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# BLACK SHEEP.

A Novel.

BY

EDMUND YATES,

AUTHOR OF "KISSING THE ROD," "THE FORLORN HOPE," ETC.

"Love is strong as death ; jealousy is cruel as the grave."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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## CONTENTS OF VOLUME II.



CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE SHADOW OF DEATH . . . . .	I
II. THE SHADOW LIGHTENED . . . . .	38
III. IN THE MUIDERSTRAAT . . . . .	64
IV. IDLESSE. . . . .	87
V. A DILEMMA . . . . .	106
VI. ON THE DEFENSIVE . . . . .	132
VII. CLEARED UP. . . . .	152
VIII. ONCE MORE TIDED OVER . . . . .	174
IX. THE AMERICAN LETTERS . . . . .	202
X. LOOKING OUT ON THE TAUNUS . . . . .	230
XI. MRS. IRETON P. BEMBRIDGE . . . . .	256
XII. ON THE BALCONY. . . . .	282
XIII. THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES . . . . .	303





# BLACK SHEEP.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

MR. CARRUTHERS was an early man; no danger of any skulking among the numerous hands which found employment on the Poynings estate. If the eye of the master be indeed the spur of the servant, Mr. Carruthers's dependents had quite enough of that stimulant. He made his rounds every morning at an hour which the in-door servants, who were obliged to have breakfast ready on his return, considered heathenish, and the out-door servants declared savoured of slave-driving. Mrs. Brookes knew that she should have no difficulty in procuring a private interview with her mistress on the morning following Mr. Dalrym-

ple's visit, as an hour and a half always elapsed between Mr. Carruthers's leaving the house and his wife's ringing for her maid. The old woman looked worn and weary and very old, as she peered from behind a red-cloth door, which shut off the corridor on which Mr. Carruthers's dressing-room opened from the grand gallery, and watched her master take his creaking way down the staircase, looking as he went more full of self-importance than usual, and treading more heavily, as if the weight of the Home-Office communication had got into his boots.

When he had disappeared, and she had heard the click of the lock as he opened the great door and went out into the pure fresh morning air, Mrs. Brookes emerged from behind the partition-door, and softly took the way to Mrs. Carruthers's bedroom. The outer door was slightly open, the heavy silken curtain within hung closely over the aperture. The old woman pushed it gently aside, and, noiselessly crossing the room, drew the window curtain, and let in sufficient light to allow her to see that Mrs. Carruthers was still sleeping. Her face, pale, and even in repose bearing a troubled

expression, was turned towards the old woman, who seated herself in an arm-chair beside the bed, and looked silently and sadly on the features, whose richest bloom and earliest sign of fading she had so faithfully watched.

“How am I to tell her?” she thought. “How am I to make her see what I see, suspect what I suspect? and yet she must know all, for the least imprudence, a moment’s forgetfulness, would ruin him. How am I to tell her?”

The silver bell of a little French clock on the chimney-piece rang out the hour melodiously, but its warning struck upon the old woman’s ear menacingly. There was much to do, and little time to do it in; she must not hesitate longer. So she laid her withered, blanched old hand upon the polished, ivory-white fingers of the sleeper, lying with the purposelessness of deep sleep upon the coverlet, and addressed her as she had been used to do in her girlhood, and her early desolate widowhood, when her humble friend had been well-nigh her only one.

“My dear,” she said, “my dear.” Mrs. Carruthers’s hand twitched in her light grasp; she

turned her head away with a troubled sigh, but yet did not wake. The old woman spoke again :  
“ My dear, I have something to say to you.”

Then Mrs. Carruthers awoke fully, and to an instantaneous comprehension that something was wrong. All her fears, all her suspicions of the day before, returned to her mind in one flash of apprehension, and she sat up white and breathless.

“ What is it, Ellen? Has he found out? Does he know?”

“ Who? What do you mean?”

“ Mr. Carruthers. Does he know George was here?”

“ God forbid!” said the old woman, in a trembling tone.

She felt the task she had before her almost beyond her power of execution. But her mistress's question, her instinctive fear, had given her a little help.

“ No,” she said, “ he knows nothing, and God send he may neither know nor suspect anything about our dear boy! but you must be quiet now and listen to me, for I must have said my say before Dixon comes—she must not find me here.”

“Why *are* you here?” asked Mrs. Carruthers, who had sat up in bed, and was now looking at the old woman, with a face which had no more trace of colour than the pillow from which it had just been raised. “Tell me, Ellen; do not keep me in suspense. Is anything wrong about George? It must concern *him*, whatever it is.”

“My dear,” began Mrs. Brookes—and now she held the slender fingers tightly in her withered palm—“I fear there is something very wrong with George.”

“Is he—is he dead?” asked the mother, in a faint voice.

“No, no; he is well and safe, and far away from this, I hope and trust.”

Mrs. Carruthers made no answer, but she gazed at her old friend with irresistible, pitiful entreaty. Mrs. Brookes answered the dumb appeal.

“Yes, my dear, I’ll tell you all. I must, for his sake. Do you know what was the business that brought that strange gentleman here, he that went out with master, and dined here last night? No, you don’t. I thought not. Thank God, you have got no hint of it from any one but me.”

“Go on, go on,” said Mrs. Carruthers, in a yet fainter voice.

“Do you remember, when George was here in February, you gave him money to buy a coat?”

“Yes,” Mrs. Carruthers rather sighed than said.

“He bought one at Evans’s, and he was remarked by the old man, who would know him again if he saw him. The business on which the strange gentleman came to master was to get him to help, as a magistrate, in finding the person who bought that coat at Evans’s, Amherst.”

“But why? What had he done? How was the coat known?”

“My dear,” said Mrs. Brookes—and now she laid one arm gently round her mistress’s shoulder as she leaned against the pillows—“the wearer of that coat is suspected of having murdered a man, whose body was found by the river-side in London the other day.”

“My God!” moaned the mother, and a hue as of death overspread her features.

“My dear, he didn’t do it. I’m sure he didn’t

do it. I would stake my soul upon it. It is some dreadful mistake. Keep up until I have done, for God's sake, and George's sake, keep up—remember there is no danger unless you lose courage and give them a hint of anything. Be sure we shall find he has sold the coat to some one else, and that some one has done this dreadful thing. But you must keep up—here, let me bathe your face and hands while I am talking, and then I'll go away, and, when Dixon comes, you must just say you are not well, and don't mean to get up to breakfast, and then I shall have an excuse for coming to you. There! you are better now, I am sure. Yes, yes; don't try to speak; I'll tell you without asking," she went on, in a rapid whisper. "The strange gentleman and master saw Evans, and he told them when he sold the coat, and the sort of person he sold it to; but Gibson and Thomas say he could not have told them distinct, for they heard the strange gentleman saying to master, in the carriage, that the description was of no use. And I am certain sure that there is not the least suspicion that he has ever been in Amherst since he bought the coat."

“ I don’t understand,” stammered Mrs. Carruthers. “ When—when did this happen ?”

“ A few days ago : it’s all in the papers.”

Mrs. Carruthers groaned.

“ Nothing about George, but about finding the body and the coat. It is all here.” The old woman took a tightly folded newspaper from her pocket. The light was too dim for her to read its contents to her mistress, who was wholly incapable of reading them herself. Mrs. Brookes, paper in hand, was going to the window, to withdraw the curtain completely, when she paused.

“ No,” she said ; “ Dixon will be here too soon. Better that you should ring for her at once, and send her for me. Can you do this, my dear ? keeping yourself up by remembering that this is only some dreadful mistake, and that George never did it—no, no more than you did. Can you let me go away for a few minutes, and then come back to you ? Remember, we cannot be too careful, for his sake ; and if Dixon found me here at an unusual hour, the servants would know there is some secret or another between us.”

“ I can bear anything—I can do anything



you tell me," was Mrs. Carruthers's answer, in a whisper.

"Well then, first lie down, and I will close the curtains and leave you. When I have had time to get to my room, ring for Dixon. Tell her you are ill. When she lets the light in she will see that for herself, and desire her to send me to you."

In another minute the room was once more in darkness, and Mrs. Brookes went down the grand staircase, in order to avoid meeting any of the servants, crossed the hall, and gained her own apartment without being observed. A short time, but long to her impatience, had elapsed, when Mrs. Carruthers's maid knocked at the door, and having received permission to enter, came in with an important face. She delivered the message which Mrs. Brookes was expecting, and added that she had never seen her lady look so ill in all her born days.

"Looks more like a corpse, I do assure you, than like the lady as I undressed last night, and circles under her eyes, dreadful. I only hope it an't typhus, for I'm dreadful nervous, not being

used to sickness, which indeed I never engaged for. But, if you please, Mrs. Brookes, you was to go to her immediate, and I'm to let Miss Carruthers know as she's to make tea this morning for master, all to their two selves, which he won't like it, I dare say."

Then the talkative damsel went her way to Miss Carruthers's room, and Mrs. Brookes hurried to that of her unhappy mistress. She had again raised herself in the bed, and was looking eagerly towards the door, with hollow haggard eyes, and lips ashy pale, whose trembling she in vain tried to control.

"Lock both doors, Ellen," she said, "and tell me all. Give me the paper; I can read it—I can indeed."

She took it, and read it steadily through—read it with the same horrible emotion, a thousand times intensified, which had agitated the faithful servant a few hours previously. Standing by the bedside, Mrs. Brookes gazed upon her pale, convulsed features, as she read, and ever, as she saw the increasing agony which they betrayed, she murmured in accents of earnest entreaty :

“Don’t, my dear, for God’s sake, don’t, not for a moment, don’t you believe it. He sold the coat, depend upon it. It looks very bad, very black and bad, but you may be sure there’s no truth in it. He sold the coat.”

She spoke to deaf ears. When Mrs. Carruthers had read the last line of the account of the inquest on the body of the unknown man, the paper dropped from her hand; she turned upon the old nurse a face which, from that moment, she never had the power to forget, and said:

“He wore it—I saw it on him on Friday,” and the next moment slipped down among the pillows, and lay as insensible as a stone.

The old woman gave no alarm, called for no assistance, but silently and steadily applied herself to recalling Mrs. Carruthers to consciousness. She had no fear of interruption. Mr. Carruthers invariably went direct to the breakfast-room on returning from his morning tour of inspection, and Clare would not visit Mrs. Carruthers in her own apartment unasked. So Mrs. Brookes set the windows and doors wide open, and let the sweet morning air fan the insensible face, while

she applied all the remedies at hand. At length Mrs. Carruthers sighed deeply, opened her eyes, and raised her hand to her forehead, where it came in contact with the wet hair.

“Hush, my dear,” said Mrs. Brookes, as she made an almost inarticulate attempt to speak. “Do not try to say anything yet. Lie quite still, until you are better.”

Mrs. Carruthers closed her eyes again and kept silent. When, after an interval, she began to look more life-like, the old woman said, softly :

“You must not give way again like this, for George’s sake. I don’t care about his wearing the coat. I know it looks bad, but it is a mistake, I am quite sure. Don’t I know the boy as well as you do, and maybe better, and don’t I know his tender heart, with all his wildness, and that he never shed a fellow-creature’s blood in anger, or for any other reason. But it’s plain he is suspected—not he, for they don’t know him, thank God, but the man that wore the coat, and we must warn him, and keep it from master. Master would go mad, I think, if anything like suspicion or disgrace came of Master George, more than the disgrace he thinks

the poor boy's goings on already. You must keep steady and composed, my dear, and you must write to him. Are you listening to me? Do you understand me?" asked the old woman, anxiously, for Mrs. Carruthers's eyes were wild and wandering, and her hand twitched convulsively in her grasp.

"Yes, yes," she murmured, "but I tell you, Ellen, he wore the coat—my boy wore the coat."

"And *I* tell you, I don't care whether he wore the coat or not," repeated Mrs. Brookes, emphatically. "He can explain that, no doubt of it; but he must be kept out of trouble, and you must be kept out of trouble, and the only way to do that, is to let him know what brought the strange gentleman to Poynings, and what he and master found out. Remember, he never did this thing, but, my dear, he has been in bad hands lately, you know that; for haven't you suffered in getting him out of them, and I don't say but that he may be mixed up with them that did. I'm afraid there can't be any doubt of that, and he must be warned. Try and think of what he told you about himself, not only just now, but when he came here before, and you will see some light, I am sure."

But Mrs. Carruthers could not think of anything, could not remember anything, could see no light. A deadly horrible conviction had seized upon her, iron fingers clutched her heart, a faint sickening terror held her captive, in body and spirit; and as the old woman gazed at her, and found her incapable of answering, the fear that her mistress was dying then and there before her eyes took possession of her. She folded up the newspaper which had fallen from Mrs. Carruthers's hand, upon the bed, replaced it in her pocket, and rang the bell for Dixon.

“My mistress is very ill,” she said, when Dixon entered the room. “You had better go and find master, and send him here. Tell him to send for Dr. Munns at once.”

Dixon gave a frightened, sympathising glance at the figure on the bed, over which the old woman was bending with such kindly solicitude, and then departed on her errand. She found Mr. Carruthers still in the breakfast-room. He was seated at the table, and held in his hand a newspaper, from which he had evidently been reading, when Dixon knocked at the door; for he was holding it slightly

aside, and poising his gold eye-glass in the other hand, when the woman entered. Mr. Carruthers was unaccustomed to being disturbed, and he did not like it, so that it was in a tone of some impatience that he said :

“ Well, Dixon, what do you want ? ”

“ If you please, sir, ” replied Dixon, hesitatingly, “ my mistress is not well. ”

“ So I hear, ” returned her master ; “ she sent word she did not mean to appear at breakfast. ” He said it rather huffily, for not to appear at breakfast was, in Mr. Carruthers’s eyes, not to have a well-regulated mind, and not to have a well-regulated mind was very lamentable and shocking indeed.

“ Yes, sir, ” Dixon went on, “ but I’m afraid she’s very ill indeed. She has been fainting this long time, sir, and Mrs. Brookes can’t bring her to at all. She sent me to ask you to send for Dr. Munns at once, and will you have the goodness to step up and see my mistress, sir ? ”

“ God bless my soul, ” said Mr. Carruthers, pettishly, but rising as he spoke, and pushing his chair away. “ This is very strange ; she has been

exposing herself to cold, I suppose. Yes, yes, go on and tell Mrs. Brookes I am coming, as soon as I send Gibson for Dr. Munns."

Dixon left the room, and Mr. Carruthers rang the bell, and desired that the coachman should attend him immediately. When Dixon had entered the breakfast-room, Clare Carruthers had been standing by the window, looking out on the garden, her back turned towards her uncle. She had not looked round once during the colloquy between her uncle and his wife's maid, but had remained quite motionless. Now Mr. Carruthers addressed her.

"Clare," he said, "you had better go to Mrs. Carruthers." But his niece was no longer in the room; she had softly opened the French window, and passed into the flower-garden, carrying among the sweet, opening flowers of the early summer, and into the serene air, a face which might have vied in its rigid terror with the face up-stairs. When Mr. Carruthers had come in that morning, and joined Clare in the pretty breakfast-room, he was in an unusually pleasant mood, and had greeted his niece with uncommon kindness. He had found



everything in good order out of doors. No advantage had been taken of his absence to neglect the inexorable sweepings and rollings, the clippings and trimmings, the gardening and grooming. So Mr. Carruthers was in good humour in consequence, and also because he was still nourishing the secret sense of his own importance, which had sprung up in his magisterial breast under the flattering influence of Mr. Dalrymple's visit. So when he saw Clare seated before the breakfast equipage, looking in her simple, pretty morning dress as fair and bright as the morning itself, and when he received an intimation that he was not to expect to see his wife at breakfast, he recalled the resolution he had made last night, and determined to broach the subject of Mr. Dalrymple's visit to his niece without delay.

A pile of letters and newspapers lay on a salver beside Mr. Carruthers's plate, but he did not attend to them until he had made a very respectable beginning in the way of breakfast. He talked to Clare in a pleasant tone, and presently asked her if she had been looking at the London papers dur-

ing the last few days. Clare replied that she seldom read anything beyond the deaths, births, and marriages, and an occasional leader, and had not read even so much while she had been at the Sycamores.

“Why do you ask, uncle?” she said. “Is there any particular news?”

“Why, yes, there is,” replied Mr. Carruthers, pompously. “There is a matter attracting public attention just now in which I am, strange to say, a good deal interested—in which responsibility has been laid on me, indeed, in a way which, though flattering—very flattering indeed—is, at the same time, embarrassing.”

Mr. Carruthers became more and more pompous with every word he spoke. Clare could not repress a disrespectful notion that he bore an absurd resemblance to the turkey-cock, whose struttings and gobblings had often amused her in the poultry-yard, as he mouthed his words and moved his chin about in his stiff and spotless cravat. His niece was rather surprised by the matter of his discourse, as she was not accustomed to associate the idea of importance to society at large with Mr. Carruthers of Poy-

ings, and cherished a rather settled conviction that, mighty potentate as he was within the handsome gates of Poynings, the world outside wagged very independently of him. She looked up at him with an expression of interest and also of surprise, but fortunately she did not give utterance to the latter and certainly predominant sentiment.

“The fact is,” said Mr. Carruthers, “a murder has been committed in London under very peculiar circumstances. It is a most mysterious affair, and the only solution of the mystery hitherto suggested is that the motive is political.”

He paused, cleared his throat, once more settled his chin comfortably, and went on, while Clare listened, wondering more and more how such a matter could affect her uncle. She was a gentle-hearted girl, but not in the least silly, and quite free from any sort of affectation; so she expressed no horror or emotion at the mere abstract idea of the murder, as a more young-ladyish young lady would have done.

“Yes, uncle?” she said, simply, as he paused.

Mr. Carruthers continued :

“The murdered man was found by the river-

side, stabbed, and robbed of whatever money and jewelry he had possessed. He was a good-looking man, young, and evidently a foreigner; but there were no means of identifying the body, and the inquest was adjourned—in fact, is still adjourned.”

“What an awful death to come by, in a strange country!” said Clare, solemnly. “How dreadful to think that his friends and relatives will perhaps never know his fate! But how did they know the poor creature was a foreigner, uncle?”

“By his dress, my dear. It appears he had on a fur-lined coat, with a hood—quite a foreign article of dress; and the only person at the inquest able to throw any light on the crime was a waiter at an eating-house in the Strand, who said that the murdered man had dined there on a certain evening—last Thursday, I believe—and had worn the fur coat, and spoken in a peculiar squeaky voice. The waiter felt sure he was not an Englishman, though he spoke good English. So the inquest was adjourned in order to get more evidence, if possible, as to the identity of the murdered man, and also that of the last person who had been seen

in his company. And this brings me to the matter in which I am interested."

Clare watched her uncle with astonishment as he rose from his chair and planted himself upon the hearth-rug before the fireplace, now adorned with its summer ornaments of plants and flowers, and draped in muslin. Taking up the familiar British attitude, and looking, if possible, more than ever pompous, Mr. Carruthers proceeded :

"You will be surprised to learn, Clare, that the visit of the gentleman who came here yesterday, and with whom I went out, had reference to this murder."

"How, uncle?" exclaimed Clare. "What on earth have you, or has any one here, to do with it?"

"Wait until I have done, and you will see," said Mr. Carruthers in a tone of stately rebuke. "The last person seen in the company of the man afterwards found murdered, and who dined with him at the tavern, wore a coat which the waiter who recognised the body had chanced to notice particularly. The appearance of this person the man failed in describing with much distinctness ;

but he was quite positive about the coat, which he had taken from the man and hung up on a peg with his own hands. And now, Clare, I am coming to the strangest part of this strange story."

The girl listened with interest indeed, and with attention, but still wondering how her uncle could be involved in the matter, and perhaps feeling a little impatient at the slowness with which, in his self-importance, he told the story.

"I was much surprised," continued Mr. Carruthers, "to find in the gentleman who came here yesterday, and whose name was Dalrymple, an emissary from the Home Office, intrusted by Lord Wolstenholme with a special mission to me"—impossible to describe the pomposity of Mr. Carruthers's expression and utterance at this point—"to me. He came to request me to assist him in investigating this most intricate and important case. It is not a mere police case, you must understand, my dear. The probability is that the murdered man is a political refugee, and that the crime has been perpetrated"—Mr. Carruthers brought out the word with indescribable relish—

“by a member of one of the secret societies, in revenge for the defection of the victim, or in apprehension of his betrayal of the cause.”

“What cause, uncle?” asked Clare innocently. She was not of a sensational turn of mind, had no fancy for horrors as horrors, and was getting a little tired of her uncle’s story.

“God knows, my dear—some of their liberty, fraternity, and equality nonsense, I suppose. At all events, this is the supposition; and to ask my aid in investigating the only clue in the possession of the government was the object of Mr. Dalrymple’s visit yesterday. The man who was seen in the company of the murdered man by the waiter at the tavern, and who went away with him, wore a coat made by Evans of Amherst. You know him, Clare—the old man who does so much of our work here. I went to his shop with Mr. Dalrymple, and we found out all about the coat. He remembered it exactly, by the description; and told us when he had made it (two years ago), and when he had sold it (six weeks ago), to a person who paid for it with a ten-pound note with the Post-office stamp upon it. The old man is not

very bright, however; for though he remembered the circumstance, and found the date in his day-book, he could not give anything like a clear description of the man who had bought the coat. He could only tell us, in general terms, that he would certainly know him again if he should see him; but he talked about a rather tall young man, neither stout nor thin, neither ugly nor handsome, dark-eyed and dark-haired,—in short, the kind of description which describes nothing. We came away as wise as we went, except in the matter of the date of the purchase of the coat. That does not help much towards the detection of the murderer, as a coat may change hands many times in six weeks, if it has been originally bought by a dubious person. The thing would have been to establish a likeness between the man described by Evans as the purchaser of the coat, and the man described by the waiter as the wearer of the coat at the tavern. But both descriptions are very vague.”

“What was the coat like?” asked Clare in a strange, deliberate tone.

“It was a blue Witney overcoat, with a label



inside the collar bearing Evans's name. The waiter at the tavern where the murdered man dined had read the name, and remembered it. This led to their sending to me; and my being known to the authorities as a very active magistrate"—here Mr. Carruthers swelled and pouted with importance—"they naturally communicated with me. The question is now, how I am to justify the very flattering confidence which Lord Wolstenholme has placed in me? It is a difficult question, and I have been considering it maturely. Mr. Dalrymple seems to think the clue quite lost. But I am not disposed to let it rest; I am determined to set every possible engine at work to discover whether the description given by the waiter and that given by Evans tally with one another."

"You said the inquest was adjourned, I think," said Clare.

"Yes, until to-day; but Mr. Dalrymple will not have learned anything. There will be an open verdict"—here Mr. Carruthers condescendingly explained to his niece the meaning of the term—"and the affair will be left to be unravelled in time. I am anxious to do all I can towards

that end ; it is a duty I owe to society, to Lord Wolstenholme, and to myself.”

Clare had risen from her chair, and approached the window. Her uncle could not see her face, as he resumed his seat at the breakfast-table, and opened his letters in his usual deliberate and dignified manner. Being letters addressed to Mr. Carruthers of Poynings, they were, of course, important ; but if they had not had that paramount claim to consideration, the communications in question might have been deemed dull and trivial. Whatever their nature, Clare Carruthers turned her head from the window, and furtively watched her uncle during their perusal. He read them with uplifted eyebrows and much use of his gold-rimmed eye-glasses, as his habit was, but then laid them down without comment, and took up a newspaper.

“ I dare say we shall find something about the business in this,” he said, addressing his niece, but without turning his head in her direction. “ Ah, I thought so ; here it is : ‘ Mysterious circumstance ; extraordinary supineness and stupidity of the police ; no one arrested on suspicion ; better arrest

the wrong man, and tranquillise the public mind, than arrest no one at all.' I'm not convinced by that reasoning, I must say. What!—no reason for regarding the murder as a political assassination? Listen to this, Clare;” and he read aloud, while she stood by the window, her back turned towards him, and listened intently, greedily, with a terrible fear and sickness at her heart:

“ ‘ *The supposition that this atrocious crime has been committed from political motives has, in our opinion, no foundation in probability, and derives very little support from common sense. The appearance of the body, the fineness of the linen, the expensive quality of the attire, the torn condition of the breast and sleeves of the shirt, which seems plainly to indicate that studs, probably of value, had been wrenched violently out; the extreme improbability that an individual, so handsomely dressed as the murdered man, would have been out without money in his pocket,—all indicate robbery, at least; and if perhaps more than robbery, certainly not less, to have been the motive of the crime. An absurd theory has been founded upon the peculiarity in the dress of the victim, and upon a remark made by the only witness*

*at the inquest about his tone of voice. Nothing is more likely, in our opinion, than a complete miscarriage of justice in this atrocious case. Suspicion has been arbitrarily directed in one channel, and the result will be, probably, the total neglect of other and more likely ones. While the political murderer is being theorised about and "wanted," the more ordinary criminal—the ruffian who kills for gain, and not for patriotism or principle—is as likely as not to escape comfortably, and enjoy his swag in some pleasant, unsuspected, and undisturbed retreat.*

“Now, I call this most unjustifiable,” said Mr. Carruthers in a tone of dignified remonstrance and indignation. “Really, the liberty of the press is going quite too far. The Government are convinced that the murder is political, and I can’t see—”

It was at this point of Mr. Carruthers’s harangue that he was interrupted by his wife’s maid. When he again looked for Clare she had disappeared, nor did he or any of the frightened and agitated household at Poynings see the young lady again for many hours. Dr. Munns arrived, and found Mr. Carruthers considerably distressed at the

condition in which Mrs. Carruthers was, also a little annoyed at that lady's want of consideration in being ill, and unable to refrain from hinting, with much reserve and dignity of manner, that he was at present more than usually engaged in business of the last importance, which rendered it peculiarly unfortunate that he should have any additional care imposed on him—public importance, he took care to explain, and no less onerous than mysterious. But the worthy gentleman's pride and pompousness were soon snubbed by the extreme gravity of Dr. Munns's manner, as he answered his inquiries and put questions in his turn relative to his patient. The doctor was both alarmed and puzzled by Mrs. Carruthers's state. He told her husband she was very seriously ill: he feared brain-fever had already set in. Could Mr. Carruthers account for the seizure in any way? No, Mr. Carruthers could not; neither could the house-keeper, nor Mrs. Carruthers's maid both of whom were closely questioned, as having more and more frequent access to that lady's presence than any other members of the household.

Had Mrs. Carruthers heard any distressing in-

telligence? had she received a shock of any kind? the doctor inquired. Mr. Carruthers appeared to sustain one from the question. Of course not; certainly not; nothing of the kind, he replied, with some unrepressed irritation of manner, and secretly regarded the bare suggestion of such a possibility as almost indecent. Mrs. Carruthers of Poynings receive shocks indeed! The doctor, who knew and disregarded his peculiarities, calmly pursued his inquiries undeterred by Mr. Carruthers's demeanour; and finding that nothing particular had happened, acknowledged that, there being no apparent cause to which so sudden and serious an illness could be attributed, he was the more uneasy as to its probable result. Then Mr. Carruthers caught the infection of his alarm, and all the best side of his character, all the real love and appreciation of his wife, ordinarily overlaid by his egotism, came out in full force, and the staunchest stickler for domestic fealty could not have demanded greater solicitude than the frightened husband exhibited.

In a wonderfully short space of time the house assumed the appearance which illness always gives.

The servants went about their work whispering, and the sitting-rooms were silent and deserted. No one bestowed a thought on Clare. The attendants on the suffering woman, busily engaged in carrying out the orders given them by Dr. Munns, who remained for several hours with his patient; the alarmed husband, who wandered about disconsolately between his own library and his wife's room,—all forgot the girl's existence. It was very late—within a few minutes of the usual dinner-hour (an inflexible period at Poynings)—when Clare Carruthers crossed the flower-garden, entered the house by the window through which she had left it, and stole gently up-stairs to her own room. She threw her hat and shawl upon her bed, and went to her dressing-table. There she stood for some minutes before the glass, holding her disordered hair back with her hands—there were bits of grass and fragments of leaves in it, as though she had been lying with her fair head prone upon the ground—and gazing upon her young misery-stricken face. White about the full pure lips, where the rich blood ordinarily glowed; purple about the long fair eyelids and

the blushing cheeks, heavy-eyed,—the girl was piteous to see, and she knew it. The hours that had passed over since she left her uncle's presence in the morning had been laden with horror, with dread, with such anguish as had never in its lightest form touched her young spirit before; and she trembled as she marked the ravages they had made in her face.

“What shall I do?” she murmured, as though questioning her own forlorn image in the glass. “What shall I do? I dare not stay away from dinner, and what will they say when they see my face?”

She fastened up her hair, and bathed her face with cold water; then returned to the glass to look at it again; but the pallor was still upon the lips, the discoloration was still about the heavy eyelids. As she stood despairingly before the dressing-table, her maid came to her.

“The dinner-bell will not ring, ma'am,” said the girl. “Mr. Carruthers is afraid of the noise for Mrs. Carruthers.”

“Ay,” said Clare, listlessly, still looking at the disfigured image in the glass. “How is she?”



“ No better, ma’am ; very bad indeed, I believe. But don’t take on so, Miss Clare,” her maid went on, affectionately. “ She is not so bad as they say, perhaps ; and, at all events, you’ll knock yourself up, and be no comfort to Mr. Carruthers.”

A light flashed upon Clare. She had only to keep silence, and no one would find her out ; her tears, her anguish, would be imputed to her share of the family trouble. Her maid, who would naturally have noticed her appearance immediately, expressed no surprise. Mrs. Carruthers was very ill, then. Something new had occurred since the morning, when there had been no hint of anything serious in her indisposition. The maid evidently believed her mistress acquainted with all that had occurred. She had only to keep quiet, and nothing would betray her ignorance. So she allowed the girl to talk, while she made some trifling change in her dress, and soon learned all the particulars of Mrs. Carruthers’s illness, and the doctor’s visit, of her uncle’s alarm, and Mrs. Brookes’s devoted attendance on her mistress. Then Clare, trembling, though relieved of her

immediate apprehension of discovery, went downstairs to join her uncle at their dreary dinner. He made no comment upon the girl's appearance, and, indeed, hardly spoke. The few words of sympathy which Clare ventured to say were briefly answered, and as soon as possible he left the dining-room. Clare sat by the table for a while, with her face buried in her hands, thinking, suffering, but not weeping. She had no more tears to-day to shed.

Presently she went to Mrs. Carruthers's room, and sat down on a chair behind the door, abstracted and silent. In the large dimly-lighted room she was hardly seen by the watchers. She saw her uncle come in, and stand forlornly by the bed; then the doctor came, and several figures moved about silently and went away, and then there was no one but Mrs. Brookes sitting still as a statue beside the sufferer, who lay in a state of stupor. How long she had been in the room before the old woman perceived her, Clare did not know; but she felt Mrs. Brookes bending over her, and taking her hand, before she knew she had moved from the bedside.

“ Pray go away and lie down, Miss Carruthers,” the old woman said, half tenderly, half severely. “ You can do no good here—no one can do any good here yet—and you will be ill yourself. We can’t do with more trouble in the house, and crying your eyes out of your head, as you’ve been doing, won’t help any one, my dear. I will send you word how she is the first thing in the morning.”

The old woman raised the girl by a gentle impulse, as she spoke, and she went meekly away, Mrs. Brookes closing the door behind her with an unspoken reflection on the uselessness of girls, who, whenever anything is the matter, can do nothing but cry.

The night gradually fell upon Poynings—the soft, sweet, early summer night. It crept into the sick-room, and overshadowed the still form upon the bed—the form whose stillness was to be succeeded by the fierce unrest, the torturing vague effort of fever ; it closed over the stern pompous master of Poynings, wakeful and sorely troubled. It darkened the pretty chamber, decorated with a thousand girlish treasures and simple adornments,

in which Clare Carruthers was striving sorely with the first fierce trial of her prosperous young life. When it was at its darkest and deepest, the girl's swollen weary eyelids closed, conquered by the irresistible mighty benefactor of the young who suffer. Then, if any eye could have pierced the darkness and looked at her as she lay sleeping, the stamp of a great fear upon her face even in her slumber, and her breast shaken by frequent heavy sighs, it would have been seen that one hand was hidden under the pillow, and the fair cheek pressed tightly down upon it, for better security. That hand was closed upon three letters, severally addressed to the advertising department of three of the daily newspapers. The contents, which were uniform, had cost the girl hours of anxious and agonising thoughts. They were very simple, and were as follows, accompanied by the the sum which she supposed their insertion would cost, very liberally estimated :

“ The gentleman who showed a lady a sprig of myrtle on last Saturday is earnestly entreated by her not to revisit the place where he met her. He will inevitably be recognised.”

“ God forgive me if I am doing wrong in this !” Clare Carruthers had said with her last waking consciousness. “ God forgive me, but I must save him if I can !”

## CHAPTER II.

### THE SHADOW LIGHTENED.

LONG before Mr. Carruthers, impelled by the irresistible force of routine, which not all the concern, and even alarm, occasioned him by Mrs. Carruthers's condition could subdue, had issued forth upon his daily tour of inspection, Clare's letters had been safely posted by her own hand at the village. She had slept but little on the night which had fallen on her first experience of fear and grief; and waking at dawn, oppressed by a heavy sense of some dimly-understood calamity, she had recalled it all in a moment; and having hurriedly dressed herself, she went down to the breakfast-room, and let herself out through the window, accompanied by her dog, whose joyous gambols in the bright morning air she did not notice. That morning air struck chill to the weary limbs and aching head of the sad, bewildered girl

as she pursued her rapid way through the shrubbery, brushing the dew from the branches of the trees as she passed hurriedly along, heart-sick, and yet wandering and confused in her thoughts.

Her walk was quite solitary and uninterrupted. She slid the letters into a convenient slit of a window-shutter of the general-shop, to which the dignity and emoluments of a post-office were attached; glanced up and down the little street, listened to certain desultory sounds which spoke of the commencement of activity in adjacent stable-yards, and to the barking with which some vagabond dogs of her acquaintance greeted her and Cæsar; satisfied herself that she was unobserved, and then retraced her steps as rapidly as possible. The large white-faced clock over the stables at Poynings — an unimpeachable instrument, never known to gain or lose within the memory of man — was striking six as Clare Carruthers carefully replaced the bolt of the breakfast-room window, and crept up-stairs again, with a faint flutter of satisfaction that her errand had been safely accomplished contending with the dreariness and dread which filled her heart. She put away her hat and

cloak, changed her dress, which was wet with the dew, and sat down by the door of the room to listen for the first stir of life in the house.

Soon she heard her uncle's step, lighter, less creaky than usual, and went out to meet him. He did not show any surprise on seeing her so early, and the expression of his face told her in a moment that he had no good news of the invalid to communicate.

“Brookes says she has had a very bad night,” he said gravely. “I am going to send for Munns at once, and to telegraph to London for more advice.” Then he went on in a state of subdued creak; and Clare, in increased bewilderment and misery, went to Mrs. Carruthers's room, where she found the reign of dangerous illness seriously inaugurated.

Doctor Munns came, and early in the afternoon a grave and polite gentleman arrived from London, who was very affable, but rather reserved, and who was also guilty of the unaccountable bad taste of suggesting a shock in connection with Mrs. Carruthers's illness. He also was emphatically corrected by Mr. Carruthers, but not with



the same harshness which had marked that gentleman's reception of Dr. Munns's suggestion. The grave gentleman from London made but little addition to Dr. Munns's treatment, declined to commit himself to any decided opinion on the case, and went away, leaving Mr. Carruthers with a sensation of helplessness and vague injury, to say nothing of downright misery and alarm, to which the Grand Lama was entirely unaccustomed.

Before the London physician made his appearance Clare and her uncle had met at breakfast, and she had learned all there was to be known on the subject which had taken entire and terrible possession of her mind. It seemed to Clare now that she had no power of thinking of anything else, that it was quite impossible that only yesterday morning she was a careless unconscious girl musing over a romantic incident in her life, speculating vaguely upon the possibility of any result accruing from it in the future, and feeling as far removed from the crimes and dangers of life as if they had no existence. Now she took her place opposite her uncle with a face whose pallor and expression of deep-seated trouble even that unob-

servant and self-engrossed potentate could not fail to notice. He did observe the alteration in Clare's looks, and was not altogether displeased by it. It argued deep solicitude for Mrs. Carruthers of Poynings—an extremely proper sentiment; so Mr. Carruthers consoled his niece after his stately fashion, acknowledging, at the same time, the unaccountable vagaries of fever, and assuring Clare that there was nothing infectious in the case—a subject on which it had never occurred to the girl to feel any uneasiness. Not so with Mr. Carruthers, who had a very great dread of illness of every kind, and a superstitious reverence for the medical art. The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the post, and Mr. Carruthers's attention was again drawn to the subject of the murder and the possibility of promoting his own importance in connection with it. Clare's pale face turned paler as her uncle took up the first letter of the number presented to him by Thomas (footman), that official looking peculiarly intelligent on the occasion; for the letter bore the magic inscription, "On Her Majesty's Service," and the seal of the Home Office.

Mr. Carruthers took some time to read the letter, even with the aid of the gold eye-glasses. It came from Mr. Dalrymple, who wrote an abnormally bad hand even for a government official—a circumstance which Mr. Carruthers mentally combined with the beard of which he retained an indignant remembrance as a sign of the degeneracy of the age. The irrepressible pompousness of the man showed itself even in this crisis of affairs, as he perused the document, and laid it down upon the table under the hand armed with the eye-glasses.

Clare waited breathless.

“Hem! my dear,” he began; “this letter is connected with the matter I mentioned to you yesterday. You remember, I dare say, about the murder, and the inquiry I was requested by the government to make at Amherst.”

O yes, Clare remembered; she had been very much interested. Had anything since transpired?

“Nothing of any moment. This letter is from Mr. Dalrymple—the gentleman who came here, as I told you, from Lord Wolstenholme.”

Clare, still breathless, bowed. There was no use in trying to accelerate Mr. Carruthers's speech. He was not to be hurried.

“He writes to me that the Home Secretary regrets very much the failure of our inquiries at Amherst, in eliciting any information concerning the only person on whom suspicion has as yet alighted. He informs me that, as I expected, and as I explained to you yesterday”—Mr. Carruthers paused condescendingly for Clare's silent gesture of assent—“the jury at the coroner's inquest (it closed yesterday) have returned an open verdict—wilful murder against some person or persons unknown; and the police have been instructed to use all possible vigilance to bring the criminal to light.”

“Have they learned anything further about the dead man?” asked Clare, with a timid look (half of anxiety, half of avoidance) towards the newspaper, which Mr. Carruthers had not yet opened, and which no member of the family would have ventured to touch unsanctioned by the previous perusal of its august head.

“About the murdered man?—no, I believe

not. Mr. Dalrymple further informs me that the fur-lined coat, and all the other less remarkable articles of clothing found on the body, are placed in the hands of the police, in the hope of future identification. There is nothing more to be done, then, that I can see. Can you suggest anything, Clare?" Mr. Carruthers asked the question in a tone almost of banter, as though there were something ridiculous in his expecting a suggestion from such a quarter, but with very little real anxiety nevertheless.

"I—I really do not know, uncle," returned Clare; "I cannot tell. You are quite sure Evans told you all he knew?"

"Everything," replied Mr. Carruthers. "The clue furnished by the coat was very slight, but it was the only one. I am convinced, myself, that the man who wore the coat, and was last seen in company with the murdered man, was the man who committed the murder." Clare shivered. "But," continued Mr. Carruthers in an argumentative tone, "the thing to establish is the identity of the man who wore the coat with the man who bought it six weeks ago."

A bright flush rose on Clare's cheeks—a flush of surprise, of hope. “Is there any doubt about that, uncle?” she asked. “The waiter described the man, didn't he? Besides, no one would part with an overcoat in six weeks.”

“*That* is by no means certain,” said Mr. Carruthers with an air of profound wisdom. “Artists and writers, and foreigners, and generally people of the vagabond kind, sell and barter their clothes very frequently. The young man whom Evans describes might have been any one, from his purposeless indistinguishable description; the waiter's memory is clearer, as is natural, being newer.”

“And what is the description he gives?” asked Clare faintly.

“You will find it in the weekly paper, my dear,” returned Mr. Carruthers, stretching his hand out towards the daily journal. “Meantime, let's see yesterday's proceedings.”

Hope had arisen in Clare's heart. Might not all her fear be unfounded, all her sufferings vain? What if the coat had not been purchased by Paul Ward at all? She tried to remember

exactly what he had said in the few jesting words that had passed on the subject. Had he said he had bought it at Amherst, or only that it had been made at Amherst? By an intense effort, so distracting and painful that it made her head ache with a sharp pain, she endeavoured to force her memory to reproduce what had passed, but in vain; she remembered only the circumstance, the fatal identification of the coat. "Artists and writers," her uncle had said, in his disdainful classification, occasionally made certain odd arrangements concerning their garments, unknown to the upper classes, to whom tailors and valets appertain of right; and Paul Ward was both a writer and an artist. Might he not have bought the coat from an acquaintance? Men of his class, she knew, often had queer acquaintances. The possession was one of the drawbacks of the otherwise glorious career of art and literature—people who might require to sell their coats, and be equal to doing it.

Yes, there was a hope, a possibility that it might be so, and the girl seized on it with avidity. But, in a moment, the terrible recollection struck

her that she was considering the matter at the wrong end. Who had bought the coat made by Evans, of Amherst, and what had been its intermediate history, were things of no import. The question was, in whose possession was it when the unknown man was murdered. Had Paul Ward dined with him at the Strand tavern? Was Paul Ward the man whom the waiter could undertake to identify, in London? If so—and the terrible pang of the conviction that so, indeed, it was returned to her with redoubled force from the momentary relief of the doubt—the danger was in London, not there at Amherst; from the waiter, not from Evans. Distracted between the horror, overwhelming to the innocent mind of the young girl, to whom sin and crime had been hitherto dim and distant phantoms, of such guilt attaching itself to the image which she had set up for the romantic worship of her girlish heart, and the urgent terrified desire which she felt that, however guilty, he might escape—nay, the more firmly she felt convinced that he *must* be guilty, the more ardently she desired it,—Clare Carruthers's gentle breast was rent with such unendurable torture as



hardly any after-happiness could compensate for or efface. All this time Mr. Carruthers was reading the newspaper, and at length he laid it down, and was about to address Clare, when the footman entered the room, and informed him that Mr. Evans, the tailor, from Amherst, wished to be permitted to speak to him as soon as convenient. With much more alacrity than he usually displayed, Mr. Carruthers desired that Evans should be shown into the library, and declared his intention of going to speak to him immediately.

“ I have no doubt, Clare, that he has come about this business,” said Mr. Carruthers, when the servant had left the room. With this consolatory assurance he left her to herself. She snatched up the newspaper, and read a brief account of the proceedings of the previous day—the close of the inquest, and some indignant remarks upon the impunity with which so atrocious a crime had, to all appearance, been committed; which wound up with a supposition that this murder was destined to be included in the number of those mysteries whose impenetrability strengthened the hand of the assassin, and made our police system

the standing jest of continental nations. How ardently she hoped, how nearly she dared to pray, that it might indeed be so!

She lingered in the breakfast-room, waiting for her uncle's return. The restlessness, the uncertainty of misery, were upon her; she dreaded the sight of every one, and yet she feared solitude, because of the thoughts, the convictions, the terrors, which peopled it. Three letters lay on the table still unopened; and when Clare looked at them, she found they were addressed to Mrs. Carruthers, and that two of the three were from America. The postmark on each was New York, and on one were stamped the words, "Too late."

"She is too ill to read any letters now, or even to be told there are any," thought Clare. "I had better put them away, or ask my uncle to do so."

She was looking at the third letter, which was from George Dallas; but she had never seen his writing, to her knowledge; and the two words, which he had written on the slip of paper she had seen, being a christian and surname, afforded her

no opportunity of recognising it as that of Paul Ward; when Mr. Carruthers returned, looking very pompous and fussy.

“ I shall communicate with the Home Office immediately,” he began. “ This is very important. Evans has been here to tell me he has read all the proceedings at the inquest, and the waiter’s description of the suspected individual tallies precisely with his own recollection of the purchaser of the coat.”

“ But, uncle,” said Clare, with quick intelligence, “ you told me the man’s evidence and Evans’s description were as vague as possible. Indeed, I was quite struck by what you said: ‘ A description that describes nothing ’ were your words. And don’t you remember telling me how frequently you had observed in your magisterial capacity that these people never could be depended on to give an accurate account of an impression or a circumstance? And how you have told me that it was one of the chief distinctions between the educated and uneducated mind, that only the former could comprehend the real value and meaning of evidence? Depend on it, Evans has no new

ground for his conviction. He has been reading the papers, and thinking over the importance of being mixed up in the matter, until he has persuaded himself into this notion. Don't you recollect that is just what you said you were sure he would do?"

Mr. Carruthers did not remember anything of the kind, nor did Clare. But the girl was progressing rapidly in the lessons which strong emotion teaches, and which add years of experience to hours of life. Instinctively she took advantage of the weakness of her uncle's character, which she comprehended without acknowledging. Mr. Carruthers had no objection to the imputation of superior sagacity conveyed in Clare's remark, and accepted the suggestion graciously; he was particularly pleased to learn that he had drawn that acute distinction between the educated and uneducated mind. It was like him, he thought: he was not a man on whom experience was wasted.

"Yes, yes, I remember, of course, my dear," replied Mr. Carruthers, graciously; "but then, you see, however little I may think of Evans's notions on the subject, I am bound to communi-

cate with the Home Office. If Mrs. Carruthers's illness did not render my absence improper and impossible, I should go to London myself, and lay the matter before Lord Wolstenholme; but, as I cannot do that, I must write at once." Mr. Carruthers, in his secret soul, regarded the obligation with no little dread, and would have been grateful for a suggestion which he would not have condescended to ask for.

"Then I will leave you, uncle," said Clare, making a strong effort to speak as cheerfully as possible, "to your task of telling the big wigs that there's nothing more to be done or known down here. You might make them laugh, if such solemn, grand people ever laugh, by telling them how the rural mind believes two vaguenesses to make a certainty, and make them grateful that Evans came to you, and not to them, with his mare's nest of corroborative evidence."

Clare's fair face was sharpened with anxiety as she spoke, despite the brightness of her tone, and she had narrowly watched the effect of her words. Her uncle felt that they conveyed pre-

cisely the hint he required, and was proportionally relieved.

“Of course, of course,” he answered, in his grandest manner; and Clare moved towards the door, when, remembering the letters, she said:

“There are some letters for Mrs. Carruthers, uncle. I fancy she is too ill to see them. Two are from America; will you take them?”

“I take them, Clare, why?” asked her uncle, in a tone of dignified surprise.

“Only because, being foreign letters, I thought they might require attention — that’s all,” said Clare, feeling herself rebuked for a vulgarity. “They come from New York.”

“Probably from Mr. Felton,” said Mr. Carruthers, pointing the gold eye-glasses at the letters in Clare’s hand with dignified coldness, but making no attempt to look at them nearer. “You had better lay them aside, or give them to Brookes or Dixon. I never meddle with Mrs. Carruthers’s family correspondence.”

Clare made her escape with the letters, feeling as if her ears had, morally speaking, been boxed; and diverted, for a little, by the sensation from the

devouring anxiety she had felt that Mr. Carruthers should communicate in the tone which she had tried to insinuate with the dignitaries of the Home Office.

The door of Mrs. Carruthers's room was open, and the curtain partly withdrawn, when Clare reached it. She called softly to Dixon, but received no reply. Then she went in, and found the housekeeper again in attendance upon the patient. To her inquiries she received from Mrs. Brookes very discouraging replies, and the old woman stated her conviction strongly that it was going to be a very bad business, and that Clare had much better go to the Sycamores.

“ You can't do any good here, Miss Carruthers,” said the old woman; and Clare thought she had never heard her speak so sternly and harshly. “ I don't know that any one can do any good; but you can't, anyhow, and the fever may be catching.”

Clare's eyes filled with tears, not only because she loved Mrs. Carruthers, not only because another trouble was added to the crushing misery that had fallen upon her, but also because it hurt her gentle nature keenly to feel herself of no account.

“No,” she said, in a low voice, “I know I am of no use, Mrs. Brookes. I am not her child. If I were, I should not be expected to leave her. And,” she added bitterly, for the first time treading on the forbidden ground, “more than that, if it were not for me, her son might be with her now, perhaps.”

“Hush, hush, pray,” whispered Mrs. Brookes, with a frightened glance at the bed; “don’t say that word! She may hear and understand more than we think.”

Clare looked at her in bewilderment, but obeyed her, and asked no questions.

“These came just now,” she said; “my uncle desired me to give them to you.”

She put the letters into the old woman’s hand, and crossed the room, leaving it by the opposite door, which communicated with Mrs. Carruthers’s dressing-room. As she passed through the inner apartment, which opened on the corridor, she observed that the portrait of George Dallas, which had hung upon the wall as long as she remembered the room, was no longer there.

The hidden anguish in her own heart, the



secret which was crushing her own young spirit, made the girl quick to see and interpret any sign of similar sorrow and mystery.

“ Mrs. Brookes has taken away her son’s picture,” Clare thought, as she slowly descended the stairs, “ and she dreads his name being mentioned in her presence. Dr. Munns asked if she had had a shock, and seemed to impute her illness to something of the kind. There is something wrong with George Dallas, and the two know it.”

When Miss Carruthers left her, Mrs. Brookes broke the seal of one of the letters without a moment’s hesitation, and read its contents, standing shielded from any possible observation by the invalid by the curtains of the bed. The letter contained only a few lines :

*“ I am going away, out of England, for a little while, my dearest mother,”* George Dallas wrote. *“ It is necessary for the transaction of my business ; but I did not know it would be so when I last communicated with you. Write to me at the subjoined address : your letter will be forwarded.”* The address given was Routh’s, at South Molton-street.

The old woman sighed heavily as she read

the letter, and then resumed her attendance on her patient.

The day waned, the London physician came and went. The household at Poynings learned little of their mistress's state. There was little to be learned. That night a letter was written to George Dallas, by Mrs. Brookes, which was a harder task to the poor old woman than she had ever been called upon to fulfil. With infinite labour, she wrote as follows :

“MY DEAR MASTER GEORGE,—Your letter has come, so I know you are not in England, and I am not sure but that some one else may see this. Your mother is very ill, in consequence of what she has seen in the papers. I do not believe it is as bad as it seems, though how bad that is, thank God, no one but your mother and I know, or can ever know, I hope and trust. Think of all the strongest and most imploring things I could say to you, my own dear boy, if it was safe to say anything; and if you can put us out of suspense, by writing, not to her, not on any account to her, but to me, do so. But if you can't, George—and think what I feel in say-

ing that *if*—keep away, don't let her hear of you, don't let her think of you in danger. Anyhow, God save, and help, and forgive you.

“Your affectionate old Nurse,

“ELLEN.”

The days went on, as time travels in sickness and in health, and there was little change in Mrs. Carruthers, and little hope at Poynings. The fever had been pronounced not infectious, and Clare had not been banished to the Sycamores. No fresh alarm had arisen to agitate her, no news of the suspected man had been obtained. The matter had apparently been consigned to oblivion. With the subsidence of her first terror and agitation, a deeper horror and dread had grown upon Clare. Supposing, as it seemed, that he was safe now, Paul Ward was still a guilty wretch, a creature to be shunned by the pure, even in thought. And the more she felt this, and thought of it, the more frankly Clare confessed to her own heart that she had loved him, that she had set him up, with so little knowledge of him after their chance meeting, as an idol in the shrine of her girlish fancy

—an idol defaced and overthrown now, a shrine for ever defiled and desecrated. She was glad to think she had warned him; she wondered how much that warning had contributed to his security. She strove hard to banish the remembrance of him in all but its true aspect of abhorrence, but she did not always succeed; and, in the innocent girl's dreams, the smile, the voice, the frank kindly words would often come again, and make her waking to the jarring gladness of the morning terrible. A shadow fell upon her beauty, the gleeful tone died out of her voice; the change of an indelible sorrow passed upon the girl, but passed unnoticed by herself or any other.

The days went on, as time travels, in sorrow and in joy; and at length change came in Mrs. Carruthers's, and there was hope at Poynings. Not hope, indeed, that she could ever be again as she had been, beautiful and stately in her serene and honoured matronhood, in her bright intelligence and dignity. That was not to be. She recovered; that is, she did not die, but she died to much of the past. She was an old woman from thenceforth, and all her beauty, save the immortal beauty of

form, had left her very quiet, very patient and gentle, but of feeble nerves, and with little memory for the past, and little attention or interest in the present, she was the merest wreck of what she had been. Her faithful old servant was not so much distressed by the change as were her husband and Clare. She had her own reasons for thinking it better that it should be so. For many days after convalescence had been declared, she had watched and waited, sick with apprehension for some sign of recollection on the part of the patient, but none came, and the old woman, while she grieved with exceeding bitterness over the wreck of all she so dearly loved, thanked God in her heart that even thus relief had come. None had come otherwise. George Dallas had made no sign.

So the time went on, and summer was in its full pomp and pride when preparations were being made on a scale suitable to the travelling arrangements of magnates of the importance of Mr. Carruthers of Poynings for a continental tour, recommended by the physicians in attendance as a means for the complete restoration of Mrs. Carruthers.

The time named for the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers had nearly arrived, and it had just been arranged that Clare should remain at the Sycamores during their absence, when Mr. Carruthers startled Mrs. Brookes considerably by asking her if she could inform him where a communication might be expected to find Mr. George Dallas? It would have been impossible for human ingenuity to have devised a question more unexpected by its recipient, and Mrs. Brookes was genuinely incapable of answering it for a moment, and showed her fear and surprise so plainly, that Mr. Carruthers, much softened by recent events, condescended to explain why he had asked it.

“I do not consider it proper that the young man should be left in ignorance of his mother’s state of health, and her absence from England,” he said, with less stateliness than usual; “and though I do not inquire into the manner and frequency of his communications with Mrs. Carruthers, I believe I am correct in supposing he has not written to her lately.”

“Not lately, sir,” replied Mrs. Brookes.

The result of this colloquy was that Mrs. Brookes gave Mr. Carruthers Routh's address at South Molton-street, and that Mr. Carruthers addressed a short epistle to George Dallas, in which he curtly informed his step-son that his mother, having just recovered from a dangerous illness which had enfeebled her mind considerably, was about to travel on the Continent for an indefinite period, during which, if he (Mr. Carruthers) should see any cause for so doing, he would communicate further with Mr. George Dallas. This letter was posted on the day which witnessed the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers "and suite" (as the County Chronicle was careful to notice) from Poynings; and Mr. Carruthers felt much conscious self-approval for having written it, and especially for having timed the writing of it so well. "Sooner, he might have made an excuse of it for coming here," thought the astute gentleman; "and it would have been heartless not to have written at all."

For once in his life, Mr. Carruthers of Poynings had written a letter of importance.

## CHAPTER III.

### IN THE MUIDERSTRAAT.

HIGH houses, broad, jolly, and red-faced, standing now on the edges of quays or at the feet of bridges, now in quaint trim little gardens, whose close-shaven turf is gaudy with brilliant bulbs, or overshadowed by box and yew, but always fringing the long, shallow, black canals, whose sluggish waters scarcely ripple under the passing barge. Water, water, everywhere, and requiring everybody's first consideration, dammed out by vast dykes and let in through numerous sluices, spanned by nearly three hundred bridges, employing a perfect army of men to watch it and tend it, to avail themselves of its presence and yet to keep it in subjection; for if not properly looked after and skillfully managed, it might at any moment submerge the city; avenues of green trees running along the canal banks and blooming



freshly in the thickest portions of the commerce-crowded quays; innumerable windmills on the horizon; picture-galleries rich in treasures of Rubens, Rembrandt, Vandyke, and Teniers; dock-yards, where square and sturdy ships are built by square and sturdy men, in solemn silence and with much pipe-smoking; asylums, homes, almshouses, through which a broad stream of well-administered charity is always flowing. A population of grave burghers, and chattering vrows, and the fattest, shiniest, and most old-fashioned children; of outlandish sailors and Jews of the grand old type, who might have sat, and whose ancestors probably did sit, as models to Rembrandt; of stalwart bargemen and canal-tenders, of strangers, some pleasure-seeking, but the great majority intent on business; for whatever may be the solemn delights of its inhabitants, to a stranger accustomed to other capitals there are few gaieties to be met with in the city to which George Dallas had wended his way—Amsterdam.

To George Dallas this mattered very little. Of the grosser kinds of pleasure he had had enough

and more than enough; the better feelings of his nature had been awakened, and nothing could have induced him to allow himself to drift back into the slough from which he had emerged. Wandering through the long picture-galleries and museums, and gloating over their contents with thorough artistic appreciation, dreamily gazing out of his hotel window over a prospect of barge-dotted and tree-bordered canals which would gradually dissolve before his eyes, the beech avenue of the Sycamores arising in its place, recalling Clare Carruthers's soft voice and ringing laugh and innocent trusting manner, George Dallas could scarcely believe that for months and months of his past life he had been the companion of sharpers and gamblers, and had been cut off from all communication with everything and everybody that in his youth he had been taught to look up to and respect. He shuddered as he recollected the orgies which he had taken part in, the company he had kept, the life he had led. He groaned aloud and stamped with rage as he thought of time lost, character blighted, opportunities missed. And his rage this time was

vented on himself: he did not, as usual, curse his step-father for having pronounced his edict of banishment; he did not lay the blame on luck or fate, which generally bore the burden; he was man enough to look his past life fairly in the face, and to own to himself that all its past privations, and what might have been its future miseries, were of his own creation. What might have been, but what should not be now. A new career lay before him, a career of honour and fame, inducements to pursue which such as he had never dreamed of were not wanting, and by Heaven's help he would succeed.

It was on the first morning after his arrival in Amsterdam that George Dallas, after much desultory thought, thus determined. Actuated by surroundings in an extraordinary degree, he had, while in London, been completely fascinated by the combined influence of Routh and Harriet; and had he remained with them he would, probably, never have shaken off that influence, or been anything but their ready instrument. But so soon as he had left them the fascination was gone, and his eyes were open to the degradation of

his position, and the impossibility, so long as he continued with his recent associates, of retrieving himself in the eyes of the world—of being anything to Clare Carruthers. This last thought decided him—he would break with Stewart Routh, yes, and with Harriet at once! He would sell the bracelet and send the proceeds to Routh with a letter, in which he would delicately but firmly express his determination and take farewell of him and Harriet. Then he would return to London, and throw himself into business at once. There was plenty for him to do at the *Mercury*, the chief had said, and—No! he must not go back to London, he must not expose himself to temptation; at all events until he was more capable of resisting it. Now, there would be Routh, with his jovial blandishments, and Deane, and all the set, and Harriet, most dangerous of all! In London he would fall back into George Dallas, the outcast, the reprobate, the black sheep, not rise into Paul Ward, the genius; and it was under the latter name that he had made acquaintance with Clare, and that he hoped to rise into fame and repute.

But though the young man had, as he imagined, fully made up his mind as to his future course, he lounged through a whole day in Amsterdam before he took the first step necessary for its pursuance—the negotiation of the bracelet and the transmission of the money to Routh—and it is probable that any movement in the matter would have been yet further delayed had he not come to the end of the slender stock of money which he had brought with him from England. The reaction from a life of fevered excitement to one of perfect calm, the atmosphere of comfortable, quiet, staid tranquillity by which he was surrounded, the opportunity for indulging his artistic sympathies without the slightest trouble, all these influences were readily adopted by a man of George Dallas's desultory habits and easy temperament; but, at last, it was absolutely necessary that some action should be taken, and George consulted the polyglot waiter of the hotel as to the best means of disposing of some valuable diamonds which he had with him.

The question was evidently one to which the polyglot waiter was well accustomed, for he

answered at once, "Dimants to puy is best by Mr. Dieverbrug, in Muiderstraat."

Not thoroughly comprehending the instance of the polyglottiness of the polyglot, George Dallas again advanced to the charge, and by varying his methods of attack, and diligently patching together such intelligible scraps as he rescued from the polyglot, he at length arrived at the fact that Mr. Dieverbrug, a Jew, who lived in the Muiderstraat, was a diamond merchant in a large way of business, speaking English, frequently visiting England, and likely to give as good, if not a better price than any one else in the trade. The polyglot added that he himself was not a bad judge of what he persisted in calling "dimants;" and as this speech was evidently a polite hint, George showed him the stones. The polyglot admired them very much, and pronounced them, in his opinion, worth between two and three hundred pounds—a valuable hint to George, who expected Mr. Dieverbrug would call upon him to name his price, and if any absurd sum was asked, the intending vendor might be looked upon with suspicion. The poly-

glot then owned that he himself frequently did a little business in the way of jewel-purchasing from visitors to the hotel, but frankly confessed that the "lot" under consideration was beyond him; so George thanked him and set out to visit Mr. Dieverbrug.

The Muiderstraat is the Jews' quarter of Amsterdam, which said, it is scarcely necessary to add that it is the dirtiest, the foulest, the most evil-smelling. There all the well-known characteristics of such places flourish more abundantly even than in the Frankfort Judengasse or our own Houndsditch. There each house is the repository of countless suits of fusty clothes, heaped up in reckless profusion on the floors, bulging out from cupboards and presses, horribly suggestive of vermin, hanging from poles protruding from the windows. There every cellar bristles with an array of boots of all kinds and shapes, amongst which the little Hebrew children squall and fight, and play at their little games of defrauding each other. There are the *bric-à-brac* shops, crammed with cheap odds and ends from every quarter of the globe, all equally undistin-

guishable under an impartial covering of dust and dirt; there are the booksellers, with their worm-eaten folios and their copies of the Scriptures, and their written announcements in the Hebrew character; there are the cheap printsellers, with smeary copies from popular pictures and highly-coloured daubs of French battle-fields and English hunting-scenes. The day was fine, and nearly all the population was either standing outside its doors or lolling at its windows, chaffering, higgling, joking, scolding. George Dallas, to whom such a scene was an entire novelty, walked slowly along with difficulty, threading his way through the various groups, amused with all he saw, and speculating within himself as to the probable personal appearance of Mr. Dieverbrug. The diamond merchant, George imagined, would probably be an old man, with gray hair and spectacles, and a large hooked nose, like one of Rembrandt's "Misers," seated in a small shop, surrounded by the rarest treasures exquisitely set. But when he arrived at the number which the polyglot had given him as Mr. Dieverbrug's residence, he found a small shop indeed, but it was



a bookseller's, and it was not until after some little time that he spied a painted inscription on the door-post directing Mr. Dieverbrug's visitors to the first floor, whither George at once proceeded.

At a small wooden table, on which stood a set of brass balance weights, sat a man of middle height and gentlemanly appearance dressed in black. The Hebraic character was not strongly marked in any of his features, though it was perceptible to an acute observer in the aquiline nose and the full red lips. He raised his eyes from a small red leather memorandum-book or diary which he had been studying as Dallas entered the room, and gave his visitor a grave salutation.

"Am I addressing Mr. Dieverbrug?" said Dallas, in English.

"I am Mr. Dieverbrug," he replied, in the same language, speaking with perfect ease and with very little foreign accentuation, "at your service."

"I have been recommended to come to you. I am, as you have probably already recognised, an Englishman, and I have some jewels for sale, which it may, perhaps, suit you to buy."

“ You have them with you ? ”

“ Yes, they are here ; ” and George took out his cherished case and placed it in Mr. Dieverbrug’s hand.

Mr. Dieverbrug opened the case quietly, and walked with it towards the window. He then took out the stones and held them to the light, then taking from his waistcoat pocket a small pair of steel nippers, he picked up each stone separately, breathed upon it, examined it attentively, and then replaced it in the case. When he had gone through this operation with all the stones, he said to George :

“ You are not a diamond merchant ? ”

“ No, indeed ! ” said Dallas, with a half-laugh ;  
“ not I.”

“ You have never,” said Mr. Dieverbrug, looking at him steadfastly from under his bushy eyebrows,—“ you have never been in a jewel-house ? ”

“ In a jewel-house ? ” echoed George.

“ What you call a jeweller’s shop ? ”

“ Never have been in a jeweller’s shop ? O yes, often.”

“ Still you fail my meaning. You have never been in a jeweller’s shop as employé, as assistant ? ”

“Assistant at a jeweller’s—ah! thank you! now I see what you’re aiming at. I’ve never been an assistant in a jeweller’s shop, you ask, which is a polite way of inquiring if I robbed my master of these stones! Thank you very much; if you’ve that opinion of me, perhaps I had better seek my bargain elsewhere.” And George Dallas, shaking all over, and very much flushed in the face, extended his hand for the case.

Mr. Dieverbrug smiled softly as he said, “If I thought that, I would have bid you go about your business at once. There are plenty of merchants at Amsterdam who would buy from you, no matter whence you came; but it is my business to ask such questions as to satisfy myself. Will you have back your diamonds, or shall I ask my questions?”

He spoke in so soft a tone, and he looked so placid and so thoroughly uncaring which way the discussion ended, that George Dallas could scarcely forbear laughing as he replied, “Ask away!”

“Ask away,” repeated Mr. Dieverbrug, still with his soft smile. “Well, then, you are not a jeweller’s employé; I can tell that by your man-

ner, which also shows me that you are not what you call swell-mob-man—rascal—escroc. So you come to me with valuable diamonds to sell; my questions are, How do you get these diamonds? Who are you?"

For an instant George Dallas paused in his reply, while he felt the blood rise in his cheeks. He next looked Mr. Dieverbrug straight in the face, as he said, "These were family diamonds. I inherited them from my mother—who is dead—and I was advised to come over here to sell them, this being the best market. As to myself, I am a literary man, a contributor to newspapers, and an author."

"Ah, ha! you write in newspapers and books? You are feuilletonist, author?" As Mr. Dieverbrug said these words he took up a stick which stood by the side of the fireplace and thumped heavily on the floor. His thumping seemed to awaken a kind of smothered response from the regions below them, and before George Dallas had recovered from his surprise, the door was opened, and an old gentleman of fantastic appearance entered the room—a very little man, with an enormous head,

which was covered with a tight-fitting little skull-cap, large eyes glaring out of silver-rimmed spectacles, a sallow puckered face fringed with a short stubbly white beard, a large aquiline nose, and thin tight lips. Buttoning immediately under his chin and reaching to his feet—no very long distance—the little man wore a greasy red flannel gaberdine dressing-gown, with flat horn buttons in a row down the front, underneath which appeared a dubiously dirty pair of flannel stockings and bright red leather slippers. With one hand the little man leaned on an ivory-handled crutch-stick; in the other he carried a yellow-paper covered book—Tauchnitz edition of some English author. As he entered the room he gave a sharp, rapid, comprehensive glance at George through his spectacles, made him a deferential bow, and then took up his position in the closest proximity to Mr. Dieverbrug, who at once addressed him in Dutch with such volubility that George, who had managed to pick up a few words during his stay, from the polyglot and others, failed to comprehend one syllable of what passed between them.

When they had finished their parley, during

which both of them looked at the diamonds and then at George, and then waved their fingers in each other's faces, and beat the palms of their hands, and shrugged their shoulders as though they never intended their heads to be again seen, Mr. Dieverbrug turned to George, and said, "This is my brother-in-law, Mr. Schaub, who keeps the bookseller's shop beneath us. He is agent for some English booksellers and newspapers, and knows more about authors than you would think. I should be glad if you would have some talk with him."

"Glad I should have some talk with him?" George Dallas commenced in wonderment; but Mr. Schaub cut in at once:

"Ye-es! Vos glad should have tokes mit eem! Should mit eem converse—sprechen, dis English author!"

"English author?"

"M-ja! m-ja! Wass him, der Schaub"—tapping himself in the middle of his greasy breast with his ivory-handled crutch—"a-gent von Tauchnitz, Galignani, die London *Times*, die *Mercury*, and von all. Wass der Schaub knows all,

and der Mynheer is English author, der Schaub must know von the Mynheer !”

George Dallas looked at him for a few moments in great bewilderment, then turned to Mr. Dieverbrug. “Upon my honour,” he said, “I should be delighted to carry out your wish and have some talk with this old gentleman, but I don’t see my way to preventing the conversation being all on his side. The fact is, I don’t understand one word he says !”

With the old sly smile, Mr. Dieverbrug said, “My brother-in-law’s talk is perhaps somewhat idiomatic, and one is required to be used to it. What he would convey is, that he, acquainted as he is with English literature and journalism, would like to know what position you hold in it, what you have written, where you have been engaged, and such-like. It is no object of us to disguise to you that he brings his experience to aid me in deciding whether or not I consider myself justified in making a dealing with you for these stones.”

“Thanks! I comprehend perfectly, and, of course, cannot object; though,” added George, with a smile, “I am afraid I have not as yet made

sufficient mark in English literature to render me a classic, or even to have gained a continental reputation for my name. Stay, though. Mr. Schaub, if I understood him rightly, represented himself as agent for one London paper to which I have contributed under my signature—the *Mercury*. You know the *Mercury*, Mr. Schaub? I thought so, and perhaps you have seen some articles there signed Paul Ward?”

“M-ja! m-ja! Wass von die ‘Strangers in London,’ von Paul Ward, am Nordjten, Hollandischen, Deutschen sea-people, von zailors would call zum visitiren?”

“That’s it, sir! Descriptions,” continued George, turning to Mr. Dieverbrug, “of the foreign sea-going populations of London.”

“M-ja, of Highway, of Shadcliffe, Ratcliffe, Shadwell, vot you call! M-ja, of Paul Ward writings I am acquaint.”

“And you are Paul Ward?” asked Mr. Dieverbrug.

“I am that apparently distinguished person,” said George.

Then Mr. Dieverbrug and Mr. Schaub plunged



pell-mell into another conversation, in which though the tongues rattled volubly enough, the shoulders, and the eyebrows, and the fingers played almost as important parts, the result being that Mr. Dieverbrug turned to George and said, "I am quite satisfied to undertake this affair, Mr. Ward, from what my brother-in-law has said of your position. Another question is, what shall I give you for the stones?"

"From what your brother-in-law has said of my position, Mr. Dieverbrug," said George, "it will, I presume, be apparent to you that I am not likely to be much versed in such matters, and that I must, to a great extent, be dependent on you."

"But you have some notion of price?"

"I have a notion—nothing more."

"And that notion is ——?"

"Well, I imagine the worth of the stones is about two hundred and fifty pounds!"

At these words Mr. Schaub gave a short sharp scream of horror, plunging his hands up to the elbows in the pockets of the red flannel gaberdine, and glaring at George through the silver-rimmed

glasses. Mr. Dieverbrug was not so wildly affected; he only smiled the soft smile a little more emphatically than before, and said:

“There is now no doubt, my dear sir, even if we had doubted it before, of your living in the region of romance! These must be Monte Christo diamonds, of M. Dumas’s own setting, to judge by the value you place on them—eh?”

“Wass won hondert fifty is vat worths,” said Mr. Schaub.

But, fortified in his own mind by the opinion of the polyglot waiter, who evidently had not spoken without some knowledge, George at once and peremptorily declined his bid, and so to work they went. The stones were had out again, re-examined, weighed in the brass balances, breathed upon, held up to the light between the steel pincers, and, at length, after a sharp discussion, carried on with most vivid pantomime between the brothers-in-law, Mr. Dieverbrug consented to buy them for one hundred and eighty pounds, and George Dallas accepted his offer. Then from the recesses of a drawer in the little wooden table Mr. Dieverbrug produced a cash-box and counted out

the sum in Dutch coin and gulden notes, and handing it to George, and shaking hands with him, the transaction was completed.

Completed, so far as Mr. Dieverbrug was concerned; but Mr. Schaub had yet an interest in it. That worthy followed George Dallas down the stairs, and, as he would have made his exit, drew him into the bookseller's shop—a dark dirty den of a place, with old mildewed folios littering the floor, with new works smelling of print and paper ranged along the counter, with countless volumes pile on pile, heaped against the walls. With his skinny yellow hand resting on George's sleeve, the old man stood confronting George in the midst of the heterogeneous assemblage, and peering up into his face through the silver-rimmed glasses, said:

“And so he wos Paul Vart—eh? Dis young man wos Paul Vart, von London aus? And Paul Vart vill back to London, and Hollandisch money no good there—eh? Best change for English, and der old Schaub shall change for eem—eh?”

“I'm not going back to London, Mr. Schaub,” said George, after a few moments' puzzling over

the old man's meaning. "I'm not going back to London; but I shall want to change this money, as I must send some of it, the larger portion, to England by to-night's post, and I am going to the bank to change it."

"Wass! der bank! der nonsense! It is the old Schaub vot vill change! Give de goot rates and all! Ach, der old Schaub vot has der English bank-note to send mit dem posttrager! Der old Schaub vot den miser dey call! Der Schaub vill change die gulden for den bank-notes, m-ja?"

"It does not matter to me much who changes it, so long as I get the proper value!" said George with a laugh; "and if the old Schaub, as you call yourself, can give me bank-notes for a hundred-and-forty pounds, I'll say done with you at once!"

"Wass vat was 'done' mit me for hundert forty pounds! See—first vill make the door to. Let das folk call miser old Schaub, but not let das folk see vot old Schaub misers. Ha, ha!"

So saying, the old gentleman closed the door of the shop, and locked it carefully. Then he retired to the back of the counter, removed several

heavy old books from one of the shelves, and unlocked a secret closet in the wall. When he turned again to George, whom he had left on the other side of the counter, he had a little roll of English bank-notes in his hand. From this he selected four notes—two of the value of fifty, and two of twenty pounds. These he handed to Dallas, receiving the equivalent in Dutch money.

“I am very much obliged to you indeed, Mr. Schaub,” said George. “By doing this for me, you’ve saved my going to the bank, and a good deal of trouble.”

“Obliged to him is not at all, mein goot freund, Vart—Paul Vart,” said the old gentleman. “Miser das folk calls old Schaub, but it is not that; he has his leetle commissions, vy not he as vell as banks? Goot deal of money pass through old Schaub’s hands, and of vot pass none go clean through, always von little shticks to him fingers!”

That night George Dallas wrote to Stewart Routh, enclosing him the money, and telling him that literary engagements had sprung up which might perhaps keep him some little time from

London. The letter despatched, he felt a different man. The tie was loosed, the coupling-chain was broken! No longer enthralled by a debt of gratitude to vice, he could try what he could do to make a name—a name which his mother should not blush to hear—a name which should be murmured with delight by Clare Caruthers!

## CHAPTER IV.

### IDLESSE.

WHEN George Dallas had relieved his conscience by despatching the money to Routh, he felt that he had sufficiently discharged a moral duty to enable him to lie fallow for a little time and reflect upon the excellence of the deed, without immediately pushing forward on that career of stern duty which he had prescribed for himself. In his desultory frame of mind it afforded him the greatest pleasure to sit apart in the quaintly-trimmed gardens, or on the shady quays, idly looking on the life passing before him, thinking that he was no longer in the power of those who had so long exercised an evil influence over him, and recollecting that out of the balance of the sum which he had received from Mr. Dieverbrug he had enough left to keep him without any absolute necessity for resorting to work for some

little time to come. For George Dallas was essentially an idler and a dreamer, an intending well-doer, but steeped to the lips in procrastination, and without the smallest knowledge of the realities of life. He had hopes and ambitions, newly kindled, as one might say; honest aspirations, such as in most men would have proved spurs to immediate enterprise; but George Dallas lay about on the seats of the public gardens, or leaned against the huge trees bordering the canals, and as he puffed into the air the light-blue smoke, and watched it curling and eddying above his head, he thought how delightful it would be to see Clare Carruthers blushing with delight at his literary success; he pictured himself telling her how he had at last succeeded in making a name, and how the desire of pleasing her had been his greatest incentive; he saw his mother trembling and joyous, his step-father with his arms open, and his cheque-book at his step-son's disposal; he had a dim vision of Amherst church, and flower-strewing maidens, and ringing bells, and cheering populace,—and then he puffed out a little more smoke, and thought that he really



must begin to think about getting into harness again.

As a first step to this desirable result, he paid his bill at the Amsterdam hotel, and started off for the Hague, where he remained for a fortnight, enjoying himself in the laziest and pleasantest manner, lounging in the picture-gallery and the royal library, living remarkably well, smoking a great deal, and thinking about Clare Carruthers; and in odd half hours, after breakfast or before he went to bed, doing a little literary work—transcript of his day's observations—which he sent to the *Mercury*, with a line to Grafton Leigh, telling him that private affairs had necessitated his coming abroad, but that when he returned he would keep the promise he had made of constant contributions to the paper; meanwhile he sent a few sketches, just to keep his hand in. In reply to this letter he received a communication from his friend Cunningham, telling him that his chief was much pleased with the articles, and would be glad, as George was so near, if he would go over to Amsterdam; and write an account of the starting of

the fleet for the herring-fishery—an event which was just about to come off, and which, owing to special circumstances at the time, excited a peculiar interest in England. In this letter Cunningham enclosed another, which he said had been for some time lying at the office, and which, on opening, George found to be from the proprietors of the *Piccadilly*, presenting their compliments to Mr. Paul Ward, stating that they were recommended by their “literary adviser,” who was much struck by the brilliancy and freshness of so much of Mr. Paul Ward’s serial story as had been sent in, to accept that story for their magazine; regretting that Mr. Ward’s name was not yet sufficiently well known to enable them to give the sum he had named as his price, but offering him, on the whole, very handsome terms.

So it had come at last! No longer to struggle on, a wretched outsider, a component of the “ruck” in the great race for name and fame and profit, but one of the select, taking the leading place in the leading periodical of the day, with the chance, if fortune favoured him, and he could

only avail himself of the opportunity so long denied, and call into action the influences so long prompting him, of rendering himself from month to month an object of interest, a living something, an actual necessity to thousands of people whose faces he should never see, and who would yet know of him, and look with the deepest interest on the ideal creatures of his fancy. Pardon the day-dream now, for the good to be derived from action is now so real, so tangible, that the lotus-leaves shall soon be cast aside. And yet how fascinating is the vision which their charm has ever evoked for the young man bound under their spell! Honour, wealth, fame, love!—not all your riches, Capel Carruthers; not your county position, not your territorial influence, not your magisterial dignity, nor anything else on which you pride yourself, shall be half as sweet to you as the dignified pride of the man who looks around him, and seeing himself possessed of all these enviable qualities, says: “By my own hand, by the talent which God has given me, and by His help alone, unaided by birth or riches, or influence, I have made myself what I am!” The

crisis in George Dallas's life had arrived; the ball was at his feet, and with the opportunity so urgent on him, all his desultoriness, all his lazy dilettanteism, vanished. He felt at last that life was real and earnest, and determined to enter upon it at once. With what big schemes his heart was filled, with what quixotic dreams his brain was bursting! In his own mind his triumphant position in the future was so assured that he could not resist taking an immediate foretaste of his happiness; and so on the very day of the receipt of Cunningham's letter a box containing some very rare Japanese fans, screens, and china, was despatched anonymously, addressed to Miss Carruthers. The cost of these trifles barely left George Dallas enough to pay his fare back to Amsterdam. But what of that? Was he not on the high road to fortune, and could he not make money as he liked?

The polyglot waiter received him, if not with open arms, at least with a smiling face and a babble of many-tongued welcomes, and placed in his hands a letter which had been more than a week awaiting him. George glanced at its super-

scription, and a shadow crossed his face as he recognised Routh's handwriting. He had looked upon that connection as so completely cut assunder, that he had forgotten his last communication necessitated a reply—an acknowledgment of the receipt of the money, at least—and he opened the letter with an undefined sensation of annoyance. He read as follows :

S. M.-street, June —, 18—.

“ Your letter, my dear George, and its enclosure is ‘to hand,’ as we say in Tokenhouse-yard; and I flatter myself that you, who know something of me, and who have seen inside my waistcoat, know that I am highly pleased at the return you have made for what you ridiculously term my ‘enormous kindness,’ and at the feeling which has prompted you, at, I am certain, some self-sacrifice, to return me the sum which I was only too pleased to be able to place at your disposal. I am a bad hand, as you, great author, literary swell, &c. &c., will soon see—I am a bad hand at fencing off what I have got to say, and therefore I must out with it at once. I know it ought to be put in a postscript—just dropped *par*

*hasard*, as though it were an after-thought, and not the real gist of the letter—but I do not understand that kind of ‘caper,’ and so must say what I have got to say in my own way. So look here! I am ten years older than you in years, and thirty years in experience; and I know what heart-burnings and worries, not merely for yourself alone, but for others very, very dear to you, you have had in raising this money which you have sent to me. You thought it a debt of honour, and consequently moved heaven and earth to discharge it; and you knew that I was hard up—a fact which had an equally irritating effect on you. Now look here! (I have said that before, I see; but never mind!) As to the honour—well, not to mince matters, it was a gambling debt, *pur et simple*; and when I reflect, as I do sometimes—Harriet knows that, and will tell you so—I know well enough that but for me you would never have been led into gambling. I am not preaching, old fellow; I am simply speaking the honest truth. Well, the thought that you have had all this to go through, and such a large sum of money to pay, yerks me, and goes against the

grain. And then, as to my being hard up, I don't mind telling you—of course in the strictest confidence—that Tokenhouse-yard is a tremendous success! It was a tight time some months ago, and no mistake; but I think we have weathered the storm, and the money is rolling in there splendidly; so splendidly and so rapidly, that—again in the strictest confidence—I am thinking of launching out a little, and taking up the position which—you'll know I'm not bragging, old boy—my birth and education warrant me in assuming. I have grovelled on long enough, heaven knows, and I want to see myself, and above all, I want to see my wife, out of the reach of—well, I need not dilate to you on what circumstances have lowered us to, and what we will now float above. So, as good luck is nothing unless one's friends share in it, I want to say to you, as delicately as I can, 'Share in mine!' Don't be in a hurry to send me back that money, don't be too proud—that's not the word, George—I should say, don't fear to remain in my debt; and, if occasion should arise, let me be your banker for further sums. I can stand the racket, and shall

be only too glad to be called upon to do so, as some slight way of atoning for having led you into what cannot be looked upon by any one, I am afraid, as a reputable life. I won't say any more on this head, because there is no need. You will know that I am in earnest in what I have said, and you will receive the fifty pounds which I have enclosed herein in the spirit in which they are sent—that of true friendship. You will be a great gun some day, if you fulfil the promise made for you by those who ought to know about it; and then you will repay me. Meanwhile, depend on it that any draft of yours on me will be duly honoured.

“And so you are not coming back to London for some time? It seems an ungenerous thing in a friend to say, but upon my soul I think the wisest thing you can do is to remain abroad, and widen your knowledge of life. You have youth and health, at your time of life the powers of observation are at their freshest and strongest, all you will want is money, and that you shan't want, if you accede to the suggestion I have just made. You will store your mind in experience,



you will see all sorts and varieties of men, and as you have nothing particular to bind you to England, you could thoroughly enjoy your freedom, and return with a valuable stock of ideas for the future benefit of the British reading public. Allez toujours, la jeunesse ! which, under its familiar translation of 'Go it while you're young!' is the best advice I can give you, George, my dear boy. During your absence, you will have shaken off all your old associations, and who knows but that the great bashaw, your step-father, may clasp you to his bosom, and leave all his acres to his dearly beloved step-son, G. D.? Only one thing ! You must not forget Harry, and you must not forget me ! If all works right, you will find us very differently situated from what you have ever known us, and you won't be ashamed to recognise us as friends. You would laugh if you could see me now, emphatically a 'City man,' wearing Oxford-mixture trousers and carrying a shabby fat umbrella, which is an infallible sign of wealth, eating chops in the middle of the day, solemnly rebuking my young clerks for late attendance at the office, and comporting myself

generally with the greatest gravity and decorum. And to think that we once used to 'back the caster,' and have, in our time, held point, quint, and quatorze. Tell it not in Gath! 'By advices last received, the produce of the mines has been twenty-two thousand oitavas, the gain whereof is, &c. &c.' That's the style now!

"Harriet is well, and, as ever, my right hand. To see her at work over the books at night, one would think she had been born in the Brazils, and had never heard of anything but silver mines. She sends kindest regards, and is fully of my opinion as to the expediency of your staying away from London. No news of Deane; but that does not surprise me. His association with us was entirely one of concurrence, and he always talked of himself as a wanderer—a bird of passage. I suppose he did not give you any hint of his probable movements on the day of the dinner, when I had the ill-luck to offend him by not coming? No one ever knew where he lived, or how, so I can't make any inquiries. However, it's very little matter.

"And now I must make an end of this long

story. Good-bye, my dear George. All sorts of luck, and jollity, and happiness attend you, but in the enjoyment of them all don't forget the pecuniary proposition I have made to you, and think sometimes kindly of

“Your sincere

“STEWART ROUTH.”

A little roll of paper had dropped from the letter when George opened it. He picked it up, and found two Bank-of-England notes for twenty pounds, and one for ten pounds.

It is no discredit to George Dallas to avow that when he had finished the perusal of this quaint epistle, and when he looked at its enclosure, he had a swelling in his throat, a quivering in the muscles of his mouth, and thick heavy tears in his eyes. He was very young, you see, and very impressionable, swaying hither and thither with the wind and the stream, unstable as water, and with very little power of adhering to any determination, however right and laudable it seemed at the first blush. There are few of us—in early youth, at all events, let us

trust—who are so clear-headed, and far-seeing, and right-hearted, as to be able to do exactly what Duty prescribes to us—the shutting out all promptings of inclination! Depend upon it the good boys in the children's story-books, those juvenile patterns who went unwaveringly to the Sunday-school, shutting their eyes to the queen-cakes and toffy so temptingly displayed on the road-side, and who were adamant in the matter of telling a fib, though by so doing they might have saved their schoolfellow a flogging—depend upon it they turned out, for the most part, very bad men, who robbed the orphans and ground the faces of the widows. George Dallas was but a man, very warm-hearted, very impressionable, and when he read Stewart Routh's letter he repented of his harshness to his friend, and accused himself of having been precipitate and ungenerous. Here was the blackleg, the sharper, the gambler, actually returning some of his legitimate winnings, and placing his purse at his acquaintance's disposal, while his step-father—But then that would not bear thinking about! Besides, his step-father was Clare's uncle; no kindness of Routh's would

ever enable him, George, to make progress in that direction, and therefore—And yet it was deuced kind in Routh to be so thoughtful. The money came so opportunely, too, just when, what with his Hague excursion and his purchases, he had spent the balance of the sum derived from the sale of the bracelet, and it would have been scarcely decent to ask for an advance from the *Mercury* office or the *Piccadilly* people. But it was a great thing that Routh advised him to keep away from England for a time—a corroboration, too, of Routh's statement that he was going into a different line of life—for of course with his new views an intimacy with Routh would be impossible, whereas, he could now let it drop quietly. He would accept the money so kindly sent him, and he would do the account of the herring fishery for the *Mercury*, and he would get on with the serial story for the *Piccadilly*, and—Well, he would remain where he was and see what turned up. The quiet, easy-going, dreamy life suited George to a nicety; and if he had been a little older, and had never seen Clare Carruthers, he might, on very little provocation, have accepted

the Dutch *far niente* as the realisation of human bliss.

So, having to remain in Holland for some few days longer, and needing some money for immediate spending, George Dallas bethought him of his old friend, Mr. Schaub, and strolled to the Muiderstraat in search of him. He found the old gentleman seated behind his counter, bending over an enormous volume in the Hebrew character, over the top of which he glared through the silver-rimmed spectacles at his visiter with anything but an inviting glance. When, however, he recognised George, which he did comparatively quickly, his forbidding look relaxed, he put down the book, and began nodding in a galvanised manner, rubbing the palms of his hands together, and showing the few fangs left in his mouth.

“Vat! Vart—Paul Vart! you here still? Wass you not back gone to your own land, Vart? You do no more vairks, Vart, you vaste your time in Amsterdam, Vart—Paul Vart!”

“No; not that,” said George, laughing; “I have not gone home, certainly, but I’ve not lost

my time. I've been seeing to your country and studying character. I've been to the Hague."

"Ja, ja! the Hague! and, like your countrymen, you have bought their die Japans, die dogues, and punch-bowls. Ja, ja!"

George admitted the fact as to japan-ware and china dogs, but denied the punch-bowls.

"Ja, ja!" groaned Mr. Schaub; "and here in dis house I could have sold you straight same, de straight same, and you save your money for journey to Hague."

"Well, I haven't saved the money," said George, with a laugh, "but I dare say I shall be able to make something of what I saw there. You'll be pleased to hear I am going to write a story for the *Piccadilly*—they've engaged me."

"Wass Peek-a-teelies wass goot, ver goot," said Mr. Schaub; "better as *Mercury*—bigger, higher, more stand!"

"Ah! but you mustn't run down the *Mercury*, either. They've asked me to write a description of the sailing of your herring-fleet. So I must stop here for a few days, and I want you to change me a Bank-of-England note."

“Ja, ja! with pleasure! Wass always likes dis Bank-of-England notes; ist goot, and clean, and so better as dirty Austrich Prussich money. Ah! he is not the same as I give you other day! He is quite new and clean for twenty pounds! Ja, ja!” he added, after holding the note up to the light, “his vater-mark is raight! A. F.! Vot is A. F., 17 April? Ah, you don’t know! You don’t become it from A. F.? Course not! Vell, vell, let me see die course of ’Change—denn I put him into my leetle stock von English bank-note!”

The old man took up a newspaper that lay on the counter before him and consulted it, made a rapid calculation on a piece of paper, and was about to turn round towards the drawer where, as George remembered, he kept his cash-box, when he stopped, handed George the pen from behind his ear, dipped it into the ink, and said:

“Vell, just write his name, Vart—Paul Vart, on his back—m-ja? And his date of month. So! Vart—Paul Vart!—m-ja! ist goot. Here’s die guldens.”

George Dallas swept the gold pieces into his



pocket, nodded to the old man, and left the shop. Mr. Schaub carefully locked away the note, made an entry of its number and amount in his ledger, and resumed his reading.

## CHAPTER V.

### A DILEMMA.

SOUTH MOLTON-STREET had apparently a strong attraction for Mr. James Swain. Perhaps he found it a profitable and productive situation in point of odd and early jobs, perhaps he had some less professional reason for frequenting it. However that may be, the fact existed that no day passed without his tousled head and imperfectly clad form making their appearance in the street two or three times between dawn and dark. He would hang about the precincts of the house in which Routh and Harriet lodged, and evinced an extraordinary preference for the archway in the vicinity as a dining-room. He might have been seen at irregular hours devouring saveloys, polonies, or, when jobs odd or even were not plentiful, hunches of bread and cheese, within the shelter of

the archway, in the most unsophisticated attitudes, and with great apparent enjoyment. Mr. James Swain's face was not free from the underlying expression of care and anxiety which is always to be found by the careful observer in the countenance of the London street-boy, but it had more than the usual complement of sauciness, cunning, readiness, and impudence.

The boy had quite an attraction for Mrs. Routh, who would smile at him when she passed him in the street, nod pleasantly to him occasionally from her window, when his business or pleasure led him to lounge past the house before she had left her bedroom of a morning, and who frequently sent him of errands, for the doing of which she rewarded him with a liberality which appeared to him astounding munificence. Mr. James Swain was of a temperament to feel kindness, neglected street-boy though he was, and he had been wonderfully impressed by the womanly compassion which had spoken to him in Harriet's gentle tones on the morning of their first meeting, and had looked out of all the trouble and foreboding in her blue eyes. His interest in the

Routh household, however, antedated that event, and received not only an additional access, but a fresh colouring from it, and an acute observer, supposing one to exist for whom so mean a matter as the mental condition of a street-boy, very vulgar indeed, and without a particle of sentimental interest about him, could possess any attraction, would have discerned that a struggle of some sort was going on in the mind of the frequenter of South Molton-street, and seeker of odd jobs.

Routh, also, was not without interest for Jim Swain. Perhaps he watched him even more closely than he watched Harriet, but if he did, it was with totally different feelings. Routh had considerable powers of self-command, and could always be civil and apparently good-tempered, no matter what his real humour might be, when it accorded with his interests to be so. But he was not a man to treat inferiors with courtesy, or to refrain from rudeness and brutality where they were safe, and unlikely to do him any discredit. Consequently, servants and other recipients of the outpourings of his temper hated him with a vivid cordiality. Jim, the street-boy, had been em-

ployed by him occasionally, and had formed, apart from certain other knowledge he had gained concerning Mr. Stewart Routh, the worst opinion of that gentleman's disposition and character.

“ He's a bad 'un, anyhow,” the boy muttered, as he watched Mr. Routh letting himself into the house he inhabited with his latch-key, having previously taken a handful of letters from a postman at the door. “ An ill-lookin' dog, too. Scowled at the letters as if he was a-goin' to eat 'em. P'raps they're love-letters. I shouldn't wonder, now, as the lady is a pinin' for some 'un else, and he's jealous, and gets hold on all the letters to catch her out.”

This bright idea, which Jim Swain derived from his habitual reading of penny romances, devoted to the delineation of the tender passion, afforded him considerable gratification, and he had already consumed several minutes and a cold sausage while turning it over in his mind, when Harriet Routh came out of the house, and passed him, as he leaned against the wall under the archway. She was very pale and quite absorbed in thought, so that, though the lad respectfully pulled

a tuft of his tousled hair in salutation, she did not perceive his presence.

“She’s not like the same woman,” mused Mr. James Swain; “she’s gone as white as anything; looks just as if she’d had to git her own livin’ for ever so long, and found it precious hard to git, too. If he’s jealous of her, and a ill treatin’ of her, blowed if I won’t peach! No, no, I won’t, though, leastways not yet, ’cause I can’t without lettin’ out on myself, too; but,” said the boy, with a long look which softened the cunning of his face strangely, “I would like to know as she was happier than I think she is.”

In the wide city of London there was not another human being to feel any such wish in connection with Harriet Routh. She was quite alone. She had so willed it, and circumstances had aided her inclination and her resolve. In the life which her husband had adopted, and she had accepted, intimacies, friendships, were impossible. The only relation between them and their kind was the relation between the swindler and his dupes, always a merely “business” connection, and generally very brief in its duration. Harriet

had not a female friend in the world. Perhaps she would not have had one under any circumstances ; she was not a woman to cherish sentiment ; the one love of her life was an overmastering passion, which had absorbed all lesser feelings ; and the secretiveness and reserve, which were large elements in her moral nature, would have been inimical to such association, which, above all, needs gushingness for its satisfactory development. Her husband's male friends saw her seldom, and were not observant or interested in the health, spirits, or appearance of any but themselves ; so there was no one but the street-boy to note the change that had passed upon her. Routh, indeed, observed it ; with the bitter, selfish impatience of his character, and silently resented it. But only silently ; he made no comment, and Harriet, for the first time, failed to interpret his feelings.

She *was* changed. Changed in face, in manner, in voice, in the daily habits of her life. The light had faded from her blue eyes, and with it their colour had paled. Her cheek had lost its roundness, and there was something set and stony in her face. It had been calm, now it was rigid.

Her voice, still low and refined, was no longer musical, and her words were rare. Personal habits are tenacious, and rarely yield, even to strong mental excitement, or under the pressure of anxious care, and Harriet, always neat and careful in her simple dress, was neat and careful still. But a close observer would have marked a change even in this respect. She cared for her looks no longer. An ill-assorted ribbon, or ill-chosen colour, would once have been impossible to Harriet Routh; but it was all the same to her now. What were the symptoms of the moral change that had passed upon her as distinctly as the physical? They were rather those of intensification than of alteration. Her determination had assumed a sternness which had not before marked it, her identification of herself with Routh had become more than ever complete. The intensity of the passion with which she loved him was hardly capable of increase, but its quiet was gone. The pliable ease, the good-fellowship, the frank equality of their companionship, had departed; and though her attention to his interests, her participation in his schemes, were as active and un-



ceasing as ever, they were no longer spontaneous, they were the result of courageous and determined effort, sustained as only a woman can sustain effort which costs her acute and unrelenting suffering. She had been much alone of late. Routh had been much and profitably occupied. The affairs of the new company were progressing favourably, and Routh's visits to Flinders were frequent and well received. He had other things of the sort on hand, and his finances were in a flourishing condition. He was on the road to success, after the fashion of modern successes, and if his luck did not change, all the respectability which attaches to a fortunate speculation was on the cards for Stewart Routh. No restoration to his former place was possible, indeed; but Routh cared nothing for that, would, perhaps, not have accepted such a restoration had it been within his reach. Struggle, scheming, shifts, and the excitement consequent thereon, were essential to him now; he liked them; the only game he could play with any relish was the desperate one. To what extent he had played it was known only to himself and Harriet, and he was beginning to be

afraid of his confederate. Not afraid of her trustworthiness, of her fidelity, of her staunch and unshrinking devotion; Stewart Routh was just as confident, as of the fact of his existence, that his wife would cheerfully have given her life for him, as she gave it to him, but the man's nature was essentially base, and the misused strength, the perverted nobility of hers crushed and frightened him. He had not felt it so much while they were very poor, while all their schemes and shifts were on a small scale, while his every-day comforts depended on her active management and unfailing forethought. But now, when he had played for a great stake and won it, when a larger career was open before him—a career from which he felt she would shrink, and into which he could never hope to force her—he grew desperately afraid of Harriet. Desperately tired of her also. He was a clever man, but she was cleverer than he. He was a man of strong passions, ungovernable, save by the master-passion, interest. She had but one, love; but it was stronger than all his put together, and told to do their worst, and his shallow nature shrank from the unknown depths of hers.

She loved him so entirely that there had never been a question of rule between them ; but Routh was a wise man in his way, and he knew in his heart he could rule Harriet only by love, and love which was perfectly genuine and true, should the time ever come in which a distinct separation of opinion and will between them should make it necessary for him to try. But he had a clear appreciation of his wife's intellect also, and he knew thoroughly well that he could not deceive her with any counterfeit presentment—the love which should rule her must be real. This was precisely what he had not to produce when required. He had loved her after his fashion for so long that he was rather surprised by his own constancy ; but it would have been difficult for Stewart Routh to go on loving any one but himself always, and Harriet was so much superior to him in strength, firmness, and disinterestedness, that her very superiority was an element of destruction for the love of such a man as he.

In all that concerned the business of Stewart Routh's life, Harriet's conduct was still the same as before—she was still industrious and invaluable

to him. But the occupations which had filled her leisure hours were all neglected now, the lonely time was no more lightened by the pursuits which her early education and her natural tastes had endeared and rendered habitual to her. One of two moods now possessed her, either uncontrollable restlessness or absorbed brooding. She would start off, when Routh had left her, and walk for hours through the crowded thoroughfares, out into the suburbs of London, or up and down the most distant and less frequented parts of the Parks, returning home weary and footsore, but with the torturing sense of restlessness unsubdued. Or, when she was alone, she would sit for hours, not in a selected position of comfort, but anywhere, on the first seat that came in her way, her head drooping, her eyes fixed and vacant, her hands closely clasped and lying in her lap, her fair low brow contracted by a stern and painful frown. From either of these two moods she rarely varied; and even in Routh's presence, one or the other would master her at times. It chanced that on the day when Jim Swain had seen Routh return to his lodgings, and take some letters from the

postman, the restless fit had come very strongly upon Harriet, and she had gone to her room to dress herself for walking, when Routh unexpectedly returned. He went into the sitting-room, and concluding she would be down-stairs presently, waited for her, reading the letters in his hand frowningly the while. But Harriet had passed quietly down the stairs and gone out, without re-entering the sitting-room, and Routh waited in vain. At length he sought her in her room, and not finding her, he angrily rang the bell, and asked the servant if she knew anything about her. She did not, and Routh dismissed her, and began to stride about the room, uttering very uncalled-for oburgations on women who were never in the way when they were wanted. As he passed the window, his eye fell upon Jim Swain tranquilly eating bread and cheese, as he leaned against the opposite railings. Routh looked at him again more closely, and again; finally, he took up his hat, went down-stairs, out of the door, and across the street, close up to the boy.

“Hollo, you sir!” he addressed him roughly.  
“What are you doing here?”

Mr. James Swain eyed his questioner with no pleasant or grateful expression of countenance, and replied, curtly :

“Nothin’ !”

“What brings you here, then ?” continued Routh.

“I ain’t a doin’ you any harm, am I ?” answered the boy, all his native impudence brought out in a moment by the overbearing manner of Routh. “It ain’t your street, I believe, nor yet your archway, as I knows on ; and if I chooses to odd job on this here lay, I don’t hurt *you*, do I ?”

The saucy manner of the lad did not anger Routh ; he hardly seemed to notice it, but appeared to be entirely possessed by some struggling remembrance not of a pleasing kind, if his expression afforded any correct clue to it.

“Have you seen a lady come out of No. 60 since you have been about here ?” he asked, passing by the boy’s saucy remarks as if he had not heard them.

“Yes, I have. I saw the lady as lives there, not two minutes after you came in. She went that way.” And he pointed down the street.

“Had she anything in her hand? Did she look as if she was going for a walk, or out shopping?”

“She hadn’t no basket or bag, and she warn’t partickler dressed; not as nice as she’s dressed sometimes. *I should say,*” continued Mr. Jim Swain, with an air of wisdom and decision, “as she was going for a constitootional, all by herself, and not to shop nor nothin’.”

Routh’s attention had wandered from the boy’s words and was fixed upon his face.

“Have I ever seen you before?” he asked him, abruptly.

A sudden rush of colour dyed Mr. James Swain’s face, even through the varnish of dirt which hid its surface, as he replied, with a little less than his customary boldness:

“Yes, sir, you’ve seen me, though in course you ain’t likely to remember it. You’ve giv’ me many a penny, and a sixpence too, and the lady.”

Again Routh looked steadily, but covertly, at him under his thick brows. He was evidently eager to ask him some question, but he refrained,

restrained by some powerful motive. Jim looked uneasily up and down the street, moved his feet about restlessly, turned his ragged pockets inside out, letting loose a multitude of dirty crumbs, and displayed a fidgety inclination to get away from South Molton-street.

“Well,” said Routh, rousing himself from his abstraction, “we’re going to move next week, and you can come and do the odd jobs for us, if you like.”

“Thankee, sir,” said Jim, who was very respectful now, and touched his ragged cap as if he had quite altered his opinion of the speaker. “What day shall I come, sir?”

“I don’t exactly know,” said Routh; “you can call and ask the lady.” And then he gave the lad a shilling, to Jim Swain’s intense surprise, and, crossing the street, once more let himself in at the door of No. 60. Having reached the sitting-room, Stewart Routh sat down by the window and fell into a fit of musing as deep as those in which Harriet Routh passed hours away.

Mr. James Swain went briskly down the



street, pleasantly conscious that the unexpected windfall of the shilling had released him from the labours of his calling for the day, and determined to proceed at once to lay it out to the greatest advantage.

“Wotever is he up to *now*?” Thus ran the street-boy’s thoughts. “I’m sure he’s jealous, or he wouldn’t be coming home unexpected, and a watchin’ of her like that. Ain’t he a brute just? And a willin’ too? Well, I’m glad I ain’t *sure*—I’m very glad I ain’t *sure*.”

With this enigmatical phrase, Mr. James Swain abandoned his mental colloquy, and directed his thoughts to more immediately personal matters.

Routh was still sitting by the window when Harriet returned, and with the first glance at his face she saw that something new had occurred.

“I did not expect you home until six o’clock,” she said, as she laid aside her bonnet, and stood by his side, laying her hand tenderly upon his shoulder.

“No,” he returned; “I came home to get some papers for Flinders about the Tunbridge

Canal business; but you have them, Harry, and you were out."

"Well," she said, calmly, looking at him with questioning eyes. "What has happened, Stewart?"

"This," he returned, very slowly, and without meeting her gaze. "As I came in I met the postman with this letter. Read it, and tell me what is to be done."

She sat down close beside him, and took the letter he held towards her. It was addressed to George Dallas, to the care of Routh, and it was, in fact, the letter which Mr. Carruthers had written to his step-son prior to his departure from Poynings. As Harriet read, her right hand sought her husband's, and held it tightly. The old look of quiet resolution, the old expression of confident resource, came into her face. She read the paper twice before she spoke.

"Stewart," she said, "this is only another head of the hydra, and we had counted them, had we not? What we have to decide is, whether this letter shall be suppressed, or whether it must be forwarded to George Dallas. At first sight,

I see no possibility of suppressing it without infinite danger, but this is only first sight, and we may see more clearly afterwards."

"Dallas has never said anything to you about letters from his mother, has he?" asked Routh.

"No," replied Harriet, "not since his second letter, when he said he supposed she was testing his repentance and good conduct, and that he would not write until he could give her some proof of both."

"Get the old woman's letter, and let us read it again."

Harriet went to her writing-table, opened a drawer, and took a paper from its recesses. It was the letter which Mrs. Brookes had written to George Dallas. The two read it carefully, and Harriet spoke first.

"We can only conjecture the meaning of this, Stewart; but, as I make it out, it means that the proceedings at the—the inquest"—she paused almost imperceptibly, then went on, in a steady tone—"awakened his mother's fears. It was lucky he told us the story of his mother's anxiety about his coat, or we should have failed to catch

the clue. Now I read the riddle thus: Mrs. Carruthers has been dangerously ill in consequence of the shock of the discovery, but she has not betrayed her knowledge or suspicions. A good deal of time has been gained, and under any circumstances that is a priceless advantage. The question now is, can any more time be gained? Can George Dallas be kept in ignorance of the appearances against him any longer? The suppression of the old woman's letter was an easy matter. It is ill-written, you see, as servants' letters usually are, indistinctly addressed, and generally unimportant. But a letter written by Mr. Carruthers of Poynings is quite another matter. It must come out, some time or other, that it was not received, and he is precisely the man to investigate the matter to the utmost. No, no, the letter must be sent to Dallas."

She spoke firmly, but her eyes were dreamy and distant. Routh knew their expression, and that some expedient, some resolve, was shaping itself in her mind. He sat quite silent until she spoke again.

"The first thing we have to do is to ascertain

with all possible exactitude the real condition of Mrs. Carruthers, where she is at present, and whether we are right in supposing her fears were excited. This letter is not calculated to bring George home, I think. Of course, if it had reached him before they left Poynings, he would have come home at once; but, see, Mr. Carruthers writes on the 10th, and says they are to start on the 11th. This is the 13th. What is the post-mark?"

"Dover," said Routh, handing her the envelope.

"Posted after they left England, no doubt," said Harriet. "Stewart, there is just one thing to be done. Let us move from this at once. It is only doing so a little sooner than we had intended. Then, if we decide on suppressing the letter, its loss may be accounted for, even to the satisfaction of Mr. Carruthers. This, while we consider what must be done."

"Yes," said Routh, "I think that will be wise; but I do not see my way out of the danger of his return, if he returns when he has received the letter. He will go down to Amherst at once,

and will discover the suspicion, and at once take steps to clear himself of it."

"Perhaps so," said Harriet, and her face darkened, "but he may not find that so easy. I hope he will not put himself into the danger; but if he does ——" She paused, and looked thoughtfully into her husband's face, while a quick shudder crept over her. He saw the look in her eyes, he felt the quiver in her hand, and frowned darkly.

"Don't take to melodrama, Harriet, it's so unlike you, and doesn't suit you. Besides, it's too late in the day for that kind of thing now."

She took no notice of the ungracious speech, but still stood looking thoughtfully at him. He rose, letting her hand drop from his shoulder, and walked up and down the room.

"Stewart," she said gently, "you must not be impatient with me if I am not as ready of resource as I was. However, I think I see what ought to be done in this emergency, and I am quite sure I can do it. I will go to Amherst, find out the true state of things there, see the old woman at Poynings, who will gladly receive me

as a friend of George Dallas ; and then, and then only, can we decide whether this letter is to reach him or not."

"By Jove, Harry, that's a splendid idea!" said Routh; "and there can't be any risk in it, for Dallas would take your doing it as the greatest kindness. *You* not so ready of resource as you were? You're more so, my girl — you're more so."

There was a little wonder in the look she turned upon him, a little surprise at the lightness of his tone, but not a ray of the pleasure which his perverted praise had once given her.

"This is the best thing to do," she said, gravely, "and I will do it at once. I will go to-morrow morning."

"And I will get our traps moved, and put up at the Tavistock till you come back. You can pack this evening, I suppose, Harry?"

"O, yes," she answered. "I shall be glad of the occupation."

"And you'll do it more easily without me," said Routh, whom no crisis of events, however serious, could render indifferent to his individual

comforts, and to whom the confusion of packing was an image of horror and disgust; "so I shall dine out, and leave you to your own devices. Here, you had better lock these up." He took the letters from a table on which she had laid them as she spoke, and held them towards her.

She drew a step nearer to him, took the papers from his hand; then suddenly let them drop upon the floor, and flung her arms wildly round Routh's neck.

"Harriet, Harriet," he said, "what's this?" as he strove to lift her face, which she held pressed against his breast with terrible force. She answered him with a groan — a groan so full of anguish, that his callousness was not proof against it.

"My love, my darling, my brave girl, don't, don't!" was all he could say, as he bent his head over her and held her tightly to him. For several moments she stood thus; then she lifted her white face, put up her hands, and drew his face down to hers, kissed him with kisses which thrilled him with an unknown sense of fear and doom, and, instantly releasing, left him.



Mr. James Swain got the promised odd job in South Molton-street sooner than he had expected it; for, calling at No. 60, according to Mr. Routh's instructions, to ask the lady when his services would be required, he was informed that she had gone away, and he was to carry down the boxes to be conveyed to their destination in the van then standing at the door. Jim performed his duty with a perturbed spirit.

“Gone away, is she?” he said over and over again. “Now I should like to know where she's gone, and wot for. I hope he ain't be up to nothin' agin her; but I don't trust him, and I ain't a goin' to lose sight of him for longer than I can help, if I knows it, until she's safe back *somewheres*.”

“That funeral is largely attended for a small town,” said Harriet Routh to the waiter at the inn at Amherst, who was laying the cloth for her dinner. She was sitting by a window on the ground-floor, and idly watching the decorous procession as it passed along the main street, to the huge admiration of gaping boys and gossiping nursemaids.

“ Yes, ma’am,” replied the man, gladly seizing the opportunity of approaching the window and having a peep on his own account.

“ He was very much respected, was old Mr. Evans ; no one in the town more so. He gave the best of measures, and used the best of mater’als ; and a charitabler man, nor a constanter at meetin’, though uncommon deaf latterly, ain’t in Amherst.”

Harriet looked inquiringly at the speaker.

“ I beg your pardon, ma’am, you’re a stranger, of course, and don’t know nothin’ about poor old Evans. He were a tailor, ma’am, at Amherst, man and boy, for fifty year and more, and got a deal of custom, which they do say no tailor here won’t have for the future, seeing as they can’t compete with the Sydenham suits.”

Harriet made no comment upon the man’s little discourse, and he left the room. When she was alone, she smiled a smile not good to see, and said, half aloud :

“ I remember how they used to talk about Providence and providential interventions on behalf of the good, long ago, when I used to fancy I

believed in Providence, and when I certainly did believe in the existence of the good. I wonder what these people would call *this*? If it is a providential intervention, the theory has two sides.”

## CHAPTER VI.

### ON THE DEFENSIVE.

THE announcement of a lady who wished to see Mrs. Brookes caused the faithful old woman no particular emotion. She was well known and much respected among the neighbours of Poynings, in the humbler sense, and visits from several of their number were ordinary events enough in her life. The announcement found her, not in her own room, but in her mistress's, where she had replaced the portrait of George, and was sitting looking at it with dim eyes and clasped hands. The time had been long in rolling over her weary old head; for though she had passed the period of life in which feeling is very keen, and sorrow has power to torture, and constancy to last, Mrs. Brookes had no other objects to divide her thoughts with Mrs. Carruthers and her son;

and day by day the old woman had brooded upon the new trouble which had come to those whom she loved so well. Perplexity mingled with her grief, for she knew not what to think. She had stoutly denied the possibility of George's guilt, in the memorable dialogue which had been the last she had held with his mother; but the faint and fluttering hope she entertained was very different from the confidence she expressed; and now, in the solitude and silence of the great house, in the absence of the absorbing demand which Mrs. Carruthers's condition had made upon all her attention and self-command, her stout old heart sank within her. His mother was gone away from all the scenes and associations which had come to have a terrible meaning. Would she ever return? Ellen hardly knew how she wished to answer this question. It were better and happier perhaps that she never did, that her tired heart should drowsily beat itself to rest in a strange country, and lie hidden under another soil than that her son had stained with blood. Had he done this thing? What of him? Where was he? The orderly house, the well-regulated household, needed little

of the old housekeeper's supervision. The absence of the family made little difference. No cleaning-days interrupted the decorous order of things in an establishment in which it would have savoured of indecorum to suppose that the rule of absolute cleanliness was ever superseded. Alterations and repairs were innovating interruptions altogether incompatible with Poynings; and, in fact, there was little or nothing to break the dead level to which old Ellen had looked forward as that of her days when she should be left alone in the stately house, and which had begun to realise itself at once.

Dixon had accompanied her mistress to foreign parts; and it was Martha, housemaid, who told Mrs. Brookes that a lady, who had been shown into her own room, wanted to see her.

“Which, I dare say, she's come after Susan's character,” remarked Martha, parenthetically, “for she ain't this side Hamherst, I know.”

Mrs. Brookes rose from the chair that she had placed opposite George's picture, took off her spectacles, from which she wiped a suspicious moisture, placed them carefully in her pocket, arranged her

cap and shawl, and, without vouchsafing any answer to the speculations of Martha, she took her way slowly to the housekeeper's room. As she crossed the hall she saw a fly standing at the open door; and the driver, a man from Page's, touched his hat to her as she passed.

"I don't know this lady," she thought. "Nobody about here takes a fly to come to Poynings."

Her visitor was seated on the heavy horsehair sofa, which in the winter flanked the fire, but was now drawn close under the window through which George had entered on that memorable night, which came freshly into the memory of the old woman at that moment. As she looked sharply at the figure which rose to greet her, Mrs. Brookes felt in a moment that she was in the presence of a woman with some purpose.

The fixedness of Harriet Routh's face, the effort of a smile—for loneliness told upon her nerves now with rapidity and power—a something forced and painful in her voice, aroused an instinctive fear in Mrs. Brookes, and put her on her guard. She made a stiff bow and a movement

with her body, which, when she was younger, would have been a curtsey, but was now only a duck, and asked her visitor's pleasure.

“ I have called upon you, Mrs. Brookes,” said Harriet, in a sweet and winning tone, “ in consequence of a paragraph which I have seen in a newspaper.”

It was an unfortunate beginning, for it set the old nurse instantly on her guard by arousing her suspicions, and making her resolve that the blue-eyed, sweet-spoken lady, who looked as if she had a purpose, should get nothing out of her.

“ Indeed,” she replied, very stiffly. “ Please to sit down, ma'am.”

Harriet resumed her seat, and began to speak rather quickly. Mrs. Brookes looked at her steadily, immovably, having put on her spectacles for the purpose, but gave her neither encouragement nor assistance by so much as a sound or a nod.

“ I am Mrs. Routh,” she said, “ and a friend of Mr. George Dallas, Mrs. Carruthers's son. It is on his account and for his sake I have come here.”



Mrs. Brookes's black-mittened hands pressed each other more closely as they lay clasped together in her lap, but she made no sign.

“ I am aware of the unfortunate circumstances which keep Mr. Dallas and his mother apart,” continued Harriet, who maintained a watch upon the old woman as steady as her own, but more covert; “ and I am afraid he will be much distressed and alarmed if this reaches him without any preparation.”

She held out a newspaper as she spoke — a newspaper she had procured at the inn at Amherst, and pointed to the paragraph which recorded the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers of Poynings and suite for the Continent; and, in addition, the regret with which “ we ” had learned that the departure in question had been occasioned by the dangerous illness of Mrs. Carruthers. Mrs. Brookes was immensely relieved, but not altogether reassured. She had a vague idea that the business of detection was sometimes intrusted to women, and she still had her doubts of the blue-eyed, sweet-spoken lady whose face indicated a purpose, without betraying it.

“ Mr. Dallas knows of his mother’s illness,” said Mrs. Brookes. “ He will not hear of it first from any newspaper.”

“ Indeed,” said Harriet. “ I am glad to know that. I am much relieved. Mr. Dallas is so intimate with Mr. Routh, my husband, and we are so much attached to him, that anything which is of importance to him concerns us. I am on my way to Dover, and I thought I would turn out of it a little to inquire into this matter.”

“ Thank you, ma’am,” said Mrs. Brookes, still unsoftened. “ May I ask if you have left your house in London ?”

“ We have for the present,” replied Harriet ; “ indeed, I don’t think we shall return there.”

Mrs. Brookes looked confused and distressed.

“ Excuse me,” she said, after an awkward pause, “ if I appear at all impertinent. I am George Dallas’s old nurse, and more his mother’s friend than her servant, and I can’t be particular about other people when they are concerned. George Dallas is not as welcome here as he ought to be in his mother’s house ; you say you know that. If you really are Mrs. Routh, you ought to

know more about him than that—more, in fact, than I do.”

“Certainly,” said Harriet, with unchanged sweetness of tone, and just the least gleam of colour in her cheek, showing that she was approaching her object. “I do know a great deal more about George Dallas than you do, if, as I conclude from your words, nothing has been heard of him since his last visit to his mother.”

She paused very slightly, but Mrs. Brookes did not utter a word.

“You are quite right to be cautious, Mrs. Brookes; in such a delicate family matter as this, caution is most essential. Poor George has been so foolish, that he has laid himself open to being harmed either by enemies or injudicious friends; but I assure you, Mrs. Brookes, I am neither. I really am Mrs. Routh, and I am quite in George’s confidence, and am here solely with the purpose of saving him any trouble or anxiety I can.”

“Where is he?” asked the old woman, suddenly, as if the question were forced upon her.

“He is at Amsterdam, in Holland,” replied Harriet, in a frank tone, and changing her seat.

for one beside Mrs. Brookes, as she spoke ; “ here are several letters from him. See,” and she drew half a dozen sheets of foreign paper, closely written over, from her pocket, and put them into the old woman’s hands. She beheld the letters with mingled pleasure and avoidance : they could not answer the question which tormented her, but they relieved her misgivings about her visitor. She felt assured now that she really was speaking to Mrs. Routh, and that the object of her visit was one of kindness to George. The letters were in his well-known hand ; the thin paper and the postmarks satisfied her that they came from abroad. He was still out of the country, then ; so far there was safety, but she must be cautious still concerning him. What if she could make Harriet the unconscious bearer of a further warning to him—a warning carefully contrived so that none but he should know its meaning, and he should understand it thoroughly ? She would try. She had thought all this while she turned the letters over in her hands ; then she returned them to Harriet, and said :

“ Thank you, ma’am. I see these are from

Master George, and it's plain he has great confidence in you. He never answered a letter I sent him : it went to your house."

"All communications for him are addressed to Mr. Routh," said Harriet, "and forwarded at once."

"Well, ma'am, he never told me where he had gone to, or wrote a letter but one to his mother ; and when that came, she was too ill to read it, or know anything about it."

"Indeed," said Harriet, in a tone of commiseration ; "she must have been taken ill just after he saw her, then?"

"She was," returned Mrs. Brookes, emphatically, "and you, ma'am, know, no doubt, why she saw him, and can understand that his conduct caused her illness."

"Not exactly that," said Harriet. "He told me all that had passed, and described his mother as full of forgiveness and hope, and he even said how well and handsome he thought her looking. George amuses us very much by constantly talking of his mother's beauty ; he will be all the more distressed when he hears of her illness, now, and

I really think, Mrs. Brookes, it cannot be quite fair to impute it to his conduct."

"It was just that, and nothing else," said the old woman; and her voice shook as she spoke, though she strove to control it. "It was, indeed, ma'am, and you must tell him the truth, without softening it, or making it any better. Tell him that she nearly died of the knowledge of his conduct, and that her mind is weakened, and her memory gone."

"Her memory gone!" exclaimed Harriet. "You don't mean to say it is so bad as that?"

"I do, indeed," said Mrs. Brookes. "And will you tell him exactly what I tell you? Tell him that his mother has forgotten all that led to her illness, all the fear and suspense she underwent. Of course she was frightened at what she had to do, and in suspense until it was done; but I am sure she has not forgotten him, and if he were to see her, or even be mentioned to her suddenly, it might have the worst effect. Be sure to tell him this, and that the only thing he can do to atone for the past in any way is to keep out of his mother's sight. He knows some of this al-

ready, for I wrote to him, and he knows from Mr. Carruthers that his mother is gone away."

"From Mr. Carruthers?" said Harriet, in a tone of admirably simulated surprise; "does *he* ever communicate with George?"

"My master is a very just man," replied Mrs. Brookes, in a stately tone, "and he would not allow his wife's son to be kept in ignorance of his mother's danger. I am sure he will send for him, wherever he may be, if there is no chance of her recovery. I don't say he would send for him sooner."

"Of course Mr. Carruthers has no idea of the cause of Mrs. Carruthers's illness?"

"No, no; it was her fear of his finding out that George had been here, and what for, that brought it on; but, of course, he did not suspect anything."

"It is very strange," said Harriet, musingly; "she seems to have borne all this business perfectly well at the time, and given way completely afterwards. It must have surprised *you* very much, Mrs. Brookes, though, no doubt, you understand your mistress's constitution."

“Yes,” replied the old woman, dryly, and ignoring the beginning of the sentence, “I understand my mistress’s constitution.”

“I will give your message to Mr. Dallas,” said Harriet, rising, “and I had better leave you our temporary address, unless, indeed, you would prefer writing to Mr. Dallas direct.”

“No,” said Mrs. Brookes. “I have nothing to say. When news of his mother comes from abroad, I will send it to you.”

The old woman was constrained and miserable in her visitor’s presence, but the hospitality of Poynings must be vindicated; and she felt, besides, that Mrs. Carruthers would, in other days, have been glad of an opportunity of being kind to any one who had been kind to George. So she pressed Harriet to take some refreshment and to prolong her visit. But Harriet would not touch bread or wine in the house, and told Mrs. Brookes she must return to Amherst immediately, to catch the train for Dover. “I dined at the inn in the town,” she said, in explanation of her refusal, “as I had to wait awhile before I could get a fly.”



“ I hope they made you comfortable, ma’am,” said Mrs. Brookes, who had resumed, when their interview assumed a commonplace complexion, her head-servant-like manner. “ Page’s people are obliging, and it is a respectable house.”

“ Very much so indeed,” returned Harriet, carelessly. “ The town seems a clean dull sort of place. I had a funeral to look at while I waited for my dinner, and the waiter entertained me with the biography of the deceased.”

“ I had not heard of a death at Amherst,” said Mrs. Brookes, primly. She did not like the flippant tone in which her visitor spoke. “ The servants have not been in the town this week.”

“ An estimable person—one Evans, a tailor, I believe; so the waiter said,” Harriet returned, still more carelessly, as she took up her parasol and railway-guide, glanced covertly at the old woman’s face, and moved to the door.

Mrs. Brookes stood quite still for several seconds; then she followed Harriet, joined her at the red-baize door which opened into the hall, accompanied her to the great door, where a footman waited, took a respectful leave of her, and

then shut herself up in her room, and remained invisible to the household for the remainder of the day.

As Harriet Routh drove back to Amherst, she leaned her head wearily against the uncongenial woodwork of the fly, and summed up the results of her journey.

“ Whatever the mother knows, the old woman knows. The old woman is as staunch as steel, and she will conceal her suspicions all the more tenaciously, the stronger they are ; and I have strengthened them. What a clever old woman she is, and how brave ! If my purpose had been what she suspected, I should have had some real difficulty in getting the information I required. It is clear that nothing is to be feared now, in this direction. Mrs. Brookes will never speak. Mrs. Carruthers is in the best possible condition for our purposes, and her son has no pretext for returning to Poynings, even if the death of the tailor had not made it quite safe for him to do so.”

She did not look out upon the fair scene

through which she was passing. To her, all beauty of nature was a dead thing; she had no heart-throbs of exultation in "the pomp that fills the summer-circuit of the hills;" no sense of its serene loveliness reached her busy brain, or tempted her troubled brooding eyes. When she occasionally lifted them, in shifting her position, they might have been blind for any knowledge of the sunshine or the greenery that was in them. "I will write to him," she went on in her thoughts, "just what she told me to say. Poor George! It is hard to have to make him believe that he has broken his mother's heart, and turned his mother's brain. He does not deserve it, fool as he is. He is easily persuaded, fortunately. I don't feel fit for much that is not easy, now. The letter must be sent on at once, and, if I do my part well, and this woman dies, or remains abroad—and I fancy Mr. Carruthers is not the man to bring an imbecile wife back, if he can help it—there's no reason why George should come to England again for years, that I can see."

The driver of the fly pulled up for a minute, and, letting down one of the front windows, in-

quired whether he was to go to the inn or to the railway station. While Harriet was answering his question by desiring him to drive to the station, and looking out of the window, a young girl on horseback, a large black Newfoundland dog galloping by her horse's side, passed the fly. The driver touched his hat respectfully, and the young lady acknowledged the salute with her whip.

“That's Miss Carruthers, ma'am,” said the man to Harriet, giving her the information in a manner which duly indicated the local importance of Miss Carruthers. Harriet looked back at the girl, and noted the golden gleam of her beautiful hair, the easy swaying of her graceful figure, the air of youth and refinement which characterised her.

“That's Miss Carruthers, is it?” she thought. “George has never seen her, I fancy, as he never mentioned her to me.”

She had some time to wait for the train, and she went into the waiting-room. But she found it already occupied by some cheery, chatty women and children, returning from a holiday excursion. Their idle talk, their careless laughter, jarred with

her mood; the children looked askance at her, and hushed their prattle; the women drew close together on the hard high leather bench which lined the room, a solemn mockery of a divan, and moderated their tones to a prim gentility. Harriet perceived the effect her presence produced, smiled slowly, and went out again upon the platform, which she paced from end to end, until the train came up, listening idly to the raised voices and renewed laughter which reached her through the open door.

When all the other passengers had taken their places, Harriet got into a carriage which had no other occupant, and so travelled up to London alone.

Routh was in the house when she reached the Tavistock, and was surprised at her speedy return. She told him how the intelligence she had heard on her arrival at Amherst had simplified her task of investigation. She made her narrative as brief as possible, she spoke in a cold measured voice which had become habitual to her, and which filled Routh with intense concealed irritation; and she never looked at him until she had concluded.

“I’ll post the letter from the old fellow at once then,” said Routh; “it’s only a couple of days late, and Dallas is too careless to notice that. When you write—you’d better not do it for a day or so, lest he might take it into his head to suspect you of a motive—you can tell him about our move.”

Harriet acquiesced, and changed the subject to their new residence, a furnished house in Mayfair. She would go there on the morrow, she said, and arrange all their little property. Had everything been removed from South Molton-street?

Everything. Routh had seen to it himself, and had employed the boy who was always about there.

“Ay,” said Harriet, dreamily, for she was thinking of the time, gone for ever, when she had been happy in the home she had left without one regret or hope. “What of him?”

“Nothing that I can make out,” answered Routh, irritably. “But I hate the sort of half-recollection I seem to have of him. There’s something in my mind connected with him, and I can’t disentangle it.”

Harriet looked up at her husband in some surprise, and turned very pale. She had a painful, an indelible remembrance connected with the first time she had seen Jim Swain. But Routh knew nothing of that; so she said nothing; she made no effort to aid his memory. She would avoid the torture when she could. Besides, she was utterly weary in body and in spirit.

Mr. Carruthers's letter reached George Dallas not exactly duly, indeed, but after a delay which would have astonished and exasperated the writer, had he known it, to the last degree.

Stewart Routh and Harriet were very much superior to George Dallas in many mental attributes, and in particular in cunning; but they were incapable of understanding the young man on certain points. One of these points was his love for his mother, with its concomitants of remorse, repentance, and resolution. Not comprehending this mixed feeling, they made a serious miscalculation. The day or two which Harriet allowed to intervene before she wrote the letter which was to prolong George's absence, exactly sufficed to bring him to England.

## CHAPTER VII.

### CLEARED UP. .

THE shock communicated to George Dallas by his step-father's letter was violent and terrible in proportion to the resolutions which had been growing up in his mind, and gaining strength and fixedness with each day's absence from the old accustomed scenes of dissipation and sources of temptation. Like all persons of similar temperament, he was easily overcome by agitation, and his eager nature led him to anticipate evil as readily as it caused him to enjoy good thoroughly. He was a strong man physically, but a sickening, weak shudder, such as might have shaken a woman, shook him as he read the few formal lines which conveyed to him so much more than their writer had known or intended. Was it all to be in vain? Was the golden time, the pre-



cious opportunity, gone by for ever? Was she to die, or to die to him at least, and never to know that his repentance had been real, that the lesson had been effectual, that the reform had been inaugurated?

The terms in which Mr. Carruthers had written to his step-son were as vague as they were formal, and the uncertainty to which the letter condemned him was as agonising as the misery which it produced. Where was she? He did not know; he had no means of knowing. How great were her sufferings? How imminent was her danger? These points were beyond the reach of his investigation. He knew that he was to blame for his mother's illness; he saw all things now in a new and clear light, and though his was no miraculous reformation, no sudden transformation from sinner to saint, but rather an evidence of mental growth and refinement under the influence of a new order of feelings, working on a singularly pliable temperament, George Dallas was so different to what he had been, that he shrank not only with disgust, but with wonder, from the contemplation of the perverse folly which had led to such results. He

had always been dissipated, worthless, and ungrateful, he thought; why had he never realised the guilt of being so before? Why, indeed? Having been blind, now he saw; having been foolish, he had become wise. The ordinary experience, after all, but which every man and woman believes in his or her case exceptional, had come to this young man, but had come laden with exceedingly bitter grief. With swift, sudden fear, too, and stinging self-distrust; for if his mother were indeed lost to him, the great motive, a real one, however tardily acknowledged, would be lost too, and then, how should he, how could he, answer for himself? Just then, in the first keenness of his suffering, in the first thrill of fear which the sense of impending punishment sent through him, he did not think of his love, he drew no strength, no counsel, no consolation from it; the only image before his mind was that of his mother, long bowed down, and now broken, under the accumulated load of grief and disappointment which he had laid upon her. Mr. Carruthers had acted characteristically, George thought in writing to him, as he had done, merely telling him of his mother's illness and removal,

but giving him no address, affording him no opportunity of writing to her. So much he had done for his own conscience' and credit's sake, not actuated by any sympathy for him. The old anger towards his step-father, the old temptation to lay the blame of all his own ill-conduct on Mr. Carruthers, to regard his banishment from Poynings as cause rather than effect, arose fiercely in George's heart, as he read the curt sentences of the letter over and over again; but they were met and conquered by a sudden softened remembrance of his mother's appeal to him for a just judgment of her husband, whom she loved, and the better nature of the young man, newly and strongly aroused, got the victory.

“No, no,” he said impetuously and aloud, “he's not to blame; the fault is mine, and if I am never to have the chance of telling her the truth, I'll tell it to myself at all events.”

George's resolution to go to England was soon taken. He must know more than Mr. Carruthers had told him, and only at Poynings could he learn it. It never occurred to him that Mrs. Brookes might have accompanied his mother abroad. His

impulsive nature rarely permitted him to foresee any obstacle in the way of a design or a desire, and he acted in this instance with his usual headlong precipitation.

When George Dallas reached London, he found he would have just sufficient time to go to South Molton-street and see Routh or Harriet for a few minutes, before he could catch a train for Amherst. Arrived at Routh's former residence, he was surprised to observe, as he got out of a hansom, that a card, displayed in the parlour window, announced "A drawing-room floor to let." The hall-door was opened at his summons with unusual alacrity, and in reply to his inquiry, the servant, a newly engaged one who had never seen him before, informed him that Mr. and Mrs. Routh had "left," and were to be found at Queen-street, Mayfair. George stood, for a moment, irresolute in surprise, and the servant repeated the address, fancying he had not heard her. His face was towards the open door, and he turned his head sharply round, as a boy's voice said, in a peculiar pert tone which had an odd indefinite familiarity for his ear :

“Any letters for Mr. Routh to-day, Mary Jane? ’cos, if so, hand ’em over.”

The speaker was Mr. James Swain, who had come up behind George Dallas unperceived, and who, when he saw the young man’s face, gave an involuntary start, and dropped his saucy manner on the instant.

“Yes, there’s three letters and a circ’lar for Mr. Routh,” replied Mary Jane, in a sulky tone; “and missis says as she hopes Mr. Routh will put his address in the paper or something, for people is always a comin’ and makin’ us think as they’re lodgers.” Then with a glance at George, which seemed to imply that he might not have been considered ineligible in that capacity, Mary Jane went to get the letters, and Dallas addressed Jim Swain.

“Are you going back to Mr. Routh’s direct?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” answered Jim. “I come every day, since they’ve been gone, to see after letters and messages.”

“Then you can take a message from me,” said George, pointing the observation with a sixpence. “Tell Mr. Routh Mr. Dallas has come to London,

having heard bad news, and has gone to his mother's house. You won't forget?"

"No, sir," I won't forget," said Jim, in a tone of satisfactory assurance.

"Say I expect to get back to-morrow, and will come to see him at once. Mr. Dallas—that's my name, remember."

George then jumped into the hansom again, and was driven away to the railway station.

"Mr. Dallas," said Jim Swain to himself as he walked slowly down the street, carrying the letters confided to him by Mary Jane—"that's your name, is it? I wonder wot you've bin up to, and where you've bin up to it? I shall tell *her* the gent's message—not *him*."

The night had fallen upon the woods and fields of Poynings, and no light gleamed from the stately old house, save one ray, which shone through the open window of the housekeeper's room. By the casement sat George Dallas, his arm upon the window-sill, his head leaning against his hand, the cool fresh air of the summer night coming gratefully to his flushed and heated face. Opposite,

and close to him, sat Mrs. Brookes, still wearing though their conference had lasted many hours, the look of agitation beyond the strength to bear it which is so painful to see on the faces of the aged. All had been explained between the old woman and the prodigal son of her beloved mistress, and the worst of her fears had been dispelled. George had not the guilt of murder on his soul. The chain of circumstances was indeed as strong as ever, but the old woman did not retain the smallest fear. His word had reassured her—indeed, the first glance at his face, in the midst of the terror and surprise of their meeting, had at once and for ever put her apprehensions to flight. Innocence of *that*, at least, was in his face, in his hurried agitated greeting, in the bewilderment with which he heard her allusion to her letter, in his total unconsciousness of the various emotions which tore her heart among them. She saw, she foresaw, no explanation of the circumstances which had led to the fatal mistake she had made; she saw only that her boy was innocent, and the vastness, the intensity, of the relief sufficed, in the first moments of their meeting, to deprive it of the

horror and bitterness with which, had she had any anticipation of such an event, she would have regarded it. But the first relief and the full explanation—all that George had to tell her, all she had to tell him—could not change the facts as regarded Mrs. Carruthers, could not alter the irrevocable, the miserable past.

When the first confusion, excitement, and incoherent mutual questioning had given way to a more settled and satisfactory conversation, Mrs. Brookes told George all that had occurred—the visit of the official gentleman from London, the servants' version of his business, the interview between Mr. Carruthers and Evans, and the suspicion and fear, only too reasonable, to which all the unfortunate circumstances had given rise.

It was with the utmost difficulty that George arrived at a clear understanding of the old woman's narrative, and came to realise how overwhelming was the presumption against him. By degrees he began to recall the circumstances which had immediately preceded and followed his clandestine visit to Poynings. He recalled the remarks he had heard at the *Mercury* office; he remembered that



there had been some talk of a murder, and that he had paid no attention to it, but had gone away as soon as possible, and never given the matter another thought. To find himself implicated in a crime of so terrible a nature, to find that circumstances had brought him in contact with such a deed, filled him with horror and stupefaction; to know that his mother had been forced to conceive such a suspicion was, even without the horrible addition of the effect produced on her, suffering far greater than any he had ever known. He felt giddy, sick, and bewildered, and could but look piteously at his faithful old friend, with a white face and wild haggard eyes.

“She believed it?” he said again and again.

“No, George, no; she only feared it, and she could not bear the fear; no wonder, for I could hardly bear it, and I am stronger than she is, and not your mother, after all. But just think, George. You bought the coat from Evans, and the man who wore that coat was seen in the company of the murdered man the last time he was seen alive. I knew there must be some dreadful mistake. I

knew you never lifted your hand against any man's life, and that some one else must have got possession of the coat; but your mother said no, that you had worn it when she saw you at Amherst, and nothing could remove the impression. George what did you do with the coat you bought at Evans's?"

"I had it down here, sure enough," answered George, "and I did wear it when she last saw me. I left it at Mr. Routh's afterwards, by mistake, and took one of his abroad with me; but this is a horrid mystery altogether. Who is the man who has been murdered? What is the motive?"

"I cannot tell you that, George," said Mrs. Brookes; "but I will give you the papers, and then you will know all, and you will understand how much she suffered."

The old woman left George alone for a few minutes, while she went to her bedroom to get the newspapers which she locked securely away at the bottom of a trunk. During her absence the young man strode about the room distractingly, trying in vain to collect his thoughts and

set them down steadily to the solution of the terrible mystery which surrounded him.

“Here they are, George,” said Ellen, as she entered the room and handed him a roll of newspapers. “Sit down here, by the window, and try to read them quietly. I must leave you now, and tell the servants who you are, and that you are going to stay here to-night—there must be no concealment now; thank God, it’s not wanted any longer. Perhaps out of all this evil good may come, my boy.”

He had sat down by the window, and was eagerly opening the roll of paper, and seeking the account of the murder. Mrs. Brookes paused by his side for a moment, laid her withered hand gently on his hair, and then left him. A moment after he started up from his chair, and cried out:

“Good God! the man was Deane!”

The shock of this discovery was extreme. Wholly unable as he had been to account for the coincidence which Mrs. Brookes’s imperfect story (for, like most persons of her class, she was an unskilful narrator of facts) had unfolded to him, he had never supposed his connection

with it real, and now he saw it all, and in a moment perceived the gravity of his situation. The nameless man whom he had seen so often, and yet known so slightly; concerning whom he had speculated often and carelessly; whom no one had recognised; whose singular dress the waiter at the tavern had described in his evidence; the date; all was conclusive. The man murdered was Deane. But who was the murderer? How was it that no one had recognised the body? With all his mysterious ways, in spite of the callous selfishness which had rendered him indifferent to companionship save in the mere pursuit of his pleasures, it seemed wonderful that no one should have been able to identify him.

“There’s Routh, now,” said George to himself, “*he* must have heard of the finding of the body, he must have read the description of the dress; he may have seen the man’s fur coat before, though I never did. To be sure, he did not dine with us that day, but he knew where Deane dined, and with whom. What can Routh have been about?”

These and a thousand questions of a similar

nature George Dallas put to himself, without finding any answer to them, without stilling the tumult in his mind. He tried to arrange the circumstances in their order of occurrence, and to think them out, but in vain; he could not do so yet: all was confusion and vague horror. He had not liked this man. Theirs had been the mere casual association of convenience and amusement—an association, perhaps, the foremost of all those which he was firmly determined never to renew; and yet he could not regard its dreadful ending with indifference. The life which had perverted George had not hardened him, and he could not readily throw off the impression created by the discovery that the man with whom he had joined in the pursuit of reckless and degrading pleasure had died a violent death within so short a time of their last meeting. When Mrs. Brookes came into the room again, the expression of the young man's face terrified her afresh.

“Ellen,” he said, “this is a dreadful business, apart from my unhappy complication with it, and what it has cost my dear mother. I knew

this unhappy man; he was a Mr. Deane. I dined with him at that tavern in the Strand. I did wear that coat. All the circumstances are correct, though all the inferences are false. I begin to understand it all now; but who can have murdered him, and for what motive, I cannot conceive. The most natural thing in the world was that they should suspect me, as the man who wore the coat. Mr. Evans will recognise me, no doubt, as he told Mr. Carruthers."

"No, no, George; the poor old man is dead," interrupted Mrs. Brookes.

"Dead?" said George. "Well, he seemed an honest fellow, and I am sorry for it; but it makes no difference in my position. When I communicate with the police, I will admit all he could prove."

"Must you do that, George?" asked Mrs. Brookes, wistfully. She had a natural dread of the law in the abstract.

"Of course I must, nurse; I can tell them who the unfortunate man was, and account for him up to a very late hour on the night of the seventeenth of April."

“Take care, George,” said the old woman. “If you can’t account for yourself afterwards, you can’t clear yourself.”

The observation was shrewd and sensible. George felt it so, and said, “Never mind that. I am innocent, and when the time comes I shall have no difficulty in proving myself innocent.”

“You know best, George,” said the old woman, with a resigned sigh; “but tell me, who was this poor man?”

“Sit down and I will tell you all about it.”

Then George seated his old friend close beside him, and told her the whole story of his intercourse with Stewart Routh, of his knowledge of Deane, his last meeting with him, their dinner together, the adjournment to the billiard-rooms, the money won by Dallas from Deane, and his leaving town early the next morning for Amherst.

“That was the day they found the body, was it not?” asked Mrs. Brookes.

“Let me see,” said George; and he again referred to the newspapers.

“Yes; it was on Wednesday, the eighteenth—in

the evening. I was down at Amherst then, nurse; that was the day I saw my mother last."

He sighed, but a smile stole over his face also. A cherished memory of that day abode in his heart.

Then Mrs. Brookes questioned George concerning Routh and his wife, and told him of Harriet's visit, and all the emotion and fear which it had caused her. George was touched and grateful.

"That was like her," he said; "she is the truest of friends, a treasure among women. I wonder she did not write to me, though, when she sent on Mr. Carruthers's letter."

The observation passed unnoticed by Mrs. Brookes. Had she asked when the letter had reached George, a discovery, dangerous to the interests of Harriet and Routh, might have been made; but she had very dim notions of continental places and distances, and the time consumed in postal transmission.

"They knew this poor man; did they not know that he was the murdered person?"

"No," said George, "they had no notion of



it. How shocked they will be when I tell them of it! Routh will be the best person in the world to tell me how to go about communicating with the police authorities. But now, Ellen, tell me about my mother.”

Time went over, and the night fell, and the old woman and the young man still talked together, and she tried to comfort him, and make him believe that all would be well. But George was slow to take such comfort—full of remorse and self-condemnation, of gloom and foreboding. The mercurial temperament of the young man made him a bad subject for such suspense and self-reproach, and though he had no shadow of fear of any trouble to come to him from the evidence on the inquest, there was a dull brooding sense of apprehension over him, against which he had no power, no heart, to strive. So he listened to the story of his mother's illness and departure, the physicians' opinions, and Mr. Caruthers's plans for her benefit and comfort, and darker and darker fell the shadow upon his heart.

“We have had no news since they left Paris,” said Mrs. Brookes, in conclusion, “but I expect

to see Miss Carruthers to-morrow. She will have a letter from her uncle."

"Miss Carruthers!" said George, lifting up his head with renewed animation. "Has she not gone abroad with them?"

"No," said Mrs. Brookes; "she is staying at the Sycamores, Sir Thomas Boldero's place. Sir Thomas is her uncle on the mother's side. She rides over very often to see me, and I expect her to-morrow."

"At what hour does she generally come?" asked George.

"In the afternoon; after lunch."

"Well, I shall be in London by that time, nurse; so there is no danger of my incurring my step-father's wrath this time by an encounter with the heiress."

There was a momentary touch of bitterness in George's voice, but his slow sad smile contradicted it.

"Ah, George!" said the old woman. "Take heart. All will be well, and the time will come when you will be welcome here."

"Perhaps so, nurse. In the mean time, you

will let me know what news Miss Carruthers brings, and especially where my mother is, and their next move."

That night George Dallas slept for the first time under the roof of the old house at Poynings; but an early hour in the morning found him on his way back to town.

When Clare Carruthers, mounted on Sir Lancelot and escorted by Cæsar, arrived at Poynings, on the following afternoon, she was surprised to find Mrs. Brookes looking well and cheerful. The girl had brought good news. Mrs. Carruthers had borne the journey well, and it was proposed that she should leave Paris and proceed to the south of France after the interval of a week. Clare roamed over the house and gardens as usual. She was beautiful as ever, but with a new and graver beauty than of old. There was no observant eye to mark the change, no kindred spirit to note and share the girl's trouble. She was quite alone. When she returned from her ramble, and while her horse was being brought round, she went to Mrs. Brookes's room to bid her good-bye. The old

woman took two letters out of her desk, and said :  
“Do you remember these letters, Miss Carruthers? You brought them to me when Mrs. Carruthers was first taken ill.”

“Yes, I remember. What of them?” Clare answered, carelessly.

“Will you have the kindness to enclose them in a large envelope, and direct them to Mr. George Dallas for me?”

“Certainly,” said Clare; but she looked a little surprised, for Mrs. Brookes wrote remarkably well for a person of her class.

“I wrote to him lately,” said Mrs. Brookes, “and the letter did not reach him; so I suppose I directed it indistinctly.”

Clare sat down at the table, and in a large bold hand wrote the address which Harriet had given upon the envelope.

“You are sending Mr. Dallas these letters that he may read them, as his mother is unable?” asked Clare, to whom the forbidden subject of Mrs. Carruthers’s son always offered more or less temptation.

“Yes, ma’am,” replied the old woman; “I

am pretty sure they come from Mr. Felton, and ought to be seen to."

"And who is Mr. Felton?" said Clare, rising and laying down her pen. "I'll post them as I pass through the village," she added.

"Mr. Felton is Mrs. Carruthers's brother," said Mrs. Brookes. "He has been in America many years, but she said something lately about his coming home."

Clare said no more, but took her leave, and went away. She posted the packet for George Dallas at the village, and, as she rode on, her fair face bore the impress of a painful recollection. She was thinking of the morning on which she had ventured to send the warning to him who was so unworthy of the fancies she had cherished—him of whom she could not think without a shudder, of whom she hardly dared to think at all. When the post was delivered the following morning at the Sycamores, a large packet was placed before Miss Carruthers. It was directed to her, and contained two numbers of the *Piccadilly*, with two instalments of George's serial story, and on the fly leaf of one were the words, "From Paul Ward."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ONCE MORE TIDED OVER,

AN air of respectability and the presence of good taste characterised the house in Queen-street, Mayfair, now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Routh. These things were inseparable from a dwelling of Harriet's. She had the peculiar feminine talent for embellishing the place she lived in, however simple and small were the means at her disposal. The lodgings at South Molton-street had never had the comfortless look and feeling of lodgings, and now there was apparently no lack of money to make the new home all that a house of its size and capabilities need be. Harriet moved about her present dwelling, not as she had moved about her former home, indeed, with happy alacrity, but with the same present judgment, the same critical

eye; and though all she did now was done mechanically, it was done thoroughly.

Harriet was very restless on the day that was to bring George Dallas to their new residence. She had duly received his message from Jim Swain, and though the keen eye of the boy, who was singularly observant of her in every particular that came under his notice, had detected that the intelligence imparted a shock to her, she had preserved her composure wonderfully, in conveying the unwelcome news to her husband. Routh had received it with far less calmness. He felt in a moment that the delay of Harriet's projected letter, a delay prescribed by himself, had induced the return of Dallas, and angry with himself for the blunder, he was angry with her that she had not foreseen the risk. He was often angry with Harriet now; a strange kind of dislike to her arose frequently in his base and ungrateful heart, and the old relations between them had undergone a change, unavowed by either, but felt keenly by both. The strength of character on which Routh knew he could rely to any extent, which he knew would never fail him or its owner, made him

strangely afraid, in the midst of all the confidence it inspired, and he was constrained in his wife's presence, and haunted out of it.

Stewart Routh had never been a rough-spoken man ; the early tradition of his education had preserved him from the external coarseness of a vagabond life, but the underlying influences of an evil temper asserted themselves at times. Thus when Harriet told him gently, and with her blue eyes bright with reassuring encouragement, that Dallas was in England, and would be with them on the morrow, he turned upon her with an angry oath. She shrank back from him for a moment, but the next, she said, gently :

“ We must meet this, Stewart, like all the rest, and it can be done.”

“ How ?” he said rudely ; “ how is it to be met ?”

“ *I will meet it, Stewart,*” she replied. “ Trust me : you have often done so, and never had cause to regret the consequence. I am changed, I know. I have not so much quickness and readiness as I had, but I have no less courage. Remember what my influence over George Dallas was ; it is still



unchanged; let me use it to the utmost of my ability. If it fails, why then"—she spoke very slowly, and leaned her hand heavily on his shoulder with the words,—“then we have but to do what I at least have always contemplated.”

Their eyes met, and they looked steadily at each other for some moments; then withdrawing his gaze from her with difficulty, Routh said, sulkily, “Very well, let it be so; you must see him first: but I suppose I shall have to see him; I can’t escape that, can I?”

She looked at him with a queer glance for a moment, and the shadow of a smile just flickered over her lips. Could he escape? That was his thought, his question. Did she ever ask it for herself? But the impression, irresistible to the woman’s keen perception, was only momentary. She answered the base query instantly.

“No, you cannot; the thing is impossible. But I will see him first, and alone; then if I succeed with him, no risk can come of your seeing him; if I fail, the danger must be faced.”

He turned sulkily away, and leaned upon the window-frame, looking idly into the street.

“ You don’t know when he will be here, I suppose ?” he said, presently.

“ I do not ; but I fancy early in the day.”

“ It’s too bad. I am sick of this. The thing is over now. Why is it always cropping up ?”

He spoke to himself rather than to her ; but she heard him, and the colour flew over her pale face at his words. He left the room soon after, and then Harriet sat down in the weary way that had become habitual to her, and murmured :

“ It is done and over ; and he wonders why it is always cropping up, and I——”

Stewart Routh did not return home until late that night. Such absences had become common now, and Harriet made no comment then or ever. How she passed the hours of solitude he did not inquire, and, indeed, she could hardly have told. On this particular evening she had employed herself on the close and attentive perusal of a number of letters. They were all written by George Dallas, and comprised the whole of his correspondence with her. She read them with attentive eye and knitted brow ; and when she locked the packet up in her desk again, she looked, as Mrs. Brookes had

seen her, like a woman who had a purpose, and who clearly saw her way to its fulfilment.

But the next day Harriet was restless. She could do the thing that lay before her, but she wanted the time for doing it to be come; she wanted to get it over. If this were weakness, then in this Harriet was weak.

Immediately after breakfast Stewart Routh went out. Only a few words had been exchanged between him and Harriet on the subject of George's expected visit, and Harriet had gone to the drawing-room when George came. She met him with the old frank welcome which he remembered so well, and, in answer to his inquiry for Routh, said she was momentarily expecting him.

"You know what brought me back to England," George said, when he was seated, and the first greeting was over; "you got my message?"

"That bad news had reached you. Yes," replied Harriet. "I was just about to write to you. You would have had my letter to-day. I learned from the newspapers that your mother was ill, and——"

"And went to see about it for me. I know all

your goodness, Mrs. Routh, and can never thank you for it half enough. It is only of a piece, though, with all your goodness to me. You have always been the best and truest of friends. My old nurse told me all about your visit. God bless you, Mrs. Routh." And George Dallas took her hand, and, for the second time in his life, kissed it.

There was a pause, a dangerous pause. Harriet felt it, for her heart was beating thickly, and her face was not under such command but that the interested eyes which were looking into it might read the traces of a deep and painful emotion.

"You have been comforted by your visit to Poynings," she said. "You have more hope and relief about your mother? Mrs. Brookes has told you all particulars."

"Yes, Mrs. Routh, I did hear all the particulars, and I also made an extraordinary and terrible discovery in connection with that illness."

"Indeed!" said Harriet, leaning towards him with the liveliest interest and concern in every feature of her face. "It is not that the illness is of a hopeless nature, I hope?"

"I trust not," he said, solemnly; "but, Mrs.

Routh, my mother has been nearly killed by being obliged to suspect me of a dreadful crime.”

“A dreadful crime! You, Mr. Dallas! What do you mean?”

“I mean,” said Dallas, “that a murder has been committed, in which I would appear to have been implicated. I know what I am about to tell you will agitate and distress you, Mrs. Routh, and one of the most mysterious points of a mysterious subject is, that it should be my lot to tell it to you.” He hesitated, then went on: “I don’t know whether I ought to tell you all that I have heard. I have to consult Routh on some important matters, so that it is the more unfortunate that he is out of the way, as no time must be lost in what I have to do.”

The occasion had come now, and Harriet was equal to it. It was with a smile, serious but quite unembarrassed, that she said:

“Don’t depose me from the position of your confidant, George.” She called him by his christian name for the first time. “You know Stewart has no secret from me. Whatever you would tell to him, tell to me. I have more time at your dis-

posal than he has, though not more friendship. In this matter, count us as one. Indeed," she added, with a very skilful assumption of playfulness, which did not, however, alter the gravity of George's manner, "as I am your correspondent, I claim precedence by prescriptive right."

"I hardly know how to tell you, Mrs. Routh ; all the circumstances are so shocking, and so very, very strange. You and Routh have been rather surprised, have you not, by the sudden disappearance of Deane? Routh always thought him an odd, eccentric, unaccountable sort of fellow, coming nobody knew whence, and likely to go nobody knew whither ; but yet it has surprised you and Routh a little that, since the day we were to have dined together in the Strand, Deane has never turned up, hasn't it?"

The strength and self-control which formed such striking features in Harriet's character were severely tried, almost beyond their limits, by the expectation of the revelation which George was about to make ; but there was not a questioning tone in her voice, not a quiver on her lip, as the minutes passed by, while she won him more and

more securely by her calm interest and friendliness. His growing anxiety to see Routh confirmed her in the belief that he knew all that his mother and Mrs. Brookes had known. Remembering the agony she had suffered when she and George had last talked together, and feeling that the present crisis was scarcely less momentous, she rallied all her powers — and they were considerable — and asked him boldly what it was he had to communicate to her. In a voice of the deepest solemnity, he said, taking her hand in his :

“The man who has been murdered, of whose murder my mother was led to suspect me, was Philip Deane !”

“ Good God !” cried Harriet, and shrank back in her chair, covering her face with her hands.

He had reason to say that the news he had to tell her would agitate and distress her. Her whole frame crept and trembled, and a chill moisture broke out on her smooth forehead and pale shivering cheeks. George was alarmed at her distress, and she knew by the intensity of her emotion, now that the words she had been expecting were spoken, how much her nervous system had suffered in

the long struggle she had fought out with such success. He tried to calm her, and loved and admired her all the more for her keen womanly feeling.

“Horrible, most horrible!” she murmured, her eyes still hidden in her shaking hands. “But how do you know? Tell me all you know.”

Then George told her without omission or reservation. She listened eagerly, greedily, and as the narrative proceeded she became quite calm. George dwelt on his astonishment that Routh had not made the discovery which had forced itself on him, but Harriet disposed of that part of the matter in a moment.

“You forget,” she said, “he was not in London. When you came to me, on your return from Amherst, do you not remember I told you Stewart was away, hiding from his creditors, poor fellow? He never heard of the murder very likely; he never interests himself in such horrors. Indeed, he never mentioned anything about it to me, and of course he must have known at once that the man was Deane. The very name of the tavern in the Strand where he



was to have dined himself, would have suggested the idea."

"Precisely so," said George; "that was the thing which puzzled me so completely, and made me anxious to see him."

"The strangeness of the coincidence," said Harriet, "is as remarkable as the event is horrible. It only proves how mistaken are our notions of the laws of chance. What could be more wildly improbable than that, living in the midst of London, and within constant reach of the talk and speculation about it, Stewart and I should have known nothing of the matter?"

"Very extraordinary indeed," said George; "one of those facts which would be denounced as too unnatural, if they were told in fiction. And how unfortunate! What a terrible mystery Routh might have cleared up!"

"And yet," Harriet replied, with a furtive glance at Dallas, full of keen and searching expression, "what could he have told, beyond the fact that he had known the man under the name of Deane? After all, it comes to that, and to no more, doesn't it?"

“To no more, my dear Mrs. Routh? To a great deal more. When we tell the police what we know, there will be not only an identification of the body, but an explanation of the motive.”

“I don’t quite understand you,” said Harriet; and as she spoke, there came a click in her throat, as there had come when she and George Dallas had last spoken together.

Would it ever be over? Should her purpose ever be gained?

“Don’t you?” said George, surprised, “and you so quick, too. But no wonder you are upset by this; it is so dreadful when one has known the person, is it not? But you *will* see in a moment that our being able to depose to the large sum of money and the jewels in the poor fellow’s possession will make the motive quite plain. They have got a notion now that he was a foreigner, and that the motive was political, whereas it was of course simply a robbery. He resisted, I suppose, and was killed in the scuffle.”

“Does the report read like that?” asked Harriet, faintly.

“It simply says he was stabbed,” said George; “but it is plain that all the newspapers took up the political-murder notion at once, and then, of course, their reports would be made to fit their theory. No doubt some ruffian did it who knew that he had a large sum about him that day. Very likely he had been traced from the City; he had been there to get some securities. I can swear to his having told me that, at all events. How very ill you look, Mrs. Routh! This ghastly story has been too much for you. I don’t think you ever liked poor Deane, but no one could know of a man’s coming to such an untimely end, if he was ever such a bad fellow, and not feel it, especially you. I wish I had not said anything. It would have been better for Routh to have told you this.”

“No, no,” said Harriet. “Indeed it is better that I should hear it from you, and you are mistaken in supposing I am so much overcome entirely on account of—on account of——”

“The murder? Yes?” asked George, looking anxiously at her.

“It is all dreadful; no one in the world can

feel it to be more dreadful than I do," said Harriet, earnestly.

As she spoke she rose from her chair, pushed her hair off her forehead, and began to walk slowly up and down the room. George sat still, following her with his eyes, and noting, in all his excitement and perturbation of spirit, the change which a few weeks had made in her appearance.

"I am grieved and troubled for you," George. I see in this serious results for you, and I think more of them."

"For me, Mrs. Routh? What can happen for me in this matter that has not already happened? My mother has suffered all she can suffer. Time may or may not restore her. Surely the follies and sins of my life have been heavily punished. Nothing can undo all this misery; but nothing can be added to it either. I have only to set the mystery at rest."

"Take care, George," said Harriet, earnestly; "I am not sure of that. Let us look at the case in all its bearings. Nothing that you have to tell can contradict the evidence given at the inquest, and which directs suspicion against you. You did

dine with this wretched man; you did leave the tavern in his company; you did wear the coat to which the waiter swears.”

“Ah, by the bye,” said George, “that was the coat I left at your house. Where is it, Mrs. Routh? It must be produced, of course.”

He did not yet perceive that she was trying to shake his determination; but she answered his question with truly wonderful carelessness. “The coat; O yes, I remember. You wrote to me about it. It must be here, of course, unless it has been lost in the flitting from South Molton-street. He tells me a lot of his things have gone astray.”

“Well,” said George, “that’s easily found out. Pray go on, Mrs. Routh. You were saying——”

“I was saying, George, that when you put together all the strange coincidences in this matter which have led, naturally it must be said, to such a conclusion as that the man who wore the coat which you bought at Amherst is the criminal whom the police want to arrest—I think you would find it very difficult to prove that you are not the man!”

“ Good God! You are not serious?” cried George.

“ I am perfectly serious,” Harriet answered. “ How can you prove it? How do *I*, at this moment, know in a manner which I could demonstrate to legal satisfaction that you are not the man who did the deed?”

George looked at her in astonishment.

“ Of course *I do* know it—that is, I believe it, which is quite a different thing; but supposing I did not believe it, supposing my mind were not made up about it, how would you propose to prove it to me? Tell me that, and then the strength of my argument, the value of my advice, will become evident to you, I think.”

Still George looked at her, and his colour rose. He was unaccountably embarrassed by the question. The whole thing had appeared to him as simple for him as it was terrible for Deane, when Harriet began to speak. It bore a very different aspect now.

“ I—I should prove that I parted with Deane, that night, at the door of the billiard-rooms where we had been playing.”

“Outside the door or inside, before witnesses or alone?” interrupted Harriet.

“Why, it certainly was outside the door, and we were alone.”

“Exactly. Then your having parted with him that night is just what you cannot prove; and as you cannot prove that, you can prove nothing. Let me repeat to you your own account of that night’s proceedings, and you will see that you can prove nothing to outweigh the presumptive evidence against you. You told me this wretched man had money about him which he boasted of; therefore, you knew he was a rich prey. You had no money—only a few shillings at least; you went to your lodgings that night, and left them without notice on the following morning, having paid your landlady with a ten-pound note that had been in this man’s possession. How can you account for that? You went to Amherst, where you remained, alone, under a feigned name, for four days; you returned to London, where it can be proved the occurrence was, at the time, a topic of general discussion, late at night. You went abroad the following morning, and at Amster-

dam you offered certain valuable diamonds for sale. The diamonds are your mother's, you say, and formed part of a bracelet given to you by her."

"No, no," said George; "I never would explain that under any circumstances."

Harriet smiled, but the steadfast earnestness of her manner was not lessened by the smile, which was just a little contemptuous.

"That is precisely what you would be forced to explain," she continued. "Certain diamond ornaments were among the articles in the possession of the murdered man, says the newspaper report," she pointed to the passage with a steady hand. He read it, and listened in silence, his face grave and anxious.

"You must account for the diamonds which you sold at Amsterdam; how are you to prove, otherwise, that they are not those the wretched man wore when he was seen in your company?"

"I remember his studs and his ring," said George, in a low agitated voice. "I wonder they have not been traced."

Harriet did not reply for a moment; and the



click in her throat was painfully hard and audible, as she said at length: "They would have been broken up, of course; and remember, George, they were unset diamonds you sold at Amsterdam."

George Dallas leaned his elbows on the table, and his head on his hands. He looked at Harriet, and her face changed when his gaze was removed—changed to a look of sharp, terrible anxiety, to all the intentness of one pleading in a desperate cause.

"You must tell the story of your visit to Amherst; you must tell the truth about your mother and the jewels; moreover, you must prove it. Can your mother do that for you?"

"No," said George, drearily; "but my old nurse can."

"How? Did she see you on the Wednesday, when you arrived at Amherst? Did she see you at all until the Monday? Could she swear you were at Amherst in the interval? And, supposing she could, what would it avail? Look here, George, this man's body was found on the Wednesday evening, the eighteenth of April, and the presumption is that it had been a night and a day in

the river. Do you see what this means?" She put her hand on his shoulder, and grasped it securely. He shrunk from her light fingers; they hurt his flesh as though they had been steel bars. She struck the newspaper lying open on the table with the other hand, and said with a desperate effort, "It means this, George: The man was found on Wednesday; but the deed was done on Tuesday night — done, of course, after you left him; but who can prove that? He was seen alive in your company late on Tuesday night, and he was never seen alive again. The hours of that night must be accounted for, George, if you are to prove yourself guiltless. How can you account for them after the time the waiter saw you leave the tavern together?"

George did not answer. She caught her breath and went on, fixing on him a sideway look of intense anxiety.

"Can any of the people at the billiard-rooms prove at what hour you left them? Can any one at your former lodgings prove at what hour you reached home that night?"

"I don't think we left any one after us at the

billiard-room but the marker," George replied. "By the way, how extraordinary that he did not come forward at the inquest! He must have noticed Deane's odd appearance, and his diamond studs and things, I should think."

"One would think so," said Harriet; "but I dare say the foreign look is commonly enough seen in such places. Still the coat must have been very conspicuous. I forget whether you said you were in the habit of going to those particular billiard-rooms."

"I did not say anything about it, Mrs. Routh. I never was there but that once. It is very odd, as you say, about Deane's coat, but the poor man hadn't it on. After we left the tavern, I said it was an odd, un-English kind of coat, and too warm, I should think, for the weather; but he said he had 'the shakes' that day—Yankee for ague, you know—and had never worn it before in this country. He carried it over his arm, I remember, the cloth side out, and threw it into a corner of the billiard-room. I dare say no one saw it."

"Had he put it on when you parted with him?" asked Harriet.

“No,” said George; “he was still carrying it over his arm, and I remember now that I said to him, ‘You had better button that trapper’s wrap of yours over all that money you’ve been staggering under the weight of.’ ‘Lightened a little, old fellow, by you,’ he said, though he had paid his losses in a note, not in gold.”

Harriet’s face was less anxious now.

“Poor fellow!” George went on, with a slight shudder; “how dreadful it is—such light words, too, as we parted with. When he handed me the note, he asked for pen and ink, and wrote his name upon it, in full, over some initials—A. F., I think—and told me a queer story about an old lady who always indorsed her notes with her name, residence, and the date of her birth, and how he once traced a forgery by a bank-note, purporting to come from her, being devoid of those eccentric inscriptions. He was telling me the story as we went out.”

George’s discursive fancy had wandered from his own position to the circumstances which invested Deane’s fate with additional sadness to his mind. Harriet frowned angrily at this

proof of his invincibly light nature, and went on sharply :

“All this adds strength to my argument. But I asked you another question. Did any one in the house you lodged at know at what hour you went home that night? Is any one in a position to prove it?”

“No,” said George. “I let myself in with a latch-key, and made no noise. I never did when I could help it, there, the old woman was such a Tartar.”

“Then there is not a flaw in my argument, George,” she said, in a sweet, solemn tone, which, from the first time he had heard it, had had an irresistible charm for the young man; “there is nothing to be gained for any one, for any conceivable interest that you are bound to consider, for any interest, indeed, except the abstract one of the law, in telling what you know of this matter.”

“The man’s friends,” remonstrated George, who, habitually submissive to her, did not recoil at the suggestion, as he would infallibly have recoiled had it come from any other person;

“they may not know, they may be in suspense, in misery.”

“I hardly think so,” said Harriet, and her blue eyes had their coldest colour, and her sweet voice its subtlest inflection of scorn. “Did you ever hear him mention relative or friend? Did you ever know a man so cold, so callous, so base, so shamelessly devoid of any interest save in his own pleasure or his own gain? Did you ever know one so narrow-hearted, so mean-spirited, of so crafty and cruel a nature?” Her energy quite startled George. She was looking straight before her, and her hand was raised as though she were tracing a picture as her mind produced it. “The man was a reptile, George—a cruel snake in his nature. I don’t believe any one on earth ever loved him, except his mother in his babyhood. I hope she’s dead; yes, I trust she’s dead! And that you should peril your safety, drag your mother’s name into the police-courts, arouse all the anger, stab all the pride, of your step-father, ruin, or at least, greatly injure, your own prospects, by the revelations you will be forced to make, supposing (which, I confess, I

think most difficult and improbable) you do prove your own innocence, seems to me utterly monstrous and irrational. Remember, you can give justice only negative assistance. If you prove that Deane was the victim, and you not the criminal, you can't tell them who the criminal is, or give them any information about Deane."

"No," said George, very quickly; "but then, you know, Routh can."

Harriet dropped her hand off his shoulder, and fell into a chair.

"You are overdone, Mrs. Routh," George said, tenderly, as he took her hand in his, and resumed his old manner of deferential affection. "You have talked too long and too much about this murder, and it has been too much for you. I ought to have seen that before. We won't say another word about it, until I have consulted Routh. How shocked he will be! I will think of all you have said; but I will do nothing to-day. I can't even wait to see him now, for I must get down to the *Mercury* office by four. I must leave you now."

"You are sure you will do nothing until we

have seen you again?" Harriet said, faintly. "George, let nothing induce you to mention the matter at the *Mercury*. Only think of the godsend a hint would be to them."

"I'll take care," said George. "I will not stir in the matter till I have talked it over thoroughly with you."

"You will stay here, George, of course," said Harriet, kindly, holding out her hand, but without rising. "We have a room at your disposal now, you know."

"Thank you, Mrs. Routh, I will; but I don't think I shall be more than a day or two in London, unless I should be detained by this sad business."

"Are you going back to Amsterdam?" asked Harriet.

"No," said George; "I am going to my mother."

"I was right," Harriet said, when she was alone, as she lay back in her chair, pale and exhausted. "I thought the one strong motive, the motive which, though late aroused, has been



strong enough to save George Dallas from himself, would be powerful now. Twice his mother has helped, has saved, at his expense, his worst, his involuntary enemy. There was nothing else to work upon, but that has succeeded."

Harriet was right to a certain extent, but not quite right. Another motive had helped the end she desired to gain, and George named it to his own heart as he walked down to the *Mercury* office by the name of Clare Carruthers.

"You are a wonderful woman, Harry," said Routh, when Harriet had concluded the brief statement into which she condensed her report of the interview between herself and George. But, though he spoke in a tone of strong admiration, and his face relaxed into a look of intense relief, he did not hold her in his arms and kiss her passionately now. "You are a wonderful woman, and this danger is escaped."

She smiled a little bitterly, very sadly, as she said :

"I don't know. At all events, it is once more tided over."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE AMERICAN LETTERS.

STEWART ROUTH was as hard a man as could readily be found, but his hardness was not proof against his meeting with George Dallas, and he showed Harriet how great a trial it was to him, and how much he feared his own constancy, when he told her he thought she had better not be present at their meeting. The curse of an unholy alliance had fallen upon these two, and was now beginning to make itself felt. Each was desirous to conceal from the other the devices to which they were compelled to resort, in order to keep up the false appearances to which they were condemned; in all their life there was no time in which they were free from restraint, except in solitude. But, though the effect was in each case the same, the origin was widely different. Harriet suffered for her husband's sake; he, entirely for

his own. He had calculated that if anything in his appearance, voice, and manner, should escape his control, George would be certain to impute it to the natural feelings of horror and regret with which he would have received the intelligence conveyed to him by Harriet, of George's discovery of the identity of the murdered man.

“ You had better remain up-stairs until I call you,” Routh had said to Harriet, “ when Dallas comes to dinner. It will be easier for you,” he added. Harriet was sitting listlessly by her dressing-table while he spoke, and he stood behind her chair, and looked gloomily at the reflection of her face in the glass.

She smiled faintly. “ Thank you, Stewart,” she said ; “ it will be easier.” Then, after a brief pause, “ Would you very much mind my not going down to dinner at all ?”

So far from minding it, Routh instantly felt that her absence would be a great relief. It would enable him to sound George thoroughly, to scheme upon whatever discoveries he should make concerning his future plans ; and then, Harriet had done all the hard work, had prepared the way for

him, had got over the difficulty and the danger. A little unpleasantness, some disagreeable emotion, must indeed be encountered, that was inevitable, but everything might go off well, and if so, Harriet's restraining presence, Harriet's face, with its constant reminder in it, would be much better out of sight.

“Not at all,” he answered. “Stay up-stairs if you like. I'll tell Dallas you are a little knocked up, but will be all right in the morning.”

“He will not be surprised, I dare say,” she replied, “though it was not my way to be knocked up formerly.”

“Nor to be always harping on one string, either; and I can't say there's a change for the better,” said Routh, roughly. Once or twice of late the inmate ruffianism of the man had come out towards her, from whom it had once been so scrupulously concealed. But she did not heed it; not a quiver crossed the drooping rigid face, at which Routh once more glanced covertly before he left the room. It would have been impossible to tell whether she had even heard him.

Routh went down to the well-appointed dining-

room, so different to the scene of the dinners of which George had formerly partaken, in the character of his guest. Wherever Harriet was, neatness and propriety never were absent, but there was something more than neatness and propriety in Routh's house now. Nevertheless, the look which the master of the house cast upon the well-laid, well-lighted table, with its perfect, unobtrusive, unpretentious appointments, was full of gloom. He wished he had not come down so soon; the inevitable meeting assumed a more portentous aspect with every minute that it was delayed; he wished he had not told Harriet to remain in her room. The fact was, Routh was staggered by the first failure of his plans. Everything had gone so right with him; his calculations had been fulfilled so exactly, so unfailingly, until now, and this unexpected accident had befallen through a blunder of his own. True, Harriet had met it with amazing tact, and had so treated it, that if only it could be further dexterously managed, it might be turned to ultimate advantage, and an incalculable strengthening of his position. Let him keep his thoughts to that view

of the question, and keep his nerves still. Were they going to play him false now, his nerves, which had never failed him before? So Mr. Stewart Routh passed a very unpleasant quarter of an hour before his expected guest arrived. He had just had recourse, as much in weakness as in nervousness, to a flask of brandy which stood on the sideboard, and had drank off half a glassful, when a knock at the door was quickly answered by the grave and correct man-servant, who formed an important and eminently respectable feature of the improved household of the Rouths, and the well-known quick tread of Dallas crossed the hall.

“ Well, Routh, old fellow !”

“ George, my boy ; delighted to see you !” and the meeting was over ; and Routh, looking into the young man’s face, saw that not a trace of suspicion rested upon it, and that the material before him was as plastic as ever.

“ Harriet is not very well this evening,” said Routh, “ and begs you will excuse her if she does not make her appearance. I undertook to make it all right, and indeed I am rather glad we should be alone just at first. I have so much to say and

to hear, and Harriet has had a long talk with you already.”

“Yes,” said George, and his smile was at once overcast, and his face darkened into gloom, “I had a long talk with her. Of course, Routh, she told you the dreadful discovery I have made, and the curious way in which I am implicated in this ghastly affair.”

“She told me all about it, my dear fellow,” returned Routh. “But here comes dinner, and we must postpone discussion until afterwards. I can only say now that I think Harriet’s view of the matter perfectly correct, and her advice the soundest possible; it generally is, you know of old.” And then Routh made a slight signal suggestive of caution to his guest, and the two men stood by the fireplace and talked of trifles while the irreproachable man-servant set the dishes upon the table, assisted by a neat parlour-maid.

While far more serious thoughts were busy in George’s mind, over the surface of it was passing observation of the changed order of things, and an amused perception of the alteration in Routh himself. It was as he had said in his letter—he

had assumed the responsibility, the pose, the prosperity of the genuine plodding "City man;" and he looked the part to absolute perfection. "And yet," George thought, "he knows that one who was with us two the last time we met has met with a violent death; he knows that I am in a position as painful and perilous as it is extraordinary, and that he is indirectly mixed up with the dreadful event, and he is as cool and unconcerned as possible. I suppose it is constitutional, this callousness; but I'm not sure it is very enviable. However, one thing is certain—it makes him the very best adviser one can possibly have under such circumstances. He won't be carried away by the horror of the circumstances. anyhow."

The dinner proceeded, and George yielded rapidly to the influences which had been so powerful, and which he had been so determined to resist, when out of Routh's presence and under the sway of his penitence and his determination to reform. The conversation of Routh asserted all its old charm; the man's consummate knowledge of the world, his varied experience, the perfect



refinement and tact which he could display at will, the apparent putting off of old things, the tone of utter respectability which enabled George's newly-sharpened conscience to consent to the fascination as readily as his predilections, had more than ever an irresistible attraction for the young man. During dinner, which, in the altered state of affairs, involved the presence of the servant, Routh kept the conversation almost entirely to Dallas's own doings, plans, and prospects. He knew Amsterdam well, and talked of Dutch art and the history of the Low Countries with much skill and fluency. Without an allusion which could supply material for the curiosity and the gossip of the servants, he made George understand that the Bohemian element had been completely banished from his life and its associations; he sketched a plan of London life for George, moderately prosperous, quite practical, and entirely inoffensive. He made him, in short, as ready to congratulate himself on the resumption of their intimacy in the present phase of his moral being as he had been to rejoice in its formation under former conditions.

Routh's spirits rose with his senses. He felt a depraved pride in the devilish skill he possessed in his grand faculty of deception. He excelled in it, he revelled in its exercise, and he had not enjoyed it, in this orthodox way, of late. He had been making money, it is true, and doing some real work as well as a good deal of swindling in the process, but he had had only the opportunity of using a certain set of his faculties. His persuasive eloquence, his personal influence, his skilful and expansive but shrewd falsehood, had lain dormant for some time. As a singer who has lost his voice for a time suddenly finds the liquid notes filling the air with all their accustomed power and sweetness, and exults in the recovered faculty, so Stewart Routh marked the pleasure, the enthusiasm, almost enabling George to forget the coming painful topic of discussion from which only a few minutes divided them, as he listened to the voice of the charmer, who had never before charmed him so wisely nor so well.

At length the wine was set upon the table, and then they were alone; and by this time, so complete did Routh feel his resumption of power over

George Dallas, that it was with indifference only very little feigned that he said :

“And now, George, let us go into this sad business about poor Deane. It has quite floored Harriet, as I dare say you guessed.”

“And so you give me the same counsel as Harriet has given me,” said George, when he had to tell his story all over again, and had worked himself up into a new fit of excitement over the horror of the murder, and the dreadful idea of the ignorance of the deed in which the dead man’s relatives still remained.

“I do, indeed, George,” said Routh, solemnly : “in taking any other course you will expose yourself to certain difficulty, and, indeed, to imminently probable danger. While you have been telling me all this, I have been thinking how fortunate it was that I was away at the time, and so down upon my luck that I never knew or thought about any public affairs, and so did not hear of the murder except in the vaguest way. In the peculiar lustre of our London civilisation, you know, George, somebody found dead in the river is so frequent a mote, that nobody thinks about it.”

“Not in a general way,” said George; “but they made so much of this, and were so confident that it was a political affair, I cannot understand how any of us escaped hearing of it.”

“Yes,” acquiesced Routh, “it is very extraordinary, but such things do happen. And rather fortunate, it seems, that they do, for if I had dropped in on the inquest, it would have been very awkward for you.”

“Why?” said George; “after all, the truth must have come out, and all this misery about my mother would have been avoided.”

An evil look from Routh’s eye lighted for a moment on the young man’s unconscious face, then glanced away, as he said:

“You forget that all I could have said must have strongly favoured the notion that the man who wore the coat which the waiter swore to, and was last seen with Deane, was the last person who ever saw him alive. If I had had time to think, of course I shouldn’t have said a word about it; but if I had been hurried into speaking, that is what I must have said. Come, George, you are much too sensitive about this

matter. Of course, I'm sorry for Deane, but I care a great deal more for you, and I decline to look at any part of this matter except such as concerns you. As to his relatives, as that part of the business appears to distress you most keenly, I must set your mind at rest by informing you that he had not a near relation in the world."

"Indeed!" said George. "How do you know?"

"He told me so," said Routh. "You will say, perhaps, that is not very trustworthy evidence, but I think we may take it in this particular instance for more than its general worth. He was the coldest, hardest, most selfish fellow I ever knew in the whole course of my experience, which has included a good deal of scoundrelism, and he seemed so thoroughly to appreciate the advantages of such isolation, that I believe it really did exist."

"He was certainly a mystery in every way," said George. "Where did he live? We never knew him—at least I never did—except loafing about at taverns, and places of the kind."

"I don't know where he lived," said Routh;

“he never gave me an address, or a rendezvous, except at some City eating-house, or West-end billiard-room.”

“How very extraordinary that no one recognised the description! It was in every way remarkable, and the fur-lined coat must have been known to some one. If I had seen any mention of the murder, I should have remembered that coat in a moment.”

“Would you?” said Routh. “Well, it would have thrown me off the scent, for I never happened to see it. An American coat, no doubt. However, I have a theory, which I think you will agree with, and which is this: I suspect he had been living somewhere in another name—he told me he wasn’t always known by that of Deane—under not very creditable circumstances, and as he must have had some property, which, had he been identified, must have been delivered up to the authorities, those in the secret have very wisely held their tongues.”

“You think there was a woman in the case?”

Routh smiled a superior smile.

“Of course I think so; and knowing as

much or as little of the man as you and I know, we are not likely to blame her much for consulting her own interests exclusively. This seems a curious case to us, because we happen to know about it; but just think, in this enormous city, in this highly criminal age, how common such things must be. How many persons may not have dropped out of existence since you and I last met, utterly unknown and uncared for, amid the mass of human beings here? It is no such rare thing, George, believe me, and you must listen to reason in this matter, and not run absurd risks to do an imaginary piece of justice."

This was Harriet's counsel merely put in colder, more worldly words. Routh watched his listener keenly as he gave it, and saw that his purpose was gained. He would have been glad now to have turned the conversation into some other channel; and did partially succeed in directing it to Dallas's literary prospects and intentions, but only for a time. George pertinaciously came back to the murder, to his mother's state, to his apprehensions that she

might never recover, and to his altered feelings towards Mr. Carruthers.

Routh made very effective use of the latter topic. He enlarged upon the pride and sensitiveness of Mr. Carruthers; adverted to the pleasure with which, in case of her recovery, his mother would hail the better state of things for which Mr. Carruthers's letter to his step-son, combined with George's adoption of a new and steady career, would afford an opening; and congratulated George upon having been saved from taking any step which, by bringing public notice upon himself in so terrible a matter, must have incensed the proud man, and irritated him against him incalculably.

George was amenable to this line of reasoning, and with only occasional divergence from the main topic of their discourse, the evening passed away, and the two men parted for the night, it having been agreed that Harriet should be taken into consultation in the morning, and a well-considered letter written to Mr. Carruthers.

George Dallas was in the dining-room on the following morning before Routh and Harriet



came in, and he found a letter directed to himself, in a hand with which he was unacquainted, on the breakfast-table. He broke the seal with some alarm and much curiosity. A slip of paper folded round two thin limp letters formed the enclosure; it bore only the words: "My dear boy, I forgot to give you these letters. You had better read them. I think they are from your uncle.—E. B."

George sat down by the window, through which the soft air of a morning bright and beautiful even in London came refreshingly in. He looked at the postmarks of the two letters, and broke the seal of that which bore the earliest date first. As he read the letter, which was long, and closely written, an occasional exclamation escaped him, and when he had finished its perusal, he threw it hastily down, and impatiently tore open the other. This one, on the contrary, was brief; he had read the few lines it contained in a few minutes, with a face expressive of the utmost astonishment, when Harriet, whose noiseless step had escaped his hearing, entered the room.

Without pausing to exchange the customary

greeting, she came quickly towards him, and asked him "What was the matter? Had he any bad news?"

"Not bad news, but most astonishing, most unexpected news, Mrs. Routh. These letters have been sent to me from Poynings; they are written to my mother by my uncle, her only brother, and they announce his immediate arrival in England. How fortunate that Ellen should have sent them to me! But I don't know what to do about sending the news to my mother. She ought to know it. What can I do?"

"Communicate with Mr. Carruthers at once, George," said Harriet, in the tone of quiet decision with which she was accustomed to settle matters submitted to her judgment. "He is with her, and knows what she can bear. Sit down now and have some breakfast, and tell me about this uncle of yours. I never heard you mention him."

She took her place at the head of the table. She was dressed, as he had been accustomed to see her, with neatness and taste; there was no change in her appearance in that respect, yet

there was a change—a change which had struck George painfully yesterday, and which, in the midst of all the agitation of to-day, he could not keep from noticing.

“Are you well, Mrs. Routh?” he asked her, anxiously. “Are you sure you are well? I don’t like your looks.”

“Never mind my looks, George,” Harriet said, cheerfully; “I am very well. Get on with your breakfast and your story. Routh will be here presently, and I want to know all about it before he comes. He gets impatient at my feminine curiosity, you know.”

The smile with which she spoke was but the ghost of her former smile, and George still looked at her strangely, but he obeyed her, and proceeded with his breakfast and his story.

“I don’t know very much about my mother’s family,” he said, “because they did not like her marriage with my father, and she kept aloof from them, and her parents were dead before she had the opportunity of appeasing them by making the fine match they would have considered her marriage with Mr. Carruthers to

be. I know that some of their relatives were settled in America,—some at New York, some in South Carolina,—and my mother's brother, Mark Felton—queer name, puritanical and fanatical, with a touch of the association of assassination about it—was sent out to New York when quite a child. I forgot to tell you it was my mother's step-father and her mother who objected to her first marriage—her own father died when she was an infant; and on her mother's second marriage with a Mr. Creswick—a poor, proud, dissipated fellow, I fancy, though I never heard much about him—the American branch of the family sent for the boy. My mother has told me they would have taken her too, and her step-father would not have made the least objection—we haven't been lucky in step-fathers, Mrs. Routh—but her mother would not stand it; and so she kept her child. Not for many years, for she married my father when she was only seventeen. Her brother was just twenty then, and had been taken into the rich American firm of his relatives, and was a prosperous man. She knew very little of him, of course. I believe he took the same

view of her marriage as her mother had taken ; at all events, the first direct communication between them took place when my mother was left a handsome and poor young widow, with one boy, who did not make much delay about proving himself the graceless and ungrateful son you know him to have been."

George's voice faltered, and an expression of pain crossed his face. Harriet looked at him kindly, and laid her soft white hand on his.

"That is all over, you know," she said. "You will not err in that way again."

"But the consequences, Mrs. Routh, the consequences. Think of my mother *now*. However," and he drew a long breath, and threw his shoulders back, like a man who tries to shift a burden, "I must go on with my story. There's not much more to tell, however. My mother might have had a home for herself and me in her brother's house, but she could not bear dependence, and has told me often that she regarded unknown relatives as the most formidable kind of strangers. Her brother's wife made him resent my mother's determination to remain in

England, and do the best she could for us both on our small means. Of course, all this was an old story long before I knew anything about it, and I fancy that it is only lately any correspondence has taken place between my mother and her brother. From this letter" (he touched the first he had read) "I can divine the nature of that correspondence. My mother," said George, sadly, "has appealed to her brother on behalf of her prodigal son, and her brother has told her his sorrows in return; they have been heavy, and in one respect not unlike her own. He, too, has an only son, and seems to find little happiness in the fact."

"Did you not know of your cousin's existence until now?" asked Harriet.

"O yes, I knew of it, in a kind of way; in fact, I just knew he existed, and no more. I don't think my mother knew more. I fancy in some previous letter he told her of his wife's death, and the general unsatisfactoriness of Arthur."

"He—your uncle, I mean—is then a widower?"

"Yes," replied George. "I won't bother you

with the whole of this long letter, Mrs. Routh ; the gist of it is this : My cousin, Arthur Felton, is not a good son, nor a good anything I fancy, for I find my uncle congratulating my mother on my affection for her, my good feeling, in spite of all— (bless the poor man ! he little knew how his words would wound, and how ill-deserved is the extenuation !)—and prophesying all manner of good things about me. It appears this hopeful son of his has been in Europe for some months, and probably in London for some months too, as my uncle says— stay, here is the passage : ‘ Arthur has with him a letter of introduction to you and Mr. Carruthers, some trifles from this side of the world which I thought you might like, and my instructions to make his cousin’s acquaintance as soon as possible. You speak of George as living habitually in London ; I hope by this time they have met, are good friends, and are, perhaps, chumming together. I have not heard from Arthur for some time. He is a careless correspondent, and not at any time so regardful of the feelings of other people as he might be. I dare say the first intelligence I shall have of him from England, as he cannot possibly

want money'—that looks bad, Mrs. Routh," said George, breaking off abruptly, and looking up at her; "that looks bad—'as he cannot possibly want money, will be from you. I know you will receive him kindly, and I earnestly hope he may make a favourable impression on Mr. Carruthers.'" Here George left off reading the letter, and looked blankly at Harriet.

"And he has never presented himself at Poynings, has he?" she asked.

"Never, that I know of; and of course Ellen Brookes would have told me, if he had. Besides, you see this letter was late for the mail, and arrived with this other one. My mother never saw either, and they have been lying more than six weeks at Poynings."

"No doubt your cousin is still in Paris. All Americans delight in Paris. He would be in no hurry to leave Paris, depend on it, if he had no more interesting acquaintance than that of an aunt and a cousin to make in London, and as much time before him as he chose."

"I should think with you, Mrs. Routh, only that this letter, written at New York on the 3rd of



April, says my uncle had heard from Arthur, who had merely written him a line from London, saying: 'Here I am. Particulars by next mail.' The mail brought no particulars, and my uncle writes to my mother, subsequently to this long letter, which is cheerful enough, you'll observe, that he is a prey to a presentiment that something is wrong with Arthur, also that he has conceived the strongest wish to come to England and see her, and especially to see me—that he has sufficient money and leisure to gratify the inclination—that he will wait for the chance of further intelligence of Arthur, and to arrange certain business matters, a month longer, and then come to England. He seems to have formed a remarkably elementary notion of my respected step-father's manners, customs, and general disposition, for he proposes to present himself at Poyning's immediately on his arrival, and never appears to entertain the least misgiving as to the cordiality of his reception. He must have been astonished at getting no answer to either letter, and I should think must have had his presentiments considerably sharpened and strengthened by the fact."

Here George referred to the date of the later of the two letters, and exclaimed :

“By Jove! I should not be surprised if he were at Poynings now!”

At this moment Routh entered the room, and, in his turn, had the new aspect of affairs explained to him, but at no great length. He displayed very little interest in the matter, thought it very probable that Mr. Felton might have arrived in England, or even at Poynings, but did not see what George could do in that case.

“You can’t go and entertain another man at a house where you haven’t the entrée yourself,” he said. “I suppose the old woman will let you know if he really comes to Poynings. In the mean time, send the letters on to Mr. Carruthers. You expect to get his address from some girl or other—his niece, I think I understood Harriet—and ask what is to be done. It’s rather a lucky turn up, Dallas, I take it, and will help your good-boy intentions towards your step-father wonderfully, to have a rich uncle to act as a connecting-link between you. By the bye, he’s sure to set you up in life, George, and perio-

dical literature will be robbed of a shining luminary."

George did not altogether like the tone in which all this was said. It was a little sneering, and altogether careless. Nothing was so difficult to Routh, as it always is to men of his class, as the sustained assumption of interest in any affairs but their own; and now that his anxieties of the previous day were relieved, and he had no immediate object in which Dallas was concerned, to gain, he was impatient of any interruption of his immediate pursuits, and harsh and rough with him. He sat down, and ate his breakfast hastily, while he read a heap of letters which lay beside his plate.

"I don't know, indeed," George had replied good-humouredly to the speech which had jarred upon him; "but you are busy, Routh, and I won't trouble you with my business just now. Mrs. Routh and I will discuss the letter to Mr. Carruthers."

"A telegram for Mr. Dallas," said the irreproachable servant, who entered the room while George was speaking. "Please to sign this, sir."

Routh looked up from his letters, Harriet set down the teapot, and quietly taking up the slip of paper which the man had laid upon the table by George's elbow, signed it with his name, writing it with a pencil which hung at her waist. The servant left the room, and George said :

“I was not wrong. This is from my uncle, and it comes from Amherst. He says : ‘Meet me at Morley's Hotel this evening, at six.’”

“Very odd,” said Routh. “Well, George, I am sure I wish you all manner of luck with your American uncle.”

He had taken up his hat and gloves as he spoke, and now rang for the servant, whom he directed to call a hansom. The man went to the door, and transferred the commission to a street-boy lingering about there, who ran off, and returned in two minutes with the required vehicle. George and Routh were standing on the steps as the boy reappeared, talking. They shook hands, and Routh was stepping into the cab, when George followed him, and said, in a whisper :

“Was it not extraordinary the boy did not recognise poor Deane?”

“What boy?” said Routh, in astonishment, and stepping back on to the flagway.

“Why, that boy; the boy you always employ. He brought you my message the other day. Don’t you remember it was he brought your note to poor Deane that day at the tavern?”

“I did not remember; I did not particularly notice,” said Routh. “Good-bye.” And he jumped into the cab, and was driven away.

George went back into the house, eyed curiously by Jim Swain, who touched his cap as he passed.

## CHAPTER X.

### LOOKING OUT ON THE TAUNUS.

IT was a beautiful day in the early autumn, and though "all the world" had not yet mustered at Homburg von der Höhe, though the hotel of "Quarter Sessions" had not yet a tithe of the illustrious names for contribution to the visitors' list which it was destined to have, the scene presented by the little white town in its setting of green — a green nearer to emerald than any between itself and the shores of Dublin Bay—was gay, striking, pleasant, and varied. Groups of fluttering dresses, whose wearers were further adorned with perfect boots and exquisite hats, and could, for the most part, boast of the attractions of youth and prettiness, were abroad in the alleys, under the shade of the slim, graceful trees. The sounds of distant music from the

bands dispersed about for the delectation of the visitors, and those of glad, careless voices in such leisure talk as suited the scene and the season, mingled themselves, and came floating in on the warm air at the open windows to regale the ears of such as had not gone out to share in the busy idleness of the majority of the sojourners at the Baths.

At one of these open windows, which looked out upon a pretty prim little garden, bordered on the confines of the broad shady alley down to which it stretched by some trees nobler and more rich in foliage than their fellows, the strollers in the alley might have observed three gentlemen in earnest and protracted conversation. One was seated in a large arm-chair, which occupied one of the sides of the bay-window; a second leaned against the open frame of the central compartment; and the third, a shorter and slighter man than either of his companions, stood upright between them, and as he spoke turned his head and his keen eyes from one to the other with an animated and characteristic gesture. The gentleman seated in the arm-chair was a tall, frostily

gray, scrupulously dressed, laboriously polite elderly man, who constantly twirled a heavy gold eye-glass in very white and bony hands. He seemed agitated—indeed, so much so, that some of his acquaintances in the far-off English district which had the honour of being his home would have found some difficulty in recognising him. He was hardly pompous as he sat this fine morning looking out on the Taunus, and taking note of neither mountain, nor valley, nor forest; his manner was actually that of a man seeking and welcoming sympathy; it really seemed possible that an observer of the scene might have ventured on taking the liberty of feeling sorry for Mr. Carruthers of Poynings.

The smaller, slighter man, who formed the centre figure of the group, was of somewhat remarkable aspect. Very wiry and alert of frame, well knit and upright, his figure had a certain youthfulness about it which was contradicted by his face—that of a man who had passed the confines of middle age. His face was handsome, thoughtful, and bore the impress of heavy trouble, and in the dark eyes, and generally in the straight and



refined features, it presented a strong resemblance to that of Mrs. Carruthers.

Not unnaturally, for the gentleman in question was Mark Felton, Mrs. Carruthers's brother.

The third component of the group, a young man, who leant against the frame of the open window and looked out, his face turned away from the speaker and the "other listener," his tall loosely-built figure distinctly visible from the road, was George Dallas.

"Under these circumstances, and seeing that waiting was inevitable, and that I could do nothing in that matter actively," Mark Felton was saying, "I determined to come on here at once. All I heard at Poynings—"

"I hope you were properly entertained there?" said Mr. Carruthers, in the old "of Poynings" manner.

"Perfectly, my dear sir—perfectly. As I was saying, all I heard at Poynings, and what George told me"—he cast a quick glance at his nephew here, in which there was already hearty liking—"made me more than ever anxious to see Laura. Besides, I was exceedingly anxious to

make your acquaintance without any further delay.”

“A wish which I reciprocated, I assure you, Mr. Felton.”

“In bringing George with me, I acted on my own judgment, and on a conviction that you would regard the matter as I do. I believed you would consider him entitled to see his mother, and would be glad to learn from me that his prospects in life are as much improved as his inclination and determination to do them honour are genuine and strong.”

“You are quite right, Mr. Felton,” said the honourable old gentleman, who had begun to feel himself somehow beaten by fate, and was, secretly, immensely relieved that his step-son had made his appearance without having been sent for, and in such unexceptionable company. “It is necessary now that Mr. Dallas—that—that George” (he got out the word with an immense effort, and it meant everything) “should be near his mother. I am glad to know he has found a friend in you.”

“And I am still more glad to believe,” said Mr. Felton, not precisely interrupting Mr. Car-

ruthers, but taking advantage of a slight pause to speak—"I am glad to know that he found me just when he was learning to do without any one."

It is possible that a good deal of Mr. Carruthers's trouble—and he had suffered severely since he had left England—had had its origin in a conviction, which had stolen upon him at first, and latterly had threatened to overwhelm him, that he had not been faultless in his conduct towards his wife and his treatment of her son. He had found out very shortly after they had left Poynings—for in the deadening of her faculties, forgetfulness of her fear of him had come—how mistaken he had been in supposing that he had suppressed her love for George, her constant remembrance of him, or had supplied by all he had given her for the boon he had withheld. In her placid way, when she would sit for hours talking softly to herself, his wife had administered some very telling lessons to Mr. Carruthers. It was with an uneasy surprise that he came to feel how very dear she was to him, how indispensable to his life, how strangely the things which had held the first place in his estimation, behind which he had ranked her, and she had

been content humbly to follow, fell away into complete insignificance. He actually forgot Poynings at times, and was not worried by fears that the lawn was not properly mown and smoothly rolled, or by visions of fallen leaves lying about in the sacred places. His "business papers" were duly forwarded to him, but they did not interest him much; his mind dwelt almost entirely on his wife's state, and he was rapidly passing, as might be expected from a man whose moral perceptions had been suddenly awakened and enlarged, from the recognition of his true share of blame in the calamity which had befallen them, to an exaggeration of that share, which rendered him almost oblivious of the provocation he had received. Had George Dallas suddenly appeared before his stepfather at Poynings, he might not have been well received; the influence of old habits and associations, in the sense of the promulgation of the old edict of banishment, might have successfully overpowered the new influences striving with pride and obstinacy in the by no means bad heart of Mr. Carruthers. But the occasion had been most auspicious. Here, in a foreign place, where Mr.

Carruthers was positively oppressed with a sense of strangeness, and where no one was present to know anything about the concession he was making, he had but trifling difficulties to overcome, and the meeting between the three gentleman had been kindly, unreserved, and cordial.

The report of his wife's condition, which Mr. Carruthers had made to her son and brother, was not very reassuring, and was doubly distressing to George, in consequence of the stress which his step-father laid upon the good effect to be anticipated by his restoration to her. Had Mr. Carruthers been in a less charitable frame of mind, he might have taken the silence and sadness with which George received his assurances on this point for sullenness; but he did not, he was actually learning to make allowance for the temperaments and the feelings of other people.

Mr. Felton and his nephew had arrived at Hombourg on the preceding evening, and Mr. Felton had communicated by letter with Mr. Carruthers, who had named an early hour on the following day for receiving his unknown brother-in-law and his little-known step-son. Their in-

terview had lasted some time, when Mr. Carruthers expressed his belief that good might result to his mother from seeing George.

The young man turned his face from the speaker, and made no answer.

“It will be necessary, of course, to have her physician’s advice and permission in the first instance,” said Mr. Felton, “before either George or I can see her. I suppose she is in good hands here?”

“In the best possible,” replied Mr. Carruthers. “Dr. Merle is famous in the treatment of these strange mental maladies; indeed, it was in order to consult him that I changed my plan, and came here instead of going to the south of France, as I had intended.”

“So Miss Carruthers told me,” said Mr. Felton; which simple observation caused George Dallas to start perceptibly, and to turn abnormally red in the face.

“Indeed,” said Mr. Carruthers. “I did not know you had seen my niece.”

“No?” said Mr. Felton. “I suppose she left it to me to tell you of her prompt politeness to an

intruder. When I had seen your housekeeper and learned all she could tell me, especially that my sister had not received my letters, and knew nothing of my return to England, I quickly made up my mind to join you abroad. Miss Carruthers being in correspondence with you, and therefore able to give me all the information I wanted, was clearly the person I ought to see, so I started for the Sycamores, saw her—and a very beautiful and charming girl she is—heard from her all she had to tell me, and then went up to town to make acquaintance with my nephew.”

Mr. Carruthers felt and looked rather conscious and uneasy while Mr. Felton was making this explanation. Clare had a considerable involuntary share in the self-reproach and regret he was experiencing. His wife had been, to a certain extent, sacrificed to her, and the remembrance disconcerted him. As for George, where was all his resentment against his step-father now? Where was all his exultation that he and destiny united had outwitted the proud and pompous old tyrant, as he had called him in his thoughts, and brought about a meeting, which his inner con-

sciousness told him had had no trifling result for either, between him and the jealously guarded heiress? It augured well for George's future that he felt deeply sorry at the moment the girl's name was mentioned that his step-father had sustained this unintentional and unknown wrong at his hands. As things were going now, he and Clare might have met, in all probability, openly and blamelessly; and George felt, in his altered mood, that he would willingly part with the romance and mystery which now attended their acquaintance to escape from the sense that he had been uncandid, that he had misled the girl by her ardent fancy, and under the temptation of resentment against his step-father. It was too late now, as George felt bitterly, for such regret; the future would enable him only so far to retrieve the past as the most scrupulous abstinence from availing himself of the opportunity whose occurrence he now regretted might retrieve it. Clare would probably know him in his true character soon; for he saw at once that Mr. Carruthers, having taken the generous resolution, had taken it thoroughly; and she would despise him for the deceit he had practised



towards her, forgetting, in his hot-headed resentment against her uncle, and infatuation with herself, that such knowledge must come, and such contempt come with it. Heavily the punishment of the past was falling upon George Dallas, even in this hour of reconciliation, or rehabilitation, of absolute good fortune. His uncle had been impressed in his favour beyond his expectations; he had learned not to expect much from young men and only sons; and George had been perfectly candid with him, so that the elder man had gained an insight into his character, full of encouragement and hope. Mr. Felton had told him that he should make his future safe, so far as pecuniary independence could secure it; and though George had suffered severely from want of money, and knew well from how much evil he might have been preserved by its possession, he did not overestimate the extent of that security; so that the tide of fortune had indeed turned for the prodigal son. But the husks were still between his teeth, and bitter in his mouth. There were two women in the world infinitely dear to him, and he had injured them both: the one, probably, mortally;

the other basely, as he now knew and felt—how severely, time alone could tell. The fortune with which his uncle would endow him could not purchase the reversal of these facts; the respectability with which he could cover the past could not efface that stain.

“As a man soweth, so shall he reap;” and harvest-time was heavy for George.

Thus thinking, George’s attention had wandered from the conversation between the others, and was only recalled by Mr. Felton’s addressing him directly.

“Your mother was always in possession of your address, George, was she not?”

“Certainly,” replied George, “until lately—until her illness. I left London for Amsterdam just before it commenced, and did not hear from or write to her, beyond a few lines, until I got your letter, sir,” turning to Mr. Carruthers.

“That decides it, you see,” continued Mr. Felton, in pursuance of the remarks which George had not heard. “My sister evidently never received any letter or message from Arthur, or, as you suggest, she would have put George in com-

munication with him. I can only conclude that he left England again to return to some of his continental haunts—they were not too reputable,” said Mr. Felton bitterly—“and has not yet returned. I must only wait, and for every reason I had better wait here.”

“Certainly,” said Mr. Carruthers. “I am very sorry you should have anything to distress you, in addition to my wife’s illness, in coming to England, especially in connection with your son.”

A footman—one of the “suite” who had attended Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers of Poynings on their departure from that deserted locality—now entered, and announced that Dr. Merle had arrived. As it had been previously arranged that Mr. Carruthers should consult that high authority in their absence, the uncle and nephew took their hats and went out into the prim little garden, whence they reached the shady road. There they paced up and down, passing and passed by the groups of loungers, some of whom were attracted by the preoccupied and serious air with which the two gentlemen conversed.

“If I did not know that he had sufficient

money to last for a longer time than I have been without news of him, and also that he has a happy knack of making money wherever he may be, in some way or other, I should at once communicate with the police," Mr. Felton was saying.

"Yes," said George; "but the worst of it is, we don't know what police to communicate with, whether English or foreign. If he had not taken his money out of the Liverpool bank, we might suppose him to be in England; but that looks conclusive, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does," said Mr. Felton. "The only clue I have is the fact that he did draw the money, and wrote me the line I told you of"—he opened his pocket-book mechanically as he spoke, glanced at a letter placed within the leaves, replaced the book in his breast-pocket, and went on,—“promising further particulars. It is almost incredible that he should be in England, and not have written again. My letters to him, addressed to the Liverpool bank, have not been sent for. He got one when he drew the money.”

"Yes, I know," said George. They had talked the matter over many times, and never drew

nearer a conclusion. It was evident to George, on the present occasion, that the character of his uncle's apprehensions was undergoing a change. At first, he had treated his son's silence as only one additional example of the utter callousness and indifference to which the father was only too well accustomed. George, to whom his cousin was an utter stranger, had accepted his uncle's view of the matter, at first, unquestioned; but he had become unsatisfied and uncertain about it of late, and was anxious, without alarming Mr. Felton, to lead him to take active steps for obtaining information of the whereabouts of his son.

“ I feel satisfied he left England again, and knows nothing of my movements. He will write out to New York, however; and if he has only done so now, there will be some delay before he knows I am in Europe.”

“ Don't you think,” asked George, hesitatingly, “ he would send to Liverpool for the letters, if he were in any uncertainty, before writing to New York? I confess I don't like his leaving them unclaimed. None of the reasons which may explain his silence reach to an explanation of that.

I don't think you ought to let much more time go over. If you had a likeness of him—" He hesitated very much here, and looked aside at his uncle, who turned sharply towards him, and said :

" Well! What! If I had a likeness—"

" You might have had it copied, and the photographs distributed to the police; so that, if anything should be wrong—"

" Wrong? In what sense, George? Do you begin to fear that anything has happened to him? You never said so at first."

" Because I did not think so, uncle; and I am not seriously uneasy now—not at all; but I think a reasonable time has elapsed, and we ought now to make active inquiry. When he turns up, and finds out what trouble and anxiety he has given, he will be more considerate in future."

" Ah," said Mr. Felton, with a sigh, " I don't think Arthur is open to any conviction of that kind. What do you think it best to do, now?"

" Well, uncle, you see you have been three weeks in Europe, and those three weeks make a considerable addition to the time since you heard

from him. If you write by the next mail to New York for a copy of his photograph— You are sure you have not one with you?”

“Quite sure. Since I found I had not one in my desk, I have searched everywhere among my luggage, but I have not one.”

“Well, then, if you write by this mail for a copy, and it is sent by return mail, if he has not turned up in the mean time, and things go on well here, I think you had better put the matter into the hands of the police. It is true you do not know whether Arthur is in England now, or abroad; but the last place in which you know him to have been is London, and from that information they must work.”

“True,” said Mr. Felton; and then continued, in a slow reluctant tone, “I shrink from it, I confess. A matter which is placed in the hands of the police always implies something disgraceful; and though I don’t expect to find that Arthur has disposed of his time and his money very creditably, I don’t like to make so sure of it as I feel convinced a close investigation will make me.”

Mr. Felton spoke with some agitation, and

George thrilled with a mingled feeling of pity and dread, he did not know of what. But he said, cheerily :

“ Well, sir, let us hope there will be no occasion for making any such investigation. You can't have an answer for nearly three weeks, and a great deal may happen in that time. Arthur may be here long before then, to answer for himself, and laugh at us for our anxiety about such a citizen of the world, old and new.”

“ I don't like it,” George thought, as he walked on in silence by the side of his uncle—“ I don't like it. And it's very plain I am not the only black sheep in the family flock, nor, I suspect, the blackest. I will see that he writes to New York ; and I will tell Routh all about this when he comes, and hear what he says. My uncle will not mind my telling him now, I dare say.”

“ When do you expect your friends, George ?” asked Mr. Felton, striking the chord of George's thought, after the fashion which everyone knows and nobody can explain.

“ To-morrow, or the day after, sir,” replied George. “ Routh wrote from Paris yesterday.”



“ I am sorry for Mrs. Routh,” said Mr. Felton; “ she’s too secretive and too cautious, too silent and too cunning, for my fancy; but she is an interesting woman and a wonderfully good wife, I am sure, though of the stony order.”

“ That is come to her lately,” said George, in an eager tone, “ since her health has failed so much. You cannot imagine what a different creature she was only a little while ago. She was as bright as the sunshine and as gay as a lark. She is, indeed, a wonderful wife—the most devoted I ever knew; and her usefulness in everything, in all a woman’s ordinary ways and in many quite extraordinary, in all Routh’s business matters, is marvellous. Even her delicate health, though she has lost her good looks very much, and her spirits quite, has not made any alteration in that. I cannot conceive what Routh would do without her.”

“ H’m! I wonder if *he* is quite so uncertain,” said Mr. Felton drily, and to George’s surprise. “ I don’t like your friend, and I don’t trust him.”

“ What do you mean ?” asked George. “ Don’t

trust him? Do you mean that you don't trust his feelings or his conduct to Harriet?"

"Precisely so, my dear boy. Mrs. Routh is a devoted wife; but I am very much mistaken—and remember I have been playing looker-on for a fortnight or so, and interested in my part, too, considering what you told me about yourself and these people—if she is not a very unhappy one. I do not pretend to explain my convictions, but I am quite clear about them. She loves Routh—that's plain enough—but she is miserable with him."

"Do you really think so? She is dreadfully changed, I know, but I thought it might be only in consequence of her ill health. Miserable with him! At all events, he is not unkind to her. I know he is very anxious about her health; for he has left London, at much inconvenience and great risk of loss, to bring her here for the waters."

"And for a turn at the gaming-tables for himself, I fancy. Routh has to me the air of a man who has been constrained into temporary respectability, and is heartily tired of it."

“I am sorry you have so bad an opinion of him, sir,” said George, who could not resist an uneasy impression that his uncle was right, and that the experiment of a renewed intimacy with Routh was not likely to be brilliantly successful, “for I was thinking of consulting him about the best way of finding out Arthur’s whereabouts.”

“No, no,” said Mr. Felton, quickly and emphatically; “say nothing to him about any business of mine; give the man no pretext to fasten an intimacy upon me. We want no cleverness of his kind in our work.”

“Very well, sir,” said George. He was discontented with his uncle, because he had formed what the young man knew in his heart was a just opinion of Routh, and discontented with himself because he could not combat it. “Of course I will speak of your affairs to no one without your permission. But one thing I must say for Routh, I do think he loves his wife.”

“And I think he hates her,” said Mr. Felton.

They had turned in their walk, and were close by the little garden gate as he uttered these words. At that moment it opened, and a servant

appeared. He told the two gentlemen that Mr. Carruthers wished to see them, and they followed him silently into the house.

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“I am quite clear that the experiment may be tried with safety and advantage,” said Dr. Merle, at the close of a long conversation with Mr. Felton and George Dallas. Dr. Merle was an elderly gentleman, with a bald head, a thin face, and eyes as piercing, as strong, and as resolute as those of an eagle; a sort of man to be “quite clear” about his ideas and decisions in general. “I have felt persuaded all along that the state of Mrs. Carruthers’s nervous system was produced by a shock, though Mr. Carruthers had no knowledge of the fact, and could supply me with no particulars.”

Here was a pretty state of things; Mr. Carruthers of Poynings obliged to listen to a stranger informing him that his own wife had received a shock on his own premises without his knowledge, confirming the opinions of two other presuming individuals, and totally indifferent to the effect upon his feelings. But Mr. Carruthers

of Poynings bore it wonderfully well. He actually nodded acquiescence towards the presumptuous doctor, and did not feel in the least angry.

“Yes,” repeated Dr. Merle, emphatically, “there has been a shock, no doubt about it. The nerves are still very weak, very much shaken, but the general health so much re-established, that I do not anticipate anything but the best results from the attempt to communicate a pleasant and happy impression to Mrs. Carruthers, though, owing to her distressing state just now, that impression must necessarily take the form of a shock also. But”—and Dr. Merle smiled, and looked at each of his hearers in turn—“I think you will agree with me, gentlemen, that there is little, if any, reliable evidence that any one was ever killed or hurt by an agreeable surprise. Mr. Carruthers has been so good as to convey to me that it would be an agreeable surprise to my patient to see him and her son together, and I am quite clear that the sooner the experiment is tried, and that Mrs. Carruthers knows there is also another pleasure in store for her”—with a bow to Mr. Felton—“the better.”

George stood up, and followed his step-father mechanically. His conviction, from the first moment he had heard of his mother's state, had been strong that she would be roused to recollection by the sight of him, and restored to a condition which would permit him to dissipate the delusion which had so terribly affected her. He only knew the secret—he only could undo the ill. Should this fail, he would reveal all to Mr. Felton and to his step-father, whose altered conduct to him had removed the danger of any ill results to his mother from such a revelation.

Mr. Carruthers preceded George across a wide corridor to a large and airy room, where the windows were wide open—where white curtains fluttered in the air, scented by the breath of flowers. Just inside the door he 'motioned to George to remain there, and then approached a large chair, whose high back hid its occupant from George's sight. He stooped over the chair, and said, in a softer voice than the Poynings household had been accustomed to hear :

“Laura, I have brought some one to see you this morning.”

George could not see from where he stood, but he concluded there was a sign of assent, for Mr. Carruthers beckoned him rapidly forward, and the next instant he was by his side, and had seen his mother's face. Another, and his mother had started up, and, with a piercing cry of "George! My son! my son!" had fallen senseless into his arms.

## CHAPTER XI.

MRS. IRETON P. BEMBRIDGE.

THE experiment which Dr. Merle had sanctioned proved successful. The wise physician had calmed the apprehensions with which her husband and son regarded the swoon into which Mrs. Carruthers had fallen upon recognising George, and had hinted that on her recovery the mother and son should be left alone.

“The old gentleman,” said Dr. Merle to Mr. Felton, “and a fine old gentleman he is—a little peculiar, but it would not do the world any harm to have a few more of his sort in it—has told me a good deal of the family history intentionally, and some of it unintentionally; and I have not the least doubt that the root of Mrs. Carruthers’s disease is simply her son.”

“He has given her some trouble, I know,”



said Mark Felton, with a sigh; "but hardly so much as that comes to, I fancy."

"Well, well, I won't be positive; but I think so. No young man ever tells all the truth about his follies; and, indeed, no middle-aged or old man, for that matter; and rely upon it, his mother knows more than any one else. She will do well, Mr. Felton. She sees him all right, no matter how wrong he may have been; there's nothing gravely amiss now. We may leave her to time now, and her son's society."

"Do you think I may venture to see her soon?"

"Impossible to say, for a day or two, my dear sir; impossible to say. Mr. Carruthers and Mr. Dallas must explain your coming to her. I don't prescribe *two* shocks, you know, even pleasant ones; and then I have no doubt you will perfect the cure."

Mr. Felton acknowledged the smooth speech with an absent sort of smile, and Dr. Merle took his leave.

"You are sure there is nothing wrong with you, George? You are quite sure you are in no

danger?" said Mrs. Carruthers, late in the afternoon of that day, to her son, as she lay quietly on a large sofa drawn close to the window, where the panes were glittering in the dying light. Her face was turned towards him, her dark eyes a little troubled, and not so bright as they had been, resting fondly and with a puzzled expression upon his face, and one thin hand fondly clasped in his. George was lying on the floor beside her sofa, his head resting against her pillow, and the fingers of her other hand were moving softly among his rich brown curls.

"Nothing, indeed, mother. All is well with me—much, much better than I ever expected or hoped; but you must not agitate yourself, or ask any questions. Dr. Merle and Mr. Carruthers have put me on my honour not to talk to you of the past, and we must keep our word, you know;" and the young man tenderly kissed the hand he held in his.

"Yes, yes," she said, in an absent, searching tone; "but there is something—there was something—I—"

"Hush, mother! In the time to come you

shall know everything, but for the present you must simply trust me. Indeed, there is nothing wrong. I am here with you, brought here and welcomed by Mr. Carruthers. You remember that he did not like me, and he had good cause; yes, he had good cause, but that is all over now. I am here with his full sanction and approbation, and you must be content to know that, to feel it, and *to rest*. You have to get strong and well now, mother, and then we shall all be quite happy."

"Yes, George, yes. I can rest now," said his mother. And she nestled down upon her sofa, and he drew the coverings around her, and they both kept silence; and presently, in the autumnal evening, when the moon rose over the dark Taunus, and the lights began to sparkle all over the little white town, Mrs. Carruthers fell asleep, with her hand clasped in that of her son, and her worn but always handsome face resting against his brown curls.

The days went by, and with the lapse of each Mrs. Carruthers made an advance towards the recovery of her health and her faculties. Very

shortly after their meeting, George had spoken to her of his uncle; and though he found it difficult to fix her attention or engage her interest, he succeeded in ascertaining that she remembered all the circumstances of her brother's life, and that he had expressed a wish and intention to come to England.

“Mark is not happy in his son,” she said one day to Mr. Carruthers and George, who had been talking to her by preconcerted arrangement on the subject. “I fear he has given him a great deal of trouble. I remember in many of his letters he said he was not blest, like me, with a son of whom he could be proud.”

George reddened violently as his mother's harmless words showed him how she had concealed all her grief from her brother, and struck him with sudden shame and confusion in his stepfather's presence. Mr. Carruthers felt inexpressibly confused also; and as readiness was not the Grand Lama's forte, he blundered out:

“Well, my dear, never mind about his son. You would be glad to see your brother Mark, wouldn't you?”

Mrs. Carruthers looked earnestly at him as she raised herself from her pillows, and the faint colour in her cheek deepened into a dark flush as she said :

“ Glad to see my brother Mark ! Indeed I should be. Is he here too ? ”

So, after long years, the brother and sister met again ; and Mark Felton was a little diverted from his anxiety about his son by the interest and affection with which his sister inspired him, and the strong hold which George Dallas gained upon the affections of a man who had been sorely wounded in his own hopes and expectations. He was not under any mistaken impression about his nephew. He knew that George had caused his mother the deepest grief, and had for a long time gone as wrong as a young man could go short of entering on a criminal career. But he divided the good from the evil in his character ; he discerned something of the noble and the generous in the young man ; and if he laid too much to the account of circumstances, and handled his follies too tenderly it was because he had himself suffered from all the grief which profli-

gacy, combined with cold and calculating meanness, can inflict upon a parent's heart.

George Dallas yielded easily to the influence of happiness. His gay and pleasant manner was full of fascination, and of a certain easy grace which had peculiar charms for his Transatlantic uncle; and his love for his mother was a constant pleasure to her brother to witness, and an irresistible testimony to the unspoiled nature of the son. True, this affection had not availed to restrain him formerly; but the partial uncle argued that circumstances had been against the boy, and that he had not had fair play. It was not very sound reasoning, but there was nothing to contradict it just at present, and Mr. Felton was content to feel rather than to reason.

Mr. and Mrs. Routh had arrived at Homburg immediately after Mr. Felton and George had reached that place of fashionable resort. Their lodgings were in a more central situation than those of Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers, and were within easy reach of all the means of diversion which the wicked little resort of the designing and their

dupes commanded. George Dallas did not see much of Routh. He had been disturbed and impressed by Mr. Felton's exceedingly emphatic expression of opinion respecting that gentleman; he had been filled with a vague regret, for which now and then he took himself to task, as ungrateful and whimsical, for having renewed his intimacy with Routh. His levity, his callousness, respecting the dreadful event concerning which he had consulted him, had shocked George at the time, and his sense of them had grown with every hour's consideration of the matter (and they were many) in which he had since engaged. Nothing had occurred to him to reverse or weaken the force of Routh's opinion; but he could not get over his heartlessness. They met, indeed, frequently. They met when George and his uncle, or his step-father, or both, walked about the town and its environs, or in the gardens; they met when George strolled about the salons of the Kursaal, religiously abstaining from play. It was strange how the taste for it had passed away from him, and how little he suffered, even at first, in establishing the rule of self-restraint; but

they rarely met in private, and they had not had half an hour's conversation in the week which had now elapsed since Routh and Harriet had arrived at Homburg.

But George had seen Harriet daily. Every afternoon he escorted his mother during her drive, and then he called on Mrs. Routh. His visits tortured her, and yet they pleased her too. Above all, there was security in them. She should know everything he was doing; she should be quite sure no other influence, stronger, dangerous, was at work, while he came to her daily, and talked to her in the old frank way. Routh shrank from seeing him, as Harriet well knew, and felt, also, that there was security in his visits to her. "He will keep out of George's way, of course," she said to herself, when she acquiesced in the expediency of following Dallas to Homburg, and the necessity for keeping him strictly in sight, for some time at least. "He will not undertake the daily torture. No; that, too, must be my share. Well, I am tied to the stake, and there is no escape; only an interval of slumber now and then, more or less rare and



brief. I don't want to tie him to it also—he could not bear it as I can.”

And she bore it well—wonderfully well, on the whole, though the simile of bodily torture is not overdrawn as representing what she endured. By a sort of tacit mutual consent, they never alluded to Deane, or the discovery of the murder. George, who never could bear the sight of a woman's suffering, had a vivid recollection of the terrible emotion she had undergone when he disclosed the truth to her, and determined to avoid the subject for the future. She understood this, but she felt tolerably certain that if any new complication arose, if any occasion of doubt or hesitation presented itself, George would seek her advice. She should not be kept in ignorance, and that was enough. She had ascertained, before they left London, that George had not mentioned the matter to Mr. Felton; and when the young man told her how otherwise complete his explanation with Mr. Felton had been, she felt a degree of satisfaction in the proof of her power and influence afforded by this reticence.

The positive injunction which Mr. Felton had

laid upon his nephew aided George's sensitiveness with respect to Harriet. He felt convinced that if his uncle had known her as he knew her, he would have been satisfied to confide to her the trouble and anxiety under which he laboured, and whose origin was assuming, to George's mind, increasing seriousness with every day which passed by without bringing news of Mr. Felton's son. But he would not, however he might find relief and counsel by doing so, discuss with Harriet a matter which he been positively forbidden to discuss with her husband: he could not ask her secrecy without hurting her by an explanation of Mr. Felton's ill opinion of Routh. So it happened that these two persons met every day, and that much liking, confidence, and esteem existed on the man's part towards the woman, and yet unbroken silence was maintained on the subject which deeply engaged the minds of both. Philip Deane's name was never mentioned by Harriet, nor did Dallas speak of Arthur Felton.

So Mrs. Carruthers improved in health. Mr. Carruthers was very gracious and affable to his step-son, and terribly nervous and anxious about

his wife, on whom, if the worthy physician could have been brought to consent, he would have kept Dr. Merle in perpetual attendance, being incapable of recognising the importance—indeed, almost the existence — of any patient of that gentleman's, except Mrs. Carruthers, of Poynings. Mr. Felton heard nothing of his son, and waited, frequently discussing the subject with Mr. Carruthers and his nephew; and the bright sweet autumn days went on. Afterwards, when George reviewed their course, and pondered on the strange and wayward ways through which his life had lain, he thought of the tranquillity, the lull there had been in that time, with wonder.

The change of scene, the physical effort, a certain inevitable deadening effect produced by the lapse of time, more powerful in cases of extreme excitement than its space would seem to warrant, had had their effect on Harriet's spirits and appearance. She looked more like herself, George thought, when he came to make her his daily visit. Perhaps he had become more accustomed to the change he had noted with solicitude on his return to London; she was certainly

more cheerful. He did not take account of the fact that he did not see her in Routh's company, though his uncle's comment on her husband's feelings towards her frequently and painfully recurred to him. Harriet questioned him frequently about his mother, and George, full of gratitude for her kindness and sympathy, spoke freely of her, of his uncle, of the altered position in which he stood with his step-father, and of his improved condition and hopes. There were only two persons of interest to him whom he did not mention to Harriet. They were Arthur Felton and Clare Carruthers.

“Have you ever been to the Kursaal in the evening?” he asked Harriet one day, as they were talking, and looking at the groups of gaily dressed men and women lounging past the window where they were seated.

“Yes, I have gone in there once or twice with Stewart; but I got tired of it very soon, and I don't want to go again.”

“My uncle met an old acquaintance there last evening,” George went on; “he does not particularly care about it either; but we were strolling about the gardens until rather late, and then

we went in and had a look at the ball-room. I had been watching a lady for some time, out-and-out the best dancer in the room, when she came up to my uncle and spoke to him, and I find out she is quite a celebrity here."

"Indeed," said Harriet, not vehemently interested.

"Yes, quite," said George; "and judging by what my uncle says, I should think she was a celebrity in New York too. I should like to show her to you, Mrs. Routh; she is like one of those impossible women in the American novels, with clusters of currants made in carbuncles, and bunches of cherries in flawless rubies, in their hair—you know the kind of thing I mean. I fancy the Phoenix would look shy about insuring her wardrobe, and Hancock feel dubious about matching her diamonds. Such a twinkling, flashing, glittering, coaxing, flippant mortal I never met in my life. I wonder if she dresses as gorgeously under the sunshine as under the gas."

"She has quite taken your fancy, George. Did Mr. Felton introduce you?"

"Yes. There she stood, looking up in his

face, but I am quite sure seeing me and every other person in the room at the same time, and chattering like a Yankee magpie; so my uncle presented me to—Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge, as he called her, in American fashion. She was there, with a whole host of people, and I didn't fancy them, 'ke-inder didn't,' as she would say, no doubt, and went away as soon as I could."

"Is she a widow?"

"Yes—at least, I think so; I heard nothing of Ireton P."

"She will be cultivating your uncle, or yourself, George. A handsome, rich young widow, and an old acquaintance of your uncle's, eh?"

"I don't feel in the least like it, Mrs. Routh, and I am sure the sparkling, flashing, dashing lady I met last night would fly at no such mean quarry. I have rather a notion, too, that my uncle does not like her."

"Have you? Did he seem displeased at the meeting?"

"Not exactly displeased—but—I am beginning to understand him now wonderfully well, and in some things he is so like my mother. Now, with

her I can always feel whether she likes a person or, not without her saying a word—I could formerly, I mean, when she was more susceptible to impressions than she is now. It's just the same in my uncle's case; and I knew, in a minute, he didn't like Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge."

"Where is she staying? At the 'Quatre Saisons,' I suppose?"

"No," said George; "she has one of the Schwarzchild houses. You know them, Mrs. Routh?"

"Yes, I know them," said Harriet. "I saw the Frau Schwarzchild yesterday, rejoicing in a pink parasol with a coral handle, set with turquoises in clumps."

"That's the woman. Shouldn't wonder if the parasol were a waif from the wardrobe of Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge. She has, then, one of those huge houses for herself and her attendants."

"Did she tell you all this in the ball-room?"

"All *this*? Bless your innocence, she got through such trivialities as these in about two minutes. I might have heard her whole history, and Ireton P.'s, no doubt, particulars of his last

illness—if he had a last illness—included, if I had asked her to dance. And, by Jove!” said George, starting up and pushing back the muslin curtain which impeded Harriet’s view of the street somewhat, “there she is, coming down the street in a pony-carriage, and looking like a whole triumphal procession on one set of wheels.”

Harriet looked out with an assumption of more curiosity than she felt. In a low, elegant, but rather over-ornamented equipage, drawn by two gray ponies, likewise rather over-ornamented, but very handsome and of great value, sat a lady of beauty as undeniable as that of her horses, and elegance as striking as that of her carriage. Woman-like, Harriet remarked the magnificence of her dress before she noticed the beauty of her face, set off as it was by the aid of the most perfect hat and feather ever put together by the milliner’s art. That beauty was at once of the correct and the sparkling order. Her features were of statuesque regularity, but they had all the piquant brilliancy of rich, glowing, passionate life. Cheeks and lips flushed with the full colour of health, masses of hair of the darkest, glossiest



brown coiled up in endless braids and rolls under the inimitable hat; eyes so dark that to call them black was a venial exaggeration; teeth which shone like jewels; and in the face, the air, over the whole person and equipment of the woman, from the wrists outstretched over the reins she held, and on which broad bands of jewels flashed, to the tip of the satin boot which protruded beneath the silken carriage-wrap spread daintily over her knees, an intolerable consciousness and domineering boldness which was simply odious. Her ponies were stepping leisurely; her glittering eyes were looking right and left, as though she were searching for some one among the scattered groups she passed, and every member of which stared at her without disguise. As much of her dress as could be seen was a magnificent mixture of satin and lace and jewels; and even in her dress there was a daring, reckless something, indefinable but distinct, which made the gazers feel that in staring at her there was no offence.

“Stunning, isn’t she, Mrs. Routh? I beg your pardon for the slang, but there is really no other word. Blinding, dazzling, and all the rest of it.”

“Stunning, certainly, George,” said Harriet, smiling; “but, somehow, I don’t think you care particularly to be stunned.”

“Not in the least. She is not a bit my style;” and George, thinking of what “his” style was, and how widely it differed from the triumphant figure in the ornate carriage out there, let the muslin curtain drop, and turned away from the window. Harriet sat down and took up her work.

“A woman whom men would love for a little while, and hate bitterly after, I fancy; but whom women would hate at once, and always.”

Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge had not found among the loungers in the town the individual whom her bright black eyes were seeking, when George Dallas and Harriet Routh had marked her from the window. She had driven rapidly away past the gardens and the Schloss, and when fully two miles outside the town she overtook a gentleman sauntering leisurely along, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and his moody eyes fixed upon the ground. The carriage was close upon him before he looked round, though

the sound made by the wheels and the trotting horses had been distinct in the clear air, as they came along the empty road. Then he turned and greeted the lady with effusion. In a moment he had taken his place beside her, and was whirled away into the green and golden distance of the forest, under the brow-crest of Taunus.

“How very odd that you should know him,” said the gorgeous lady of the pony-carriage to the gentleman seated beside her, as she walked her ponies along a shady road, where the slim trees stood on guard on either side, and the fallen leaves rustled under the wheels.

“Not so very odd. He is a near relative of one of my most intimate friends.”

“Ah, his nephew, I suppose you mean, a tall young man with good eyes, and a remarkably rich expression of countenance.”

“I recognise the description certainly, and it is not flattering. That is the individual; his name is Dallas.”

“A booby, I’m convinced. How he can be an intimate friend of yours I cannot understand.”

She said this rather sulkily, which, by adding to its character of sincerity, made the indirect flattery in which she was a proficient all the more delicious. Her companion's eyes flashed with pleasure as he turned them upon her with a look which she did not raise her eyes to receive, but which dyed her cheek a deeper rose-tint than before. Then she went on :

“He is come here with Mr. Felton to meet his cousin, I suppose. Arthur Felton will not like that, I fancy. He regarded this fine family reunion as a very decided nuisance, I can assure you.”

“I don't quite understand you,” her companion said. “Mr. Felton's son is not here, that I know of; he certainly had not arrived yesterday, for Dallas was at my lodgings, and would have been sure to mention it.”

“No,” replied the lady, with a slow provoking smile, which lighted her eyes up with mischief, and showed more of her faultless teeth than always glistened on the world. “I know he is not here, but he is coming. I gave him a rendezvous here for this very week, in Paris, last March.”

The gentleman looked at her in such extreme surprise that it quite amused her. She did not only smile now, she laughed.

“I will explain my meaning,” she said, “in very few words. I have known the Feltons all my life, and Arthur has been more or less in love with me since he was a boy; rather less than more, perhaps, for that’s his way, and not at all to the detriment of his being quite as much in love with any number of women besides. He and his father never got on well. Mr. Felton did not like ‘his ways’ as the goodies and gossips say, and, in particular, he did not like his being in love with me, for he can’t bear me. Frightfully bad taste, isn’t it? Get along, President,” this to one of the ponies, as she touched him up with her whip; “you’ve had walking enough. Awfully bad taste—thank you, you needn’t say yes; you’re looking unutterable things. Of course, I don’t mind that particularly, and I don’t care for Arthur Felton in the ve-ry least,” with a most enchanting drawl and the faintest pout of the crimson lips. “He made himself a perfect nuisance in Paris, and I really

must have quarrelled with him, if I had not gone away with some friends who wouldn't have Arthur —no, not in the ve-ry least," and she repeated the before-mentioned little performance quite enchantingly.

"But you agreed to meet him here?" said the her companion, very moodily.

"Agreed to meet him here! How ridiculous you are! I gave him rendezvous, which I beg to observe is not precisely the same thing as agreeing to meet him."

"*Sounds like it,*" said the gentleman, still more sulkily.

"Very true; but it isn't. I meant to come here—I always lay my plans long beforehand—just at this time, and I thought I might as well let him come here as have him constantly teasing me in the mean time. It was a long while off, remember." And her black eyes danced with mischief and enticement.

"And where is he now?" asked her companion, after he had given her another look which brought the burning colour to her cheeks once more.

“How on earth should *I* know?” was her answer; and as she made it she turned her head round, and looked him full in the face. “How on earth should I know?” she repeated. “You don’t imagine, I suppose, that I correspond with all the friends of my youth. No, no; I never think of people when they are out of my sight. I have no one that I care about enough to think of in absence, and I never write a letter if I can possibly avoid it.”

“I understood, when Mr. Felton came to London, he had not heard from his son for some time, and he has certainly not seen him there.”

“Very likely; Master Arthur is not a particularly dutiful son. However, his father will see him here, if he stays till next week, that’s a fact.”

“What sort of person is Mr. Felton’s son? I can’t say I admire the old gentleman much.”

“No! Don’t get on with him? I should think not, neither do I; but Arthur’s not in the ve-ry least like him. Not nearly so good-looking; not like the Feltons, I should say, at all; like his mother. His cousin, though he’s a big booby, is a good-looking fellow, and looks like a

gentleman. Now that's just what Arthur does not look like."

"And what is just what he does look like?" asked her companion, who took what he thought was a secret pleasure in hearing this unknown admirer of the beautiful woman who had captivated his fancy spoken of in depreciating terms. But he was quite mistaken. Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge discerned this amiable sentiment with perfect distinctness, and gave it all the nutriment to be supplied by the most consummate and dexterous coquetry.

"H'm!" she said, with a bewitching air of thought and deliberation. "What does Arthur Felton look like? Very like a Yankee, and a little like a Jew;" and she laughed most musically.

As Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge drove her gray ponies towards the little white town, the carriage passed, near a turn in one of the level shady roads, a bench placed between two tall slim trees. Between the bench and the road lay a broad pathway, with a grassy edge. A lady, simply dressed,



of a small slight figure, and whose face was bent downwards, but in whose air there was unmistakable refinement, was sitting on the bench, and leaning a little forward, was making marks on the ground with her parasol, less in idleness than in the abstraction of thought. As the ponies trotted merrily by, and their mistress laughed, rather loudly but musically, the lady looked up, and the eyes of the two women met. The gentleman who sat by the fair American, and who was on the side of the carriage nearest to the pathway, was so absorbed in the animated conversation being carried on between them, that he did not notice the solitary figure, nor see that anything had attracted his companion's attention. Indeed, the attraction was but momentary; the look had hardly been interchanged before the carriage whirled past Harriet Routh.

She came forward upon the footpath, and looked after the fast-receding figure of her husband, as he bent deferentially towards the woman she had seen that morning, until she could see it no longer; and still stood there when the level shaded road was blank and empty.

## CHAPTER XII.

### ON THE BALCONY.

“ARE you going out this evening, Stewart?” asked Harriet Routh of her husband, as they sat together, after their dinner—which had not been a particularly lively meal—was removed. She did not look at him as she put the question, but gazed out of the window, holding back the curtain, while she spoke. Stewart Routh was examining the contents of a heap of letters which lay on the table before him, and did not answer for a moment. She repeated the question :

“Are you going out anywhere this evening, Stewart?”

“Of course I am going out,” he answered impatiently. “Why do you ask? I am not going to be mewed up here in this stifling room all the evening.”

“No, of course not,” she answered very gently

and without an inflection in her voice to betray that she perceived the irritation of his tone. "Of course not. You go out every evening, as every one else does here. I only asked because I think of going with you."

"*You, Harry?*" he said, with real embarrassment, but with feigned cordiality. "That *is* a sudden start. Why, you have never been out in the evening since we've been here but once, and then you seemed to dislike the place very much. Have you not been out to-day?"

"Yes, I have. I walked a long way to-day. But I have a fancy to go to the Kursaal this evening. George Dallas tells me a number of new people have come, and I have a fancy to see them."

Stewart Routh frowned. He disliked this fancy of his wife's; he did not understand it. Harriet had always shrunk from strangers and crowds, and had gone to Homburg very unwillingly. On their first arrival, when he would have been tolerably willing to take her about with him, though he felt a growing repugnance to her society, she would not go out except to drink the

waters early in the day, and now, on an occasion when it was particularly inconvenient to him, she took a fancy to go out. Besides, he hated the mention of George Dallas's name. There was a tacit sympathy between him and Harriet on this point. True, she bore the pain of his daily visits, but then she was accustomed to bearing pain. But she rarely spoke of him, and she knew his intercourse with Routh was very slight and casual. Harriet possessed even more than the ordinary feminine power of divination in such matters, and she felt instinctively that Mr. Felton both disliked and distrusted her husband.

“It is fortunate we do not want to use Dallas for our purpose any longer,” Harriet had said to herself on only the second occasion of her seeing the uncle and nephew together—“very fortunate; for Mr. Felton would be a decided and a dangerous antagonist. Weak and wavering as George is, his uncle could rule him, I am sure, and would do so, contrary to us.” This impression had been confirmed since Harriet had watched, as she was in the habit of doing, the proceedings of Mr. Felton and George at Homburg. When George

visited her, he rarely mentioned Routh, and she knew they had not dined together ever since they had been there. Assisted, insensibly, by his uncle's opinion and influence, George had emancipated himself, as all his reflections had dictated, but as all his resolutions had failed to accomplish. So Harriet ceased to mention George to Routh, and thus it was that her speech jarred unpleasantly upon his ear.

"Indeed," he said. "I should think Dallas a very poor judge of what is or is not likely to amuse you. However, I'm sorry I can't take you out this evening. I have an engagement."

Still she kept her head turned from him and looked out of the window. He glanced at her uneasily, cleared his throat, and went on:

"I promised to meet Hunt and Kirkland at the tables to-night and try our luck. I'm sorry for it, Harry, and I'll keep to-morrow evening quite free. That will do for you, won't it?"

"Yes," she replied; "that will do."

She did not look round, and he did not approach her. He fidgeted about the room a little,

sorted his letters, tied them up in a bundle, locked them into his travelling desk, and finally, with another uneasy glance at her, he left the room. Harriet sat quite still, her hand upon the curtain, her face towards the window. So she sat for several minutes after he had left the house, in evening dress, with a loose paletot on, and she had seen him go down the street towards the Kursaal. Then she wrote a few lines to George Dallas, and, having sent her note, one more seated herself by the window. The room was darkening in the quick coming night, and her figure was indistinct in its motionless attitude by the window, when George came gaily into her presence.

“Here I am, Mrs. Routh. What are your commands? Nothing wrong with you, I hope? I can't see you plainly in the dusk. Where's Routh?”

“He has gone out. He had an engagement, and I have a particular fancy to go out this evening, to see the world; in fact, at the Kursaal, in particular. You are always so kind and obliging, I thought, as Stewart could not take me, if your mother did not particularly want you

this evening, you might give me your escort for an hour."

"Too delighted," said George, with genuine pleasure. "I am quite free. Mr. Carruthers is with my mother, and my uncle is writing letters for the American mail."

Harriet thanked him, and left the room; but returned almost immediately, with her bonnet on, and wearing a heavy black lace veil.

"You will be smothered in that veil, Mrs. Routh," said George, as they left the house. "And you won't get the full benefit of this delightful evening air."

"I prefer it," she said; "there are some men here, friends of Stewart, whom I don't care to see."

They went on, almost in silence, for Harriet was very thoughtful, and George was wondering what made her so "low," and whether these friends of Routh's were any of the "old set." He hoped for Harriet's sake, Routh was not playing recklessly. He was very clever, of course, but still—and with all the wisdom and the zeal of his present mental and moral condition, George

shook his head at the idea of a deflection into gambling on the part of Routh.

The often-described scene at the Kursaal displayed all the customary features. Light, gilding, gaiety, the lustre and rustle of women's dress, the murmur of voices, and the ring of laughter in all the rooms not devoted to play; but at the tables, silence, attention, and all the variety which attends the exhibition of the passion of gambling in all its stages. From the careless loungeur, who, merely passing through the rooms, threw a few florins on the table to try what the game was like, to the men and women who lived for and in the hours during which the tables were open to them, all, with the intermediate ranks of votaries and degrees of servitude, were there.

George was so accustomed to Harriet's retiring manners, and so prepared to find the scene distasteful to her, that he did not notice her unwillingness to assume a prominent position in any of the rooms through which they passed. As they entered each, she drew him a little behind the crowd in occupation, and talked to him about the style of the apartment, its decoration, the brilliancy



of its light—in short, made any commonplace remarks which occurred to her.

They were standing near the door of one of the saloons, and Harriet, though her veil was not lifted, was scanning from behind its shelter curiously, and with a rapid sharpness peculiar to her, the brilliant-dressed crowd, talking, laughing, flirting, lounging on the velvet seats, and some furtively yawning in the weariness of their hearts; when a sudden brisk general flutter and a pervading whisper attracted the attention of both. The movement was caused by the entrance of a lady, so magnificently dressed and so extremely handsome that she could not have failed to create a sensation in any resort of gaiety, fashion, and the pomp and pride of life. The voluminous folds of her blue satin dress were covered, overflowed rather, by those of a splendid mantilla of black lace, worn Spanish fashion over her head, where a brilliant scarlet flower nestled between the rich filmy fabric and the lustrous black brown hair coiled closely round it. She came in, her head held up, her bright black eyes flashing, her whole face and figure radiant with reckless beauty and

assertion. Two or three gentlemen accompanied her, and her appearance had the same processional air which George had commented upon in the morning. The lady was Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge.

“We’re in luck, Mrs. Routh,” said George. “Here comes my uncle’s fair friend, or fair enemy, whichever she may be, in all her splendour. What a pity Mr. Felton is not here! Perhaps she will speak to me.”

“Perhaps so,” whispered Harriet, as she slipped her hand from under his arm, and sat down on a bench behind him. “Pray don’t move, please. I particularly wish to be hidden.”

At this moment, Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge, advancing with her train, amid the looks of the assembly, some admiring, some affecting the contemptuous, and a few not remarkably respectful, approached George. From behind him, where her head just touched the back of his elbow, Harriet’s blue eyes were fixed upon her. But the triumphant beauty was quite unconscious of their gaze. She stopped for a moment, and spoke to George.

“ Good evening, Mr. Dallas. Is Mr. Felton here? No? He is expecting his son, I suppose.”

“ He does not know, madam. He has not heard from him.”

“ Indeed! But Arthur is always lazy about letter-writing. However, he will be here soon, to answer for himself.”

“ Will he? Do you know, my uncle is very anxious——”

She interrupted him with a laugh and a slight gesture of her hand, in which the woman watching her discerned an insolent meaning, then said, as she passed on :

“ He knows where to find me, if he wants to know what I can tell him. Good evening, Mr. Dallas.”

“ Did you hear that, Harriet?” said George, in an agitated voice, after he had watched the brilliant figure as it mingled with the crowd in the long saloon.

“ I did,” said Harriet. “ And though I don’t understand her meaning, I think there is something wrong and cruel in it. That is a bold, bad

woman, George," she went on, speaking earnestly; "and though *I* am not exactly the person entitled to warn you against dangerous friends——"

"Yes, yes, you are," interrupted George, eagerly, as he drew her hand again under his arm, and they moved on; "indeed you are. You are the best of friends to me. When I think of all the past, I hardly know how to thank you enough. All that happened before I went to Amsterdam, and the way you helped me out of my scrapes, and all that happened since; the good advice you gave me! Only think what would have happened to me if I had not acted upon it."

He was going on eagerly, when she stopped him by the iron pressure of her fingers upon his arm.

"Pray don't," she said. "I am not strong now. I can't talk of these—of anything that agitates me."

"I beg your pardon," said George, soothingly. "I ought to have remembered. And also, Mrs. Routh, I know you never like to be

thanked. What were you going to say when I thoughtlessly interrupted you?"

"I was going to say," she replied, in quite her customary tone, "that I don't think this American lady would be a very safe friend, and that I don't think she feels kindly towards your uncle. There was something malicious in her tone. Is your uncle uneasy about his son?"

The question put George into a difficulty, and Harriet, with unfailing tact, perceived in a moment that it had done so. "I remember," she said, "the tone in which Mr. Felton wrote of his son, in his first letter, was not favourable to him; but this is a family matter, George, and you are quite right not to tell me about it."

"Thank you, Mrs. Routh," said George, "You are always right, and always kind. I must tell my uncle what has passed this evening. Thus much I may say to you. He has had no news of his son lately, and will be very glad to receive any."

"I don't think he will be glad to receive news of his son through *her*," said Harriet. All the time this conversation lasted, she had been scan-

ning the crowd through which they were moving, and noting every fresh arrival.

“ Shall we go into the gardens? the lights look pretty,” she continued.

George acquiesced, and they passed through the wide doors and down the broad steps into the gay scene over which the tranquil starlit sky spread a canopy of deep cloudless blue; the blue of tempered steel; the dark blue of the night, which is so solemnly beautiful.

“ Are you always so successful?” a voice, pitched to a low and expressive key, said to a lady, who sat, an hour later that night, with a heap of gold and silver beside her, under the brilliant light which streamed down over the gaming-tables and their occupants, but lighted up no such dauntless, bright, conquering beauty as hers. The man who had spoken stood behind her; his hand rested on the back of her chair, and was hidden in the folds of the laced drapery which fell over her dress. She gave him an upward, backward flash of her black eyes, and answered :

“ Always, and in everything. I invariably

play to win. But sometimes I care little for the game, and tire of it in the winning. Now, for instance, I am tired of this."

"Will you leave it, then?"

"Of course," and she rose as she spoke, took up her money, dropped it with a laugh into a silver-net bag, a revival of the old gypsin, which hung at her waist, and, drawing her lace drapery round her, moved away. The man who had spoken followed her closely and silently. She passed into one of the saloons, and out into a long balcony, on which a row of windows opened, and which overlooked the gardens filled with groups of people.

A band was stationed in one of the rooms which opened upon the terrace, and the music sounded pleasantly in the still air.

"And so you are always successful!" said the man who had spoken before to the lady, who leaned upon the balcony, with the light from within just tingeing the satin of her dress, and the faint light of the moon and stars lending her grace and beauty a softened radiance which well became them, though somewhat foreign to them. "I

believe that firmly. Indeed, how could you fail? I cannot fancy you associated with defeat. I cannot fancy anything but triumph for such a Venus Victrix as you are!"

"You say very pretty things," was the slightly contemptuous answer, "and you say them very well. But I think I am a little tired of them, among other things. You see, I have heard so many of them, ever since I can remember. In fact, I have eaten bonbons of every kind, of all the colours, as they say in Paris, and they pall upon my taste now."

"You are not easily understood," said her companion; "but you are the most enchanting of enigmas."

"Again!" she said, and held up an ungloved hand, on which jewels shone in the dim mixed light.

"Yes, again and again!" he replied, and he drew nearer to her, and spoke eagerly, earnestly, in low fervent tones. She did not shrink from him; she listened, with her arms wrapped in her lace mantle, resting upon the balcony, the long black eyelashes shading her eyes, and the head,



with the scarlet flower decking it, bent—not in timidity, but in attentive thought. The man leaned with his back against the balcony, and his face turned partly towards her, partly towards the open windows, through which the light was shining. The lady listened, but rarely uttered a word. It was a story, a narrative of some kind which her companion was telling, and it evidently interested her.

They were alone. The rooms within filled, and emptied, and filled again, and people rambled about them, went out upon the terrace and into the gardens; but no one intruded upon the *tête-à-tête* upon the balcony.

A momentary pause in the earnest, passionate flow of her companion's speech caused the lady to change her position and look up at him. "What is it?" she said.

"Nothing. Dallas passed by one of the windows just now, and I thought he might have seen me. He evidently did not, for he's just the blundering fool to have come out here to us if he had. It never would occur to him that he could be in any one's way."

There was an exasperation in his tone which surprised the lady. But she said, calmly, "I told you I thought him a booby." She resumed her former position, and as she did so the scarlet flower fell from her hair over the parapet. Her companion did not notice the accident, owing to his position. She leaned a little more forward to see where the flower had fallen. A lady, who had, no doubt, been passing along the terrace under the balcony at the moment, had picked it up. Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge saw the blossom with the deep red colour in the lady's hand as she walked rapidly away, and was lost to sight at the end of the terrace.

A little more time passed, and the American lady and her companion left the balcony, passed through the central hall, and reached the grand entrance of the Kursaal. A close carriage was in waiting, into which the gentleman handed her.

"Where is the flower you wore in your hair to-night?" he said, as he lingered, holding the carriage door in his hand; "have you taken it out? Are you going to give it to me?" Exciting

boldness was in his voice, and his keen dark eyes were aflame.

“Impertinent! I lost it; it fell over the balcony while you were talking—talking nonsense, I fancy.”

“I will find it when you are gone. I may—— No, I will keep it.”

“Some one has been too quick for you,” she said, with a mischievous laugh. “I saw some one pick it up and walk off with it, very quickly too.”

“What? and you——”

“Don’t be foolish,” she interrupted him; “shut the door, please, I’m cold. I want to pull the glass up—I want to get home. There, good-night. Pooh, are you a booby also? It was only a woman!”

A brilliant light was given by the lamps in the portico, and it shone on her face as she leaned a moment from the carriage window and looked full at him, a marvellous smile on her curved lips and in her black eyes. Then the carriage was gone, and he was standing like a man in a dream.

“Has Mrs. Routh come in?” George had

asked, anxiously, of the English servant at Routh's lodgings, half an hour before.

"Yes, sir ; but she has gone to her room, and she told me to give you this."

It was a note, written hastily in pencil, on a card :

"I felt so ill, after you left me to get me the lemonade, that I was afraid to wait for your return, and came home at once. Pray forgive me. I know you will come here first, or I would send to your own house.

"H. R."

"Tell Mrs. Routh I hope to see her to-morrow," said George, "and to find her better." Then he walked slowly towards his mother's house, thinking as he went of Clare Carruthers, of the Sycamores, and of how still, and solemn, and stately that noble avenue of beeches in which he saw her first was then doubtless looking in the moonlight ; thinking the harmless thoughts of a young man whom love, the purifier, has come to save. A carriage passing him with bright lamps, and a swift vision of sheeny blue seen for an

instant, reminded him of Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge, and turned his thoughts to the topic of his uncle's anxiety. When he reached home, he found Mr. Felton alone; and told him at once what had passed.

“You are quite correct in supposing that I don't particularly like this woman, George,” said Mr. Felton, after they had talked for some time, “and that I should prefer any other channel of intelligence. But we must take what we can get, and it is a great relief to get any. It is quite evident there's nothing wrong with him. I don't allude to his conduct,” said Mr. Felton, with a sigh. “I mean as to his safety. I shall call on her to-morrow.”

George bade his uncle good-night, and was going to his own room, when a thought struck him, and he returned.

“It has just occurred to me, uncle,” he said, “that Mrs. Bembridge may have a likeness of Arthur. From the account you give of her, I fancy she is likely to possess such trophies. Now we may not require to use such a thing at all, and you have sent for one under any circumstances;

still, when you see her, if you consider it expedient, you might ascertain whether she has one in her possession. If her information is not satisfactory, to have a likeness at hand will save time.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES.

MR. FELTON was scrupulously polite towards women. His American training showed in this particular more strongly than in any other, and caused him to contrast advantageously with the pompous and self-engrossed Mr. Carruthers of Poynings, who was not a general favourite in the small society with whom he condescended to mix while in "foreign parts," as he carefully designated the places of his sojourn which were so unfortunate as not to be under British rule. Mr. Carruthers was apt to apologise, or rather to explain, the temporary seclusion in which Mrs. Carruthers delicate health obliged him to remain, on the rare occasions when he encountered any of his acquaintances with a highly offensive air of understanding and regretting the loss he was obliged to inflict upon them; and the innocent

and worthy gentleman would have been very much astonished if it had been revealed to him that his condescension had generally the effect of irritating some and amusing others among the number of its recipients. The manners of his brother-in-law were at once more simple and more refined. There was no taint of egotism in them, and, though his engrossing cares, added to a naturally grave disposition, made him serious and reserved, everyone liked Mr. Felton.

Except Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge, who disliked him as much as she could be at the trouble of disliking anybody—which, indeed, was not much, for her real nature was essentially trivial, and her affections, except for herself and her enmities, alike wavering, weak, and contemptible. Mr. Felton neither liked nor respected the brilliant woman who was so much admired and so very much “talked about” at Homburg; but he said nothing of his contumacious dissent from the general opinion except to George, and was gravely courteous and acquiescent when the lady, her dress, her ponies, her “dash,” and her wealth—the latter estimated with the usual liberality



of society in such cases—were discussed in his presence. They had been pretty freely discussed during a few days which preceded the conversation concerning her which had taken place between the uncle and nephew. When they met again on the following morning, George asked Mr. Felton when he intended to visit Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge, and was informed that his uncle purposed writing to the lady to inquire at what time it would be her pleasure and convenience to receive him. George looked a little doubtful on hearing this. The remembrance of Harriet's strongly expressed opinion was in his mind, and he had a notion that his uncle would have done more wisely had he sought her presence unannounced. But such a proceeding would have been entirely inconsistent with Mr. Felton's notions of the proper and polite, and his nephew dismissed the subject; reflecting that, after all, as she had said "he knows where to find me if he wants to know what I can tell him," she could not refuse to see him. So Mr. Felton's note was written and sent, and an answer returned which perfectly justified George's mis-

giving that if Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge were afforded an opportunity of offering Mr. Felton an impertinence, she would not hesitate to avail herself of it.

The answer was curt and decisive. Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge was particularly engaged that day, and would be particularly engaged the next; on the third she would receive Mr. Felton at three o'clock. Mr. Felton handed the missive to his nephew with an expression of countenance partly disconcerted and partly amused.

“I thought so,” said George, as he tossed the dainty sheet of paper, with its undecipherable monogram and its perfume of the latest fashion, upon the table — “I thought so. We must only wait until Thursday, that is, unless we chance to meet your fair correspondent in our walks between to-day and Thursday.”

But Mr. Felton and his nephew did not chance to meet Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge either on that or on the succeeding day. Once they saw her pony-carriage coming towards them, but it turned off into another road, and was out of sight before they reached the turn.

“I am pretty sure she saw and recognised us,” George Dallas thought; “but why she should avoid my uncle, except out of sheer spite, I cannot imagine.”

There was no further to look for the lady's motive. Sheer spite was the highest flight of Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge's powers of revenge or anger. She was an accomplished and systematic coquette; and, having more brains than heart, however mediocre her endowments in either sense, she was perfectly successful. She disliked Mr. Felton, because he had never betrayed any admiration or even consciousness of her beauty, and it was very annoying to a woman of her stamp to have tried her arts unsuccessfully on an elderly man. She had tried them merely in an idle hour, and with the amiable purpose of enjoying the novelty of such a conquest; but she had failed, and she was irritated by her failure.

If Mr. Felton had even sheltered himself behind the rampart of his years, it would have been more tolerable—if he had extended a kind of paternal protection to her, for instance. But he did not; he simply paid her ordinary atten-

tions in his customary grave way, whenever he was brought in contact with her, and, for the rest, calmly ignored her. When his son appeared in her train, she had not the satisfaction of believing she could make the father wretched by encouraging him. Mr. Felton had graver cause than any she could help to procure for him, for disapproval of his son's conduct in most respects. She counted for nothing in the sum of his dissatisfaction, but she certainly became more distasteful to him when she was added to the number of its components. Mark Felton had wounded the sensitive self-love of a woman who knew no deeper passion. She was animated by genuine spite towards him, when she declined to accede to his request for an immediate interview.

By what feeling was Stewart Routh, who was with her when she received Mr. Felton's note, and who strongly urged the answer she sent to it, actuated? He would have found it difficult to tell. Not jealousy; the tone in which she had spoken of Arthur Felton precluded that feeling. Routh had felt that it was genuine, even while he knew that this woman was deliberately en-

slaving him, and therefore was naturally suspicious of every tone in which she spoke of any one. But his judgment was not yet entirely clouded by passion; he had felt, in their brief conversation relative to Arthur Felton, that her tone had been true. He hated George Dallas now; he did not deceive himself about that. There was a vague dread and trouble in his thoughts concerning the young man. Once he had only despised him. He no longer despised him; but he hated him instead. And this hatred, further reaching than love, included all who were connected with George, and especially Mr. Felton, whose grave and distant manner, whose calm and penetrating glance, conveyed keen offence to Stewart Routh. They had not spoken of the matter to each other; but Routh had felt, as soon and as strongly as Harriet, that his influence over Dallas was at an end. As it happened, he had successfully used that influence for the last time in which he could foresee any need for its employment, and therefore Mr. Felton had not done him any practical injury; but that did not matter: he hated him all the same.

He had watched the smile with which Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge read Mr. Felton's note a little anxiously. He did not dare to ask her from whom the missive came, but she graciously gave him the information.

"He wants to see me, to find out Master Arthur's doings," she said, with a ringing mischievous laugh. "Not that I know anything about him since he left Paris, and I shall have to look serious and listen to more preaching than goes well with the sunshine of to-day. Its rather a nuisance;" and the lady pouted her scarlet lips very effectively.

"Don't see him," said Routh, as he leant forward and gazed at her with eager admiration. "Don't see him. Don't lose this beautiful day, or any part of it, for him. You can't give him any real information."

"Except that his son is coming here," she said, slyly.

"I forgot," said Stewart Routh, as he rose and walked moodily to the window.

Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge smiled a little triumphantly, and said gaily: "He shall wait

for the news. I dare say it will be quite as welcome to-morrow."

"Don't say to-morrow either," said Routh, approaching her again, as she seated herself at her writing-table, and bending so as to look into her eyes.

"Why?" she asked, as she selected a pen.

"Because I must go away on Thursday. I have an appointment, to meet a man at Frankfort. I shall be away all day. Let this anxious parent come to you in my absence; don't waste the time upon him."

"And if the time does not seem so wonderfully precious to me, what then?" said the lady, looking straight at him, and giving to her voice a truly irresistible charm, a tone in which the least possible rebuke of his presumption was mingled with the subtlest encouragement. "What then?" she repeated. ("Decidedly, he is dreadfully in earnest," she thought.)

"Then," said Routh, in a low hoarse voice, "then I do not say you are deceiving me, but I am deceiving myself."

So Mr. Felton received the answer to his

note, and found that he must wait until the following Thursday.

People talked about Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge at Homburg as they had talked about her at New York and at Paris, at Florence and at Naples; in fact, in every place where she had shone and sparkled, distributed her flashing glances, and dispensed her apparently inexhaustible dollars. They talked of her at all the places of public resort, and in all the private circles. Mr. Felton was eagerly questioned about his beautiful compatriot by the people whom he met at the springs and in the gardens, and even by the visitors to Mr. and Mrs. Carruthers. Probably he did not know much about her; certainly he said little. She was a widow, without near relations, childless, and possessed of a large fortune. There was no doubt at all about that. Was she "received" in her own country? Yes, certainly. He had never heard anything against her. Her manners were very independent, rather too independent for European ideas. Very likely Mr. Felton was not a judge. At all events, ladies rarely visited the brilliant American. Indeed!



But that did not surprise him. Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge did not care for ladies' society—disliked it, in fact—and had no hesitation about saying so. Women did not amuse her, and she cared only for being amused. This, with the numerous amplifications which would naturally attend such a discussion, had all been heard by George, and was just the sort of thing calculated to excite the curiosity and interest of a young man of his disposition and antecedents. But it all failed to attract him now. Life had become very serious and real to George Dallas of late, and the image he carried about with him, enshrined in his memory, and sanctified in his heart, had nothing in common with the prosperous and insolent beauty which was the American's panoply.

It was rather late in the afternoon of the day on which Mr. Felton had received Mrs. Bembridge's note, before George presented himself at Harriet's lodgings. He had been detained by his mother, who had kept him talking to her a much longer time than usual. Mrs. Carruthers was daily gaining strength, and her pleasure in her

son's society was touching to witness, especially when her husband was also present. She would lie on her sofa, while the two conversed, more and more freely, as the air of making one another's acquaintance which had attended their first few days together wore off, and was replaced by pleasant companionship. At such times George would look at his mother with his heart full of remorse and repentance, and think mournfully how he had caused her all the suffering which had indirectly led to the result for which she had not dared to hope. And when her son left her, quiet tears of gratitude fell from his mother's eyes—those eyes no longer bright indeed, but always beautiful. There was still a dimness over her mind and memory: she was easily interested in and occupied with things and subjects which were present; and her son was by no means anxious for her entire awakening as to the past. Let the explanation come when it might, it must be painful; and its postponement was desirable. There were times, when they were alone, when George saw a troubled, anxious, questioning look in his mother's face, a look which betokened a painful effort of the me-

mory—a groping look, he described it to himself—and then he would make some excuse to leave her, or to procure the presence of a third person. When they were no longer alone, the look gradually subsided, and placid calm took its place.

That calm had been uninterrupted during their long interview on the morning in question. For the first time, George talked to his mother of his literary plans and projects, of the fair measure of success which had already attended his efforts, of his uncle's generosity to him—in short, of every pleasing subject to which he could direct her attention. The time slipped by unnoticed, and it was with some self-reproach that George found he had deferred his visit to Harriet to so late an hour.

This self-reproach was not lessened when he reached Harriet's lodgings. He found her in her accustomed seat by the window, but totally unoccupied, and his first glance at her face filled him with alarm.

“You are surely very ill, Mrs. Routh,” he said. “There is something wrong with you. What is it?”

Harriet looked at him with a strange absent

look, as if she hardly understood him. He took her hand, and held it for a moment, looking at her inquiringly. But she withdrew it, and said:

“No, there is nothing wrong with me. I was tired last night, that is all.”

“I am afraid you thought me very stupid, Mrs. Routh; and so I was indeed, to have kept you waiting so long, and not brought you the lemonade you wished for, after all. I was so frightened when I returned to the place where I had left you, and you were not there. The fact was, I got the lemonade readily enough; but I had forgotten my purse, and had no money to pay for it, so I had to go and find Kirkland in the reading-room, and got some from him.”

“Was he alone?”

“Kirkland? O yes, alone, and bored as usual, abusing everybody and everything, and wondering what could possibly induce people to come to such a beastly hole. I hate his style of talk, and I could not help saying it was odd he should be one of the misguided multitude.”

“Did you see Mr. Hunt?”

“Yes; he was just leaving when I met him,

not in the sweetest of tempers. The way he growled about Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge (her mere name irritates him) amused me exceedingly.”

“Indeed. How has she provoked his wrath?”

“I could not wait to hear exactly, but he said something about some man whom he particularly wanted as a ‘pal’ here—delightful way of talking, his! beats Kirkland’s—having fallen into her clutches. I suppose he is left lamenting; but I fancy Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge is the safer companion of the two, unless the individual in question is uncommonly sharp.”

Harriet looked attentively and searchingly at George. His unconsciousness was evidently quite unfeigned, and she refrained from asking him a question that had been on her lips.

“I came back to look for you as soon as ever I could get rid of Hunt,” continued George; “but you had disappeared, and then I came here at once. Routh had not come in, I think, then?”

“No,” said Harriet, curtly.

Then the conversation drifted to other matters, and George, who felt unusually happy and hopeful

that day, was proportionately self-engrossed, and tested Harriet's power of listening considerably. She sat before him pale and quiet, and there was never a sparkle in her blue eyes, or a flush upon her white cheek ; yet she was not cold, not uninterested, and if the answers she made, and the interest she manifested, were unreal, and the result of effort, at least she concealed their falsehood well. He talked of his mother and of his uncle, and told her how Mr. Felton had made him a present of a handsome sum of money only that morning.

“ And, as if to prove the truth of the saying that ‘ it never rains but it pours, ’ ” said George, “ I not only got this money from him, which a little time ago would have seemed positive riches to me, and a longer time ago would have saved me from—well, Mrs. Routh, I need not tell *you* from what it would have saved me ; but I got a handsome price for my story, and a proposal from the *Piccadilly* people to do another serial for them, to commence in November.”

“ Do you really think, George,” Harriet said, as if her attention had not extended to the con-

cluding sentence — “do you really think that money would have kept you all right?”

George reddened, and looked disconcerted; then laughed uneasily, and answered :

“ I know what you mean. You mean that I know myself very little if I lay the blame of my sins and follies on circumstances, don't you?”

She did not answer him, nor did she remove her serious fixed gaze from his face.

“ Yes,” he said, “ that is what you mean, and you are right. Still, I think the want of money made me reckless, made me worse than I should otherwise have been. I might not have spent it badly, you know, after all. I don't feel any inclination to go wrong now.”

“ No ; you are under your mother's influence,” said Harriet. And then George thought how much he should like to tell this woman—for whom he felt so much regard, and such growing compassion, though he could not give any satisfactory reason for the feeling—about Clare Carruthers. He thought he should like to confess to her the fault of which he had been guilty towards the unconscious girl and to ask her counsel. He thought

he should like to acknowledge the existence of another influence, in addition to his mother's. But he restrained the resolution, he hardly knew why. Harriet might think him a presumptuous fool to assign any importance to his chance meeting with the young lady, and, besides, Harriet herself was ill, and ill at ease, and he had talked sufficiently about himself already. No, if he were ever to mention Clare to Harriet, it should not be now.

“Routh is too rich now, too completely a man of capital and business, for me to hope to be of any use to him with my little windfalls,” said George, heartily; “but of course he knows, and you too, I shall never forget all I owe him.”

Harriet forced herself to smile, and utter some commonplace sentences of deprecation.

“There is one thing I want to do with some of the money I have been paid for my story,” said George, “and I want to consult you about it. I have to touch on a painful subject, too, in doing so. You remember all about the bracelet which my dear mother gave me? You remember how we broke it up together that night?”

Harriet remembered. She did not tell him



so in words, but she bent her head, and turned it from him, and set her face towards the street.

“You remember,” he repeated. “Pray forgive me, if the allusion is agitating. We little thought then what had happened; however, we won’t talk about *that* any more. What I want to do is this: you have the gold setting of the bracelet and the blue stones, sapphires, turquoises: what do you call them? I want to replace the diamonds. I can do so by adding a little of my uncle’s gift to my own money, and, when you return to England, I shall get the gold and things from you. I can easily procure the Palais Royal bracelet—Ellen will get it for me—and have the other restored exactly. If my mother is ever well enough to be told about it—and there is every probability that she will be, thank God—I think she will be glad I should have done this.”

“No doubt,” said Harriet, in a low voice. She did not start when he spoke of the strange task they had executed in concert on that memorable night, and no outward sign told how her flesh crept. “No doubt. But you will not have the bracelet made in England?”

“No,” said George; “I shall have it made in Paris. I will arrange about it when my uncle and I are passing through.”

“When does Mr. Felton go to England?”

“As soon as he gets his letters from New York, if his son does not turn up in the mean time. I hope he may do so. When do you think of returning?”

“I don’t know,” said Harriet, moodily. “If it depended on me, to-morrow. I hate this place.”

Energy was common to Harriet’s mode of speech, but vehemence was not; and the vehemence with which she spoke these words caused George to look at her with surprise. A dark frown was on her face—a frown which she relaxed with a visible effort when she perceived that he was looking at her.

“By the bye,” she said, rising and going to a table in a corner of the room, “you need not wait for my return to have the bracelet made. My desk always travels with me. The little packet is in it. I have never looked at or disturbed it. You had better take it to Paris with you, and give your directions with it in your hand. There will

be no occasion, I should think, to let the jeweller see the other."

She opened the desk as she spoke, and took from a secret drawer a small packet, folded in a sheet of letter-paper, and sealed. George Dallas's name was written upon it. It was that which she had put away in his presence so many months before (or years, was it, or centuries?). He took it from her, put it into his pocket, unopened, and took leave of her.

"You won't venture out this evening, Mrs. Routh, I suppose?" said George, turning again to her when he had reached the door.

"No," said Harriet. "I shall remain at home this evening." When he left her, she closed and locked her desk, and resumed her place at the window. The general dinner-hour was drawing near, and gay groups were passing, on their way to the hotels and to the Kursaal. The English servant, after a time, told Harriet that the dinner she had ordered from a restaurant had been sent in; should it be served, or would she wait longer for Mr. Routh?

Dinner might be served, Harriet answered.

Still she did not leave the window. Presently an open carriage, drawn by gray ponies, whirled by. Mrs. Ireton P. Bembridge was unaccompanied, except by her groom. The carriage went towards the Schwarzhild House. She was going to dine at home, probably. The servant asked if she should close the blinds. No, Harriet preferred them left as they were; and when she had made a pretence of dining, she once more took her place by the window. Lights were brought, but she carried them to the table in the corner of the room, where her desk stood, and sat in the shadow, looking out upon the street. Soon the street became empty, rain fell in torrents, and the lights glimmered on the surface of the pools. The hours passed. Harriet sat motionless, except that once or twice she pressed her hands upon her temples. Once she murmured, half audibly :

“ I wonder if I am going mad ? ”

At eleven o'clock Routh came home. He opened the door of the room in which Harriet was sitting, came in, and leaned against the wall without speaking. In quick instinctive alarm she went to the table in the corner, took up a

candle, and held it towards his face. He was quite pale, his eyes were glassy, his hair was disordered. In a moment Harriet saw, and saw for the first time in her life, that he was intoxicated.

END OF VOL. II.

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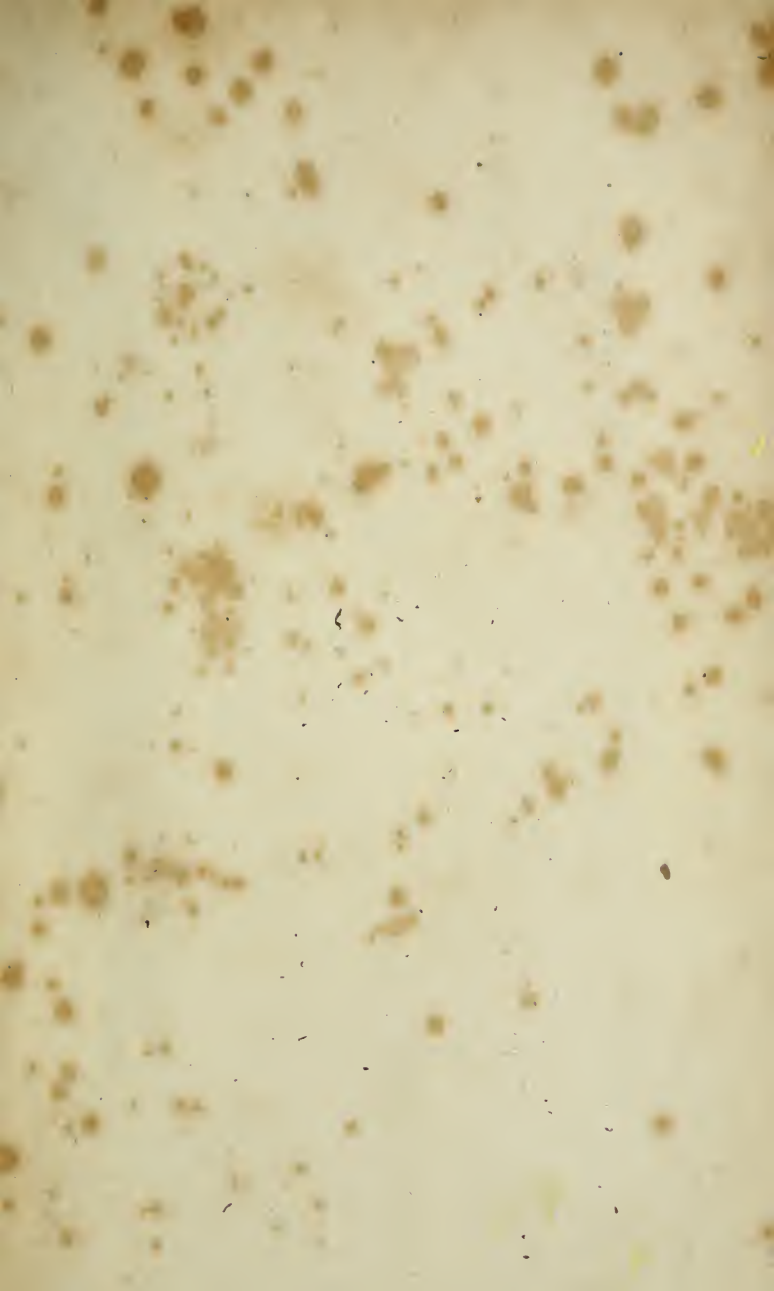
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