

After dinner, of course we had music. The great lawyer seemed superbly indifferent to our melody, though Emma never exerted her exquisite voice with better effect. He watched us all with his searching eyes, and read us, I feel sure, even better than we read ourselves.

When the ladies had retired, Mr. Clift Poole requested me to grant him and the learned serjeant an interview. Was I anxious to hear my fate? Some mysterious power seemed to numb me. Serjeant Deane began at once.

“With regard to the power you have placed in the hands of the present Lady Beaudepré to obtain a divorce, by five years’ desertion, it seems to me, with a little of adverse action combined, there will not be much doubt that she can obtain it. If the divorce is absolute for her happiness and future prospects, she can plead upon several questions, which I need not detail unless they are required.

But in the long conference I had with Lady Dunargent this morning, I do not conceal from you that the impression is strongly forced on my mind, it is Lady Dunargent who desires the divorce, and not Lady Beaudepré."

I assented by a sign.

"And you feel convinced in your own mind that you can never be happy as the husband of Lady Beaudepré?"

"I have proved my conviction by exiling myself from my home for five years."

"Lady Dunargent implied that there was a something in the character, the manner, the appearance, or the habits of Lady Beaudepré, that was antagonistic to you. In fact, that you were justified in refusing to live with her."

"By no means. I deny this. My little cousin is one I could love dearly, were she not my wife. She commands my respect, and is beloved here in her home with extraordinary devotion."

"Sir," said the lawyer, laying his hand on mine, and looking into my eyes with a solemn, grave fervour that had in it something of the look of a warning archangel, "if that young creature was my wife, I should not know how to thank God enough for the gift of her!"

His voice was of that penetrating, thrilling power, it sounded like the deep note of an alarm-bell. But the more I acknowledged the influence, so much the more rose in me the stern will of the Beaudeprés. I answered coldly,

“Sir, I am indebted to you for the honour you do my cousin on so short an acquaintance.”

“It is short,” he replied, in a nonchalant manner. Then, more earnestly—“It is short, but my judgment is none the less truth itself. One day you will acknowledge this; but I beg your pardon, gentlemen, we will now proceed. Lady Dunargent confided to me that her daughter, the Lady Emma Dunargent, has become attached to you, Sir Osman, in consequence of your marked attentions abroad, and subsequent offer to her.”

There was something so beneficent in the look of Mr. Deane—so irresistible in his powerful capacity of intellect, with so much of human sympathy, that, while a sudden rush of rage filled my heart at the despicable position in which his words placed me, I yet was compelled to say—“This is but too true.”

A slight smile fluttered on his lips as he said,

“It is well women do not know the full extent of their power over us. Lady Dunargent further gave me to understand that the life—perhaps the

reason, what she has—of Lady Emma Dunargent were both likely to be endangered if your divorce could not be obtained.”

“I do not presume, Mr. Deane, to value myself at so high rate.”

A sneer, remarkable for its power, possessed the whole of his countenance for one fleeting moment.

“Sir Osman,” he replied, gravely, “a man’s heart and honour are precious gifts to be placed in a woman’s keeping. It is his own fault if he does not confide them to one who will regard them as her dearest treasures.”

Mr. Clift Poole, as if impatient at this constant verging from the real subject, here interposed.

“It will be an absolute injury to the case if Sir Osman’s future intentions, as regards Lady Emma Dunargent, should be brought into court.”

“It was with a view to this certain indamage-ment that I have mentioned the matter. If Lady Dunargent thinks, in her maternal heart, that any court of justice in England will be moved by the plea that their decision will cause her daughter, the Lady Emma, to go mad, or die, the sooner she is undeceived the better.”

The ironical and sarcastic tone he assumed made



me hate him, even more than I hated myself. To have my poor, loving, lovely Emma thus held up to ridicule! I had nothing to do but gnaw at my heart inwardly, and swear to myself I would love her all the more devotedly.

“You will therefore, my dear Sir Osman, either empower me to explain to her ladyship the extremely unsympathetic nature of the law, and the obdurate vindictiveness with which the dispensers of that law treat those who endeavour to bias their judgment by a display of maternal love and solicitude, doubtless most beautiful; or you will tell her yourself, intimating, as I have no doubt you will do, in the most delicate and soothing manner, that the sooner she leaves Beaudepré and England the better for herself, and the intellect and life of the Lady Emma Dunargent. The least hint of the real parties proceeding in this divorce case, will, as Mr. Clift Poole asserted, damage it beyond our power to rectify. Furthermore, it will be a matter of absolute necessity that I should have a private interview with Lady Beaudepré.”

“This I can promise you,” I faltered, “but spare her—any—spare her—that is—she has done nothing—in this matter she is wholly blameless. I would to God my little cousin saw, in this release I

seek, as happy a prospect before her as I anticipate.”

“Your sentiments are, no doubt, praiseworthy, Sir Osman. But, as I remarked before, women do not know their own power over us. Lady Beau-depré will doubtless sacrifice herself to please you ; she has the sacred insignia of martyrdom written on her brow, in her radiant eyes ; if you—I mean she—obtain this divorce, she will trample under foot every love-sick boy that comes near her, and play with a grave man’s honourable heart, as with a football, rather than allow herself to be consoled after the fashion you indicate.”

“You seem to have studied her character, Mr. Deane.”

“There was no occasion to study it. If a lawyer cannot detect by the countenance the prevailing virtue or vice of any person with whom he is brought into contact, he loses half his prestige. Five minutes’ conversation placed Lady Dunargent’s heart and soul naked before me. A good woman, but her very virtue is her bane. A fond mother, yet her love will be the ruin of both her children. She defends what is right without judgment ; consequences have more power with her than a motive ; and as for her religion, she only possesses

that decent sort of piety which sprouts and perishes according to her human affections. Now, with regard to that perfect picture of a gentlewoman, who retains as much beauty of person as befits a most beautiful character, I have but to say that with affections more ardent, because her nature is enthusiastic, she has a soul ever burning with celestial fire, which purifies and blesses every action of her life. She has had a sorrow, you can see it folded down in the depths of her eyes; she has made a sacrifice, but it has perfected the character that was a rare one before."

"Mr. Deane, you are right. I thank you; but why thank you? It is but doing my cousin Ermine justice. We Beaudépés are supposed to have the strongest family attachments."

"Methinks I know one who wants it."

His significant manner abashed me. How intolerable this feeling of degradation!

"Lady Dunargent," continued Mr. Deane, in his dry, caustic tones, "was very earnest about an immediate settlement of this affair. Her daughter, the Lady Emma, is, it appears, already suffering much from the procrastination of her happiness. You, perhaps, Mr. Clift Poole, will undertake to get it permanently fixed in her ladyship's mind, that some

months must elapse, it might so happen a year, before she may begin to order the wedding-cake. Such an important matter as this cannot be disposed of in the summary way, I fear, she calculates on. And now, I think, we need say no more to-night. I propose leaving for town the day after to-morrow, and will thank you, Sir Osman, for one more interview such as this before I depart. You will kindly arrange my conference with Lady Beau-depré to-morrow.”

I retired to my room, and gave myself up, alternately, to rage and mortification. Again I seem to hate that unfortunate little creature, who, so calm, so stately, so well content with herself, goes on performing the daily duties of hospitality, unmoved and untortured as I am. If she had but shewn the slightest emotion—looked sorrowful—with but the shadow of a tear in her eyes, said but the simplest word to me, of horror, or shock, or even no more than a demur, I would forego—but stay, Emma, my poor Emma! Must I sacrifice her? Will it be a sacrifice? When that merciless lawyer spoke of you and your mother, some echo in my heart seemed to respond, whispering to me that a man laying his heart in the hand of a woman ought to be sure she knew the value of the gift.

And have I reason to think that the honour I worship, is to you as strong as your affection for me?  
Oh! Emma, Emma!

## CHAPTER X.

## BEHIND THE BLUE CURTAIN.

“That which the fountain sheds forth returns again to the fountain ;  
 Patience ! accomplish thy labour : accomplish thy work of affection !  
 Sorrow and silence are strong : and patient endurance is Godlike.”

LONGFELLOW.

I DO not know which I pity most, Osman or Lady Dunargent. This matter, which appeared to them so easy in the doing, is presenting absolute mountains of horror and disgust to both. But for the fear of her daughter's reason and health, I feel sure Lady Dunargent would be delighted to obey the dictates of her kind heart, and say, “Osman, go to your wife, ask her forgiveness, be happy together.” And I fancy Osman,

hating the position he is in, would find it less galling to rise up and do so.

But Lady Emma!—at times I wonder if she is sincere, or moved to act as she does from a sort of wretched jealousy, that cannot bear to have a rival. History is not without its examples of love changing the whole nature; and can we wonder at her love for Osman? It is not so much his extreme beauty, the perfection of his face and form, as that sense of exquisite honour and refinement that beams with such power from his eyes. To be loved by such a heart is a triumph that few women could forego. They know their happiness must be certain in such hands; they know the happiness they can give in return. Angels might be satisfied with the perfectness of such a union. And yet is it surprising to me that, with this high sense of honour, Osman does not see he is outraging the laws of God, seeking this divorce. I misdoubt me he has more regard to those of man. Lady Emma is probably the first person to whom he has uttered vows. According to man's laws, these are paramount to all other. His *Beaudep re* will is ruling him to the full as much as it did his grandfather; and though he must acknowledge that the character of Dew is very superior to that

of Lady Emma, yet, even in acknowledging it, he will the more firmly abide by the woman he has told he loves.

He came here early this morning to tell us of the opinion of the lawyers, and for the first time he did not seem able to look us in the face. Anne was very gentle and kind to him. He wanted comfort, he said, and desired to know from us whether it would do for him to leave the place for a while.

“You have sent out invitations for parties and a ball?”

“I have.”

“Wait until they are over. You will find us only ready to help you in everything. This time will soon pass. I am going to Beaudepré, and will walk back with you.”

As we walked down the avenue, Osman in some measure laid bare his heart to me. I could see that the fixed determination of it remained strong as ever, but his fine nature was suffering tortures from the fear that Lady Emma had not altogether behaved rightly to Dew.

“I would know, but I fear to ask, who told Dew the real reason that brought me home.”

The temptation was great to tell him, but I re-



frained, partly because my Dew required no assistance from the faults of others to raise her character, and partly because my womanly pride forbade me to expose another woman, much as it would serve me to do so.

“Your wish is not wise, Osman,” I replied—  
“think of it no more. It will not help you either way.”

“I do not know ; you are right about our love of kindred. I at times fancy, if Dew gave but a sigh, said a word——”

Here he stopped—how my heart beat ! We reached the house, and were met at the hall door by Dew. Her pretty, fresh morning dress, her straw hat, her blue ribbons, gave her an infinite becomingness of aspect, which, joined to her soft, graceful manner, made me think her the sweetest thing my eyes could look on. She made me her morning salutation ; then turned, and presented her cousin with a rose, not saying a word. He took hold of her hand, as if to detain and speak to her. As he continued to hold it and say nothing, the beautiful *Beaudep re* bloom rose to her cheeks, her forehead, and was even to be seen down to the very tips of the tiny fingers which lay in his. She looked shy and embarrassed. It was the blush of

a girl whose hand had never yet been clasped in that of a man. A beautiful smile came to Osman's face as he noticed this.

"Dear little Dew," he said, "think well of me, and love me, if you can, after to-day."

The blush died away, and her face grew utterly colourless and immovable. He looked eagerly at her; her eyes were bent on the ground, her hand fell from his—she stood as if suddenly turned to stone.

At that instant Lady Emma appeared.

"I want that rose," she demanded, somewhat haughtily.

"Pardon me," he replied; "come with me, and I will gather another for you."

And they went, heedless of us.

I took Dew's hand, and led her into the library, where was Mr. Deane. His quick eye noted a change in her.

"What has happened?" he asked abruptly.

She recovered her composure as if by magic, and assuming the little stately air, that became her so well, replied for herself.

"I am here to give my consent—I am ready to obey your commands."

"My commands! Lady Beaudepré, believe

me, they would be very different from what I see you expect."

"I wish, sir, to know—and yet—not so—I would know nothing. Simply make that use of me which will obtain my cousin his wish."

"I cannot do so, without amply satisfying myself you really comprehend the position in which you will be placed. Sir Osman can only obtain a divorce through your petition, and complaint of desertion. He must remain inactive, while you must appear the vindictive and aggrieved party. At all times, such a position for a woman is painful;—to one of your nature, it will be—it must be intolerable."

"I can bear it," she answered, white as a lily, but with glowing eyes.

"I believe you," he answered gravely. "As to the question of what you will bear, I can say no more. Let me rather ask you if you will aid your cousin in becoming one of the most miserable of men?"

"How?" she exclaimed, with a sort of passion.

"If he becomes free to marry again, he will marry the Lady Emma Dunargent."

"I have been told so, and that it is for his happiness."

“This is his expectation. I ask you candidly, is she the sort of person to make him happy?”

“He thinks so.”

“You know it will not be so.”

The powerful expression of his countenance, the solemn pathos in his voice, made her tremble, while the tears rained from her eyes.

“Will you listen to some advice from me?”

She raised her eyes to his in speaking gratitude, and put her hand out, as in the attitude of one craving help. He took it in his, looked at its slender delicacy, its transparent colour—the blue veins were so blue, and the pink palm so pink, he could not but admire it.

“This little tiny hand has a firm grasp, and its colour shows the healthy, pure blood that makes it so delicate, yet so strong. Your heart is pourtrayed by your hand; filled with the most delicate perceptions—it is powerful to perform its duty. Lady Beaudepré, you must cast from you all those little scruples that gentle-nurtured, refined people cling to, as if they were commands from God. My perceptions as a lawyer, my feelings as a man, both present to me the picture of a good and honourable man, on the verge of making a most fatal mistake—through pique, or resentment. The pique is to-

wards yourself, and is fast fading, like a dissolving view, into a very contrary feeling. The resentment is against his grandfather, and it needs but be placed before him in a proper light, and he will see the utter paradox of a living man avenging himself on a dead one. You have it in your power, if ever woman had, to turn the pique into love, the resentment against the dead into a pæon in his praise. You must make love to your husband as openly as the Lady Emma Dunargent."

The sweet, innocent face of my darling was dyed with blushes.

"Sir Osman has evidently been humoured and petted from childhood by women. He longs to be loved, and made much of again. Most men do. Even I, amid the dry duties of the law, cannot help dreaming at times of a woman's hand caressing my hair,—the soft touch of lips, that touch because they love. You smile. Permit me to have some human feelings. Now, I advise that you enter the lists against your rival. Hitherto you have, or I am much mistaken, smoothed the way for her in every possible manner. Doubtless it was she who told you of Sir Osman's intentions, and you mean to be tortured before you will confess it. It is my opinion, did Sir Osman know of

it, there would be a rupture at once. You are careful to gloss over her rudenesses—you are equally solicitous to show forth the only virtue she possesses, a taste for music. It is my opinion that you take a serious, painful delight in depreciating yourself and exalting her. There is truly an agonising pleasure in such conduct, a sort of exquisite penance, that reminds one of the self-imposed tortures of the Romish Church; and it is equally fallacious in its end. Blinded by the radiance of self-imposed immolation, the result is wholly forgotten. The Ritualist forgets the Saviour, and fervently thinks he works out his own salvation. You, in thinking too much of Lady Emma, lose sight of the welfare of Sir Osman. Do you take my meaning?"

"I do, Mr. Deane," I interrupted. "We are but poor women, less used to the world than the very servants that do our bidding. We have held to our womanly ways and conceits, among which a prudery and reserve is doubtless one of the strongest; and to make love to a man who is in love with another woman, appears to me——"

"He is her husband—pardon me for interrupting you. The most modest, pure, prim-prudish creature amongst you can never cavil at a wife luring

her husband to her side by the sweet, innocent tokens of a wife's love."

"I will try," murmured Dew.

"That is my brave little lady!"

"But it will have no effect."

"Why—why do you think so?"

"Because my cousin is pledged in love and honour to the one, while the other has nothing but his aversion and avoidance as her share."

"All the more credit to you if you win. Where there is no difficulty, there is neither praise nor honour. If virtue were visible, men would not worship her so much for her beauty as her goodness. A brave spirit ennobles gentleness. There, I could string a dozen more aphorisms for you, but, thank God, they are needless."

Dew looked up wistful, yet grateful.

"Sir," she said, "I must not be treacherous—underhand towards her."

"Pooh!—was ever seen a more insignificant, false, trustless face? Confide in her, and she will use your confidence for her own advantage. No, I require nothing underhand from you, Lady Beaudepré—be yourself, and merely make Art so far wait upon Nature as to use her gifts on every occasion. I understand you are going to

celebrate the return of Sir Osman by some fêtes—a ball or two. Give me leave to recommend to Lady Beaudepré's notice a very celebrated milliner."

Dew laughed her little silvery laugh. The eyes of the great, grim lawyer looked lovingly at her.

"You will ask me, Lady Beaudepré, to attend these fêtes?"

"Certainly, Mr. Deane."

"I presume Lady Dunargent is at the bottom of all this show and gaiety?"

"No," I answered; "my young kinsman promised his tenantry and neighbours a fête."

"'Tis bad taste in the Dunargents to show themselves, considering that which they intend to do will give a certain blow to the prestige of the neighbourhood. However, it is not my business, and it certainly is not my pleasure, to charge myself with their concerns. By-the-by, Lady Beaudepré, will you allow me to suggest a little less scornful treatment of the young Earl? 'Tis astonishing how quick a man is to resent the intrusion of another on his domain, though he care nothing for his domain. 'Tis inherent in the nature of man, as it is inherent in the old cock of the



yard, to give his presumptuous young rival a drubbing."

Dew shook her head.

"'Tis a sad thing to be too scrupulous," observed Mr. Deane.

We took leave of this wonderful man with mutual compliments on both sides, he saying as a parting salutation,

"Remember, you can get your divorce, if you are bent on it; but I would conquer the other way."

In the expressive face of Dew he read a satisfactory reply.

We had scarcely left him when Lady Dunargent and Osman both craved an audience. Osman looked flushed and perturbed. He tried to catch a glimpse of Dew's face, but she turned rapidly up the passage that led to her own apartments. What passed between the three I do not know, but I am convinced that subtle lawyer played with Lady Dunargent's little weaknesses, until Osman must have quivered in every nerve. Never had I seen him look so gloomy and abstracted as when we all met in the evening, preparatory to dinner. We were all assembled but Lady Emma and Dew.

Lady Emma suddenly appeared, with a height-

ened colour, a frown on her fair brow, a discomposure expressed in every hair of her head. With that deferential politeness so becoming in him, Osman bowed low as he handed her a chair. She flounced from it in anger, and swept by him with an air not so much of haughtiness, as of angry pettishness. Lovely as she was—as she looked—in this stormy mood, there was a sad array of evil passions expressed in her face that made one withdraw one's eyes from it, in pity that aught so fair should be so disfigured. Her mother, with her usual fuss and gushingness, rushed to her, embraced her, called upon "Jane" to bring her a footstool, and had scarcely finished her soothing efforts, when, like a serene angel of peace and love, little Dew entered the room. Still all in white, folds upon folds of soft, snowy drapery floating round her, a single ornament of diamonds, in the form of a star, in her hair. Her head was not carried with its usual stately air, but drooped a little; blushes kept rising in quick succession—she looked like an innocent little white-robed angel dropped down from some world where evil and passion had no entrance. She advanced towards the middle of the room, when, just the least in the world coquettishly, she looked at Sir Osman; then

hesitated, blushed deeply, held out a little bouquet, and, with the prettiest look of half-love, half-sorrow, said, "Will you accept this?"

He took it at once, with eagerness. Evidently he read in this act that Dew desired to show her forgiveness of the deed of the morning—the absolute decision of the divorce. She might be—was, that he could see—grieved at heart, but she forgave him.

Any other design in this departure from her usual manner evidently was unnoticed by him. But his brow cleared, his eyes brightened—at least, whatever he might suffer himself, his little cousin would be spared the bitterness he felt. She accepted her position, and was ready to forgive him at once. He had meant, if she was deeply hurt, to be heedless of Lady Emma's jealousy, and do his utmost to soothe and reconcile Dew to the inevitable change in her position. But now this additional duty, this harassing care, was removed.

Dew was quick to perceive the interpretation he put upon her act, and, spite of a look from Mr. Deane, passed on and sat down by Miss Dun-argent.

I have said little of this lady, principally because

there was not much to say of her. She acted as chorus to the whole of the family, and made herself useful, I presume, to them all. Poor creature! I pitied her, as from her position of family toad-eater, she could be only an object of compassion to those who were not Dunargents. At the same time, as before mentioned, she was not wholly innocuous: or, perhaps we felt that the high-bred rudenesses of Lady Dunargent and her children were not to be borne second-hand from Miss Dunargent.

In the evening, Lady Emma being still sulky and cross, Dew asked Osman to sing a duet with her, which she showed him in her music-book. He complied at once, and was, as indeed he could not help, greatly surprised by the sweetness and correctness of her voice.

Meantime, Mr. Deane dropped the subtle, sarcastic demeanour of the lawyer, and became a lively, sprightly, almost fascinating man of the world. He displayed these virtues apparently for the benefit of the Dunargents alone. Lady Emma condescended to blush and smile under the influence of his manner and compliments. Lady Dunargent's good-natured but somewhat too noisy laughter showed how much she appreciated his

worldly and witty remarks; while the ancient and forbidding "Jane" bridled and simpered under the unusual circumstance of being noticed at all. Apparently this poor creature permitted her imagination to run away with her, causing her to lose the few wits she had, under the bewildering sensations of being noticed and complimented.

Alas! that you should have raised your despicable finger to point at my darling, Miss Dunargent! I forget the respect due to her and myself, permitting myself to feel even that you had annoyed me. Go in peace, poor creature, I will say no more against you. I throw from me the idea that you can harm her.

The young Earl, meantime, followed Dew as her shadow. While her eyes never lost the shadow of sorrow in them, there was something inexpressibly soft and touching in her manner. She was no longer to him the stately, intelligent lady that kept his boyish admiration in such absolute control, but a timid, sensitive girl, who accepted his attentions. Osman watched them both narrowly. While the young Earl was in a wild flutter of delight at the change in her manner to him, I am much mistaken if Osman did not see that her cheek was colourless, her heart spiritless, spite of her soft manner to

him. While the blood rushed freely to neck and brow, the eyes drooped whenever Osman addressed her.

Was he noting the difference in this way of hers? Did he see her hand tremble as she turned over the leaves of the song they were singing together? Did he remember what he had intimated, though so vaguely, to me, of the desire to see some feeling on the part of Dew? He saw it now. What did he think of it? I could not tell. But it was not in the power of one even so subtle and sagacious as Mr. Deane long to keep down the throes of jealousy.

Lady Emma was one of those exorbitant devourers of flattery, she must be the cynosure of all eyes, or the incense of the one or the few lost its fragrance for her. And when the adulation she required was not proffered from the quarter most due to her, she must be pardoned if she exacted a double quantity. As she arose and asserted what she might consider her rights, Dew retreated, as it were. Not all Mr. Deane's looks or whispers provoked her into a brave warfare with her rival.

"You can soon provoke her into a display of ill-temper," I overheard him say.

Dew shook her head.

“What! forego a woman’s dearest privilege, that of routing a rival, and when the issue is of such paramount importance?”

“My dearest privilege lies not that way, Mr. Deane.”

“The more’s the pity. Never had woman such a chance. Why, a flash of your eyes would do it!”

A sudden flash was bent on him. Its effect was what he anticipated for another.

“Pardon me, Lady Beaudepré, but do not slay me again with that smiting look of lofty indignation and virtue. I see you are right. To enter into rivalry with a nature so unlike your own, will necessarily spoil your snow-white armour. I will leave you to conquer in your own way. If you fail, the fault will not be yours, but rather arise from a perversity of mind that too often governs these proud things we men call our hearts.”

He came and sat down by me.

“If I saw a chance of being successful, dear Madam, it would be my wisest plan to hurry on this divorce at once, and, having obtained it, go in and win the wife Sir Osman has rejected. Do not blush so youthfully, Madam—I would not speak thus lightly had so much as the least ghost of such

an idea something of reality in it. I only wish you to know that the more I see of Lady Beaudepré, the more am I surprised at the fatuity which leads Sir Osman to reject her, and place his happiness in the keeping of a pretty doll, whose least foible is her want of mind."

"Hush! Mr. Deane, he is close at hand."

"All the better," he muttered.

Poor Osman! Did he overhear, as once I overheard? Will he be warned? Will he do as I did, act on the spur of the moment? The case is different, yet in the fact of being already married, a thousand times more easy. I fear me a certain chivalry of nature will keep him firm towards the woman he thinks he will betray, rather than the one sacrificed by the will of his grandfather.



## CHAPTER XI.

## BEHIND THE RED CURTAIN.

“Come, knit hands, and beat the ground  
In a light fantastic round.”

MILTON.

I AM happier. Strange to say, I owe my present peace of mind to Dew herself. In every way she endeavours to prove to me that she bears me no resentment for the part I am acting by her. And yet, standing in the position of one rejected, rejected without having had the merest fair-play, without the commonest justice, as if she was a criminal, a blot on the face of nature—how reasonable, how legitimate would have been a contrary course!

Emma would fain have me think she is already dazzled by the prospect of the offer of becoming a Countess; but no, there is a wistful, upbraiding look in her eyes, when they meet mine, that tells me

she suffers. I do not flatter myself that this pain is caused by the loss of me as her husband. I rather think that every affection of her truly loving nature, every thought that rises in her heart, has reference altogether to Beaudepré. And how can I blame her for this? The pride and delight with which I regard this beautiful place, the yearning I have to live a reasonable and worthy life in it, the craving for the good-fellowship of all near me, —all these give me some faint notion of what Dew loses in ceasing to be the mistress of Beaudepré. She has in a manner held that position from childhood. Suddenly, in the very zenith of her enjoyment of it, she is thrust out from all part and interest therein.

Poor little Dew! How can I repair all this to her? It must be done, otherwise the happiness I anticipate will be too dearly purchased. How admirably she has arranged everything for these fêtes, and without the least bustle or confusion! When Lady Dunargent reminded me this morning of their approach, and startled me by the question as to what preparations had been made, I was for the moment aghast at the labour I had imposed upon myself, and in the flurry of the moment turned to Dew. In answer to my look she said,

“The preparations are begun.”

“Good heavens! my dear child, without consulting me? How can you know all that is necessary?”

“Pray, Madam, mention what ought to be done.”

“Invitations ought to be sent out.”

“They have been sent, Lady Dunargent, and these are the acceptances and refusals.”

“I am glad to see so goodly a packet of the former,” I observed.

“Yes,” answered Dew, “your ball, cousin, seems a very popular act.”

“And, pray, about music?”

“The band is the usual one from London.”

In fact, though Lady Dunargent endeavoured to prove herself of some use in suggestions and offers, there was nothing to be done. We had only to prepare to make ourselves agreeable, and be as much amused as we could. She was loud in her praises of Dew's forethought and arrangement. I was glad the Dunargents took such an interest in these fêtes. For my part, I felt no inclination for them. In truth, I cannot help feeling ashamed of the part I am about to play, and I care not to be thought to pander to the tastes of my neighbours, at the expense of my own self-

respect. How often do I upbraid myself for coming here at all, and especially bringing the Dunargents, until my freedom was obtained. How much I should have spared myself had every disagreeable subject been discussed by means of the post, rather than as we are doing now. My best feelings are torn and wounded, my judgment swayed and warped, my heart upbraiding me, as well as my reason; nevertheless I am true to you, Emma—I will bear this, and more, for your sake!

And yet why will you not trust me? Why not imitate your mother, and accord to the unfortunate victim of our loves the honour and praise so justly her due? Why am I daily forced to admire my kinswomen for their true loyalty and nobility of soul, while I deprecate the unfair, the undignified attitude you assume? 'Tis true, perhaps, that poor little Dew may, with gentle deprecating ways, try to turn my long hatred and disgust of her into some feeling more befitting a Christian, a gentleman, and a kinsman. Why resent this? But let me weary myself no more. I brought it on myself—let me bear it. Even Pelham worries me. I can see plainly that we shall have to part. And it is ridiculous the pain and annoyance this gives me. But a truce to all this. I will go over to

the Hunting Lodge, to regain my good-humour. It is so pleasant to bask in the genial sunshine of fine elevated hearts.

The fêtes are over. I am glad of it. They passed off better than I expected, and leave me somewhat reconciled to having given them. I had a good deal of annoyance beforehand. Lady Dunargent was absolutely a little tiresome, with her fuss and worry. Dew bore with her admirably—in fact, the good worthy creature had forgotten that, in giving these fêtes, which she considered were meant to introduce the Dunargent family into the county, necessarily Dew must receive the company. She was inevitably the Lady Beaudepré of the time. For once, and certainly the only time I have ever seen her, Lady Dunargent was out of temper. In every possible way she endeavoured to persuade me to permit her to do it. But I was firm, spite of my Emma's tears and entreaties.

We had another scene equally painful, upon the appearance of Dew dressed for the ball. When I first saw a vision of something fairy-like, radiant with diamonds, of an almost ethereal appearance, I could not conceive that this

exquisite little figure was the simple, insignificant girl we none of us cared to look at twice. Her hair was arranged with wonderful art and style, flashing with diamonds, that assumed the shape of a coronet here and there, which well became her stately air and attitude. A sparkling fringe of diamonds passed from shoulder to shoulder, gradually lessening to a point at the tiny waist. While round her throat she had a singular chain of diamonds, that must have been made to fit so slender a neck, it sat so exactly to it. A little fresh pink rose was fastened at her shoulder, the only colour about her—but the beautiful *Beaudepré* bloom, which rose high and pure in her cheeks!

By this colour, by the luminous light in her eyes, I, versed in the ways of women, read that this cold, sedate little cousin of mine had not looked in her glass unmoved. She was conscious that there could be nothing more sweet, more uncommon than herself in this radiant dress, this mass of sparkling hair, this peculiarly refined and exquisite appearance. A pearl set in diamonds. I could not, and would not if I could, have refrained from expressing my admiration.

Lady Dunargent and my Emma were with me

when she entered. Unlike their usual habit of being late for everything, as they could not take the prominent part they desired—at least they would share in the reception of the guests, and so were ready before I was. Emma's lovely face and figure rose out of soft clouds of blue, a colour which became her infinitely. I had never seen her look more lovely. But this radiant little Dew, from some unknown charm—from some peculiar grace of her own—looked something like the seraph out of a star.

I had scarcely said as much as I desired, the pretty little creature blushing deeper and deeper, when Lady Dunargent drew me aside. Her words were hasty and somewhat incoherent; but by degrees I discovered that she desired Dew to take off her diamonds.

“Why?” I asked in a sudden surprise.

“Dear Osman, do not mistake me. I do not begrudge the dear darling child figuring in them for once—but Emma! They are, of course, family diamonds. She could not wear them after the appearance of your cousin in them.”

“Why not?”

“Impossible—quite impossible! Emma, come and persuade him yourself.”

“I never will wear them—never, never!” exclaimed Emma, “if she does.”

I saw Dew, with that exquisite sense of defining what was disagreeable, which I so much admire in her, apply herself to remedy it; she put up her hand to unclasp her necklace.

“Stay!” I exclaimed, laying my hand on hers, “if these diamonds are your own, Dew, of course they remain where they are. If they are mine, still let them stay, for I present you with them.”

“Thank you, cousin,” she replied simply.

“Dearest Osman,” exclaimed Lady Dunargent, kissing her fondly, “how right of you!—how excellent! Do let me join you in the gift.”

And her kind eyes filled with tears. But I learnt in the course of the evening, from my cousin Ermine, that the diamonds were all her own, made on purpose for her, as I had conjectured from their size, by her grandfather. I went to her at once, for that simple “Thank you, cousin,” rang in my ears, when she could have answered so differently. Whatever of gratified feeling my heart had experienced on making her a present—paltry though I thought it—in return for all of which I was going to deprive her, it was now lost in an admiration for that true nobility of heart



which I feel is superior to all beauty. She was talking to Mr. Deane, whose evident admiration was shared in by the circle that surrounded her. She seemed to feel my approach without looking up, the perception of which quickened my pulse.

“Dew,” I half whispered—“dear little Dew, come with me—I have something to say to you.”

The crowd opened as by magic—’twas impossible not to read the pleasure—the hope in all their eyes. Ah! me, too late! She would not listen to my apologies—she would hear none of the names I called myself for presuming to present her so ostentatiously with what was her own.

“Dance with me, cousin, and we will whirl all your scruples away.”

For the first time in my life my arm was round the slender waist of her who was my wife. I never touched anything so fairy-like, so fragile. It seemed to me she had wings on her feet, and though we revolved with twice the quickness of the music, she yet kept the most perfect time. On, on we went! I felt no fatigue; she floated, rather than leant on my arm. The true fascination of dancing was for once patent to my mind, even to intoxication. I would not let her stop. Suddenly she threw her slender arms round me,

murmuring, "Save me, Osman!" I had taxed her too much; she almost fainted as I carried her into a little tower room. Before I could lay her on the couch within it, Pelham was at my side, with eau-de-Cologne and water. The expression of that man's face haunts me still. Was it a warning? He instantly withdrew, drawing the curtain before the entrance that separated us from the rest of the company, and, I feel sure, standing guard there. For the first time I and my wife were alone. My wife!—the word thrilled me, and as I looked at the fair little thing panting for breath, but beaming with the sweetest happiness, her little hand still clutching my coat, I wonder now I did not take her into my arms and say, "Wife, forgive me." Her eyes asked me to do so—those sweet-speaking, luminous eyes that told me so much. And the sound of my name from her lips—it struck on my ear like the finest chord of music, so softly, gently whispered. It seemed almost as if my mother had whispered it. But I could not be a villain twice. Taking her little hand, I kissed it, saying,

"Never call me that hateful word 'cousin' again, Dew. I like my name from your lips best."

She made no reply, her breath still panting, but

she left her hand in mine, and looked in my eyes. Had I no reply to make to that speechless eloquence? I said, confusedly,

“I never had such a partner before, Dew; you have made me realise the fascination of dancing. Do not let me have the fear that I have fatigued you too much.”

A sudden cloud darkened the brilliancy of her eyes—her head drooped, her hand fell from mine; then she rose, stately and self-possessed, and with a sign motioned that we should join the others. As I passed with her from behind the curtain, did nothing whisper to me—I had left light behind, and was going into darkness—that my mother’s spirit had been with me, and was gone?

For the rest of the evening there was no Beau-depré bloom on the cheek of my poor little Dew, and I knew why. Would to God, Dew, I had put prejudice aside, and come alone, to try if I could like you! And yet the peculiar points of your character—those that excite my admiration—are caused by the not unreasonable faults of the people I brought with me. Let me pause—I must now think only of them.

My lovely Emma, accustomed as she was to the open admiration of all her foreign friends, must

have been well pleased with the genuine, hearty compliments that met her on all sides. His Grace told me that not only were they very much pleased to welcome me back, but I deserved the thanks of the county for showing them such loveliness as hers.

If I mistake not, his grace might have possessed a wife even more beautiful—my cousin Ermine. Surely, in their first greeting this evening, I traced in his haughty, stern face, a wild gleam of agony and remorse, as curtsying with her inimitable grace, my fair old cousin recognised him. A beautiful, pure blush dyed her face for a moment, giving her almost all her former loveliness. He spoke but little to his wife, but seemed on very good terms with his son, who is a mixture of his father and mother, having the worst points of each.

“You are jealous,” whispered Emma to me, looking radiantly happy and beautiful as she said so.

“I will always be jealous,” I whispered, in return, “if it makes you look as you do now.”

“Ah! Osman, how can one love without being jealous? I have been flirting with Lord Hartly, on purpose to make you so, and am delighted to find you hate him already.”

“Not hate—that is too strong a word. I cannot quite tell why I dislike him.”

“Of course, because he is so particular in his attentions to me.”

“Pardon me, Emma, I like you to be admired. I was pleased to see him so attentive.”

“Nay,” she answered, pouting; “I will hear no more of a love so cold.”

Cold! after all I had—but the lovely thing has yet to learn the nobility of love.

“I think Lord Hartly one of the handsomest men in the room.”

“He is handsome personally, but his expression is extremely against him.”

“Now, do confess you are jealous, and I will forgive you everything.”

We quarrelled, as lovers do. Never was Lady Dunargent happier or more gushing. The intercourse between herself and the Duchess waxed warmer and warmer. They seemed congenial souls. And, let me confess it, there is a certain power in brilliant dance-music, a dazzling happiness in resplendent halls of revelry, a beaming delight in the bright and happy faces of people adorned in shining, beautiful garments, that creates a vivid pleasure in the dullest heart.

“Really,” laughed the clever, acute lawyer, Mr. Deane, “I am breaking the tenth commandment every moment. Absolutely, I envy you, Sir Osman. A man who has the power and the will to create such a lovely scene, to fill it with happy faces, to provide so much for their enjoyment, is to be envied, though it has no other end than mere pleasure. Yes, I do envy you, because you add so much to the happiness of mankind at so little cost. Whereas we, after spending the best of our lives in pouring over the driest and most dusty of books, now and then are so fortunate as to do a good turn by our learning, to one person—perhaps half-a-dozen. And we plume ourselves on that. I think I shall give up the law, and go in for entertaining the world.”

The tenants' ball was as great a success. It will be my own fault if I am not beloved by them, and valued by my neighbours.

The Dunargents seemed to feel with me the hearty kindness I received from everybody. The love of that boy Dunargent increases every day for Dew. I wonder if she likes it. Since our dance together, she has not been the same; yet how inimitably does she act the great lady! Most embarrassing it was, the enthusiasm of the tenants,

at the mention of her name, the drinking of her health. When I rose to return thanks for her, doing so in terms none deserved better, the uproar was tremendous. My tongue was paralysed for the moment—I felt like a criminal—I feel certain I looked like one. I sat down, and saw that my confusion was interpreted as to the sins of the past—my long desertion of her. Alas! for those about to be committed! For a moment I saw a glimpse of the divine satisfaction of doing what others liked, rather than to carry out my own wilful will.

## CHAPTER XII.

## BEHIND THE BLUE CURTAIN.

“Between two worlds life hovers like a star,  
 ’Twi’x night and morn, upon the horizon’s verge;  
 How little do we know that which we are!  
 How less what we may be.”

BYRON.

ONCE more we have met. Henry, the lover of my youth, now his Grace, the husband of another. Did I feel any pangs of regret? If I did, they lasted but a moment. Age has deepened and made manifest what was evil in his nature. Faint gleams of self-love, of unscrupulous will, of erring temper, had shown themselves even in our short courtship. But what woman sees the faults of her lover without feeling happy in the thought that she can soften, alleviate, vanquish them, perhaps? Thus I thought. But the wife he married has failed to do so. The petty, undignified resentment that made him send me the various accounts



of his marriage in the public papers has risen into a thunder-cloud on his brow, hardening and branding it with a mark as of Cain. Cruel, cold eyes,—a mouth only moved by sneers,—a stained, unhealthy hue of complexion. Could I have saved him this sad change? Perhaps! The vanity of women is great, that of the *Beaudeprés* greater. Between them, I settled it with myself, that had that rose dropped where I intended, the man now before me, on whom I could not but look with compassion, would have still been the magnificent creature which God intended him to be. All the fine features, the noble presence, spoilt and made loathsome by the evil of the expression. Only when conversing with his son did his features relax—but, oh! how much more frightful he became! The wicked leer on a young face is intolerable, but on an old one—ah! my God, how I thank Thee that in the sacred purity of my poor Anne's sick-room I had never seen the like before. He spoke to me constantly, following me from seat to seat. I overheard him say to his son—

“Hartly, I owe the *Beaudeprés* a grudge—never felt with more bitter strength than now. Revenge me by flirting with that little seraph, whose eyes outshine her diamonds!”

“Useless, mine honoured father. I have tried her before. She is as cold as her diamonds. But don’t you see Sir Osman’s eyes following that bewitching loveliness in blue? I fancy I can indulge your Grace in that quarter.”

“Anyhow, in any way, revenge me, and we will think of the consequences after.”

Whatever of disgust or shock I felt on hearing this, all was swallowed up in the thought that Lady Emma might prove what Dew was utterly incapable of. High as her rank was already, to be a Duchess in prospect was infinitely superior, to her mind, to being the wife of a Baronet on terms that must shock half the world—that is, if her mind was capable of taking in the idea. I give her credit for some feeling. I am persuaded that she loves Osman, after her fashion, but that she loves a triumph over one of her own sex still more.

Mr. Deane being near me, I could not refrain from mentioning that I overheard Lord Hartly tell his father he was smitten with the loveliness in blue.

“Perhaps,” I added, “she may think it a better fate to be a Duchess than a Baronet’s wife.”

“Not she, Madam—she thinks of nothing but her own whims. Nevertheless I thank you for

the idea. I shall take the opportunity of forcing the advantages of such a match upon her weak mind. If I can get it to take root there I should not wonder if it bore fruit. Did you ever see anything so matchless in sweetness, in dignity, in truest purity and perfection, as our 'my lady'? That is the name I hear everybody call her, and it suits her. She is the embodiment of a lady."

"She looks wonderfully well to-night," I answered.

"There is a sort of consciousness about her that I find most bewitching. And what ought he to think for whom it is assumed! She conquers to-night, or dies—by which I mean she gives up."

"I fancy Osman sorely regrets he did not come here some time ago, just to judge with calmness and kindness if he could not take to himself the wife his grandfather imposed upon him."

"He certainly thinks so—but depend upon it, half her attraction to him now arises entirely from that high feeling of chivalry and honour, so conspicuous in his character, which resents the absurd behaviour of Lady Dunargent and her daughter. His heart is a very noble one; but the Beaudepré obstinacy is almost in complete possession of it at present. If Lady Dunargent forgets the rights of

the present wife, for the claims of the future one—and Lady Emma exacts what is not hers yet—both of which, I pray heaven, they may do—this obstinacy will melt before them, like icicles in the sun. I build all my hopes upon this now, as the sweetest ‘my lady’ has gone to the utmost verge her delicate, sensitive nature can bear. What a barrier of adamant is the modesty of a woman! She blushes to make love to her own husband. But when it is broken through—oh! my dear Madam!”

Here Mr. Deane covered his face with his hands, in mock shame. There was no need to blush for my sex. This adamant shield was never broken through, unless there was a traitor within the citadel. As I remarked this, he rejoined—

“True, my transcendent, incomparable Madam; and I much mistake if his Grace has not discovered the difference between traitor and no traitor.”

Truly nothing escapes these lawyers. It will be strange if the Duke, endeavouring to revenge himself on me, through those I most love, should, all unknown to himself, accomplish a breach between Osman and Lady Emma. Thus he will benefit me, beyond all my hopes.

Little as I am versed in the ways of men, it is

impossible not to see that in every instance where Osman has to judge between Lady Emma and Dew, he is painfully conscious that the former cannot understand his feelings, while the latter acts just as he would wish her. And yet he swerves not for a moment in his purpose. Every day proves to him that his grandfather selected a wife for him, that in nobility of mind, in purity of heart, in quickness, intelligence, sensibility, and sweetness, is the woman of all others to suit him best. While the petulant, facile, ill-educated Lady Emma tries his patience and temper, at times, beyond endurance.

Lady Dunargent, intent only on seeing her child happy, will not perceive the advantage of a marriage, with the noble house of Hartlyborough. If we could only instill this into her kind, good heart, and hear her babble forth a ceaseless commenting on the advantage of being a duchess, Lady Emma might be imbued with the feeling herself. I am persuaded, were this to happen, she would dismiss Osman with as much unconcern as a disgraced servant. Ah! me, that I should find myself almost praying for such a consummation. How am I fallen in my own estimation, lending myself to the whims and evil passions of others, even using them

to further my own wishes. Pray heaven I may not be punished!

My dear Anne's eyes shone with a holy and serene light, when I told her of the meeting at the ball with him, whom I had left for her sake, and of the impression he made upon me.

"Anne," said I, kissing her joyfully, "perhaps you saved me from a horrible life—struggling and battling, to perhaps my own detriment, with a nature wholly antagonistic to my own."

Dear Anne of course said he would have become a saint had he lived with me; we were ever lauding up each other, Anne and I—helped to do so by our old Belle.

But to return to the most important persons of this history. I am not sorry Osman gave these fêtes. People saw him, and as they did so, could not help acknowledging his perfections of person and manner. Whatever he may do now, he has created an interest in their hearts, that will stand him in good stead. If he would but open his wilfully blinded eyes.

Mr. Deane has reluctantly given it as his opinion that the divorce can be obtained. This news has unbound the tongue of Lady Dunargent. She now talks openly of her daughter as mistress

of Beaudepré, and cannot help assuming a little. Yet is her manner to Dew that of the most affectionate mother.

Dew says nothing to us, but looks listless, apathetic. To-day I was present at a very curious scene. For a short time, what ecstatic hope it gave me! Lord Dunargent, whose devotion to Dew has increased to an absurd and embarrassing pitch, upon hearing his mother say, in her usual careless, heedless garrulity—

“I shall advise Emma to new-furnish her drawing-rooms with blue.”

“Mother!” he exclaimed warningly, pointing to Dew sitting at a distance.

“The dear child will not mind, I am sure,” she answered, smiling good-humouredly upon her.

Dew looked up for a moment, a gleam in her face, of agony. Shocked by it, the young lord rushed towards her, and clasping both her hands in his, said,

“Lady Beaudepré—Dew!—dearest, sweetest of human beings, take mine—take all I have. You shall have twenty drawing-rooms—everything in the world I have shall be yours!”

Dew alone retained her self-possession; both Lady Dunargent and myself were speechless. At

this very crisis Osman and Lady Emma entered the room. Dew withdrew her hands from the young Earl, and disappeared through the open window.

“What is the matter?” exclaimed Lady Emma.

“Your brother, my love—your brother—the strangest affair. My dear Dunargent, pray control yourself; the darling child may take you at your word.”

“Of whom are you speaking?” asked Osman hotly.

“My dear Beaudepré,” said Lord Dunargent, coming forward with a manly and becoming air, “forgive me if I have been precipitate. I do not desire to find fault with my mother, but it is truly her fault that I have forgotten myself. She does speak so constantly of—of your being free, that somehow I have almost persuaded myself that Lady Beaudepré is free; and—and I have just, really quite in a hurry, said what I intend to say the moment she is free.”

“Dunargent!” exclaimed his mother.

“Yes, mamma, I mean to have Lady Beaudepré for my wife, if I am so happy as to persuade her to become so.”

And a fine honest blush suffused his face—a



frank, determined look shone from his eyes.

“Dunargent, I must forbid such a marriage. Your father would rise out of his grave. Recollect the care I have taken of your principles—the immense pains I have taken that you should never be contaminated by any intercourse with fast men and public-school boys.”

“It would have been better for me if you had,” he answered boldly. “At all events, I mean to make up for the deficiency. I don’t intend ever to go abroad again. I shall live for the future at Dunargent. I mean to learn farming; I have ordered myself a couple of breechloaders, and hope I shall be able to follow the hounds; and if I have Lady Beaudepré for my wife, I shall not envy the Emperor of all the world, if ever there is one.”

Lady Dunargent looked horrified.

“Dear mamma,” said Lady Emma, “don’t grieve. Osman and I have already settled that his cousin will be just the wife for Dunargent.”

“Hush! my child,” murmured the dowager; “hush, your innocent mind cannot see into the future. Go, my children—go both of you; let me speak my mind to Osman—he will understand.”

“I’ll go, mother; but my mind is made up.

You have been a very kind mother ; but it is some time since I wished you had been wiser."

And the young fellow dashed out of the room, as if afraid of saying still more. Lady Emma was reluctant to follow. She was like a wayward child, desiring to know everything.

When we were alone, I was in a maze of astonishment at the extraordinary want of judgment and reason in this poor Lady Dunargent.

"My dear Osman," she began, with much solemnity, "you can bear witness to Miss Beaudepré of my love and devotion to my children. It is a passion with me—I can compare it to nothing else. I have had no other thought or feeling but for them."

"No children ever had a fonder mother," interrupted Osman, stiffening into that stately hauteur that marked him nerving his pride to bear a shock.

"I have always been so anxious about their religious instruction, and have given them the highest principles."

"Doubtless, Madam ; it was the remembrance of this that made me encourage Dunargent's liking for my cousin."

"Encourage !—oh ! Osman, can you not see what might be said if he married her ? After all

my care, the name of Dunargent standing so high in the British Peerage—my anxiety to keep it there always without stain or blot !”

“Lady Dunargent, I wish you to understand that I think, if your son is so fortunate as to obtain my cousin for his wife, he will, as he himself said, be one of the most enviable of men.”

“Osman, she is a darling—the sweetest creature—I love her next to you all. Perhaps I am wrong in my prejudice, but the world is so wicked, they might say Lady Dunargent was a *divorcée*;—no fault of her own, as we all know.”

Osman rose suddenly, and caught at her hand, to arrest any further words.

“Lady Dunargent, I thank you. In either case there will be this probability. Even if I could bear it for Emma, I cannot for Dew. I am her kinsman ; her fair name is in my charge. I sacrifice my happiness rather than tarnish it.”

In a moment Lady Dunargent threw herself into his arms, and with great earnestness and fervour, mingled with a passion of tears, besought his forgiveness.

“I shall never forgive myself. It was and is my duty to take her to my heart. Osman, go—go and bring her. I shall know no happiness

until I have kissed and blessed her as my daughter.”

Osman pacified her, but would not go for Dew.

“’Tis useless,” he said. “I cannot permit her to be wounded and shocked. She is not like us, Lady Dunargent.”

Lady Dunargent acknowledged this in such appropriate and warm terms, I could not but forgive her too. How nearly she lost, and we gained! I must be pardoned if I sighed, while I reflected on the scene, as one that more resembled a nightmare than a reality.

Truly, as Mr. Deane says, Lady Dunargent’s love for her children, leads her to say and do the strangest things.

How grateful one ought to be when Reason and Love go hand in hand together.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## BEHIND THE RED CURTAIN.

“ An accent very low  
 In blandishment—but a most silver flow  
 Of subtle-paced counsel in distress ;  
 Right to the heart and brain, tho’ undescried,  
 Winning its way, with extreme gentleness,  
 Through all the outworks of suspicious pride.”

TENNYSON.

GONE!—Dew gone! I cannot believe it! I—rang violently for Pelham—I rang until he appeared.

“ Where is she—Lady Beaudepré?—when did she go? Order the carriage.”

“ There is one ready, Sir Osman. I felt sure you would wish it. I have packed your portman-teau. Lady Dunargent desires a few words with you, Sir Osman.”

I went to her; she also had a letter from Dew—my little Dew—poor, sweet, noble Dew!

But let me write down all that occurred beforehand. Notwithstanding the quick and complete atonement that Lady Dunargent made to me for that extraordinary and to me inexplicable nonsense regarding a probable slur on Dew's name (why more on hers than mine?—and why might her daughter marry the one victim of my grandfather's will, and her son be disgraced by marrying the other? My blood glows hotly the more I think on this)—I could not rest that night for thinking of it. My reason protests there can be no slur, but my honour bids me tell Emma that I will not be happy myself until I have good cause for being certain Dew does not suffer in name. Would to God I could be sure she would be happy! But this love of home and kindred—this acute sensitiveness, which I can so well understand from actual inheritance of the same feelings, will, as in Ermine of old, lead her to think nothing of any sacrifice, provided she retains her pride of self—a noble reticence, which will appear to the world as happiness. I shall know the contrary.

Ermine! Ermine! you were right in saying our love of kindred was strong. At this moment I see no happiness in calling Emma mine, while Dew

stands aloof, beggared in all she loved—slandered by the will of a kinsman.

Thinking thus, I went to Emma. I had a prayer on my lips, that I might find her the sweet, gentle Emma whose soft manner soothed my mind, as her sweet melody entranced my senses not so long ago. She was gentle—she was sweet beyond my hopes ; but, alas !—oh ! but—mocking, hopeless *but*—how to write down what she said ? How describe the mingled rapture of the power of such love, and the nameless smart anguish that has left its sting so deeply thrust, I cannot draw it forth. Why did Heaven make the outside so perfect, leaving the casket unfinished within ? But it was your innocence, my poor Emma—let me remember that ! And doubtless, to a tender, susceptible heart, it would be a wearisome and thankless task to succeed one so beloved as Dew.

“Everybody will hate me,” cried she, pillowing her tear-stained face in my breast. “I would rather go with you to the end of the world, and bear all this blame and censure you fear for Dew. I shall think nothing of that, or care for it—I only love you ! Let us leave everything here as it is—Dew just as she is—and we will go away, and never see any more of them evermore again !”

Poor, sweet, pretty, innocent Emma! I felt something must be done to awaken up in her mind a perception of what she was so recklessly proposing.

“Emma,” I said, freeing myself, not without a little violence, from her clasp, “utter such words to me again, and you see me no more. I am, and have been, heartily ashamed of myself for some time, but I mean no other person to be angry at hearing my name. Your tender, good mother, whose greatest fault is her love for her children, stands between me and you. Go to her, look in her eyes—where you have never seen any expression but love for you—imagine to yourself the change in them if—go, Emma, go. I hope the Almighty will cover me with infamy and nameless horror, if I cause that loving mother’s heart one pang!”

Speechless and terrified, she left me. It was her innocence—all her innocence! Something impelled me to go and seek Dew. I desired an anodyne to soothe my perturbed heart; it seemed to me I ought tell her that ill-nature and envy might follow her steps—and would she fear it? I was at a loss to know where to find her room, but fortunately Pelham was at hand. He not



only knew it, but assured me she was within.

I knocked twice at the door, but receiving no answer, and remembering dimly that this must be either the school-room or nursery, which Dew and I once shared together on my first visit to Beaudép re, I opened the door and went in.

It was the nursery. I instantly recollected the great orieled window, wherein I had sat and imbibed the first seeds of that unnatural hatred, so nursed and encouraged, until, as might be expected, it overwhelmed and burdened me with its weeds. The room was large, and seemed to me portioned off into different uses. Flowers, birds, work, a painting-easel filled and furnished the oriel window. By another small window was a piano, opened. Fresh-gathered flowers lay on the music-books. A low easy-chair had one of those foreign tables near it, that are a table above, a bookcase beneath. Flowers were there too, and books everywhere. Curious, quaint, strange things struck my eyes, but they became riveted on a large oaken useful office-table, covered with the books and papers usually seen in conjunction with it. The blotting-book was open, an estate paper on it, and with her hands laid underneath her cheek, lay my poor little Dew fast asleep. A glory of hair covered

her and the table, but her eyelashes were heavy with tears, her face still wet, the estate-paper blistered with them.

She lay like a worn-out child that had cried itself to sleep. What superhuman power withheld me from taking her into my arms, and awakening her into her happiness? It was you, Emma. Could I forget what your innocent love had proffered? Yet it seemed as if my mother was near me, urging me to forego my Beaudepré pride and self-will, entreating me to wander no further into the dark, steep path of doubt and error.

The soft summer wind fluttered the curtains, I looked up, and saw opposite to me an archway, from whence a hanging drapery had been withdrawn, showing me part of the interior of a bedroom, with the little white bed that I well remembered had once been mine.

But it was wrong to stay here; and yet I could not tear myself away. I took up one of the long tresses that hung like the tendrils of a vine over the back of a chair, and endeavoured to reason with myself. I acknowledged at once that all beauty of form and feature gave way before beauty of character and mind. As I recalled the wonderful loveliness of her who had so lately

urged me to think but of ourselves, I looked at the tiny sleeping face pillowed on its hands. There was something more than beauty in her—something divine. Could it be possible that my grandfather's prophecy had come true, that I should thank him for giving me a wife of all women in the world most suited to me? If it was so, I discovered it too late.

I looked round the room once more. Here had Dew lived from the hour she was born. She could not raise her eyes without recalling her whole life. She must love it as her dearest, only friend. Without father or mother, placed in a false position by her grandfather, here in this room, the little child, the joyous girl, the deserted woman, must have experienced feelings of a varied and extraordinary kind. And the result was that her orphanage early made her rely on herself; her undue elevation by her grandfather, instead of spoiling, gave her the truest idea of the position of a woman; her desertion had invested her with the pathetic beauty of pity. Dew, Dew, though you may never know it, you are amply revenged. Without swerving from the human love I owe her whom I intend to make my wife, I adore you.

I kissed the tress of hair, and noiselessly left

the room. Pelham seemed disappointed at my sudden return. I wrote to Mr. Deane, asking him if it was at all likely that the world would visit upon the innocent head of Lady Beaudepré any of the odium of the divorce. I sent Pelham to town with it, and in the evening received the following answer :—

“With regard to your question touching any slur resting on the name of Lady Beaudepré, do not ask me to foretell what the world will say. They may take the side of your wife, and uphold her, worship her, pet her, as a victim; and they may do just the contrary. But it will make no difference to Lady Beaudepré. She has pronounced vows once that she will never utter again. So if you should decide to please yourself, you will do no further harm than giving us another Miss Beaudepré. And without any hyperbole, you may pride yourself much on them. For my part, I return very unwillingly to the common specimens of the angelic race, after leaving their company. But I forget, you of all men will be the last to agree with me; for which, suffer me to pity you. Your sincere servant,

“ARTHUR DEANE.”

Was I an object of pity? I looked upon my cousin Ermine with a pride and admiration second to no other feeling of my life; and I have already confessed that I adored the character of Dew. Why did I not return home years ago?—Why did I sweep out from my heart all suggestions of justice and fairness to my cousin? Why—but “believe me,” I said to myself, “you may multiply your questions endlessly, and all will end in the same result. You have been the betrayer, instead of the betrayed, the destroyer instead of the victim. And now, when those higher aspirations which God is so merciful as to permit erring nature to feel, those better thoughts that ennoble the smallest actions—when these keep warning me ever and ever that the soul, the mind, the nature of the wife my grandfather selected for me, is that soul, that mind, that nature I could and do adore—I feel the fealty of love drawing me away—away!”

Is it possible for a reasoning, human man to admire what he does not love?—to love where he cannot praise? Poor, pretty, fond, foolish Emma, did you look as lovely in my eyes this evening, with your flashing eyes and scornful manner, as the little gentle creature out of whose luminous eyes shone both pity and fear? Yes, fear lest you

should say or do that which in her sensitive, womanly nature she could not bear even her rival to do. Can it be possible that I am blinded by the bombast of sentiment, rather than the reality of love? I cannot decide. I am incapable of reasoning. I dare not go deeper into my heart, and find that the stubborn will of the Beaudeprés melts before the vision of a little pale girl with wistful, pitiful eyes. After all, perhaps it is only goodness that I worship in her. She brings into the room with her an air of peace and serenity. She flits about, a little fairy of thought and care for us all. Her voice is like low melody—calming the heart. I watch, with exquisite pleasure, her little innocent ways with Lady Dunargent, now arch, now prettily astonished, now the least in the world peremptory. And utterly unconscious is my lady that this child, as she calls her, winds her round her finger, and makes her do all she requires.

And yet so much of high-bred dignity in keeping down the stupid impertinences of Miss Dunargent—so much of stateliness in her treatment of her boy-lover. Dew! Dew! I become wild as I think of it all. I long—I desire—I pant to see what new phase your character would show if you were in love. In love to folly, as I am, or think I am.

But Mr. Deane says you will never pronounce the vows you once said for me. Can that be from anything like love? Pshaw, not for me—it is natural you should cling to Beaudepré.

But indeed, Dew, I should like to see you in love. What expression would come into that little face! what new light in the already wonderful eyes! I think you would be a little haughty with your lover. He would have to sue on his knees, for even a look. What a patient price he would have to pay only to touch your hand! How delicious if, in a moment of forgetfulness, you permitted him to kiss it! What a delight to lay a trap for some small—oh! such a small token, a word of love! And strange, is it not, Dew? I have been wondering if, as your brother, your own beloved brother, you would ever permit my lips to touch that innocent little cheek that blushes and pales in a second of time! It seems to me that I long to do so. How unlike the—but no, no! I must not—will not enter further into the dangerous causeway of comparison—from out of which I may wander, only to find myself perjured.

I must have that interview with Dew. Something tells me that she will give me the counsel I

so much require. She will be true to Emma, more true than I am myself, so strong in her womanhood. Mr. Deane is biassed but one way, and I like him for it. It shows that my admiration for Dew's character is not based upon any false foundation. He can look at no beauty, with her speaking countenance to admire and watch. Ermine is too full of the dues and prerogatives of her birthright to assist me. Besides, that sort of high honour which will restrain her from her helping one woman at the expense of another, even though one is loved, and the other feared. She will be apt, or I mistake her, to be the more reserved on the side of her own wishes. What a pride I take in this! How I love her the better for it!

I sent to Dew by Pelham, who came back instantly, and hurried me off, as if he suspected that "his lady," as he called her, would again evade the interview. She was standing by what I style her office-table, which was littered with bills and accounts. Her cheek was flushed—her eyes heavy and dark-rimmed. Her hair was pushed away from her forehead, showing its breadth and expanse. Altogether, Dew looked more like the unfortunate creature I married by her grandfather's dying bed, than I had yet seen her.



Did this affect me? Yes. She was now, as then, sorrowful—tears welling up, kept back by a resolute will—sleepless at nights, if one might judge by their wan expression. Did I think her ugly—hateful? I took her hand—I drew her towards me. I clasped her close to my heart, suddenly, irrepressibly.

“Dew, Dew,” I whispered hoarsely, “forgive me! forgive me!”

“I do, cousin, I do; from my heart—my soul!”

And somehow she slipped out of my grasp, and was again standing alone by the table, her cheeks like the reddest rose. Her eyes shining gloriously—but also divinely resolute. If I was so weak as to be false to both women—this, my little angel, would guard me from a display of it.

“Sit here, cousin, and I will place myself thus. Now confide all you desire to me. We Beaudeprés are never false to each other.”

How can I tell what I said? Where did I find words in which to make clear to her innocent mind the fealty I considered due to my love, Emma?—the worship I was compelled to pay to her, Dew? How am I to explain the soothing effect of her voice?—the few words so fitly spoken, reminding me of “the apples of gold, set in pictures of silver.”

How gradually the mists cleared away from my brain, and I saw myself judging myself by the code of man's honour, rather than the righteous will of the Almighty. It was not from any word of Dew's, laying the fact plainly to my heart, that the vows I pronounced before God five years ago rose before me in mightiest power ; while the sinful promise, when I had no right to promise, assumed not only the feebleness of folly, but had the taint of wickedness in it.

Her manner was so simple, her pity for Emma ever welling up ; her forgetfulness of herself, the swift blushes that swept over her face as I basely tried some of those arts and spells hitherto never vainly used. They did not swerve her for one moment. She stood defiant, resolute, a reproving angel to me, but a woman, too, a real, true-hearted woman—just the woman my mother had prayed the good God to give me.

“You know, Dew,” I said at last, after the fashion of men in their pride and self-love, “you have but to say the word, and I will stay the divorce, break with——”

“Hush !” she exclaimed, interrupting me, “you are insulting me. I do not buy my rights ; I cannot beg them ; I disdain to ask for them. And if

you love" (ah! how pathetic was her voice!) "you insult her more than myself."

The slight figure, the soft voice, the luminous eyes, were each and all expressive of a dignity and gracious reproof that abashed and humbled me, as if she was the young angel who staid the proud and worldly Balaam in his unrighteous way. Ere I recovered she was gone.

Why did she go? From indignation and anger, or because I was putting her gentle, loving heart to too severe a test?

I wandered about the room. I felt a strange pleasure in touching all I fancied she had touched that day. I looked into different books—many of them were marked with pencil lines. "I shall read all these," I said to myself, and put two at once into my pocket. I sat down at the office-table, and wondered at the precision and neatness of her figures and writing, and thought of the small thing, like a child, lying sleeping there, her cheek pillowed on her two hands, with her hair for a coverlet. And she did business which appeared impossible to me. I advanced to the archway; I drew back the curtain that was now drawn between it and the larger room. I did not intend to enter, but I saw a rose; it was on a little table by the

little white bed, it had been thrown on it carelessly.

I must have that rose. I could not do otherwise than take it. I cannot tell what I might have done next, but I heard Pelham calling me. It was to tell me Mr. Vincent was below, desiring to see me.

He wore a serious, grave aspect, and at once let me know the meaning of it.

“I hope, Sir Osman—I trust in God,” here his voice became broken and agitated, “that a rumour now steadily gaining ground is not true. Surely it is impossible I see before me a man capable of breaking the marriage vows through the medium of the law?”

An inexpressible relief and comfort entered my heart. I grasped his hand warmly, and assured him no forlorn wretch ever more needed Divine help and guidance. I laid bare my heart to him, concealing nothing but what was sacred between Emma and myself.

“I am supposed, Sir Osman, not to be a man of the world, and therefore the advice I should give will be probably antagonistic to the code of honour. You have, though not in a position to do so honourably, exchanged vows with a lady for

the purpose of making her your wife, though you have one already. Cannot you retrace this step?"

"I fear not now."

"Will you permit me to speak to Lady Emma?"

"By all means. I am even more anxious that she should escape the sin of this than myself."

"You think it sin?"

"I begin to fear it is, from the pain and trouble I suffer."

"And from no other cause? Let me beseech you, Sir Osman, to question yourself narrowly. Why is this matter so painful and disagreeable now, when, if I may judge from your countenance, it was entirely the contrary on your coming here?"

"I will confess to you honestly that Lady Beaudepré—my wife"—(a sort of thrill ran through my veins as I said these words)—"is very different from what I expected. It pains me to remove her from a place and position she has so long occupied—where she is beloved and adored."

"Yes, beloved and adored; you never said truer words—but the Lady Emma, surely her character, her love, meets this pain as a sort of counterpoise?"

“I fear not; every day I find myself thinking more of the displacement of my cousin than the possession of Lady Emma.”

“I thank you for your candour; it bids me hope that I can convince you by the code of honour, before I try the divine law of God, that you would be more false to Lady Emma in marrying her, than to Lady Beaudepré in divorcing her.”

“How?”

“Because, unconsciously to yourself, you love your wife, Sir Osman.”

“It is not love, Mr. Vincent; it is that sort of admiration—adoration—which a weak human mortal feels for one above him.”

“Do you not think this admiration or adoration for a fine character will but lessen your love for an inferior one?”

“You probe me keenly—I think it may.”

“Then will you be false to Lady Emma?”

“As you put it, I shall; as I know it, it will be so.”

“And yet you hesitate to take the step.”

“I do; the human code of honour binds me like adamant—but, Mr. Vincent, I will not outrage the Divine law, the love of which is, I see,

beaming from your eyes. May I endeavour, by the sacrifice of myself, to offend neither God nor man?"

"How can you do so?"

"Once more I will exile myself from home and country; the same hemisphere shall not hold me and Lady Emma. Beaudepré will remain happy and prosperous under the gentle rule of the dearest of my race."

I was not prepared for some blinding tears in the eyes of Mr. Vincent.

"After all our hopes, our delight, it will be hard to part with you—hard indeed to let you go; but if you cannot satisfy your conscience in any other way—go, and God bless you!"

And I shall do this, I thought.

Meantime, I have said nothing to poor Emma since I dismissed her so summarily to her mother. She has resented what I said to her then in a singular and painful manner—a sort of scorn, nay, dislike, has entered the expression of those eyes wherein I once read heaven. Her mode of treating Dew shocks and dismays her mother, who is only kept from remonstrating by Dew herself.

I suffered several days to pass, preparing myself

to carry out my promise to Mr. Vincent. We had got entangled by some engagement to go to Hartleyborough. I determined to make known the decision I had come to before we went. On the very morning I intended to do so, I found this letter on my dressing-table :—

“DEAR COUSIN,

“Do not be angry that I leave you for a while. You are meditating some strange step—forgive me that I anticipate you, and do not doubt but that I am

“Your ever affectionate

“DEW.”



## CHAPTER XIV.

## BEHIND THE BLUE CURTAIN.

“What was life ever but conflict and change?  
 From the ages of old  
 Hath affliction been widening its range.”

ANON.

ANNE and I were astonished by visitors—their Graces the Duke and Duchess of Hartleyborough. We had no preparation, but I am persuaded we did not show our astonishment. He was somewhat silent, but there was neither sneer nor wickedness expressed in his countenance. She was voluble and noisy. Anne and I were just ourselves. At least, I think so. And I am confirmed in this by the fact that my pulse beat as calmly as if only Belle had entered with my dear Anne's tea.

They did not remain long, but the Duchess, reminded, as it seemed, by her husband, asked me, in

a friendly manner, to come and visit them at Hartleyborough.

“We intend asking the whole party from Beau-depré,” she continued, “and are on our way there now, to pay our compliments, and make our request.”

In refusing the invitation I merely excused myself by saying, “I never went out anywhere.” His eyes glared for a moment, and as they flashed from me to Anne, he understood well enough that—though I did not say it—once more I was not going to leave Anne for him.

“By-the-by,” he said, “is it true that our quiet neighbourhood is going to be enlivened by a divorce case? And how do they make the plea? Has my little lady slipped, or is Sir Osman too much fascinated by his beautiful guest?”

“You are going to Beau-depré—you can ask them,” I answered.

No doubt I looked shocked—no doubt I suddenly assumed all my maidenly armour. He laughed, just as I imagine the wickedest man might laugh.

“Ha! it is all true, I see—you cannot disguise it. You are to be envied, Miss Beau-depré, you can still blush like a girl!”

“Ha! ha!” laughed the Duchess, “Lady Beau-depré looks a sly puss!”

I wonder I went through the mock ceremony of hand-shaking with her. We heard them still laughing as they went down the avenue. Sly puss! Gracious heavens!

“Don’t think any more about it, Ermine,” said Anne, my comforter. “’Tis a better name than being an unwomanly woman!”

“Sly puss! If ever I forgive that creature!”

“Ermine,” remonstrated Anne, “would you have her think herself of such consequence that she can annoy you?”

“Sly puss! God forgive me!”

“Ermine! Ermine! she only said the name that belongs to herself and thoughts!”

“Anne! Anne! I am in a passion!”

“No need to tell me that, my dear. I did not think such poor creatures as our visitors could hurt you, whatever they said.”

But Anne could not calm me down. It is very sad how one can suffer oneself to be bruised and wounded by the sneers and untruths of despicable people. I was consequently in no fit mood to receive a long visit from Lady Dunargent that evening, who, gratified by the Ducal visit, came up to expend her overflowing feelings to us.

“Yes, the Duke informed me he had never entered the house since the day he was terribly insulted by one of the family—old Sir Austin, I suppose—but he always considered that by-gones should be by-gones. Especially when Sir Osman had returned, and brought with him—but indeed he was too complimentary. I did my best to return his pretty speeches, and assured him of the infinite gratification it always gave me to heal breaches. He might rest assured the fault would be his own if ever the two houses quarrelled again. And though, of course, I could not be as confidential with him as I desired to be, yet I gave him to understand there was every prospect of matters being on a very different footing from what they had hitherto been. The cause of my return to England was much mixed up with this, and I had no doubt Sir Osman would be anxious to make him thoroughly his friend, by giving his Grace the earliest intelligence of any change. I thought it right to do this, my dear ladies, as the world will be, of course, biassed by the opinion of the Duke and Duchess, much as you and I may wonder at them for so being. The vulgar crowd always guides itself by the opinion of rank, and I thought my dearest Emma, and almost equally dear Osman,

would benefit by the friendship and countenance of the Duke and Duchess hereafter.

“We are all asked to Hartleyborough, and shall all go. ‘It would be madness to refuse,’ as I said to Osman, when his cousin Dew announced her intention not to make one of the party. Madness, when one remembers that the Duke is only just forgiving and forgetting a great insult he received from one of the *Beaudeprés*. Emma is wild with delight, and I am most anxious she should see the princely way in which the nobility of this happy, prosperous England live. It will be an excellent opportunity—don’t you think so, Miss Anne?”

“Excellent! Did Dew give any reason why she would not go?”

“No, she did not. She is a little out of sorts—bilious, perhaps; she does not look well. My poor dear boy, he is in love to folly. My dear Osman has made me see there can be no risk in his marrying her, some of these days; and, upon my word, I really begin to think she is in every way suited to him. They are both so well-read, so clever—their arguments are really most interesting.”

“Do not think, Lady Dunargent, for a moment of such a marriage. Discourage your son, rather than let him fancy it can ever take place.”

“Why not?—I hope Dew does not resent what I said at first. I can assure you”—(crying)—“I have repented so much that I could be so unkind. It was certainly owing to my feelings as a mother—and yet I ought to have thought of her, poor little motherless thing! I can assure you, and you may tell her with perfect truth, that I do not know which I look forward to most—Emma’s marriage, or Dunargent’s.”

“We none of us, Madam, credit you with any but the most amiable and good-natured intentions. Nevertheless, Dew will never marry your son. She has very strong religious feelings.”

“So have I; and, indeed, my dear Miss Beau-depré, I cannot conceive any woman, being a mother, who has not. Night and morning have I prayed for my children ever since they were born. No mother could do more; and therefore I am very well qualified to give the dear child no advice but what is absolutely the best.”

“All this we allow, dear lady; but can you believe that Dew may love her cousin too well ever to love another?”

“Love him!—impossible; she knows he loves my Emma, and is engaged to her.”

“Dew is married to him.”

Lady Dunargent started and turned pale, as if some new idea smote her ; but her maternal feelings rose again.

“Do persuade—do make her marry Dunargent—he will break his heart. I will promise everything—I will never go near their place—I won’t interfere. She shall have all the family jewels. I will be a mother, just the same as her very own mother—indeed, I think her the dearest little thing—I cannot help loving her.”

“That is me, I hope,” said Dew, stealing in, and putting her arms round the old lady’s neck.

“Oh ! my dear, dear darling child, it is.” (Sob, sob.)

“And why do you sob?”

“Because your aunts say you will not marry Dunargent. You are too religious—and I am very religious myself, as a mother ought to be. And nothing would induce me to advise you, my dear child, not to be religious.”

“I am sure of it.”

“Then you will marry Dunargent?”

“I will be your daughter, if you like, but not by marrying your son.”

“Is it because—is it true what your aunt says, that—that you love Osman?”

“I love him!—I have no other to love!”

The room was filled with the melody and pathos with which she uttered these words.

“Oh! dear! dear!” cried Lady Dunargent, her handkerchief to her eyes, “what a state of things! You know how devotedly, how ardently, how passionately Emma loves him, and he returns it.”

“I know it, ma’am,” said the poor child, laying her head caressingly on the old lady’s shoulder. “My love is of that sort, I prefer his happiness to my own. But love of that sort is never felt twice; so I will be your daughter, and Lord Dunargent will some day give you another. Then you will be rich, with three girls to pray for.”

“My dear, I do not understand you. I fear I am not so good as you. I wish now—but you see, my Emma—well, it is all as God wills, and what can I say more?”

“No more, so wipe your eyes, and let you and me walk home together; I will but say a few words to my aunties, and then I will follow you down the avenue.”

“Dew!” I exclaimed, “she has not a bad heart. You could soon persuade her it was only right to take her daughter away, and leave you free to be



reconciled to your husband. She almost grasped the idea."

Dew put her hand on my mouth.

"We Beaudeprés are so odd, we will not do what we are asked to do. I know what the feeling is to be the forced wife on the unwilling husband. It may perhaps be necessary for my pride as a Beaudeprés, for my dignity as a woman—for the ultimate and only satisfaction to my heart, that I am sought with the eagerness with which I was left—that I am valued as much as I was despised, loved even more than I was hated."

"Dew! Dew!" we cried, but could say no more. There was a bright, undaunted spirit beaming from her eyes—the beautiful dignity of a noble woman in her air. We did not dare to murmur—to expostulate. We saw that the woman was determined to avenge the girl—that the stubborn will of the Beaudeprés was as strong in the heart of this slight creature as in the most obdurate of them all. Here was a difficulty that Anne and I had never contemplated. One, mightiest of all, arising from the only quarter where we feared nothing.

The prospect of a rupture with Lady Emma presented almost a confirmed appearance, in con-

trast to the stern, unrelenting atonement that was necessary to appease the injured dignity of the gentlest, most fragile, most insignificant of all of the Beaudeprés.

“And yet you love him, Dew?” burst from my lips.

“I do; if I did not, I would pursue the common game of rivalry. I would enter the lists, and battle inch by inch. I disdain it!”

“Dew, you are hurt. Mr. Deane’s advice was not followed with the success you wished.”

“No, auntie, do not think so badly of me. I was anxious to follow his advice—indeed, I acknowledge to you that my future happiness is the stake for which I am trying. But I must follow Lady Dunargent. I only wish to tell you this, my aunts. If I take a strange step, if I leave Beaudeprés, if I open every path for my rival, as you call her, to enter, do not blame me. Surely this, my sweetest, loveliest old auntie, has not forgotten that she prided herself more on her gracious sweet ways than her beauty; and that she abated not one jot of her womanly prerogatives for the most ardent lover—the highest rank. Give me leave to possess a little faith in the power of the virtues I learnt from you; and if they will not

make my husband sue to me for my love, they must console me, for nothing else will. No more; kiss and bless your poor little Dew, and forget the haughty creature that just now took her place; only love me—love me now and ever.”

As if we could help it! Yet were we very sad. Could it be possible that Osman would ever be brought to sue for the love of his long-hated little wife—his despised cousin? He who loved another after a lordly, somewhat imperious love, and exacted all manner of little sacrifices from her. Courtly and kindly as he was, he was certainly spoilt, as regarded women; and made them court him rather than take the trouble to do that part himself.

And Lady Emma was fond of giving him the unction he so much delighted in. Long ago had they thrown to the winds that reserve and deferential behaviour that marked their conduct to each other when first I saw them.

“And yet,” said I to Anne, “I am not sure, little as I know of their ways, if a man is not sooner charmed by a reserved love than one too gushing.”

“Perhaps so, Ermine; but of this we are sure. Osman knows a fine character when he sees it,

and thoroughly delights in it. Dew has perceived this. She thinks to conquer him through his love for what is good and noble."

"Men are so weak, Anne—look at the Duke."

"Ah, dear vain old thing! but do not compare Osman with him."

"I cannot help liking poor Lady Dunargent. How she blunders into the very thing she ought not to say, utterly unconscious thereof, until, it being suddenly revealed to her as in a mirror, she has only tears. I wonder what Dew intends doing, that we are not to forbid her?"

As Anne and I did nothing but talk to each other of the two so dear to us, saying the same things over and over again, and wondering at the strange and singular change in Dew, it is useless my recording any more of it.

We had a visit from Lady Emma, only the second since she has been here, and which we should not have had, but that she could not have the company of Sir Osman without—that is, she was jealous of the time he spent with us, and thought it as well to come and see for herself what was his attraction.

I have not said much about her. Apart from her great beauty, she was an ordinary, supercilious

young woman. She was very well versed in that sort of impertinent politeness that is more difficult to bear than rudeness. Her music, as I said before, gave her a wonderful charm, and seemed to put a soul into an otherwise empty heart and frame. She was full of little nothings this day, and I wondered Osman was not tired of her frivolous vanities. But she was wondrously pretty, and I saw how almost impossible it was to withstand it. I was much bewitched with her myself when she was smiling and good-humoured. Even her pettishness and ill-temper were not unbecoming. Poor Osman!—he was like the fly on the verge of the spider's web. I seemed, as I saw them together, to realise what was in Dew's mind. Osman was a flirt—he could not resist the spell of beauty; yet he loved goodness, nobility of heart, gracious, gentle ways, with that exalted truth and honour that command admiration. He had a passion for these. Dew, perceiving this, thought it right, for her own happiness and his honour, that he should be put to the proof. What wonderful strength of mind in her, not only to see this, but to dare to trust to the trial! Certainly 'twere best she lost all, rather than gained half.

Some days have passed since I have written in

my journal, and what changes have taken place! The whole country now knows the reason of Sir Osman's return. We are beset with entreaties and bewailings. Alas! who can feel as we do? Mr. Vincent alone seems calm. He has told Anne and me in confidence that we certainly shall not lose our darling. I go to Beaudepré with my eyes wide open. Certainly there is not only a quarrel between Osman and Lady Emma, but between the daughter and mother. Seriously, I think Lady Dunargent would welcome, as the greatest boon, a reconciliation between Osman and his wife, or, rather, a rupture between him and her daughter. She has glimmerings not only that her daughter cannot—is not capable of filling Dew's place, but her religious scruples are roused—we presume by Mr. Vincent. Moreover—and we really must forgive her—she sees the prospect of a much better match in view. One can see through her so easily. Her goodness of heart, which no one can deny her, makes her anxious to please us all, and I really believe her love for Dew is truly maternal.

But what is moving Osman? Surely a quarrel with one so easily swayed one way or the other cannot have brought that grave sad look in his

eyes! Anne will have it that he has discovered how infinitely superior is the wife his grandfather chose for him to the wife he has selected.

“And he is bound in honour to her,” observed Anne.

“But he is bound by God’s laws to Dew.”

“Men think nothing of that, Ermine. Dew seems happier than she was.”

“Perhaps she divines he is doing her justice.”

“Or perhaps this plan, which she mentioned to us, is about to be realised.”

“I am at times rather angry with myself that we do not assist her more—that we keep aloof.”

“Oh! no—do not think so. She would ask us at once. If she is to conquer, she will conquer her own way.”

“Meanwhile, we have the assurance of Mr. Vincent we shall not lose her.”

Not lose her!—she is gone!—our Dew is gone!

## CHAPTER XV.

## BEHIND THE RED CURTAIN.

“ For every sweet with sour is tempered still,  
 That maketh it be coveted the more ;  
 For easy things that may be got at will,  
 Most sorts of men do set but little store.”

**M**R. VINCENT has convinced me it is not for Dew's sake, but my own, that I go to seek her. It will be more for her dignity and comfort, that she is left to pursue the course she has chosen.

“ I know her so well,” he said, “ that if you do so, while your heart and your reason are struggling against each other, and honour is the only religion you profess, she will but feel insulted by any attempt to put her again into the humiliating position from which she has freed herself. She has the noblest and frankest heart ever woman pos-



sessed ; but she knows very well what is her due, and will exact it to the utmost."

And while I suffered, I yet gloried in this pride, so like my own. But Mr. Vincent was hard, methought.

My heart struggling with my reason, and no religion but that of honour ! I will prove this. I will go to Emma ; I will place before her the arguments of Mr. Vincent. I will tell her I am so weak, I desire her help to do rightly. She shall know the poor opinion Mr. Vincent has of my character ; and that I am, as he thinks, and as I think myself, so near a villain, I hate myself. She offered much to me ; but a while ago so much, that in her innocence she scarce knew it was her all. Surely, for the sake of what is right, she will be of nobler mind, and urge me to please God at any cost.

What a vast phalanx of thoughts seem rising in my brain since I have discovered that life is not to be considered life, if only regarded as at the present moment. To live as I have done, indifferent to the past day, careless of the coming one, intent only on the one I possess, seems to me now the act of a madman, throwing into the bottomless sea treasures that he will want, but can never re-

gain. Scarcely have I felt that I possess a soul. And yet to it I owe that secret gladness which makes me see and love virtue; from it proceeds that anxiety and tremor at the approaches of vice. In my listless, wayward life, I considered only the present, not the future; but as I feel the instincts of my soul probing me, what a love of life comes over me!—what a fear of becoming nothing!—what an eager recognition of eternity! I must not lose these new perceptions, or sink their importance, into a wicked determination to have my own will.

I began writing down my thoughts, by acknowledging, in flippant petulance, that I was in a dilemma. I am rightly punished by finding myself at this moment in one a thousand times more perplexing. To prove that I am in serious conference with my soul, I will again write down the particulars of my position, and in nothing excuse myself.

I presumed to love a lady without the right to do so—being married. This lady attracted my listless attention by a beauty almost divine, and a talent that was divine. A certain feeling, emanating from my unknown soul, kept me from proposing to her. But man is weak, and the devil always at hand. I said, or implied, what I had not the right to do, and the lady considered me her ac-

knowledge lover. My wife I presumed to hate; and despite many a hint and suggestion from my soul, I continued to hate, until, at last, my aversion reared itself into a monstrous libel upon her. This feeling I nourished, despite of justice and reason. I therefore hailed, with a sort of meagre joy, the idea that I might be free from her. I thought myself the very soul of honour and good feeling, and I decided to fulfil my design in an open and conciliatory manner. I owed nothing to this wife but hate. I was indebted to my love for a renewal of life and hope. Yet she I hated was to be considered, and the woman I loved to be thrust aside for the present. Such was the honourable design!

So I came home, deciding in my magnificence that the matter should be done; and it could not fail to succeed, carried out in the honourable fashion I designed. And how has it succeeded? Let me be honest in the reply. It has not succeeded at all. The wife that I hated has become dear to me. The woman that I loved is—do I hate you, Emma? No, a thousand times, no! Do I love both—or is it only the charm of virtue in Dew that makes my soul rise up, and do her honour, in spite of myself?

I came to England, longing to be divorced. I will leave England rather than be divorced. I will never displace Dew from her home and name. I cannot live and see my Emma's tears.

If this is not a dilemma, there never was one before. Neither reason nor justice can help me. Each woman seems to have a paramount claim on me. And if—oh! sweet, high-hearted Dew!—I give you the palm, be not vexed with me, dearest Emma, for it is virtue I so worship in Dew. Virtue wears to me a fairer aspect than love. Be not jealous, Emma, but take your place side by side with Dew, and make me love you both, with so much of pure and honourable feeling, that I shall think nothing of the sacrifice I must make to tear myself from both. Yes, it must be so; there is no other way out of my dilemma—nothing left to satisfy my soul, but that I wander forth again into the world, lonely in the midst of it—homeless, with such a home—conscious I am poverty-stricken to the lips for want of love, yet conscious-stricken that I owe it all to myself! This—this is the only thing left me to do. I may not love Emma, because it is a sin. I must not love Dew, because I am not worthy to do so. Farewell all those hopes and longings, bred in me from earliest childhood! Farewell the new feelings

that have so strongly asserted their power! Farewell all idea of happiness! But if I know that no one has suffered by my fault, surely I shall be consoled—surely I shall not be so base as to think myself a victim. I had not written the word “victim,” when I received a message from Lady Emma, desiring to see me.

She threw herself into my arms, with a passionate entreaty that I would love her, for no one else did.

“Nay, Emma, your mother!”

“Mamma is unkind, unjust to me; she brings me a letter to read, from Dew, and requests that I will note it, for it is pitiable. And she forgets me, who suffer so much more.”

“How sad I am to hear that, Emma, for I want your help. I was coming to you now to beseech you to urge me to do right.”

“I know what you mean by that. I am just to do what I shall most dislike in the world.”

“Mr. Vincent has been to me; he seems shocked, in a religious point of view, as to my intentions.”

“What has religion to do with us? We love each other, and ought to marry. I think Dew was quite right to go away. You were almost

beginning to love her, Osman ; and how could you dare to do so ?”

“ I dare to love what is good. My mother was always speaking to me of God ; and as a child, before I could reason, I loved Him because she did. Now I find that her many prayers for me are answered. I cannot do what is wrong, even though I wreck my own happiness.”

“ You mean to give me up, and bring Dew back as your wife ; not from any motive of religion, but because you love her.”

“ I mean to go from here at once, and wander forth a lonely and desolate man. If I dare not marry you, because God and His laws forbid it, so may I not insult Dew, and ask her to forgive the past. But, Emma, dearest Emma, I would fain not have the remorse on my soul that you are unhappy. Hate me—scorn me—revile me, it is but just !”

“ I shall not do either. I have said that I loved you—I have proved it in many ways. We are suited to each other, and though you may think yourself bound to Lady Beaudepré, you belong to me.”

“ ’Tis a sin to think so.”

“ Why more so now than before ?”

“It is not more so;—it was always wicked.”

“You may think yourself as wicked as you please; I am not so. I will not give you up; you are mine.”

How was I to answer her? How describe the growing horror that possessed me? Was it possible that this lovely, exquisite creature, for whom I had been ready to blazon forth to the world our family scandal, throwing it down at the feet of the hard and unscrupulous multitude, that they might tear it to pieces, and laugh as they tore, was it possible that she revolted me? Did I regard her beauty as nothing, her words lacerating, her love perplexing? If I did, I groaned in secret over the shattered idol, and implored God in my heart to touch her with a ray of divine light. For perhaps I was to blame, that so fair a creature without should have so little that was fair within.

I was to receive no help from Emma. All that was to be done must proceed from myself.

“I do not know how far you are justified in saying that my love for Dew makes me false to you, Emma. There has always slumbered in my heart the seeds of virtue, I thank God; my return home awakened them into life. I felt the beauty of that

existence which has an aim, a hope, a work. The life that Dew has been leading seemed to me precisely the life I should like to lead, but from which I had banished myself. There is something inexpressibly grateful to the heart in being the little king of a simple kingdom, leading the worshippers to the village church, having a band of hearty, devoted tenants, being warmly welcomed by kindly, pleasant neighbours, and knowing that one held in one's hand the power of scattering so much pleasure and good far and near. All these things I felt in the most vivid manner, on my return home. I thought to share them with you. Tell me, have such ideas entered your heart?"

"No, all these things plague me. Let us go back to Italy, and leave Dew here, as she was before."

"Then one part of my duty is pleasant. Dew shall return here, queen and mistress, as she has been since she was a child. Beaudepré shall not suffer from any fault of mine."

"Ah! dear Osman, then you love me, and me only?"

"If I love, Emma, I may not say it."

"What folly! If there is a creature I despise, 'tis one of your godly sort."



“Then despise me, Emma; for I will not do this thing.”

Never was man more punished than I was for the sins and perversities of my stubborn will. I underwent a trial that was none the less severe to bear, because she whom I loved became to me like the demon bride, fair at one time, loathsome at another. And what torment can be more terrible than to love and despise at the same moment, and at the same time to be conscious that one is oneself the cause of that which we deplore?

And yet I had this consolation, it was not so much love for me that moved this poor, pretty Emma to act as she was doing. Mortifying as it might be under other circumstances to find that her jealousy and anger arose out of what she was pleased to call the inferiority of her rival—that it was not love, real love, was a source of congratulation to me. Vain, selfish, and indolent, it was right my vanity should be wounded, my selfishness punished, and my indolence provoked into actions alike painful and intolerant.

“Let us go to your mother,” I said, at last wearied out.

“For what purpose? Only to be told I am perverse and self-willed?”

“But we can settle nothing ourselves.”

“That is your fault. You will not do what I ask.”

“To grant your request, would be to your everlasting hurt.”

“But I do not think so, Osman—my Osman! I would sacrifice everything for you.”

“And yet, Emma, you do not love me. You are only thinking of triumphing over a little rival, who has gone and left the field open to you.”

“But she is not a little rival. Though she has gone, she rules here as much as ever. Did I not hear you give orders nothing was to be altered that Lady Beaudepré had planned?”

“Because she is coming back, and I am going away.”

“I do not believe in that going away.”

“Then 'tis useless my saying more.”

And I thought to go, but she clung to me, and I could not rudely shake her off.

“I will be satisfied,” she said, “if you will go on with the divorce?”

“The plea does not come from me—I am not entitled to demand it!”

“But Dew only wishes to be sure that you desire it, to go on with her plea.”

“I have not as yet signified to her that I do not wish it to go on. It is progressing at present.”

“Then, oh! Osman—my Osman! promise me that it shall go on. At least make me this concession.”

“If it is necessary for your happiness—if it is the only atonement I can make to you, let it go on; but the moment it is pronounced, I banish myself from your sight.”

“But not from hers?”

“That question you have no right to ask. I am her nearest kinsman; she may demand my services.”

And so we had another scene. The entrance of Lady Dunargent saved me from almost confessing to this too lovely Emma that, if my heart was false to her, she owed its dereliction to herself. Perhaps I should have felt better satisfied with myself now if I had said so; but of all things in the world, let me not mar her happiness. I will make any sacrifice, any concession, so that I may leave her contented, and Dew Lady Beaudepré. The irritation—anger—despair of my soul must lie hidden, and lacerate me in secret. But she does not love me—she does not understand the fealty of love, which would be the sacrifice, rather than the sacrificer.

And this knowledge makes me happy. But a little more assurance of this, but the certainty that I am correct in my estimation of her feeling for me—once free to let my thoughts rove where they will, it may be, sweet and gentle Dew, that in worshipping virtue, I shall find myself loving thee, without the thralldom of another claim.

Lady Dunargent perceived that we two had been quarrelling, but she prudently ignored the fact. Emma's face by no means promised gentleness and obedience.

How strangely quick I am to perceive her faults, and how base I think myself to do so! Lady Dunargent came to consult me about our visit to Hartleyborough.

“Are we still to go there?” I asked, in some amazement. “Surely, in the present state of affairs, we had better send excuses?”

“My dear Osman, not for the world. People will be sure to imagine something very serious has happened. Dew refused to go from the first, and so will not be missed. And really my poor boy is so upset by her departure, I want to amuse his mind a little. He is absolutely crying upstairs.”

I felt much as if I could cry with him. It ap-

pears the sky might fall, but we must go to Hartleyborough. Well, 'tis useless making protestations, and not fulfilling them.

“What day are we expected?”

“Dear Osman, have you forgotten?—'tis tomorrow. The dear Duchess admired Emma so much; and I am so desirous Emma should see one of the finest houses and establishments in the world. Besides, they will be neighbours.”

“No,” said Emma; “he has become too good. Mr. Vincent has told him he will commit a sin if he marries me.”

“Dear Osman, Mr. Vincent is not a proper judge.”

What an abject fool I felt myself.

“Will you see Mr. Vincent yourself, Lady Dunargent?”

“If I do, Osman, I can only assure him that there is not a more religious person than myself anywhere.”

“Still, he represents to me that, once having pronounced vows, I ought not, for the mere gratification of a human love, to outrage them—I shall offend God.”

“He is too particular! Does he think that I would permit my darling child to be a party to any wickedness?”

“He says we none of us feel the heinousness of the crime we are committing.”

“I beg his pardon. Surely he can trust me, a woman of the highest principles. And dear little Dew thinks the same—has she not gone away on purpose? The prettiest little note she left behind for me, saying, ‘I was to excuse her going away. It was only to make us all happier that she did so.’ And she is quite right, I am happier, now that I do not see her poor little face—sometimes so white and pitiful, it quite went to my heart.”

“You see, even mamma pities her more than me.”

“Because, my darling, when you think of it all, she is to be pitied; for I fear nothing will induce her to listen to Dunargent. She has fixed all her affections upon Beaudepré, and will never be happy out of it. That is my belief.”

“I do not wish to live at Beaudepré. Osman knows I would rather live anywhere else. Dew can come here as before.”

“You must not mind what she says at present, Osman, the dear child has had much to vex her. But, come, Emma, your dresses for Hartleyborough have arrived. I want you to try them on.”

I had not realised the comfort of being alone for

above a minute, when a new vexation upset me. Pelham appeared.

“Beg pardon, Sir Osman, I wish to leave your service.”

“Go to the devil, fellow !”

“It is not me who is going there, Sir Osman.”

I was about to kick him out, all the long pent-up irritation of my heart bursting forth. But there were tears in his eyes.

“Why do you leave me, Pelham? You know me sufficiently well to be aware I hate a new servant.”

“Yes, Sir Osman—I do indeed, Sir Osman. But people talk so, Sir Osman, and that’s a thing as I can’t bear to be reflected on, Sir Osman.”

“And what can it signify who reflects upon you if I am satisfied?”

“Beg pardon, Sir Osman, it is not me as they reflects on.”

“Is it me, Pelham?”

“I make no reflections, Sir Osman; but if there is to be changes here which displaces a lady of whom her servants is proud of the very ground she stands on, whose service is a credit and an honour, I thought it best, Sir Osman, not to be a party to it.”

“You amuse me, Pelham. Have all servants these particular notions with regard to those they serve?”

“As a body, Sir Osman, we mostly like to be proud of those we serve. As an ’umble individual, Sir Osman, if you will excuse me, I would rather go to the devil myself than that my master should.”

“I respect your feelings, Pelham, and hope, as you have so much regard for me as to consent to be damned for me, that you won’t put me to the pain of having a new servant about me. Lady Beaudepré will never be deprived by me of the position she so worthily fills. All my energies are to be devoted to getting her back here amongst you all—for good.”

Pelham’s tears now overflowed, and he had to bolt out of the room. Presently he looked in again.

“Beg pardon, Sir Osman, if you will please to forgive me this once, I will never offend again.”

“You mean that you do not intend to leave me?”

“I should be unworthy the best master that ever lived, if I did so,” said he, fervently.

I derived a secret satisfaction from this little scene, which, after all my vexation and worry, did me good. I spent all the afternoon in seriously



facing my position ; and I found myself at the end grievously puzzled as to which of the two I had been most of a villain to—Emma or Dew. And while I did so, I could not but confess I owed all the misery I was now enduring to myself. The exquisite mortification of proving false to the fealty of love well-nigh upset the balance of my mind. For it was impossible to probe my heart without confessing to myself that my love for the beautiful Emma was a thing of the past—gone for ever ; while amid the shame and humiliation this caused me, there arose above every other feeling a sensation of exquisite satisfaction that the despised Dew was inevitably my wife. She was mine.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## BEHIND THE BLUE CURTAIN.

“Pleasures are like poppies spread,  
 You seize the flower—its bloom is shed.  
 Or like the snow falls on the river,  
 A moment white, then melts for ever.”

BURNS.

OSMAN appears to Anne and me much relieved by something. Not Dew's absence, I trust. Anne thinks he has made up his mind one way or the other, and I cannot think it is for that way we so much fear and abhor, because the good expression in his eyes beams forth with a most becoming lustre. He has lost a certain air of shame that has lately oppressed him, entering our sitting-room with a smile on his face, and that sort of pride and dignity which so well become him. How we do dote on him, to be sure, spite of everything.

We just said a little of the blank in our lives wanting Dew.

“Yes,” he answered, “it is most astonishing how such a little sunburnt thing has made herself absolutely part of the happiness of being at Beaudepré. I miss her every minute, and the others seem very dull without her. When the door opens we all expect her to walk in, to propose some little scheme of amusement for us.”

“You will forgive us, then,” said Anne. “She was like sunshine to us.”

“Oh! I forgive you heartily,” said he. “When these people go, you shall have her back!”

“These people, Osman—what are we to infer?”

“Anything you like,” said he. “Though I fear, whatever you may think, I shall be none the less a knave in my own eyes!”

“If we are to believe history, Osman, you won’t be the first who has acted as a fool for the sake of a woman. I cannot help sometimes thinking advantage was taken of some word you said, or perhaps a look.”

And Anne, as she said this, looked sharply at him.

“And I, in my turn, took my advantage,” was all he replied.

“You may be sure, Anne,” said I, after he was gone, “you hit something sorely on the head when you made that remark, about taking advantage of a word or look. He did not deny the fact.”

“I have had the impression on my mind for some time. I never see him and Lady Emma together that I do not think she first proposed to him !”

“That is very odd. I have noticed at times he is a little afraid of what she may say, but then you know he is so very particular as to women’s sayings and doings.”

“He will never tell if he was drawn into saying more than he meant ; but ’tis a comfort to think so.”

“It is. I wonder Lady Dunargent does not see the propriety of leaving Beaudepré, now Dew has gone.”

“You forget their engagement to Hartleyborough. I do not find fault with her bad taste in going there (though I believe she knows no better, with her foreign notions), for I hope Lady Emma will get into a flirtation with Lord Hartley. She seems in the mood to take up any mischief.”

“Anne, Anne, is it you, so worldly, not to say spiteful ?”

“Spiteful is a very ugly word. Simply I am

very happy. A little good chance of some sort, and Osman and Lady Emma will care nothing for each other."

"Their love never seemed to me to be a good healthy love. It was principally made up of a mutual fondness for music."

"Of course you are a better judge than I am, having had a lover, my dear!"

Anne was fond of bantering me when in good spirits. I was wondering very often how things were going on at Hartleyborough—whether the good-natured, blundering Lady Dunargent was kindly borne with, or scornfully sneered at?—if Lady Emma's wonderful beauty had the affect we hoped?—if his Grace would only require revenge, not a daughter-in-law? What would be Osman's feelings if he saw the lady for whom he was about to sacrifice so much, flirting? Would it relieve him, if he discovered she did not love him? Would he fly after Dew, and bring her back?—and bringing her back, would that little proud, indignant heart give way? By which I mean, would she forgive him, if he asked for forgiveness, and pronouncing vows over again, become his real and happy wife?

'Tis my belief the child won't do that until she feels he is abjectly in love with her. By abjectly, I

mean deeply, devotedly, unmistakeably. And she will require a probation. Will he bear that?

“What a great deal these young people make us endure, Anne,” I remarked, after indulging in a perfect muddle of these thoughts.

“They do, indeed, Ermine, with their pride, and their dignity, and their airs and nonsense! They forget how we are longing to see them all happy.”

“Then, like me, you think Lady Emma’s chance is gone?”

“I think so, from this, she could not stand comparison by the side of Dew. She has neither the heart nor the intelligence of Dew.”

“Do not, my dear ladies,” said Mr. Vincent, looking in at the window, “compare the two together in that fashion. One is a noble, pious, true-hearted woman; the other is simply a giddy, vain, ill-tempered girl. Not that I wish Sir Osman to make this discovery as palpably as I have, for if he does, some one of those false codes of honour, that bewilder the brains of most sensible men, will lead him to cling to Lady Emma, and what he calls her claims, all the more strongly because he has ceased to love her.”

“Has he spoken to you on the subject, Mr. Vincent?”

“I have to him, and told him plainly, as his pastor, that he will offend against every divine law if he persists in exacting this divorce from Lady Beaudepré; for, of course, she must make the plea, as he has not the shadow of an excuse for doing so.”

“What did he say?”

“He listened humbly and submissively, and if you will promise not to tell, I really think he was relieved to find he could not carry out his wishes without sinning.”

“Why are we not to tell?—we have observed he is happier.”

“Because, so strange is the heart of man, he will never forgive the intimation he was false to his love, before he thought of his God. He will consider it necessary for him to throw himself in the dust at her feet, and let her trample him to the death, by way of atonement. But unless she has Lady Beaudepré in the same position, she will not be satisfied.”

“You think so ill of her?”

“I am wrong to say all this—I really know so little of her. The mother is a very weak woman; she may be the same—in which case, we have the

consolation of knowing she will be swayed by any whim."

"That is not crediting her with much, either. But I am of your mind. Might she have the chance of becoming a Duchess, I should not wonder but that she forgets the existence of Sir Osman and Lady Beaudepré."

"The sooner she does so, the better for us all. Meantime, have you heard from Lady Beaudepré?"

"Yes, she has gone abroad, accompanied by her old governess. She makes no allusion to anything at home, but describes what she sees, so that Anne declares she has travelled with her."

"I have had a letter from Mr. Deane, who says he is now in doubt about the divorce. I wrote to him concerning it."

"I wish he would discover that it was impossible, for then the Dunargents must give up Osman."

"Do you never find, my dear ladies, that what is said to be impossible becomes instantly, to some people, the thing they must and will do. I have written again to Mr. Deane, begging him to keep this new hitch quiet. As long as the stream is running the same way with silly people, they never look ahead. By this means they can be



stranded on a rock without much hope of saving themselves.”

“You are trenching on Mr. Deane’s prerogatives, with your worldly maxims.”

“I am to be all things to all men, and having utterly failed in convincing Lady Dunargent I am more pious than herself, or more anxious to fulfil the law of God, I have no weapons now but worldly ones.”

“You have had an interview with her?”

“Yes, of two hours’ duration—for the purpose, she was pleased to say, of learning from me what was the right thing to do.”

“And yet she will not be advised by you?”

“She gave me no opportunity to advise her. The two hours were entirely spent by her in giving me a history of her religious feelings; and when she had talked until she really had not strength for more, she rose and took leave of me in the following words: ‘And now, my dear Mr. Vincent, adieu. It will ever be a source of the purest satisfaction to me that I have had this conversation with you, and so removed any impression on your mind that I am the least of a worldly character. We agree in everything, and in nothing so much as our desire to please God. Thank

you much for your kind sympathy. I shall ever regard this conversation with you as one of the most pleasing and satisfactory kind."

"You are laughing at us, Mr. Vincent?"

"I assure you not so. To argue with such a mind would be simply as useful as blowing soap bubbles. One may be thankful that her impulses are so good, though, to be sure, her mind is too feeble to be wicked. It is strange to me that Sir Osman should be blind to the extreme childishness of her character."

"When one lives with people for any length of time, what irked us at first in them soon loses the power to do so, from familiarity with it. The first evening I spent with Lady Dunargent I could have applied a good many epithets to her that are now all merged into one thing—she is a good-natured simpleton. I suppose Osman does not perceive anything but her love for him?"

"Here is Sir Osman, galloping up the avenue. Some news of some kind he brings."

"What does his face express?" cried Anne.

"Concern and haste," answered Mr. Vincent.

Fortunately we were not kept long in suspense; though the news was the last we expected to hear. The young Earl has disappeared, or eloped—and

his mother is distracted. Osman was on his way to Beaudepré, to make preparations for going to look for him.

“Suppose, Osman, he should be with Dew?”

A beautiful smile illumined his face.

“I hope he may be with her; it will not be my fault if such an accident happens as our meeting. Will you kindly take care of Lady Dunargent and her daughter?—they will be back from Hartleyborough presently.”

I went to Beaudepré and gave the necessary orders, leaving a note to beg, if they felt inclined, that they would come in the evening to sit with Anne and me. I did not expect them—but they came—Lady Dunargent most miserable, and Lady Emma subdued and soft in manner. Lady Dunargent took possession of me, and poured out her sorrows in a low tone.

“I shall always be sorry I went against my better judgment to Hartleyborough. Emma wished it; and after her disappointment and vexation, I thought it but right to humour her. Not but what they were kind—very kind, so they thought; but they all cliqued together—if you can understand what I mean—they in a manner kept us outside a certain circle. I don't complain so

much of the Duke and Duchess, who were civil to all their guests ; though, as regards their civility, it was very little—everybody was left pretty much to their own devices. Emma was only asked to sing once—in truth, Miss Beaudepré, I could not but see that we were being snubbed. God knows how much I love and admire Lady Beaudepré—dear little Dew!—but it appeared the resolve of every visitor in the house to speak of nothing else but her, and her excellencies, which are great, dear little thing!—I will not be unjust ; they could not say too much of her. At the same time they did say too much of her—they gave me to understand I was there to be insulted, for presuming to think my daughter should take her place. Naturally I was angry, though I did not show it—and nothing could exceed the kindness and attention of dear Osman both to me and Emma. No son could have been more affectionate ; and his admirable way of treating Emma, as if he was a sort of brother of hers—talking openly of his wife to her, and making every one see there was nothing, and could be nothing between them—will never be forgotten by me. And if Emma has a spark of the same feeling that fills my heart—however, I say nothing—I have been a devoted

mother. Oh! my poor boy, why did you leave me? It seems the people, unscrupulous as I thought them to me, were eversomuch more so to him; and he heard things that shocked and horrified him, about his mother and sister. Oh! it was too cruel—the poor boy would not bear it. He wrote really a most excellent letter to the Duke—so dignified and sensible; saying that ‘though a boy in age, he had the feelings of a man for his mother and sister; and as the Duke’s guests would talk of them in his presence in a way he had no power to resent, he had no resource left but to leave the Duke’s house, explaining the reason. He had not known much of English society,’ he added; ‘but he hoped to be able to say some day that it was at least composed of ladies and gentlemen.’ An excellent letter, was it not? I was quite proud of it, though I was crying bitterly, not knowing what had become of him; and I must say one or two people were very kind to me—but would you believe it, Miss Beaupré? Lord Hartley never addressed so much as a single word to Emma all the time we were there. He was flirting the whole time with an ugly, forward girl, who they said was very clever; but I assure you her cleverness consisted in saying things I,

an old married woman, would never have uttered a word upon.”

“They are not so high in their manners as their rank.”

“That is most true; but I expected such different things. There was no girl in the house to compare with Emma.”

“You expected different things here?”

“Yes, but you were all so kind—you acted so, that I preferred your wishes to my own at last,—fortunate it was that I did so. If we had displaced Dew, I feel that it would have been impossible for Emma to live here. I am glad to say she sees that,—and if we do not teaze her, she will soon be her sweet self again. I went to great expense about dresses for Hartleyborough, and, as you see, all for nothing. And they admired Emma so much at the Beaudepré ball. However, I have done with them. I have almost come to the conclusion I dislike England and English people—though indeed I am ungrateful to say so, sitting by such a dear, kind friend as you have been. I will not be ungrateful. You have never resented upon me what you had a right to do, the purpose for which I came to England. But you are very superior people. I heard at Hartleyborough what you might have

been, dear Miss Beaudepré, but for your poor sister. I honour you for it—family affection is what I dote on—I quite love and respect you, and I do not wonder the Duke has never got over it. All I can say is, even if Osman had not so frankly and properly told Emma of the change in his feelings, I never would have permitted the divorce to take place. I feel in my heart that doting on her, as I do, I would have seen her slowly die before my eyes, rather than she should have taken Dew's place."

This was a sort of epitome of the dear, kind woman's confidence.

Meanwhile, one still more strange was going on between Anne and the Lady Emma. Anne says it began by the Lady Emma steadily regarding her, as young people, not very well-bred, will do.

"Were you always so?" said she at last.

"Not when I was born. Ermine and I are twins, and I was the prettiest baby of the two. My nurse let me fall over the banisters."

"Do you grieve about it?"

"I have had too much suffering to grieve about mere beauty, if that is what you mean."

"Yes, I think I meant that. I do not know how people can bear being ugly."

“Our little Dew is not pretty.”

She looked eagerly at me.

“No, that is why I am astonished she is so much regarded.”

“And do you think beauty of such value? Is not a good, fine heart—a generous disposition—a character you can trust, better than all beauty?”

She was silent.

“Osman loves me, almost as much as the still beautiful Ermine, and she has sacrificed everything for my happiness.”

“Yes, so I heard—she might have been Duchess of Hartleyborough.”

“God has no greater gift to give us, than that of a fine heart. That is a thing the people of our family value more than beauty.”

“Mamma always admired Osman’s goodness, while I admired his beauty.”

“Osman’s goodness gave way before the snare of your beauty, pretty lady; but fortunately his heart veered round to the true dictates of religion and honour. Ermine and I used to have very sad thoughts about the only two Beaudeprés left, upon whom all our hopes and affections were centered. But God was so good as to gift them with fine, noble hearts. Osman permitted a stub-



born will to blind his reason—so God punished him by ensnaring him to do that his heart and conscience revolted from, and at last He made him hate himself. But Dew only extracted good from her trial, and became what she is to us all. In both you will trace a lofty nature, that shrinks from dishonour, a love of name and race; and turning for comfort and safety to the practice of what is pure and good—for the same blood runs in their veins, which made my Ermine sacrifice human love and glory, to be her misshapen sister's nurse."

"Miss Anne—I think I must tell—you will be glad, since you think so much of goodness. Osman, Sir Osman did not exactly make an offer to me. I have since considered that perhaps I understood more than he meant."

"You have indeed made me happy, though I cannot still forgive him."

"Yes, you must ; I was a great deal more to blame than that. However, I will not tell you any more. I do not like people to be so ill-natured to mamma, as they were at Hartleyborough. Dew shall come home, and she and Sir Osman, so respected and beloved, will show everybody how much they like my mother. Do you think they will?"

“I have no doubt of it. We all love your mother, and if we do not love you—we are quite ready to do so, when you have found your fine, good heart, and will let us see that it is there.”

“Ah! I know what you mean. And I really think, when I tell Dew how these people behaved to mamma, she will knit her brows so, as she can do, and be as angry as I am.”

“So you see, Ermine—I was right. Lady Emma confessed to me she interpreted Osman’s admiration of her as she pleased, not as he intended. Now, I thank God for that more than all. And so, Ermine,” said Anne, in conclusion, “all our bugbears have blown themselves up into empty bubbles, and you may congratulate yourself on the wise policy that counselled acting on the defensive. Our enemies are routed by their own weapons—vanquished and fallen at our feet. We have but to find Dew, to sing the song of victory.”

To find Dew!

The first of the two missing ones found was Lord Dunargent. Wisely he had gone home to his own castle, and thither his mother and sister followed him; and we received very happy letters from Lady Dunargent, who, in the warm welcome given to the young heir, and the delight he took in every-

thing about his home, forgot all her misfortunes, and the ill-treatment she received in our county.

Osman came home at once, in time to learn that we had not only written to Dew, but received answers. But she would not come home.

“In truth,” said Mr. Vincent to us, confidentially, “she is right in her decision. She says, if she comes home now, at the first word, and again resumes the duties so long her charge, Sir Osman will never overcome his natural indolence. He must be left to himself, and learn perforce the business of a landlord. Evidently she received letters from the Dunargents that gave her pleasure, but she is right in the determination not to come home.”

This was part of her letter to us:—

“I have never had a holiday before, my aunts, and you do not know how I am enjoying it. You have your Osman to love, and he has you. I might perhaps interfere a little amongst you all, and make you jealous—or I might be jealous myself. I say it out of no pique, or foolish whim, I want an absolute rest or pause in my life. In this beautiful country—everywhere the eye resting on God’s most magnificent works—I can live upon merely gazing; and as I gaze my heart expands,

and lifts itself up to those better and holier things that will make me, I hope, more worthy of your love and goodness. Let me be for awhile, my aunts—you little know how much of pride, conceit, and vain-glory there is to be dispersed and driven out of the heart of your loving Dew.”

Osman looks wonderfully happy. One evening he opened his heart to us.

“You know, my cousins, how loth I was to go to Hartleyborough. To that visit I shall probably owe what of happiness I have left myself. So little do we know what is best for us. The company there were of a very mixed sort. Some the Duke’s fancy, some the Duchess’s—neither of these at all to my fancy. We had a large assortment of county people, and one or two Londoners, who went about among the rest much like peacocks, their beaks on high, and only occupied with the sweep of their own tails. These troubled themselves to speak to no one but each other, and came and went without exchanging even a common greeting with those, so many days in the same house with them. I was amused at them, and regarded them as some new species of animal. Accustomed to the loquacious, friendly ways of foreigners, Lady Dunargent greeted all in the genial flow of

her kindly heart. Of course she was very much snubbed—once or twice in a most rude, and, I must confess, vulgar manner. One person, who would never be admitted into any other house than the free-and-easy one of Hartleyborough, went so far as to say to a neighbour, loud enough for Lady Dunargent to hear, ‘That is the housekeeper, I suppose—a jolly old soul.’ ‘Take care,’ replied one of those sarcastic, clever fellows, who are allowed to say what they like, ‘she can say worse of you.’ This sort of thing revolting me, shocked her. She became confused and dismayed with it all; consequently they made a complete butt of her, when I was not by to take her part. She was also keenly sensitive as to the way in which she and Emma were left almost to themselves. The county people were always talking of Dew, for a purpose, I could see; but I so far anticipated them, that with Emma’s help, they could not say so much of her as we did. It was after one of these scenes that Emma said, ‘I hate England, and everything in it. Even to be your wife, Osman, I could not bear it.’—‘You can never be my wife, Emma, as long as Dew lives,’ I replied.—‘She is better than these people.’—‘A thousand times.’—‘She loves mamma, and was always so good to me.’—‘She

longed to have you for a friend,' I said.—'And I would not be her friend. I wish she was here, she would be very haughty with these people.'—'I think she would. I think she would be very soft and pretty in her way to your mother before all these people, and so nice to you and me.'—'She would. How I long for her to be here. She always does just the right thing. Osman, pray forgive me all my bad conduct.'—'I have much more need to ask forgiveness of you.'—'I am glad you think so. One hates to be treated like this.' She was almost on the verge, my cousins, of bidding me go and bring Dew home then. It was a little too much to expect. But she has done so now. Before I left Dunargent, she thanked me for all the trouble I had had about her brother, and the comfort I had been to her mother; and then she said, 'Go and bring Dew home, and tell her I am going to be your sister.' You can imagine I heard this with very mingled feelings; at the same time two predominated—joy that I could love Emma with admiration and without sin; still greater joy that my admiration of Dew was sin if I did not love her. I fancy the latter will be only too easy. Already I feel as if I shall know no happiness until I hear her lips call

me husband. She will not say that word unless she loves me."

"You may be sure of that, Osman. Do you know that Anne and I looked to the Hartleyborough visit as a means of effecting the union we have so much at heart. But after a very different fashion; we hoped—I trust your vanity will bear the shock—that Lady Emma and Lord Hartley would flirt to the verge of a serious engagement. I should not blurt this out so openly, but that Lady Dunargent had the same idea in her head; from, I am certain, the laudable motive of inducing Lady Emma to give you up."

Osman only smiled a reply.

"I suppose," he asked, after a pause, "it would not do for me to go and bring Dew home?"

"I would wait a little. She is very anxious not to return here the responsible party for everything. Take your place as head, master, governor, and comptroller. Perhaps in that position you may find her more obedient to the commands of the head of her house, than if she returned queen regnant."

"That is a good idea. Once I know she will obey me, my orders will be most arbitrary. I already fancy that my first command will be that

she always bends on me those tender, wistful glances that penetrated my soul the first moment I saw her. Already I feel a happiness, a serenity and buoyancy of heart that makes me conscious her love will crown me with all those blessings so constantly invoked on my head by my mother. Think of my happiness, Anne, Ermine, if I should chance to hear those shy lips say, 'I love you!'



## CHAPTER XVII.

## BEHIND THE RED CURTAIN.

“I will not swear—for thou dost know that easy :  
 But put me to the proof—say, ‘kill thyself.’  
 I will outlabour Hercules in will,  
 And in performance, if that waits on will.  
 Shall I fight swordless with a youthful lion ?  
 Shall I do aught that I may die in doing ?  
 Oh ! were it possible for such an angel,  
 I almost wish thou hadst some impious task,  
 That I might act it, and be damned for thee.”

BEDDOES.

SHE will not come home. This is the answer to me :—

“Forgive me, dear Osman, that I am disobedient to the first command you ever gave me. I will try that it shall be for the last time. I am in need of rest and change. I desire to be a child again, which I cannot be at home. If I am really so happy as to be no longer your incubus, I shall

have need of solitude and time to prepare myself to feel the change. Some bear adversity better than an overplus of joy. I have not to tell you of the anguish that our race feels if one of us mars the happiness of another, but I can tell you that from this moment the long wailing to be laid safe in my mother's arms ceases to be felt by your ever affectionate

“DEW.”

Dear, little, sweetest creature! Ah! Dew, you are right. I feel the bitterest anguish—the keenest remorse for making you unhappy. She longed to die, poor darling, and be with her mother. To my passionate outburst of remorse she makes no other reply, and she is right. To long to be with her mother in the grave, and I have been the cause!

How shall I write to her, for write I must?—how keep in temperate bounds the torrent of love, of sorrow, of bewailing, of hope, of promise, that is burning to pour itself forth? For she desires to be at peace, and feel again as if she was a little child.

“My darling, you shall be indulged. You say you will never again disobey me. Let me, then,

take this opportunity of outpouring on you every thought—every feeling I possess. I will take your slightest wish as my law. You shall be at rest, and feel again as a little child, all the happinesses and sweetnesses of youth having been crushed out of you by a cruel kinsman. An overplus of joy!—ah! Dew, Dew, you know not the wild throb of happiness this admission gives me. For, if you will not permit me to say so to yourself, I must to the senseless stones, the callous trees, to everything around me, confess that this is love that now possesses me—love hallowed by virtue and God. How it throbs, thrilling me with delight! If I am not much mistaken, Dew, it is as much for my benefit as your own that you desire me to remain at our home while you wander abroad. I am to fulfil the duties you have performed so long. Be it so. At once will I enter upon the task, but to do it with true spirit—with the care and devotion you bestowed—I must take your rooms—I must imagine myself you—the sweetest creature. I will establish myself there at once. I will write to you, Dew, from your own table, where you laid your little tired head, and longed to be safe with your mother.”

I wrote my Dew a long letter, just as if I was

her own beloved and loving husband. I regarded her absence from me as the necessary consequence of my being obliged to stay at home while she was ordered by wise physicians to be abroad, for her health and amusement. I thought it well to accustom her to this, and I detailed to her all that was doing at our home—the improvements I meditated, and the alterations I fancied she would like. And for ever, I wrote of my mother. The ecstasy of receiving my darling's replies, and how there would be little slips now and then from the prim, maidenly reserve she had imbibed from Ermine and Anne—such as “our home,” instead of *Beau-depré*, and the pronoun “we,” in lieu of some senseless preposition. Altogether, I was not unhappy.

I found ample amusement in new painting and adorning *Beau-depré*—in preparing for my darling the proper rooms for the most beloved of all the *Lady Beau-deprés*. I consulted her upon a good many things, but there were some of which I said nothing.

“It may be,” I thought to myself, “that she will not be able to see, in the innocence of her sweet heart, how I am racked and tormented with the thought that I have lost five years of happi-

ness, which makes me think every day almost as another year, until I can show how amply I repent. And so she will keep me at arm's length, until I know not what madness I may commit. I picture to myself the hour when, her woman's pride appeased—her girl's dignity satisfied with the wealth of love I shall pour out at her feet—she will lay her dear hand in mine confidently. I shall once more feel the touch of the pure lips of love; the caress of a heart all my own—the whisper of prayers for me, and me only! But she may dally off and on. So I will say nothing of what I intend, until I have her here in my power. I think she will not resist my pleading.

Ermine looks more beautiful than ever, as joy and happiness bring her every day to help me. We have a garden-chair for Anne, not thinking ourselves altogether happy, we three Beaudeprés, unless we are together, talking of her for whom we are making such preparations.

I go out amongst my neighbours wherever I am asked. I make no secret of the love, the devotion I have for my wife, and that our present separation is but temporary, while Beaudeprés is being altered and adorned for her. I hear constantly from Lady

Dunargent, who, it appears, also corresponds with Dew, and is not backward in telling that arbitrary young person she is astonished “she suffers dear Osman to remain at home alone !” “Dear Osman” is beginning to feel he cannot stay much longer. If she does not soon give him some hope—if she does not intimate there is a time fixed in her mind, not far off, it will be impossible for me to wait longer. Especially after a visit from Sergeant Deane.

“She is a very daring little thing,” said he, “presuming that we shall wait her pleasure. True, you kept her waiting for five years, but we did not. I do not see, Miss Beaudepré—Miss Anne, why we should not tell her how we are all suffering for the want of seeing her.”

And I believe he wrote to her. She was daring ; never one word did she vouchsafe to write as to when she would come home—even to Sergeant Deane. There was not another preparation left to be made for her ; I was beginning to be desperate.

For some time I had given myself no rest day or night, toiling in every possible way, so as to drive all thoughts from my mind ; and I must confess, the more I walked and rode, the greater fatigue I endured, the better I felt. Life was literally a luxury could I have had my Dew.

One day, goaded by the longing I had to see those sweet lustrous eyes, I poured out a little of my my dejection and disappointment to Lady Dunargent.

I was sitting with my kinswomen at the Hunting-lodge, about ten days after this, when a telegram came from Lady Dunargent, entreating me to come to her at once.

“Do not go,” exclaimed Ermine, with a sudden fear in her eyes.

“Go at once,” said Anne, a fine spirit glowing in hers.

“Anne,” murmured Ermine, “remember the temptation.”

“Ermine,” said Anne, “he is above temptation.”

I bid them both a hurried farewell, and barely giving Pelham time to prepare for the journey, I set off. What has happened at Dunargent, from whence we had received so lately such happy letters?

It was nearly five o'clock, when the fly I had hired from their station drew up at the Park Lodge. Suddenly a vision of loveliness and brightness came out of the cottage, and in a moment was seated by my side.

“Oh! Emma,” I exclaimed, “how relieved I am

to see you! I feared some misfortune had occurred, but you never looked more lovely or happy."

"Mamma did not telegraph for any misfortune, we only wanted you for happiness."

"I am glad—glad!" I murmured, kissing her hand. "It has reference to you, Emma?"

"Yes, a little."

"A little! how can you fancy that I should regard any thing concerning your happiness as a trifle."

"How good you are!" she replied softly. "Oh! how good! and how glad I am that all has ended as it has done, for I should have disappointed you. But we are here. And there is mamma. Dunargent has gone out of the way for awhile."

Wondering at the tremulousness of her voice, at the flush and starting tear, I sprang out of the carriage. This time I met dear Lady Dunargent's cheek with a son's affection, and she complimented me warmly on my looks and appearance, as we went into the house.

"Come with me," said Emma, peremptorily.

I obeyed. She opened a door, and drew me forward. There was my Dew. A cry of joy burst from my lips; but I saw in the instant that her surprise was as great as my own. If Lady Dun-



argent had telegraphed for me, I felt certain Emma had summoned Dew.

I repressed my delight with adamantine efforts;—I felt certain that all hope for the present depended upon my discretion, as the little brows were knit together. We were alone. At the same time, I could not forego my privilege. No, if she punished me with the most heartless severity, she was my wife, and I must welcome her.

I folded her gently in my arms—I kissed her sweet lips, as a devotee kisses the foot of a saint—I murmured thanks to God that I saw her again. But I did all with the utmost humility and deference. And the brows relaxed—blushes dyed the dear little face crimson—I felt the beating of her heart against my own; yet did she say—with her little head haughty and high—her luminous eyes bright and resolute,

“We have been tricked, cousin.”

“We have. Dew, I like being tricked,” and I ventured to kiss her again.

She gave me, or did I fancy it? just the least in the world, a pressure with her slender arms, and then was out of my grasp. I implored myself secretly to be intensely careful as to what I was about. And I did not implore in vain. We sat

down, and though I devoured her with my eyes, I took no other liberty.

“I was summoned here by telegram, by Lady Emma—I arrived an hour ago,” said she.

“And I was summoned in the same way by Lady Dunargent, and only arrived this moment.”

“Clearly, cousin, they did it to amuse themselves.”

“I presume they did, cousin,” said I, gravely.

She looked at me a little vexed.

“Suppose we go and join them,” said I.

“If you please,” said she.

So we went.

Evidently our appearance so soon did not please the two ladies. However, my imperious wife desired it, as I thought, and meaning to oblige her, I could do no other. We all chatted together most amiably. But I took care, whenever Dew called me cousin, to cousin her back again. I was intoxicated with happiness, by perceiving she did not like being “cousined” at all.

Dinner arrived, and after it Dew requested Emma and me to sing once more. Poor Dunargent never appeared;—it seemed his love was by no means boyish—he could not yet bring himself to see Dew again without pain.

While Emma and Dew were singing together—the former imploring the latter to do so with her—dear Lady Dunargent whispered all her confidence to me.

“Dear Osman, it was all that visit to Hartleyborough. Though I suffered immensely, it opened my darling’s eyes. I would suffer it all over again, and ten times as much, to feel as happy as I do now. Yes, she planned it all; she read your last letter, and it made her quite unhappy. She knew Dew was of that nature, she would fly to her immediately, if she heard she wanted her. My darling Emma—oh! my dear Osman, the happiness, the luxury, the ecstasy of knowing your children are good! I now quite understand what made me love you so, and desire you should be my Emma’s husband—it was the goodness in your eyes. We can think of nothing but how the sweetest Dew, and those dear Miss Beaudeprés received, and behaved to us,—even after they knew the wickedness we intended. Dear Osman, it made me hate myself. And Emma is now feeling the same, and the only happiness and atonement she could think of, was to bring you together somehow. Dew is the least in the world too reserved. So Emma thought it best to take her by surprise, and if you

had not been surprised too, of course Dew would have been indignant and high. It was delightful to see my dear Emma's enthusiasm and anxiety;—only if Dew is naughty, dear darling, she cannot be naughty—but if she is, what we know she can be, how it will disappoint my child!"

"She shall not be disappointed, dear Lady Dun-argent," I replied. "Now that I know your dear Emma's wishes, I shall devote myself to fulfilling them."

And so I began to court—to make love to my wife. It gave me a thrill of infinite satisfaction to perceive that after all she was a human little thing, full of blushes and tremors, such as are common to mortals. Moreover, when I was a little intoxicated with love, and could not prevent my lips, my eyes, my every action expressing that I was intoxicated, I saw that she cast furtive glances at Emma, who doubtless caught them, and, like an angel, took every care to show how delighted she was if I made any progress in my wooing.

"I do wish I was sunburnt!" sighed that loveliest Emma, as she gazed at the little browned face of my Dew—more sunburnt than ever.

And Dew blushed and smiled. Perhaps she was a little too much embrowned; but I was so

anxious always to read the expression of her glorious eyes, so longing for the time when I might kiss those scarlet lips as often as I pleased, that it did not occur to me to see if she was fair or brown. Whenever she was so merciful as to say, "Osman," I sugared her with pet names.

One day, I was taken by Lady Dunargent to the Rectory, and, to my surprise, found Dunargent there. She had some difficulty in making him see me. Poor boy! I felt humiliated and sorrowful before him. Humiliated, that he, a mere boy, should have discovered and valued that which I had rejected and scorned. Sorrowful, that he was another victim to my insolent will.

As I walked home, the thought struck me that I might take advantage of his determination to stay away from Dunargent, while we were his mother's guests, to see if I could not persuade my imperious wife to return home with me. I was thinking how to serve him, not myself, when this idea occurred to me. My wife rarely gave me the chance of being alone with her, and truly she was right, as I took every advantage of such opportunities to accustom her to her husband's love; but we rode together every day alone. So, next day, I said, "I saw Dunargent at the Rectory yes-

terday,—he will not return while we are here.”

“Will he not?” she replied, faltering and abashed. A rush of innocent shame and dismay covered her with blushes. “I—I—must—that is—perhaps—had we not better go away?”

That “we” was to me the most blessed concession, though born of the shame that forbade her to insinuate she was the cause of Dunargent’s absence.

“I am most anxious to get home,” I replied; “summoned here at a minute’s notice, I left everything at sixes and sevens. Thorne recommends an immediate fall of timber before the season passes, and I was to have met the people yesterday, and signed the agreement. Also I have qualified as a magistrate, and no one was more surprised than myself to find I have a turn that way.”

“And the Assizes will be soon,” interrupted Dew, her face beaming.

“Yes, we are only dallying and amusing ourselves here, while we keep poor Dunargent——”

“Oh!” exclaimed Dew, wincing as if I had hit her with my riding-whip, “I will write to my aunts at once.”

The deuce take—no;—write to Ermine and

Anne! does she mean to go to them? It was necessary to take the initiative.

“My darling, I will send Pelham, to say we shall be at home to-morrow, and that the carriage is to meet us at the station.”

“And I will write to my——”

“Dew,” I exclaimed, hot anger and indignation flashing from my eyes, “you will not so insult me, you will come home with me.”

She looked timidly, imploringly at me, but said not a word.

“Thank you, darling,” said I, in answer to this look. But I thought it as well to keep up an injured and stilted dignity, to alarm her still; and, for fear of any change, I took her hand in mine, as I helped her from her horse, and went straight to Lady Dunargent.

“We think of going home to-morrow,” said I.

“If you permit us,” interrupted Dew, struggling faintly against her fate.

“Permit you! My darling child, I have been only wondering you remained so long; besides, I do so want Dun——”

The purity of Dew's heart could not permit any further mention of her boyish lover. She threw

herself into Lady Dunargent's arms, and kissed the name from her lips.

Lady Emma's delight at the success of her scheme was prettily dashed with her regret at losing Dew.

"I am beginning to love you so," she said.

"I told my aunts you and I would be friends," whispered my Dew, who expended upon Emma all those caresses that ought to have been mine.

"Ah! how right you were! But, Dew, Osman, you must do me a favour."

"Anything," we replied, for once united in voice and sentiment.

"You must give another ball; you must ask us and the Hartleyboroughs, and all the people that were staying with them; and you must elevate mamma on high, and show everybody how you love and like her."

"Osman shall do that for her, and I for you."

Dew never said much at a time, but when she did speak her look and action doubly endorsed her words. Emma kissed her with ardour.

And on the next day I set out with my wife. I paid a trifle, as I thought—a fortune, as I perceived he considered—to the guard, to give us a carriage to ourselves. In the midst of the most



devoted care and attention, I was careful not to let my wife see that I meant to presume on the concession she had made to come home with me. No ; in everything I gave her to understand I was her slave at present, asking for nothing from her but the exquisite pleasure of being her guardian and protector. She grew confiding and happy. She was not able to repress the luminous light that flooded her eyes, and the involuntary smile that hovered on her lips at every mention of home. I saw she was thirsting to be there, as the traveller in the desert longs to reach the cool well.

“Dew,” I said, drawing her close to me, as we neared our home, “would you like to hear of my mother? She hovered over my cradle with the appearance and words of an angel. My earliest recollections are of her constant whispered prayers over me, and the delight that suffused her face with a flush of joy when I did childish acts of goodness and charity, made me blend my love of her with a love of God that has since become inseparable. She had the most fragile health, and in the latter part of her life only exerted herself to please me. Conscious of an early death, she would counsel me as if I was already grown up ; and one of her favourite topics was the wife her darling was to

have, to console him for the loss of his mother. ' I should wish her to be a little creature like myself. She must have a good and noble heart, the thoughts of which must beam out lustroly from her eyes. Do not care so much for beauty of feature as expression, because that will present you with some fresh motive for loving her ; expression shames beauty when it is exalted. She must have pretty, coaxing ways, and amuse my Osman by her liveliness and little wilful whims. For she must have a will of her own, so that she may, by a quick and sudden burst of love, at a proper moment, submit in wifely fashion. Though she will by that get her way, for she will do it in so sweet and bewitching a fashion, you cannot choose but let her do her will. And she will know how far she may carry this if wise, only using her power to make you love her more. She must also be a wise companion for graver hours, so that my Osman may not be tempted to lead an idle, frivolous life. She must be of that mind, if you have a noble thought she must better it with one of her own. And if it should chance that a hasty word passes between you, be she right or be she wrong, let her come with tender, wistful eyes, and beg her fault may be forgotten. When you have found that wife, Os-

man, put this ring upon her finger, and I will, unseen, bless your vows.' Do you think, my Dew, that in spite of myself my mother's prayers and wishes are realised, and that for five years I have possessed this matchless little wife?"

"Osman," she murmured, "I cannot be happy if another suffers."

"Do you mean Emma?"

She sighed an assent.

"I cannot think she ever loved me, and by the way my heart throbs now, as you may feel, Dew, I know I never loved her."

"Those that say nothing feel more—she may be suffering."

"Nay, Dew, be juster to Emma. To love me, would be sin. By pardoning me, you take away even the reproach of this."

"If she was married, or would marry, I should be more content."

"Then give Dunargent that content." I knew this would sorely anger my Dew; and she pouted to tears. "Why may Emma do that which disgusts you in her brother? Why may she sin, and he not? You won't answer, Dew? She has asked me to be her brother—will you not be her sister? Be a true sister. If you are ever so ob-

durate, it cannot alter her position and mine.”

“I do not like to be happy at her expense,” she murmured.

“Thanks, Dew—thanks, my wife, that you admit so much. Surely you know, and you have been told, we should not have suited each other. Months ago, I recorded that, though I loved Emma, I adored you.”

Dew smiled.

“You will, some day, remember how you were forced to marry me.”

“But happily I was married to you—that is my greatest comfort now; that even if you do not love me, you will have to acknowledge me as your husband. I will woo you after any fashion for your love, Dew, and the love of the husband is superior to that of the lover.”

Seeing her still sad and reserved, I added,

“Do you know, Dew, that I never should have been persuaded to marry you, had it not been that my heart betrayed me. I could not bear to see our grandfather die in such misery. Though I repent it all my life, I said to myself, ‘I’ll do it to give him an easy death.’”

“That is what I also said to myself.”

“Did you, darling? I suppose that love of kin-

dred which Ermine says is so strong a trait in our family, made us both prefer to sacrifice ourselves, rather than pain our grandfather."

"There evidently was a sacrifice on one side," said Dew, with a little dash of bravery.

"None on the other," I exclaimed, glad to catch my dearest darling thing at an advantage.

"You know best," retorted she; "I nearly died of it."

I punished her for that, and would not let her go until I had put my mother's ring on her finger. I wanted her to kiss me, and let her off on hard pleading, on the promise she would do one other thing. In her hurry she promised.

"We are at the Hunting-lodge; how quickly the time has passed! Come with me to Ermine and Anne, and ask their blessing on this our second nuptials." A moment's pause, the carriage stopped.

"Dew," I said entreatingly, holding out my hand.

She gave me hers; the bell was rung, the door opened, and we went hand in hand up to Anne's sitting-room. We paused at the door, hearing voices.

"It is so strange, Anne, that we do not hear."

“Doubt nothing, Ermine; I am glad we do not hear.”

“But Dew may be wilful.”

“Then Osman will be loving.”

“Lady Emma perhaps repents giving him up.”

“Then Osman will set her right again.”

“It seems to me we shall be dead, Anne, before we see our darlings again.”

“Be patient. Some day they will walk in hand in hand, saying, ‘Bless us, Ermine and Anne. Bless us, Ermine and Anne.’”

And we stood before them. Then we went home blessed.

THE END.













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