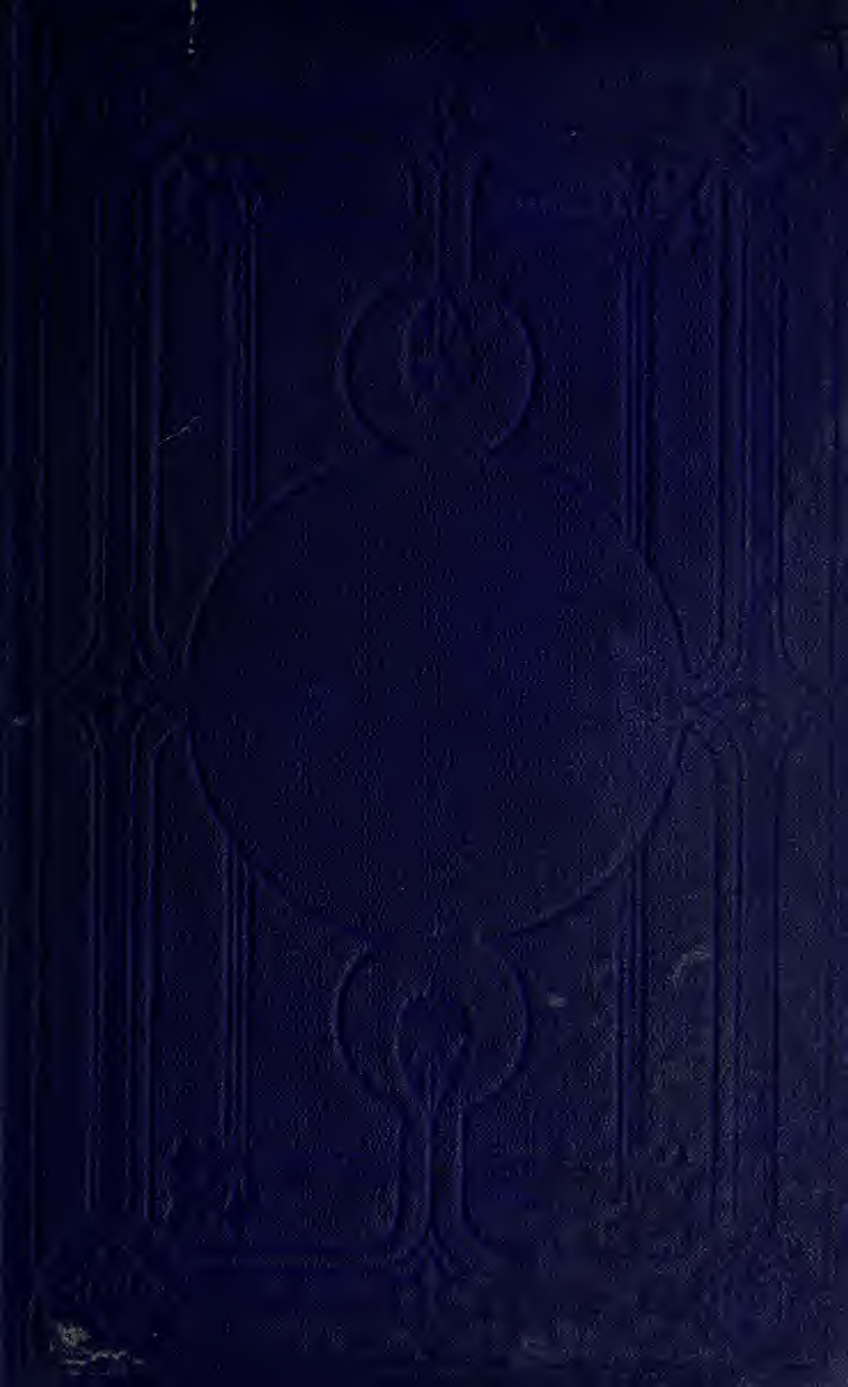

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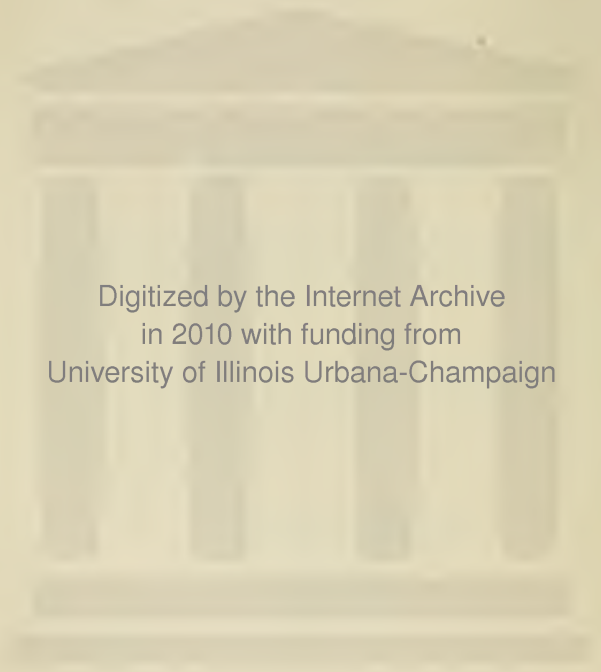

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Book the Third.

CHAPTER I.

ÆGROTAT ANIMO.

Miss Grace Lambert had made herself so popular at Hardriggs, had so ingratiated herself with all staying in that hospitable mansion, that the news, duly conveyed to the breakfast-table by Mrs. Bloxam on the morning after Miles Challoner's visit, that she was too unwell to leave her room, threw a considerable damp over the company assembled. Old Sir Giles, who had been very much impressed by Gertrude's quiet manner and cheerful spirits since she had been staying in the house—who had been perfectly astonished at the discovery that, though an opera-singer and

a great public favourite, she had, as he phrased it, "no d—d nonsense about her"—was the first to break out into loudly-expressed lamentation, mingled with suggestions of sending off at once to Hastings for medical advice, or telegraphing to London with the same object. Lady Belwether was distressed beyond measure; the idea of any-one so charming, anyone capable of yielding such exquisite delight, suffering from pain or sickness seemed to be something quite beyond the old lady's ken. She was at Gertrude's bedside within five minutes after she had heard of her young friend's indisposition, and was shocked at the swollen eyelids and pallid drawn face of her idol. The Dean, too, received the news with great regret: he had experienced much pleasure in Miss Lambert's society. The very fact of her position had had its secret charm; there was something specially pleasant in being brought into daily communion with one whose status in life was considered equivocal, but whose conduct was unexceptionable, and, if occasion required, would bear any amount of scrutiny. All great men

have their enemies; the Dean was not without his. The *odium theologicum*, than which there is nothing stronger, had made him its butt on various occasions, and many of his clerical brethren had poured out the vials of their wrath, through the medium of the Church journals to which they contributed, on his devoted head. The Dean had hitherto never replied to any of these attacks; but he had thought more than once, as he sat nursing his knee and looking out through the bay-window of the library at Hardriggs, that he should be by no means sorry if the contemporaneous visit of Miss Lambert and himself were made the subject of attack; and he had planned out a very brilliant and taking letter in reply—a letter abounding in charity and in quotations from the Fathers, Pollok's *Course of Time*, and the *Christian Year*. The Dean expressed to Lady Belwether that, charming as her guests were in the aggregate, Miss Lambert's secession would leave among them a blank, a *hiatus*, which was not merely *valde deflendus*, but which, in point of fact, it would be impossible to fill up; and the old

lady, though she did not understand Latin, comprehended the general nature of the remark, and found in it new cause for self-gratulation, and fresh weapons of defence against the insidious attacks of Martha and the Reverend Tophet. There were, it is true, certain people staying at Hardriggs who seemed to take it as a grievance that any "person in Miss Lambert's position," as they were good enough to call it, should be taken ill at all; but they were in a decided minority, and most of them were very much ashamed of the opinion they had held when they found the Dean of Burwash taking the young lady's indisposition so much to heart.

Had any one of them the slightest suspicion of the real cause of Gertrude's ailment? Not one. Would any one of them have given credence for a moment, if they had been told, that on the previous day the girl had refused the proffered hands of two men, one of them an earl, the other a wealthy commoner? Not one. "Such things are all very well in books, my dear," Lady Belwether would have told you, adding from memory

a list of ennobled actresses who had all done honour to the position in life to which they had been raised; but the chances came but seldom, and were always taken advantage of by those to whom they were offered. What would have been the effect on the host and hostess, and on the rest of their company, if it had become known that Lord Ticehurst had made Miss Lambert an offer, it would be impossible to say. They would have wondered at him, they would have wondered much more at her, and they would have professed to pity, and probably have cordially hated them both. However, that was a secret which of all in that house was known but to Gertrude alone, and she was not one who would wittingly let it pass her lips.

She was ill; she had a perfect right to say so, and was not uttering the slightest falsehood in the assertion. That dreadful sinking of the heart, that utter prostration, that deep, dead blankness of spirits, that hopelessness, that refusal to be comforted—if this did not constitute illness, what did? He *did* love her, then? She had known it

long, but what bliss it was to hear him avow it! Should she ever lose the remembrance of him as he stood before her—the light in his eye, the *pose* of his head, the tone of his voice? True? She would stake her life on that man's truth. What a difference between his diffident earnestness and the theatrical swagger with which Gilbert Lloyd asked her the same question—ah, how many years ago! Lord Ticehurst, too,—she had almost forgotten his visit and its purport, so overshadowed was it by the importance of the affair which immediately succeeded it,—Lord Ticehurst—he was, in his way, considerate and kindly—meant to be all courteous and all honest; she hoped her manner to him had not been brusque or abrupt. Countess of Ticehurst, eh?—rank, wealth, station. For an instant a hard, cold, proud look, which had been a stranger to her face of late, flitted across her features, and then faded away. No! Those might have had their allurements when she first learned Gilbert Lloyd's worthlessness, and recommenced her life, scorning to yield, and merely looking on all human weaknesses as

stepping-stones for her advancement. She had learned better things than that now. Miles! Could it be possible that but a comparatively short time ago he had been supremely indifferent to her? that she had looked on and seen the love for her growing in his heart, without a dream of ever reciprocating it? And now—Refused him! she could have done nothing else. And for his own sake—as she had told him, but as he seemed unable to comprehend,—for his own sake. For the love of such a man as Miles Challoner she would have risked everything, in the first appreciation of such a sentiment so fresh and novel to her in all her experience of life—and that experience had been singular and not small; to be the recipient of such a passion as that man proffered and laid at her feet, she would have let her dead past bury its dead; forgotten, buried, stamped down out of all chance of resurrection the events of her early life—her marriage, her separation from her husband. The compact made between her and Gilbert Lloyd should have been more than ever religiously fulfilled. That she held

that husband at her mercy she knew perfectly well: only once had he ventured to question her power that evening at Mrs. Burge's reception, and his conduct then had given her ample proof of the impossibility of his resistance to her will. She had nothing to fear from him; and she knew him well enough to be certain that he had kept that secret at least locked in his own breast. But Miles? No! she had done rightly; even if her appreciation of Miles Challoner's warm admiration and generous regard had not grown and deepened into a feeling, the strength of which forbade her striving against it, and which she knew and confessed to herself to be love, she would have rebelled against any attempt to hoodwink or deceive that loyal-hearted gentleman. But now the attempt had been treachery of the basest kind. She loved him—loved him wildly, passionately, and yet with an intermingled reverence and respect such as her girlish fancy had never dreamed of; and she had refused him, had told him—not indeed calmly or quietly, for once her self-control had failed her, but with earnest-

ness and decision—that her fate was decided, her way of life quite fixed, and that she could never be his wife! Ah, if they could have known all, those good people downstairs, they would scarcely have wondered at Miss Lambert's indisposition. They ascribed her illness to over-exertion, over-excitement, the reaction after the feverish professional life of the past few months. A little rest, they said to each other, would "bring her round." A little rest! Something more than a little rest is required, as they would have allowed, could they have seen what no one, not even Mrs. Bloxam, saw,—the favourite of the public with dishevelled hair and streaming eyes stretched prone upon her pillow, and sobbing as though her heart would break!

Miss Grace Lambert's illness or indisposition, thus evoking the compassion of the company staying at Hardriggs, was, whatever the company might have thought about it, known to herself to spring purely from mental distress. The same *teterrima causa* acted on Lord Sandilands, but brought about a different physical result. On

the morning after Miles had communicated the result of his interview with Gertrude the old nobleman awoke with a return of the symptoms which had previously alarmed him so much increased that he felt it necessary to send for a local practitioner, by whose report he would be guided as to the expediency of summoning his own ordinary physician from London.

Hastings is so essentially a resort of invalids, that the faculty is to be found there in every variety. Allopathy, seated far back in its brougham, looks sedately and smugly at the saunterers on the promenade; while Homœopathy, thinking to assume a virtue even if it have it not, and to wear the livery of medicine though scorned by regular practitioners, whirls by, black-clothed and white-chokered, in its open four-wheeler. Nor are there wanting the followers of even less generally received science. On that charming slope, midway between Hastings and St. Leonards, where a scrap of green struggles to put in an arid appearance amidst the vast masses of rock and sand, Herr Douss, the favourite pupil of

Priessnitz (what a large-hearted fellow he must have been, to judge by the number of his favourite pupils!), opened a water-cure establishment, to which, for financial reasons, he has recently added the attractions of a Turkish bath, and invariably has a houseful of damp hypochondriacs. And in the immediate neighbourhood is there not the sanatorium of the celebrated Mr. Crax? a gentleman who has discovered the secret that no mortal ailment can withstand being rubbed in a peculiar manner, and who shampoos you, and rubs you, and pulls your joints, and pommels you all over until you become a miracle of youth and freshness, to which the renovated Æson could not be compared.

It is not for an instant to be supposed that any of this unlicensed band were allowed to work their will on the person of Lord Sandilands. The old gentleman was far too careful of his health to quit the immediate precincts of his private physician without being relegated to someone to whom that physician had knowledge, and in whom he had trust. Sir Charles Dumfunk,

of Harley-street, habitually attended Lord Sandilands, and was liked by his lordship as a friend as well as esteemed as a physician. A very courtly old gentleman was Sir Charles, one who for years had been honorary physician to the Grand Scandinavian Opera, and had written more medical certificates for sulky singers and dancers than any other member of his craft. In his capacity of fashionable physician—the lungs and throat were supposed to be his speciality—Sir Charles Dumfunk had the power of bidding many of his patients to quit their usual pursuits, and devote themselves to the restoration of their health in a softer climate. The ultra-fashionables were generally sent to Nice, Cannes, or Mentone; "it little matters," the old gentleman used to remark; "they will carry Belgrave-square and its manners and customs with them wherever they go." *Nouveaux riches* were despatched to Madeira, energetic patients to Algiers, while mild cases were permitted to pass their winter at Hastings. At each one of these places the leading physician was Sir Charles Dumfunk's friend. Little Dr.

Bede, of St. Leonards, swore by the great London Galen, who invariably sent him a score of patients during the winter, and was as good to him as a couple of hundred a-year. Lord Sandilands had come down armed with a letter of introduction to Dr. Bede, and had sent it on by his servant, accompanied by a brace of partridges from the Belwether estate, very soon after his arrival. Dr. Bede had acknowledged the receipt of letter and birds in a very neat little note, had looked-up Lord Sandilands in the *Peerage*—the only lay book in his medical library—and had left his card at his lordship's lodgings. Consequently, when, the morning after Miles's *fiasco* at Hardriggs, Dr. Bede was summoned to come to Lord Sandilands at once, physician and patient knew as much about each other as, failing a personal interview, was possible.

Symptoms detailed, examination made, Dr. Bede—a very precise and methodical little gentleman, with a singularly neatly-tied black neckerchief, towards which the eye of every patient was infallibly attracted, and a curiously stony

and expressionless blue eye of his own, out of which nothing could ever be gleaned,—Dr. Bede, tightly buttoned to the throat in his little black surtout, gives it as his decided opinion that it is gout, "and not a doubt about it." Lord Sandilands, really half-gratified that he is literally laid by the heels by an aristocratic and gentlemanly complaint, combats the notion—no hereditary predisposition, no previous symptoms. Dr. Bede is firm and Lord Sandilands is convinced. An affair of time, of course; an affair very much at the patient's own will; entire abstinence from this and that and the other, and very little of anything else; perfect quiet and rest of mind and body—of mind quite as much as body—repeats the little doctor, with a would-be sharp glance at the patient, whose mental worry shows itself in a thousand little ways, all of which are patent to the sharp-eyed practitioner. Lord Sandilands promises obedience with a half laugh; he is very much obliged to Dr. Bede, he has thorough confidence in his comprehension and treatment of the case; there is no need to send

to town for Dumfunk? Dr. Bede, with confidence dashed with humility, thinks not—of course it is for his lordship to decide; but he, Dr. Bede, has not the smallest fear, provided his instructions are strictly obeyed; and he is quite aware of the value of the charge Sir Charles Dumfunk has confided to him. So far all is arranged. The doctor will look in every day, and his lordship promises strict compliance with his instructions.

So far all is arranged; but when the doctor is fairly gone, and the door is shut, and Lord Sandilands has heard the sound of the wheels of the professional brougham, low on the sand and loud on the stones, echo away, the old gentleman is fain to admit—first to himself, secondly to Miles, whom he summons immediately—that it is impossible for him to keep his word so far as being mentally quiet is concerned.

"If I'm to be clapped down on this particularly slippery chintz sofa, my dear boy," said he, "I must accept the fiat. It might be better, but it might be much worse. I can hear the

pleasant plashing of the sea, which, though a little melancholy, is deuced musical; and I can see the boats floating away in the distance; and I have every opportunity of making myself acquainted with the hideousness of the prevailing fashion in female dress; and, if I'm feeling too happy, there's safe to arrive a German band, and murder some of my favourite *morceaux* in a manner which reminds me that, like that king of Thingummy, I am mortal, begad! But it's no use for that little medico—polite, pleasant little person in his way, too—no use for that little medico to tell me to keep my mind perfectly quiet, and not to excite myself about anything. What a ridiculous thing for a man to prescribe! as though we hadn't all of us always something to worry ourselves about!"

Miles Challoner was, as times go, a wonderful specimen of a selfless man. He had temporarily laid aside his own trouble on finding that his old friend was really ill, and it was in genuine good faith that he said:

"Why, what in the world have you to worry

you now, old friend? What should prevent your keeping rigidly to that mental repose which Dr. Bede says is so essential to your well-doing?"

"What have I got to worry me? What is likely to prove antipathic to my being quiet?" asked Lord Sandilands in petulant querulous tones. "'Gad, when a man's old it's imagined that he has no care, no interest but in himself! You ought to know me better, Miles; 'pon my soul you ought!"

"I do know all your goodness, and—"

"No, no! Goodness and stuff! Do you or do you not know the interest I take in you? You do? Good! Then is it likely I could allow affairs to remain as they are between you and Miss Lambert without worrying myself about them? without trying my poor *possible* to bring them right?"

"My dear old friend—"

"Yes, yes! your dear old friend; that's all very well; you treat me like a child, Miles. I know you mean it kindly; but I've been accustomed to act and think for myself for so long that

I can't throw off the habit even now, when that dapper little fellow tells me I ought; and I must at once go into this business of Grace Lambert's. I have my own ideas on that matter, and I won't at all regard her decision as final, notwithstanding your solemn face and manner. Now, look here, my dear boy, it's of no use lifting up that warning finger; if you cross my wishes I shall become infinitely worse, and less bearable. I've always heard that gout is a disease in which, above all others, the patient must be humoured. I must see— There! you're jumping up at once—and quite enough to give me a sharp attack—simply because you thought I was going to name your divinity. Wasn't it so? I thought as much. Nothing of the sort; I was about to say that I must see Mrs. Bloxam at once. I have some very special business to talk over with her, and I should be much obliged if you, Miles, would take a fly and go over at once to Hardriggs and bring Mrs. Bloxam back with you."

"I?—go over to Hardriggs after—"

"Go over to Hardriggs! And why not? I'm

sure you could not complain of your reception by Sir Giles and Lady Belwether; they have been most cordially polite to you on every occasion of your visiting them, and *they* are the host and hostess at Hardriggs, I believe. Besides, I ask you to do me a special favour, in doing which you need expose yourself to no disagreeables, even to seeing anyone whom you would rather not see."

"You are quite right, and I will be off at once."

"That's spoken like my dear good fellow! Good-bye, Miles, good-bye!—If he does come across her in the house or the grounds?" said the old gentleman, as the door closed behind his *protégé*. "Well, you never can tell; it might have been whim, a mere passing caprice, in which case she might be perfectly ready to revoke to-day; and no harm could be done by his meeting her again. Or it might be something more serious—is something more serious probably, for Gertrude is a girl with plenty of resolution and firm will. At any rate, I'm right in having Mrs. Bloxam here to talk it over, and I think I shall hold to

the programme which I have already arranged in my mind."

The Hastings fly, drawn by the flea-bitten gray horse, which conveyed Miles Challoner to Hardriggs, went anything but gaily over the dusty, hilly road. The driver, a sullen young man, with dreary views of life, saw at a glance that his fare was in an abstracted frame of mind, and looked anything but likely to pay for extra speed. So he sat on his box, driving the usual half-crown-an-hour rate, giving the flea-bitten gray an occasional chuck with the reins, producing a corresponding "job" from the bit, and occupying himself now by fitting a new end to his whip-lash, now by humming dolorous ditties in the hardest Sussex twang, with a particularly painful and constantly recurring development of the letter "r." Miles sat leaning back in the carriage, his hat thrust over his eyes, his hands plunged deep in his pockets. He was buried in thought of no pleasant kind, and neither heard nor heeded the chaff of the passers-by, which was

loud and frequent. The first portion of the way to Hardriggs lies along the Fairlight-road, and numerous parties of cheerful Cockneys, in vehicles and on foot, on their way to the romantic Lover's Seat, and the waterfall where there is no water, and the pretty glen, passed the carriage containing the moody young man, and commented openly on its occupant. "He don't look like a pleasurer, he don't!" was a remark that gained immediate sympathy; while a more comic suggestion that "he looked as if he'd lost a fourpenny-piece," was received with tumultuous applause. Neither style of comment had the least effect on Miles Challoner, who remained chewing the cud of his own reflections until the stopping of the fly at the outer gate of Hardriggs Park reminded him of having seen Lord Ticehurst driving through that gate on the occasion of his visit on the previous day. Suddenly it flashed across him that the young nobleman's manner had been specially odd and remarkable. Could it have been that—and yet the expression of Lord Ticehurst's face was chapfallen and disconsolate, anything but that of

a successful suitor. All the world had said, during the past season, that his lordship had been very strongly *épris* of Miss Lambert, he had paid her constant attention, and— That could have had no influence on her decision of yesterday; she could never have listened to Lord Ticehurst's protestations, even if he had made any such, or he would not have gone away in so melancholy and depressed a state. Besides, had not Grace told him that she loved him, Miles—that he was not mistaken in her—that she had not misled him? And yet she would not marry him? Ah, there must be some mistake, something which could be explained away? Lord Sandilands had evidently felt that when he had asked him to come over with this message to Mrs. Bloxam. He would see Miss Lambert—not asking for her directly, that would be too marked, but taking an opportunity of chancing on her, and—well, after all, the dearest object of his life might be obtained.

They were pleased to see the good-looking young man at Hardriggs, as he descended from the fly and joined the pre-luncheon croquet-party

on the lawn. He had been there very recently, it is true; but good-looking young men are always welcome in country-houses, where indeed a fresh face, a fresh voice, a few fresh ideas, are priceless. Miles threw a hurried glance over the croquet-players. Miss Lambert was not amongst them. They were all young people, who, after the first greeting, returned to their game and its necessary accompaniment of flirtation. But Dean Asprey was seated under a "wide-spreading beech-tree," reading the *Times*, and he rose as he saw Miles approach, dropped the paper, and went to meet him. As the Dean approached, Miles could not help noticing his aristocratic appearance; could scarcely help smiling at the wonderful way in which the tailor had combined the fashionable and clerical element in his dress.

"How do you do, my dear Mr. Challoner?" said Dean Asprey, in those bland mellifluous tones which had won so many hearts. "So delighted to see you here again! With only one fear tempering my pleasure, and that is that—believing you to be alone? yes, that is so?—the fear that

my dear old friend Lord Sandilands is indisposed? Say I'm wrong, and set my fears at rest!"

"I would gladly, Mr. Dean; but I cannot. Lord Sandilands has a sharp attack of the gout."

"Of the gout? Well, well, I can recollect John Borlase these—ah, no matter how many years; too many to trouble to recollect—and the gout was the last complaint one would have ascribed to him."

"Well, he has it now, without a doubt. Dr. Bede of St. Leonards has seen him, and pronounced definitely in the matter. I have come over to ask Mrs. Bloxam, who is a very old friend of his, to go and see him."

"Ay, ay, indeed! Mrs. Bloxam—a very charming and estimable person, by the way, and apparently well versed in many questions which, for females at least, would be considered abstruse—Mrs. Bloxam is in great request just now. Her young charge Miss Lambert is also ill, and—"

"Miss Lambert ill!" cried Miles; "what is the matter?"

"O, nothing of any consequence, I believe,"

replied the Dean. ("Charmingly ingenuous the youth of the present day," he said to himself: "he has at once revealed the reason of his coming over here again so soon, without having the smallest idea that he has done so.") "Nothing of any consequence; a trifling indisposition, a *migraine*, a *nichts*, which in anyone else would be thought nothing of, but which in Miss Lambert is naturally regarded with special interest. You know her, of course. I mean know to appreciate her, rather than know in the mere ordinary sense of acquaintance?"

"I—I—yes, O yes! I've had the pleasure of seeing Miss Lambert frequently in town, and think her—of course, most charming—You're sure there's nothing serious the matter with her, because Lord Sandilands, don't you know, is such an old friend of hers, and takes such interest, that—"

"I know that perfectly, and would not dream of deceiving you for an instant. Some of us, I know, are suspected of doing evil that good may come," said the Dean, with a specially sweet

smile; "but it is a very dangerous doctrine, which I have always held in abhorrence. I see a servant passing the end of the lawn, and I suppose I may be considered sufficiently at home here to venture to give an order.—James, would you be good enough to let Mrs. Bloxam know that Mr. Challoner is here, and would gladly speak with her? Thank you, very much.—And now, my dear Mr. Challoner, to return to our very interesting conversation. What were we talking about?"

"You were mentioning that Miss Lambert was ill, and—"

"Ay, to be sure, Miss Lambert! What a charming girl! what grace and beauty! what amiability! what unaffected— And you have known her for some time? I can well understand her creating a great sensation in London. Such a mixture of beauty and talent is very rare, and naturally very impressive. What says Dryden?—

> 'Old as I am, for ladies' love unfit,
> The power of beauty I remember yet.'

What a charming couplet, is it not? And so, as

you were saying, Miss Lambert is a great success in London society?"

"Rather as you were saying, Mr. Dean," said Miles, with a feeble attempt at a smile,—he knew he should not see Gertrude, and the conversation was beginning to bore him,—"though I can cordially indorse the remark. Miss Lambert made a complete conquest of everyone she met, including Lady Belwether, who is hastening towards us. —How do you do, Lady Belwether? I'm sorry to learn I have left one sick friend to come to another."

"Our dear Grace is certainly better, my dear Mr. Challoner.—Dean, you will be glad to hear that.—Fancy my position, Mr. Challoner; the responsibility of having anyone like that in one's care, on whom so much might be said to hang, you know. Sir Giles was for telegraphing off at once to London for advice, but Grace would not have it. And she has proved to be right, as she always is, dear creature! She is much better, and she heard the message you brought, Mr. Challoner, about Mrs. Bloxam, and has not raised the

least objection to her going. Indeed, so like her, sweet thing! she seems to have forgotten herself in anxiety about Lord Sandilands."

"I suppose, Lady Belwether, that there is not much chance of my seeing Miss Lambert?"

"Seeing her? To-day? My dear sir, not the remotest chance in the world. I strictly forbade her thinking of leaving her room to-day; and when Mrs. Bloxam has gone away with you, I shall take her place at Grace's side.—You think I'm right, Dean? The importance of such a case as this is—Exactly, I knew you'd agree with me. What do you think Lady Hawksley said when she heard the darling was ill?"

"Knowing Lady Hawksley," said the Dean, again with his pleasant smile, "the field of speculation is too vast for me to attempt to enter on it. What did her ladyship remark?"

"She said it must be a horrid bore for me; and what would Miss Lambert have done if she had been taken ill in the season, when she was singing. Did you ever hear such horrible things? But I told her that if Miss Lambert had been taken

ill in town she would have had everybody's sympathy, from the Queen downwards; which is more than can be said of some people, I could not help adding."

As the old lady finished speaking, Mrs. Bloxam appeared, and very shortly afterwards she and Miles took their leave, and started off for Hastings in the fly. Miles had rather looked forward to this drive in Mrs. Bloxam's company. The thought of it had afforded him some little consolation when he found that there was no chance of his seeing Grace. In default of the presence of the adored one it is the lover's greatest delight to find someone who will either talk about her, or will listen to his outspoken raptures. Miles thought that in Mrs. Bloxam he might possibly find both these virtues combined; and accordingly they had scarcely cleared the gates of the Hardriggs avenue before he began to ply his companion with a series of questions concerning Miss Lambert. These questions were artfully framed, and a less worldly-wise woman than Mrs. Bloxam might have been deceived as to their purport. But that worthy

lady was not merely always perfectly cute and observant, but on this particular occasion she was, if possible, more than ever on her guard. Although during the previous day her fingers had been unremittingly engaged on her "fancy-work" during the entire period of Lord Sandilands' visit, her eyes had strayed now and then to the large looking-glass close by her, which reflected a window and a part of the garden beyond, leading to the lime-walk. In that looking-glass Mrs. Bloxam had seen her charge and Miles Challoner walking together, talking earnestly, and through the same medium Mrs. Bloxam had seen each of them return separately, and ill at ease. The ex-schoolmistress had all her life been in the habit of putting two and two together, and arriving at the result with commendable quickness and accuracy, and her perspicacity did not fail her now. She felt certain that Miles had proposed, and that Gertrude had refused him, though she loved him; equally certain that Lord Sandilands was aware of a portion—she couldn't tell how much—of the real state of affairs, and that he had sent for her

with the intention of discussing them with her; and Mrs. Bloxam very much deprecated the idea of any such discussion. She did not know where it might end, or what it might lead to; and there were passages in the life of her quondam pupil which Mrs. Bloxam had not thought it necessary to dilate upon, or indeed to introduce to Lord Sandilands' notice; and circumstances might render the further suppression of those passages impossible.

So Mrs. Bloxam sat back in the fly and answered all Miles Challoner's questions in monosyllables, and was glad when, finding it impossible to extract anything from his companion, the young man lapsed into silence and left her to her own reflections, occupying himself with his. Neither were roseate-hued. The hope which had sprung up in Miles's breast as he journeyed to Hardriggs seemed suddenly to have paled and faded out—why he knew not. Grace was ill, to be sure, but the fact of her illness did not account for the sudden change in the aspect of his fortunes—did not account for that sinking of the heart, that depres-

sion, that *avertissement* of coming trouble which we have all of us experienced many times in our lives, and which just then was settling down in thick black clouds over Miles Challoner. And Mrs. Bloxam's reflections were sombre and unpleasant. What Mr. Browning calls "the conscience-prick and the memory-smart" were beginning to tell upon her; she had lost the power of self-possession, and the faculty of lying—at least of lying in that superior manner which she had once possessed—had deserted her.

So they drove along in silence, and the holiday excursionists to Fairlight had more fun out of them and much openly-expressed chaff, opining how that "his mother had found him out courtin' the gal, and had fetched him away;" how that "he'd married the old woman for her money, and found out his mistake." But when they arrived at Robertson's-terrace, they found that Lord Sandilands had experienced a renewal of his attack, and that Dr. Bede had expressed a strong desire that his patient should be left perfectly quiet and undisturbed. To this, however, Lord

Sandilands would not agree, and, pursuant to his orders, Mrs. Bloxam was shown to his room immediately after her arrival.

She found the old nobleman faint and weak, just recovering from a sharp bout of pain. The sight of her seemed to rouse and please him. He asked her a few unimportant questions about the people at Hardriggs, seemed difficult to convince that Gertrude's indisposition was only of a temporary character, spoke in a manner that was anything but cheerful or reassuring about his own health, and remained so long flying round the real matter at his heart, that Mrs. Bloxam began to think he would never settle on it. At length, when the landlady of the lodgings had left the room and they were alone, Lord Sandilands said:

"Our acquaintance dates so far back, Mrs. Bloxam, and has been of such a character, that there need be no reticence on either side."

Mrs. Bloxam winced at his words, and moved uneasily on the chair which she had taken

by the sick man's bedside. But she was sufficient mistress of herself to bow and utter a few polite commonplaces.

"I could not get an opportunity of speaking to you yesterday," continued his lordship; "but I know how generally observant you are, and I am sure you cannot have failed to remark that my visit to Hardriggs with my young *protégé*—for so I must regard Mr. Challoner—was not a mere ceremonious call. There is no need in disguising from you—if indeed you do not know it already—that he is desperately in love with Gertrude. It will further tend to place us in our proper position if I tell you plainly, and without reserve, that Mr. Challoner yesterday proposed to Gertrude, and—was rejected."

If Mrs. Bloxam had seen all plain-sailing before her it is probable that she would have professed the liveliest astonishment, the greatest stupefaction, at this statement. But as she knew that she should have to wind her course through very doubtful channels, and would require all her skill to avoid shoals and contest storms, she

thought it better to rely upon Lord Burleigh's plan, and content herself with a nod.

This nod Lord Sandilands took to mean acquiescence. "You did comprehend all that?" he asked. "I was only doing justice to the acuteness which I have always ascribed to you when I imagined such was the case. Now we come to the more serious part of the question. Why did Gertrude refuse that young man's offer? Not that she did not, does not, love him? I'm an old fellow now, but I'm not old enough to have forgotten entirely that pleasant mute language; and if woman's looks and woman's ways are the same as they were thirty years since, Gertrude is decidedly in love with Miles Challoner. You have not had many opportunities of seeing them together, and therefore cannot judge so well. But I *know* it. Why did she reject him, then? Why, ma'am, because, thank God, she inherits a certain proper pride; and she felt that she, an unknown woman—unknown so far as family and friends are concerned, and with a precarious income dependent

on her health and strength—was not going to permit a member of an old county family to enter into what might be thought a *mésalliance* for her."

"Very proper," murmured Mrs. Bloxam, having nothing else to say.

"Exactly; very proper, under circumstances. But those circumstances must be changed; they must be no longer permitted to exist. It must be my care, Mrs. Bloxam," continued Lord Sandilands, with additional gravity, "as it is my duty—yes, my bounden duty—to endow that young lady with such means that she can freely and frankly give herself to the man she loves, without any obligation on either side."

"But to do that, my lord, you must acknowledge your relationship to Gertrude?"

"I have made up my mind to that already, Mrs. Bloxam," said the old gentleman; "I have a sort of idea that I sha'n't get over this attack, and that is a reparation which must be made before I die. O, not that I'm going to die just now," he added, as he saw her face change; "but still—"

"Don't you think you should have a nurse, my lord,—someone more accustomed to illness, and more able to devote herself entirely to your service, than the landlady here? If I could be of any use—"

"A thousand thanks, Mrs. Bloxam. But I have telegraphed to town for my housekeeper —ah, I forgot you have not seen her; she has only recently come to me, but seems a clear-headed, sensible woman—and she will come down and nurse me. I am a little faint just now, Mrs. Bloxam, and must ask you to leave me for the present. I will speak again to you on that subject before you and Gertrude leave Hard-riggs."

Mrs. Bloxam left the room with sentiments of a very unpleasant kind. Lord Sandilands thought it was the want of fortune that induced Gertrude to refuse Miles Challoner. But what about her relations with Mr. Gilbert Lloyd, of which his lordship was totally unaware?

CHAPTER II.

RECOGNITION.

THE meditations of Mrs. Bloxam as she returned to Hardriggs were not agreeable. She was exceedingly puzzled as to what her best line of action would be, in consideration of her own interests, and, indeed, to do her justice, those of Gertrude. Justice is the more easily done in this respect, as the two were identical, and not to be separated by any of the ingenuity which Mrs. Bloxam would no doubt have found for the occasion, had there been any profit in its employment. The position was a difficult one, and she was glad of the solitary drive, which enabled her to lay it all out, like a map, before her mind, and study it at comparative leisure. The temporary illness of Gertrude was, she felt, in the present conjuncture of affairs, a point in

her favour. She could not go to Lord Sandilands, and, during the continuance of his attack of gout, Lord Sandilands could not go to her. That they should not meet until a decisive line of action had been arranged—first by Mrs. Bloxam in her own mind, and then imparted to and acceded to by Gertrude—was of the last importance; and that was safe. The revelation of her parentage to Gertrude by Lord Sandilands would so immediately and radically alter the relations between her and her noble friend, that it could hardly be practicable to keep the fact of her marriage concealed from Lord Sandilands. That revealed, the sequel to the marriage must also be made known; and what view would the old nobleman be likely to take of the remarkably original arrangement into which Gilbert Lloyd and Gertrude had entered? Would he be excessively shocked, and insist at once on its reversal? or would he regard it as on the whole the best and most sensible proceeding for two persons, who had discovered their marriage to be an immeasurable mistake and an incalculable

evil, to have given themselves such redress and relief as the law would have afforded them only at the cost of much expense and publicity? Mrs. Bloxam entertained a conviction that the latter view was much the more probable one to be taken by Lord Sandilands; but, in any case, how should she stand with him? Not only should she be convicted of having deceived him, and of gross negligence and breach of trust as regarded the young girl placed under her care, but she should be proved guilty of having received money for Gertrude's maintenance and education for two years after they had ceased to be any concern of hers—after the girl's husband had undertaken the one, and the world had become the vehicle of the other. There was a double awkwardness and difficulty in this part of Mrs. Bloxam's puzzle. It was almost as unpleasant to admit the fact to Gertrude as to have it stated to herself by Lord Sandilands. Under no circumstances would it do for her to quarrel with Gertrude, that was clear. If she ran the risk of contracting another marriage,

the secret of the first would remain in Mrs. Bloxam's possession, and she would always be in Mrs. Bloxam's power. It must not be supposed that the woman was altogether heartless and cold-blooded in making these calculations: she had real affection for Gertrude at the bottom of them all; but she was of a cool temperament and businesslike habits, and she thoroughly understood the useful art of classifying her sentiments, and not permitting one order of them to interfere with another out of time and place. The position was a difficult one; and it was the business aspect of it she had to consider just now. A comfortable home for the remainder of her life, a reasonable amount of the kind of pleasure and society which she liked, and a necessity for only the most trifling inroads upon her savings: such were the blessings to the attainment of which Mrs. Bloxam looked forward as the legitimate value of her lien upon Gertrude. In the event of her declining to run the risk of marriage, and remaining on the stage, Mrs. Bloxam's material interests would be almost

as secure; so that she could afford to consider the matter with tolerable impartiality. She did not like to face the discussion which must take place between her and Gertrude, because of the money-transaction involved in it. Could she avoid acknowledging it, she thought, and trust to Lord Sandilands, though he must find it out, being too careless and indifferent to think about it? *That* would be very nice, only she had no reason to suppose that Lord Sandilands was by any means careless or indifferent in money-matters. It was very unpleasant; but it must be left to right itself somehow; and as for the other, and greater breach of trust? After all, the girl eloped from the Vale House; she did not assist or connive at the affair; and she might excuse herself to Lord Sandilands on the plea of the readiness and kindness with which she acceded to Gertrude's request when she proposed to return to her house. What would Gertrude think, how would she act, when the revelation and the offer should be made to her? Mrs. Bloxam had not answered any of these questions to her satis-

faction, or dispelled any of these anxieties, when she reached Hardriggs.

Miss Lambert was better, Lady Belwether was happy to say; she had had some refreshing sleep, and would no doubt get on nicely now. Mrs. Bloxam went to the invalid's room, and found Grace awake and looking very much better. Her face bore traces of mental strife and suffering, but they had passed over, and she was now quite composed. Mrs. Bloxam was a judicious woman in everything, and she took care not to agitate Gertrude.

"Lord Sandilands is very ill," she said, "but not dangerously so; and he is comfortable enough there, and not badly looked after. But he has sent for his own housekeeper, which is a good move. It is nothing but gout; but he is not strong, and he will probably be laid up for some time."

Gertrude asked some general questions, and Mrs. Bloxam answered them; and then, settling herself in a comfortable attitude, and keeping Gertrude's face well in view, she told her that in

requesting her to visit him Lord Sandilands had a particular object in view. The colour deepened a little on Gertrude's cheek as she inquired its nature.

"I mean to tell you all about it, my dear," said Mrs. Bloxam; "but if I am to do so, I must break through the reserve which I have always maintained—as I think it was best for both of us I should—and refer not only to your marriage"—Gertrude started—"but to later circumstances, which render your position difficult. I suppose I have your permission to speak plainly?"

"Certainly," replied Gertrude. "I am sure you would not, unnecessarily or without due consideration, say anything to wound my feelings; and I am prepared to listen to anything you think it right to say."

This was not a cordial speech, but Mrs. Bloxam did not mind that. She wanted permission to speak, and she had gotten it; the manner of it was of no consequence. Things had changed since Gertrude had written the letter which procured her readmittance to the Vale House, but

the natures of the two women had not undergone much alteration, and they felt only as much more warmly towards each other as prosperity and success predispose towards general kindliness and complacency.

"You are right," said Mrs. Bloxam; "I would not. You have not told me any particulars concerning your quarrel with your husband, and I don't wish to know—I really do not. I am not more free from curiosity, no doubt, than other people; but I would rather not gratify it in this instance. There is only one thing that I must know, if you will tell it to me." She paused, and Gertrude said, looking steadily at her,

"What is it? I may use my discretion about answering your question at all when I hear it; but if I decide on answering it, be quite sure that I will tell you the exact truth."

"No, you won't, my dear," said Mrs. Bloxam; "I don't require it. I want only the vague truth; tell me that. Is the secret of your quarrel with your husband one which puts him in your power —which secures your liberty, your right of action,

to you under all circumstances—which makes the carrying out of this daring scheme of yours, this self-divorce, a matter distinctly of your choice, in which he cannot thwart or foil you?"

Gertrude's gaze at the speaker did not relax, her eyelids did not droop, but she took a little time before she answered.

"I will tell you what you ask. The secret of my quarrel with Gilbert Lloyd is one which puts him in my power. He *must* do as I choose in every matter in which I am concerned. I am perfectly free; he is hopelessly bound. But the agreement between us is mutual. I have no right over him, as he has none over me. I shall never recognise his existence in any way."

"That you have the power of carrying out that resolution is the only thing I need to know," said Mrs. Bloxam. "It makes me clear about the advice I am going to give you. Having this perfect guarantee for his not venturing to interfere with you, you consider yourself of course entitled to act as if no such person as your husband were in existence. Have you any objection to tell me

whether you are disposed to push this right of action to the extent of marrying again—of marrying Miles Challoner, for instance?"

Mrs. Bloxam shifted her position as she asked this question, laid her head well back against the cushion of her chair, and did not look at Gertrude, who took longer to reply than before. When she spoke, the words came with difficulty.

"You must have some very strong reason for asking me such a question."

"I have, my dear. Mere curiosity, or even anything short of the necessity which exists for our understanding each other to a certain extent, would never have induced me to ask it. Will you answer me?"

"Yes," said Gertrude, "I will. I acknowledge no limits to the extent to which I am disposed to push my right of action. I should marry without hesitation from motives of ambition; I should marry without hesitation if the man were any but what he is—*if he were anyone but Miles Challoner.*"

Mrs. Bloxam sat bolt upright, and gazed at Gertrude in irrepressible, unmixed amazement.

"What do you say?" she asked. "Can it be possible that we are all mistaken? Lord Sandilands and I, and Miles Challoner himself, for he thinks you love him. I am as certain as I ever was of any human being's sentiments. Have you been blind to his love, his devotion to you? What *do* you mean?"

"I mean this," said Gertrude: "I know that Miles Challoner loves me; he has told me so; but I knew it before; I have not been blind to his devotion; and I love him." She paused. The listener's attitude and expression of uncomprehending astonishment remained unchanged. "I love him; I know the difference now, and I know that what I once took for love did not deserve the name. I would not deceive *him;* I would not dishonour *him;* I would not involve *him* in the degradation of my life,—for the degradation of the past is still upon me—for any joy the world could give me, not even for that of being his wife."

The passion and earnestness of her speech almost transformed Gertrude. She surprised Mrs. Bloxam so much, that all her previously-arranged

line of argument escaped her memory, and she could say nothing but

"Gertrude, Gertrude, you *do* astonish me!"

"Not more than I astonish myself, I assure you; not so much. Before I knew him I don't think I could even have imagined what it was like to care more for the peace and happiness of another than for my own. I have learned what it is like now, and the lesson, in one word, means love. Go on with what you have to say to me, Mrs. Bloxam, remembering in it all that I love Miles Challoner, and will never involve him in any way in my life."

"But this completely upsets what I was going to say to you," said Mrs. Bloxam; "it changes the whole state of things, but it renders it no less necessary that you should make up your mind how you will explain matters to Lord Sandilands."

"To Lord Sandilands?" said Gertrude inquiringly. "What have I to explain to him, and why?"

"Because he is Miles Challoner's friend and yours; and because he knows that Miles wants

to marry you, and most earnestly desires that the marriage should take place."

"*He* desires it! How can that be? How can a man of Lord Sandilands' rank wish his friend to make so unequal a marriage—a marriage which the world he lives in would so utterly condemn?"

"Probably because he has lived long enough in that world to know that its opinion is of no great value, and to think that Miles Challoner had better consult his own happiness than its prejudices. He is a great friend and admirer of yours also; and, in short, I may as well tell you plainly and abruptly, he sent for me to consult me on the best means of overcoming what he considers misplaced pride and overstrained delicacy on your part, and inducing you to consent to his arranging the preliminaries to the marriage; I mean"—here Mrs. Bloxam hesitated a little—"settling everything as your mutual friend."

"It is well for him it cannot be," said Gertrude bitterly, "or the world would hardly praise his conduct in helping Miles Challoner to a marriage with me. The interest Lord Sandilands

takes in me deserves all my gratitude and as much of my confidence as I can give, and he shall have them. He may be displeased that his kind projects are not to be carried out, but he will understand that it is impossible."

"I don't see that he will understand it," said Mrs. Bloxam, "unless you tell him about your marriage; and how are you to do that?" She forgot for the moment that she spoke with the knowledge of Gertrude's parentage in her mind, but that Gertrude was quite ignorant of it.

"Tell Lord Sandilands of my marriage!" said Gertrude; "what can you be thinking of? That must never be known *to anyone;* he is a kind friend indeed, but nothing would induce me to tell him *that.*"

"I beg your pardon; of course not," said Mrs. Bloxam, recovering herself, and remembering that the communication Lord Sandilands intended to make must not be forestalled. "Your resolution surprised me so much, I grew confused. But how will you account for refusing Mr. Challoner?"

"I shall account for it," said Gertrude, "on

the best grounds—grounds which would be adequate in my own judgment had I never made the fatal mistake of my miserable marriage. If I were nothing more than the world knows or believes me to be, I should still hold myself an unsuitable wife for *him*, and should still refuse him for his own sake."

"And this is what you will tell Lord Sandilands?" said Mrs. Bloxam. "Gertrude, are you sure you can stand firm to your decision against the pleading of your lover and the support and arguments of your friend?"

"I am quite sure," said Gertrude, "for I shall stand firm for their own sakes. To yield would be to injure, to hesitate would be to torment them: I will neither yield nor hesitate."

"Lord Sandilands wishes to see you as soon as you can come with me to see him," said Mrs. Bloxam. "I know he intends to urge Mr. Challoner's cause with all the argument and all the authority in his power."

"No argument and no authority can avail," said Gertrude.

"And you are determined to go on in this stage-life?"

"Yes; it is delightful to me in some respects, and it is independent and free. I don't say I have not had a struggle in reaching the determination I have arrived at, but I have reached it, and there is nothing more to be said or done. Whenever you choose, after a day or two, I will see Lord Sandilands; he will help me to impress on Miles Challoner the uselessness, indeed the cruelty, of pressing a suit which can only pain me and avail him nothing. I shall convince *him* easily; he knows the world too well to be difficult of persuasion of the justice of all that I shall say to him."

"It appears to me," thought Mrs. Bloxam, "that I shall get out of this business safely whatever happens, if she only perseveres in hiding her marriage; and I don't think there's much danger of her not doing so."

"I am rather tired, dear," said Gertrude after a pause, during which they had both kept silence, and turning towards Mrs. Bloxam with perhaps

the sweetest smile and the friendliest gesture she had ever bestowed upon that lady; "and I think we will not talk any more just now. Tell Lady Belwether I shall try to come down for a little this evening. I am far from suspecting the kind old lady of wishing me to tumble for the company; but I should like to oblige her and the Dean, if possible."

Mrs. Bloxam took the hint. Gertrude was left alone, to endure all the agony caused her by the resolution she had taken; but yet to feel that she derived strength from having taken it, and that to get her decision finally and authoritatively communicated to Miles Challoner by Lord Sandilands, with the addition of an earnest request that he would not remain in England at present, and subject her and himself to the pain of meeting, was a very sensible relief. The bitterness of the suffering through which she passed at this time never quite died out of Gertrude's memory. There was something in it which wrung her soul with a far keener and deadlier anguish than all the coarser, more actual miseries which had beset

her miserable married life. By the measure of the increased strength and refinement of her feelings, of the growth of her intellect, and the development of her tastes, the power and the obligation to suffer in this instance were increased. Of the man whom she had once fancied she loved, Gertrude never thought with any distinctness either of abhorrence, fear, or regret. The few words she had spoken to him in the midst of the fashionable crowd where they had last met had, she felt, effectually freed her from his pursuit henceforth; and in her present frame of mind, with her whole nature softened by her love for Miles, she was accustomed to look back rather on her own errors of judgment and perception as the fatal folly of her own girlhood, as the origin of her misfortunes, and to allow the sinister figure of her husband to slink in the backgrounds of her memory, something to be shunned and left in obscurity. In the wildest and deepest of her misery, and when her resolution was highest and sternest, there was one steadfast feeling in Gertrude's heart, by which she clung in all the tem-

pest of emotion, while the clamour was loudest in her storm-tossed heart. It was the indestructible happiness of knowing herself beloved. Nothing could take that from her, whatever befell; life might have many more trials, many more deprivations in store for her, but it could not deprive her of that—not even change on his own part: and she did not think he would change. Very early in their acquaintance she had recognised, with the pleasure of a kindred disposition, the tranquil stability of Miles Challoner's character; but not even change could alter that truth, could efface that blessedness, could deprive her of that priceless treasure. She even asked herself, in the mood of mournful exultation in which she was, whether she could have felt this secret, subtle joy so keenly if she had not learned to distinguish the false from the true by such a terrible experience? If this had been a first love, could it have been so awfully dear and precious, a consolation so priceless, as to be hugged and hidden in her utmost heart; a talisman against misery, a talisman sufficiently powerful to subdue the anguish of its own in-

effectualness, its own hopelessness? Could any girl unversed in the world's way, unskilled in the world's delusions, innocent and ignorant, knowing no ill of herself or others, have loved Miles Challoner as she loved him—this woman who had been brought in such close contact with crime, meanness, degradation, who had passed from girlhood to womanhood, on the border of respectability, with a tolerably uninterrupted look-out, very little space intervening over the debateable land of scheming, shifts, and general Bohemianism—this woman, whose dearest hope was to keep the knowledge of the truth about her—her life—her very name—from the man she loved?

The task of speaking with Lord Sandilands, of destroying the hopes the kind old man cherished for his friend and for her, of defending the position she had to take up, for the destruction of all the prospect of happiness which life had to offer her, was not one to be contemplated with anything but intense reluctance. But Gertrude forced herself to the contemplation of it, and made up her mind to get the interview over

as soon as possible. She had not forgotten that she had promised Miles to see him again, to speak with him again, on the subject of the suit he had urged. She knew well how impatient he would be; but while her illness and seclusion continued, he would know the fulfilment of her promise was not possible. What if she made an effort to go down to the drawing-room to-night, and found him there—was forced to meet him in the presence of strangers? She could not endure that; she felt that her nerves, in such a trial, would refuse to obey her will. She would write a line to him, asking him to remain away from Hardriggs until he should hear from her again. There could be no harm in that; but suppose he should be intending to come there that evening, the intimation of her wish would reach him too late. She rang the bell, and sent her maid for Mrs. Bloxam, to whom she propounded the difficulty.

"I know he will be here," Mrs. Bloxam said; "Lady Belwether has just said so."

"Then I must write," said Gertrude, "and you must give him the note."

Mrs. Bloxam conveyed the few lines, in which Gertrude begged Miles to abstain from appearing in the drawing-room after dinner, to the hands of that anxious and almost-despairing lover, and he instantly obeyed the behest which it contained. Lord Sandilands' illness and need of his society furnished an excuse which was not only valid, but did him credit with his hostess and Mr. Dean, who was pleased to remark that his attention to his noble friend was a very gratifying spectacle, very gratifying indeed. When Miles rejoined his noble friend he told him most ruefully of the fresh rebuff he had received, and presented a doleful aspect anything but exhilarating to an invalid in want of cheerful companionship. Lord Sandilands did not seem to notice the depressed state of his spirits, but listened to him with an air rather of satisfaction than otherwise.

"Never mind, Miles," he said; "it's a good sign that she did not choose to meet you in the presence of a lot of strangers. Have patience, my dear boy, and I promise you, on the faith of your old

friend, which never failed you yet, all will be well."

Miss Lambert made her appearance that evening in the drawing-room at Hardriggs for a short time. She was warmly congratulated on her recovery, and had many pretty things said to her about her temporary eclipse. She even ventured to sing—just one song; a simple but beautiful one, which went to the hearts of the company in general, and apparently to the nose of Mr. Dean in particular, as that dignitary used his handkerchief with prolonged solemnity while the concluding cadence was yet lingering in the air. It was agreed on all hands that never had Miss Lambert been more completely charming.

On the day but one after,—a bright, balmy day, when the earth looked its best, and the sky its bluest,—one of the Hardriggs equipages conveyed Mrs. Bloxam and Miss Lambert to Lord Sandilands' seaside abode. The visit had been duly notified by a message from Mrs. Bloxam, and the ladies had the satisfaction of learning that his lordship was much better, and quite able

to receive them. They were ushered upstairs, and into a sitting-room on the first-floor. The room was empty, and the folding-doors which communicated with another room were closed. In a few moments they opened, and gave admittance to a middle-aged woman, plainly dressed, very respectable; the exact model of all a housekeeper ought to be. On her steady arm Lord Sandilands leaned; and as he limped slowly towards his visitors with extended hand, expressing his pleasure at seeing them, Gertrude recognised in the housekeeper Mrs. Bush, and Mrs. Bush recognised in the lady whom she had heard announced as Miss Lambert the wife of her *ci-devant* lodger, Gilbert Lloyd.

CHAPTER III.

A MINE IS LAID.

REFUSED! rejected! Lord Ticehurst could scarcely believe it. "Declined the honour," she said; that was the way she put it. Declined the honour! "Whish!" went the whip over the heads of the roans, who became marvellously unsteady at the sound, and reared, and plunged, and pulled, and caused the middle-aged groom once again to peer over the head of the phaeton more nervously and uncomfortably than ever.

Lord Ticehurst could not understand the experience of the morning. The more he thought over it the more preposterous it appeared to him. Throughout the whole course of his life he had never had one wish thwarted. At Eton his fag did his exercises, and at Oxford the dons toadied

him as dons only can toady; and in later life he had had henchmen innumerable, who had received his every word as law. As for this affair with Miss Lambert, he—well, he didn't know; he had not been so cocksure about it at first, when he first began to be spooney on her. She was a deuced nice girl, there was no denying that,—clever, and all that kind of thing; sort of person that any fellow might be proud of to see sitting at the head of his table, and look deuced well at the Opera, and all that. Was not half so cocksure when he first began to be spooney; that was perhaps because he was spooney; fellows always thought they were not good enough for the woman they were spooney on; and—not good enough? that's a great notion! the idea of the Earl of Ticehurst not being good enough for—no, he couldn't say anything against her; she was an opera-singer, everyone knew, but she was a perfect lady. O d—, what a nuisance it was! Since he had made up his mind to it he had begun to look upon it as quite certain, as a result about which there could not be the smallest doubt; and

now he saw that all his conjectures had been false and his plans foundationless. What could be her motive? No question of hoping to hook a larger fish? That was absurd. Lord Ticehurst reflected with a certain amount of consolation that there were very few larger fish than he in the waters preserved for matrimonial angling, and of those few none were likely to make Miss Lambert an offer. Not any question of personal objection? Even if such a thing were probable to a person in his position, Miss Lambert's manner to him had always been courteous, and occasionally cordial. No one could have been making mischief about him? No, he thought not; he did not go in to be straitlaced, and all that kind of thing, any more than any other fellow of his age; but there was nothing that anyone could lay hold of and make a fuss about; his name was not mentioned in conjunction with any woman's, or anything of that kind that a woman might find objectionable in the man who wanted to marry her. What, then, could it be? Could it be shyness, modesty, and all that? Jove! he'd

never thought of that, never looked at it in that light. Could it be possible that Miss Lambert had refused him because she did not feel herself up to the mark—didn't think herself equal to the position which he had proposed to her to occupy? The notion was a very pleasant one to Lord Ticehurst; it gratified his vanity, and it gave him hope. It might come off after all! He had not had much experience of women—not of that sort, at least—and it was impossible to make them out; there was never any knowing what to do with them. After all, perhaps, she only wanted a little more pressing; he certainly had nipped off rather sharp, without asking her to explain, or anything of that kind. He supposed that was what fellows usually did,—asked the women "Why," and all that sort of thing. "Declined the honour," she said; perhaps if he had given her the chance she would not have declined it a second time. He would give her the chance; he would go over again to what's-a-name, old Belwether's place, and tell Miss Lambert that he really meant it, and that—

As the thought of "what's-a-name, old Belwether's place," passed through Lord Ticehurst's mind, simultaneously arose therein the very uncomfortable recollection of having seen Miles Challoner at the gate. The young nobleman's spirits, which had risen rapidly under the roseate influence of his hopes, sunk at once to zero when he remembered that Gilbert Lloyd had told him of the manner in which this man Challoner was making "strong running" for Miss Lambert, and bade him beware of him as a dangerous rival. Jove! that might account for her declining the honour, and all that. Of course it was a ridiculous thing to imagine any woman taking a fellow like Chaldecott—Challoner, or whatever they called him—before a man in his position; but one never knew, it was impossible to say; and—he did not know what the deuce to do one way or the other.

"Princes and women must not be contradicted," says the proverb. Young noblemen, or old noblemen for the matter of that, with health and wealth, are pretty much in the same category.

For the first time in his life Lord Ticehurst found himself debarred from the fulfilment of a special wish, and he raged inwardly and chafed against his destiny. He could have cried from sheer spite and vexation; he stamped his foot in his rage, and once more startled the roans out of all propriety. He felt that he was morally "cornered;" he did not like to give up all idea of this girl, for whom he had a certain liking and a certain passion, and in the possession of whom he would have had the justification of that pride which was perhaps the most thoroughly developed of all the various component parts of his character. On the other hand, he dared not run the chance of a second rejection, as the news of it might get wind, and he might be made to appear ridiculous; and, like most of his order, Lord Ticehurst was more afraid of ridicule than of anything else. To be laughed at had always been looked on by him as the greatest possible infliction, for he knew that neither his position nor his wealth rendered him invulnerable to "chaff;" and he was sufficiently man of the world to feel that

these advantages in themselves would tempt the aim and barb the arrows of the sharpshooters. He could not face it out, by Jove he couldn't! The mere thought of being bantered on the subject of his rejection by Miss Lambert gave an apoplectic hue to his lordship's cheeks, and brought large beads of perspiration on to his forehead.

"I couldn't stand it," he said half aloud, and forgetting the proximity of the serious groom. "'Gad! I think I should go mad, and that kind of thing. Don't think I'll give old Gil the chance of having a crow over me just yet. He's sure to ask me how I got on, and all that, and I'd better hold it over for an hour or two. He's rather spiky in his chaff, I've noticed lately, Master Gil is; I don't know what's come to him!"

So, on further reflection, Lord Ticehurst struck off the road leading to Eastbourne, and turned back, tooling the roans along the St. Leonards parade, to the immense delight of the promenaders there assembled, and finally pulling up at the door of the principal hotel in Hastings. Here

he alighted, and bidding his groom to bring the phaeton round at eight in the evening, entered the hotel, ordered an early dinner, and strolled out on to the parade.

A person in Lord Ticehurst's position and of Lord Ticehurst's habits is almost certain to find a number of acquaintances in every place of anything like pretension to fashion which he may visit; and his lordship had not lounged up the promenade for more than a dozen paces ere his arrival was known to as many persons. Old Lady Spills, who was always seated at the bow-window of her lodgings with a powerful opera-glass, marked the young nobleman's arrival at the hotel, and immediately called to her granddaughter, then resident with her, to get her hat and accompany her on the parade as quickly as possible. "Not that it's of any use," the old lady remarked to herself; "for Julia is as stupid as an owl, and not likely to be attractive even to the most innocent of youths, much less to a young man like this, who is, no doubt, perfectly able to take care of himself." The Duke of Doncaster

a melancholy old man, in a crumpled wig and dyed whiskers, wearing the bell-hat, large-checked neckerchief, and cut-away green coat of the past generation, was driving his team up and down the parade, solemnly and methodically as was his usual afternoon practice, and he recognised Lord Ticehurst's presence by jerking his whip-elbow into the air in true coachman-like fashion. The sisters Lavrock, of the Scandinavian Opera and the nobility's concerts—brave little women, who in the off-season went round to the different watering-places, and made a good deal of money by giving a little musical entertainment—blushed and giggled in great delight as his good-natured lordship stopped them on the promenade, and inquired with unaffected interest after their well-doing. That eminent landscape-painter Scumble, R.A., who had often met Lord Ticehurst at Carabas House, over which mansion he seemed to have the right of free warren, happened to be staying at Hastings, partly for the sake of studying marine effects, partly for the purpose of pacifying Mrs. Scumble, who had but a dull time of it in

London; and he tore off his wideawake as he met Lord Ticehurst's eye, and pretended to have nothing to do with Mrs. Scumble, who at that moment was a little way off, placidly bargaining for a shell pincushion. Lastly, Bobby Maitland —who had come ashore for two days from Mr. Stackborough's yacht, with the view of meeting his solicitor, and settling pecuniary matters during his absence—Bobby Maitland, looking over the blind of the coffee-room of the Marine Hotel, along which blind he had been thoughtfully rubbing his nose, spied his lordship, and announced his discovery to his friend Stackborough in these flattering terms: "By Jove, Haystacks, old man, here's that ass Ticehurst!"

"Haystacks" and "old man" were both terms of endearment and familiarity. Mr. Stackborough was about three-and-twenty, very rich, very foolish, and with an irrepressible yearning for what he called "high society." He had chambers in the Albany, splendid horses, a capital yacht, and more clothes than any other man in London. He was always extensively got-up, and never

looked like a gentleman. Bobby Maitland, who lived with him and on him, could influence him on everything except his wardrobe—in that matter he always would have his own way. On the present occasion he was elaborately appareled in maritime fashion, dark-blue jacket with gilt buttons, very open white waistcoat, flap shirt-collar, trousers tight to the knee, then loose and flapping, black oilskin-hat with blue ribbon. Mr. Stackborough generally suited his language as far as possible to his style of costume. When that was horsey he talked turf, now he talked sea; consequently he said—

"Ticehurst, eh? Where does he hail from?"

"How the deuce should I know!" replied Bobby. "He's only just come in sight."

"T'other craft in company, of course?" suggested Mr. Stackborough. "He's always under convoy, Ticehurst is! T'other craft's close by, I suppose, or at all events in the offing." And Mr. Stackborough peered from under his hand at his friend as though scanning the horizon.

"Look here, Haystacks, old man!" said Bobby

Maitland thoughtfully; "you must moderate your transports, you must indeed. There's too much of this bold-smuggler business about you—a deal too much. I daresay it's a kind of gaff that takes with some people, but it don't with me, and so you may as well drop it. It isn't good style either; so drop it, old flick, and tell me in the Queen's English what you mean."

Mr. Stackborough wriggled uneasily in the maritime suit and blushed. "All right," he said after a minute's pause, "I'll take care. Thank you for telling me, Bobby. What I meant to say was, wasn't Lloyd there? He's always with Ticehurst, you know."

"O, I understand now! No; Ticehurst seems to be by himself for a wonder. No doubt Lloyd's close at hand, though; he never lets my lord go far without him."

"Shall we 'bout ship and—I mean, shall we go out and speak to him?" asked Mr. Stackborough. It *was* so difficult to resist the influence of the maritime garments.

"Well, yes; there's no harm," said Bobby,

knowing his young friend was dying to speak to and be seen speaking to a recognised "swell."

So Mr. Stackborough put on the glazed hat with the blue ribbon, and they strolled into the street. Now, though Lord Ticehurst did not much affect Bobby Maitland, and had a great contempt for Mr. Stackborough, he had such a horror of being alone and being thrown on his own resources for amusement, that, as soon as he saw these gentlemen approaching, he brightened up, and received them with a warmth which completely captivated Mr. Stackborough. Bobby Maitland was older and less enthusiastic. He disliked Ticehurst; and as he knew there was nothing to be got out of his lordship, he always spoke to him with charming frankness.

"We could scarcely believe it was you, Etchingham," said he, after the ordinary salutations had been exchanged.

"O, ah!" replied his lordship, "didn't expect to find me in this place, eh?"

"Well, no, perhaps one wouldn't have thought of finding you here. Nothing going on that you

can understand—horses, I mean, and that kind of thing. But that was not what I meant."

"What did you mean, then?" asked his lordship somewhat crossly, for he understood and appreciated the sneer.

"Well, we didn't think you were ever let out without your dry-nurse—Lloyd, don't you know? Don't be angry, old fellow, it's only my chaff!"

"It's a deuced bad style of chaff," said Lord Ticehurst, who had grown very white, and whose lips trembled as he spoke,—"a deuced bad style of chaff; and I'll trouble you not to try it on me, Mr. Maitland!"

"'Mr.' Maitland! Come, that be hanged!" said Bobby, who saw that he had gone a little too far. "I'm very sorry if I've offended you, Etchingham, and I apologise. I can't say more."

The good-natured young man accepted the apology at once, and the three walked on together. Lord Ticehurst, then explaining that he was only in the town for a few hours, and that he had ordered a solitary dinner at the Queen's

Hotel, was easily persuaded to let Mr. Stackborough (who was too delighted to fetch and carry for a lord) go and countermand it, while his lordship agreed to dine with his new-found acquaintances at the Marine. So, to the intense delight of Mr. Stackborough, they strolled up and down the parade, listening to the band, looking after the pretty women, and criticising the horses. "Haystacks'" conversation became almost unintelligible during this walk; for Lord Ticehurst being eminently horsey, and the talk running on the breeding and look of horses, Mr. Stackborough would, under ordinary circumstances, have turned on the turf tap, and drawn his idioms from the stable; but the maritime clothes still from time to time asserted their influence, and the result was that the unfortunate youth got into a series of linguistic knots which he could not untie, and with which no one could assist him.

The dinner at the Marine was a success. Boffham, who keeps the hotel, had been *chef* to Count Krammetsvogel, of the Hanoverian em-

bassy, in former days, and had turned out many excellent official dinners, of which Lord Ticehurst's father had partaken. When he heard that the young lord was to be a guest of one of his guests, Boffham went himself to the kitchen, and showed that neither Time nor the gout had robbed his hand of its cunning. The wines too —notably some Chateau Yquem and some Steinberger Cabinet, which had been bought by Boffham out of the Krammetsvogel cellar when the count was recalled—were delicious; so delicious, that many bottles were drunk, and the hearts of the drinkers were warmed, and their tongues loosened. Something which Bobby Maitland had said to him when they first met that day had stuck in Lord Ticehurst's throat. He had tried to swallow it, but the attempt had been unsuccessful. Under the influence of the wine he felt he must mention it—he could see no reason why he should not.

"Bobby!" he said, as they were sipping their claret, "my horses will be round in a minute; but I want to say two words to you before I go.

—Don't you move, Mr. Stacks,"—Stackborough made a kind of blundering attempt to rise, —"don't you move, there's nothing secret or private," — here Lord Ticehurst looked long and earnestly at the wick of the candle close by him, then proceeded—"or at least, if there is, you're far too good a fellow, Stacks, to—to—you know what I mean.—So do you, Bobby."

"All right, Etchingham, old boy, I know," said Mr. Maitland. "What do you want to say?" Mr. Maitland had to repeat his question, Lord Ticehurst having again become absorbed in the contemplation of the candle. "What do you want to say?"

"What do I want to say?" said his lordship, after a pause—"ah, that's just it! I wonder—O, I know! Don't you know when you folks first met me to-day, you said something, Bobby —something about Lloyd?"

"Yes, I recollect—what then?"

"You asked me where my nurse was, or something of that sort, didn't you?"

"I think I did."

"Ah! just tell me, like a good fellow—is that the way men talk about me and Lloyd?"

"What way?"

"Do they say that he—that I—that he's like what you said, my nurse?"

"They say you daren't call your soul your own without his leave. That you never move hand or foot without him; some say he washes you and parts your hair; but that's their way of putting it. What they mean is, that he's your master, and you're his most obedient."

"And do you think Lloyd knows they say this?"

"Knows they say it!" repeated Bobby Maitland, with a loud vinous laugh; "knows they say it! why, he says it himself; boasts of it!"

"The deuce he does!" said Lord Ticehurst, rising with an unsteady gait. "That must be stopped! There are some things that a man can stand; and there are some things he——My carriage. Thank you!—Good-night, Mr. Stacks; very glad to have looked you up.—Good-night, Bobby; see you at Doncaster, I suppose? No!

well, then—never mind.—Right, Martin!" and his lordship dashed off at a tremendous pace, while the serious groom, who had seen his master reel on the phaeton-step, looked more serious than ever as he jumped up behind.

When the other two gentlemen returned to their room, Mr. Stackborough said, "He didn't half like what you said about Lloyd just now. Shouldn't wonder if there was a row when he gets home."

"Serve Master Gil deuced well right," said Maitland; "I've owed him one for a long time, and now I think I've paid him. Teach him to give himself airs over me next time we meet in the ring."

"Devilish pleasant, gentlemanly fellow is Etchinghurst," said Mr. Stackborough, steadying himself by holding on to the table.

Bobby Maitland regarded him with a smile. "His name is Etchingham, not Etchinghurst; but you're not sufficiently intimate with him to call him anything but Lord Ticehurst. Haystacks, dear old boy, you've had too much

wine; have a tumbler of soda, plain, and go to bed."

There was no reason for the serious groom's apprehensions, so far as the safety of his person was concerned. It is a received axiom that the effects of intoxication are increased when gentlemen labouring under them are exposed to the influence of the air; and the groom's perturbation was probably based upon this theory. He had not, however, probably made allowance for the fact—which possibly had never come within his ken—that when the mind is actively at work it becomes an admirable counter-irritant to the influence of wine. That feeble nonsense of the hiccupping toper of the past generation relative to the drowning of dull Care in bowls was as void of reason as of rhythm. That men in good spirits will have those spirits made livelier by good drink in good company is intelligible enough; but dull Care—whatever he may have suffered in the three-bottle days—declines to be drowned or in any way got rid of by such a

quantity of liquor as is at the present time drank in society. The confirmation of his suspicions about Gilbert Lloyd, which Bobby Maitland had communicated with so much charming frankness to Lord Ticehurst, had had a singularly sobering influence on the young nobleman. The anger arising in his heart seemed to have chased away the fumes which had been obscuring his brain; and after he had been five minutes on the road he was in as good condition as he ever was—which, perhaps, is not saying much—to think the matter calmly through. It was a lovely night; the roans, knowing they were on their homeward journey, stepped out splendidly and refrained from indulging in any of the capers and antics which had characterised their morning's performance; and Lord Ticehurst, getting them well in hand, settled himself down to think over all he had heard, and to endeavour to arrive at some definite conclusion before the end of his drive.

Was it what we have no adequate expression for, but what the French call the *vin triste*, that

was exercising its malign influence over the young man? Had his "potations pottle deep" but resulted in stirring up dull Care instead of drowning him? Had Boffham's Chateau Yquem and Steinberger Cabinet an effect exactly opposite to that of the waters of Lethe? Certain it is that as Lord Ticehurst rolled rapidly homewards his memory, which very seldom troubled him, was actively at work, and his reflections were of anything but a pleasant character.

So they said that he was a mere child in Gilbert Lloyd's hands, did they?—that he dare not call his soul his own; that he had no will, no opinion,—chaffed, and said Lloyd was his dry-nurse, did they? Pleasant that, by Jove!—to have things like that said about you by fellows to whom you had always been civil and polite, and all that kind of thing—more than that, hospitable, and letting them stand in with good things, and putting them on to everything you knew. And they went about and said this—not before your face, of course; they would not do that; but thought it before your face, and went

about and said it as soon as your back was turned. Made you their laughing-stock and their butt; poked their fun at you all the time they were eating your dinners, and made game of you while they borrowed your money It was d—d unfriendly and blackguard conduct; that's what it was. And Bobby Maitland was as bad as any of them—worse, for he would never have heard of it but for him. They all thought he was a fool, and Bobby must have thought so too, sneering about him and Gilbert Lloyd, and pretending to think he would not notice it. He would let them see pretty sharp he was not such a fool as they took him for; let them see he knew how they laughed at and chaffed him. Next time any of them wanted a fifty for a fortnight, that would be the time. They should laugh the wrong side of their mouths then, he would take care. Called himself a gentleman too, did Bobby Maitland, and gave himself airs because he was a peer's son. Why, damme, that other chap, that poor fellow Haystacks, or whatever his name was, with all his ridiculous nonsense about his get-up and all

that, he was more of a gentleman than Bobby Maitland. He looked quite queer and uncomfortable, Haystacks did, when Maitland was going on all that chaff about the nurse.

About the nurse? That riled him more than anything else. "How was it he was let out without his nurse?" That's what Maitland had said. As he thought of that speech Lord Ticehurst kicked out against the splashboard in front of him, startled the roans into a gallop, and woke the groom from an elysian dream of eating boiled beans and bacon in the back-parlour of a public-house which was his own. And when he had asked if Gilbert knew about the chaff that was going on, Maitland said he did, and, more than that, had started it and laughed at it himself. Could that be true? He could scarcely think that; he had been doosid kind to old Gil, and doosid fond of him, and done all sorts of things for him one way or the other, and he did not believe old Gil would go against him in that way. Fellows are always talking about ingratitude and that kind of thing, but he did not think anyone

would be such a thorough-paced duffer as to go in against a fellow who had shown him nothing but kindness ever since he had known him. Ever since he had known him? Well, that was not so long ago, when he came to think about it, but it seemed like his whole life. He thought with an odd kind of incredulous wonder on that portion of his life anterior to his acquaintance with Gilbert Lloyd. The Plater-Dobbs *régime* seemed like a dream. He was a vulgar old cad, the Plater, but he would not have played double, he would not have allowed any of the fellows to chaff. No fellows had ever been allowed to chaff him, even at Eton—Eton, hey presto! At that reminiscence the clouds rolled away, and scenes of bygone time and the actors in them, unthought of for years, rose before the young man's mind. Some of those fellows who had been with him at Eton, and were now doing so well and making such stir in the world—Brackenbury, who had made such a hit in the House, and who, everybody said, would be A1 some of these days; and Graves, who had written a devilish clever book

about something; and Hammond, who was under-secretary in one of those office-places down at Whitehall, and who the newspapers said was a rising man, and all that. Lord! he recollected when he first went to Eton, his old governor took him, and— What a crowd there was when they buried his governor in the family-vault at Etchingham! He recollected Lord Tantallon the Premier standing at the foot of the grave after the service, and looking in, with the tears running down his face. No end of official swells came down to see the last of their old colleague. He recollected seeing the great black-marble top of the tomb, which had been taken off, lying on its side among the weeds; and he remembered the smell of the newly-turned earth, and the trodden turf, and he could see just as plainly as on the day itself the men from the London newspapers bending over to read the inscription on the coffin. Poor old governor! he was a clever fellow, and was awfully respectable and respected. He would not think much of the life his son was leading, mixed up with horses and betting-people

and jockeys, and all that kind of thing. Whew! it could not be helped, he supposed. It was too late to change it. Steady there! Arrived!

When Lord Ticehurst entered the rooms in the hotel which he occupied conjointly with Gilbert Lloyd, he found that gentleman asleep on the sofa, with a decanter of brandy on a small table by his side. The decanter was half-empty; and when Gilbert, awaking at the noise made by his friend's arrival, turned round, his face, especially round the eyes, had a strained, flushed look, and his voice, when he began to speak, was rather thick and husky.

"Hallo!" he said, raising himself on his elbow, and shading his eyes with his other hand, "you've got back!"

"Yes," replied his lordship; "here I am!"

"Perhaps the next time you are going to stop out to dinner you will have the goodness to say so."

"Don't be cross, old man; you knew I was going, fast enough."

"I knew you were going out to luncheon, but there was nothing said about dinner, I believe;

and as to being cross, it's enough to make a fellow savage, having had to cool his heels about here for an hour and a half, waiting dinner for a man who never came; and then to sit down to a lot of stuff cooked to rags, half cold, and quite uneatable."

"Sorry for that, Gil," said Lord Ticehurst with unimpaired good-humour; "very sorry, but you should not have waited."

"O, I like that!" said Lloyd; "and suppose your lordship had not had your dinner, and had come in when I had half-finished mine, you would have been pleased, wouldn't you?"

"I don't suppose 'my lordship,' as you call me, would have cared one straw about it. What a rum fellow you are, Gil! What's the matter with you to-night, that you are going on in this way?"

"Going on in what way? I merely suggested that it would have been pleasanter if you had said you would not be back to dinner, and—"

"But I didn't know that I should not. I had

no intention of stopping when I went away. Can't you understand?"

"O yes, I understand! *Chapeau bas, chapeau bas!* However, that's no matter now. I ought to have known that the young lady would suggest your stopping there — that the old Belwethers would be delighted to receive a person of your lordship's quality, and that—"

"There, you may drop that silliness as soon as you like. It's very funny, I daresay; but it's all thrown away, because I didn't stop at Hardriggs after all."

"The deuce you didn't! Why, where did you dine, then?"

"At the hotel at Hastings, with Bobby Maitland and that young fellow he's always about with now—'Haystacks.'"

"I know," growled Gilbert. He hated Maitland, and half-despised him, as men do their unsuccessful rivals. "What on earth made you dine with them?"

"Well, I don't know," said the earl, blushing a little, in spite of vigorous attempts to prevent it

and look unconcerned. "I—I had stopped later there than I intended at Hardriggs, and I thought you would have dined, and so I put up at Hastings, and those fellows saw me and asked me to dinner."

"And you went, deuced Samaritan-like and benevolent, and all that, I declare! That fellow Stackborough will be set up for life; there will be no holding him, now that he has once dined in company with a real live earl."

"Well, I don't know; Mr. Stackborough seemed to me to behave like a gentleman."

"O yes; but you like a fellow who bows down before you, Etchingham, we all know that; and it's natural enough. However, that's neither here nor there. What about the object of your visit to Hardriggs? You saw the young lady?"

"Yes, I saw her."

"And you carried out your intention?"

"What intention?" asked Lord Ticehurst, summoning up courage, and looking his friend full in the face. And then Gilbert knew for certain, what he had decidedly anticipated, that

Lord Ticehurst had been rejected by Gertrude.

"What intention?" he replied, with a sneer already dawning on his face; "why, the intention of proposing to Miss—what does she call herself?—Miss Lambert."

"Yes," said Lord Ticehurst quietly, "I carried out that intention."

"Well, and we are to ring the joy-bells, and to roast the whole ox, and set the barrels of ale flowing, and order the bishop to be in readiness at St. George's, and select the new carriages, and have Etchingham new furnished. And when are we to do all this?"

"Not just now, at all events," said Lord Ticehurst. "First catch your hare, don't you know?" and his lordship tried to look knowing—a process in which he failed sublimely.

"Why, you don't mean to say that—"

"I mean to say that I proposed to Miss Lambert—you know her name fast enough—and she refused me."

"Refused you!" screamed Gilbert with ad-

mirably-assumed astonishment; "refused you,—the opera-singer, the tragedy-queen, the Princess Do Re has refused my lord with his thousands and his tens of thousands! The world is coming to an end! People will next question the value of an hereditary legislature. You astound me!"

"I'll tell you what, Lloyd," said Lord Ticehurst sulkily, "I wish you to drop that style of chaff; I don't see the fun of it."

"You never saw the fun of anything, Etchingham; it is not your *métier;* Providence has ordained otherwise. It's for us poor devils to see the fun that you big swells make for us."

Rage swelled within Lord Ticehurst's heart as he listened to these words, which were so eminently corroborative of what Bobby Maitland had said to him, and of what he had thought to himself on his homeward drive. But he controlled himself, and said:

"Well, what I see or what I don't see don't matter much just now. Perhaps I see more than some people think I do; more than I give tongue

about, that's certain. However, I don't care about being chaffed on that subject, and so please drop it."

"Poor old boy!" said Lloyd, with an elaborate affectation of compassion; "of course he's very sore, that's natural enough; and of course it comes much harder to a fellow in his position, who thinks that he has only to lie under the wall and the ripe cherries will tumble into his mouth, to find that they sometimes hang on the stalk and *won't* tumble. It puts me in mind of the little stories in one syllable that we used to learn at school. 'There was once a small boy, and he cried for the moon, and when—'"

"D—n it, sir, will you stop?" cried Lord Ticehurst, angered beyond all patience. "Look here, Lloyd, you and I have been friends for a long time; but if you go on in this way I shall—"

"What?" interrupted Gilbert, turning quickly on him.

"Cut the whole concern, stock, lock, and barrel," said his lordship, "and part from you for ever."

The two men stood confronting each other; Lord Ticehurst flushed and heated, Lloyd wonderfully pale and calm, and only betraying agitation in the twitchings of the muscles of his mouth. He was the first to speak.

"Part from me for ever, eh?" he said in slow deliberate tones, each word clipping out from between his thin tight lips. "O no, you wouldn't do that! You are not very wise, Lord Ticehurst, but you would not be such a fool as to quarrel with or part from the man who has made you what you are. Ah, you may stare and pretend to be astonished, but I repeat, who has made you what you are. And you need not come down upon me, as you are going to—I see it!—with the whole long story of your birth and position and status, and all the rest of it. I know all that from *Debrett;* and still I stick to my text, —that I made you what you are! The time has come—you have brought it about, not I; I could have gone on for ever as we were—but the time has come for plain speaking; and I say that whatever you are, and whatever you may be thought

of in the world, you owe to me, to me; without whom you would have remained the unformed cub you were when I found you in the hands of that old duffer, Plater Dobbs!"

The prospect of a row with his pupil—not a separation, of course, but a brisk breeze to freshen up the tamely-flowing current of their ordinary life—had often occurred to Gilbert Lloyd. He had thought over calmly what should be his conduct under such circumstances, and he had determined upon using the strongest possible "bounce," and acting in the most offensive and most truculent manner. His remembrance of Lord Ticehurst's behaviour in the quarrel with the Frenchman, M. de Prailles, at Baden, prompted him to this line of action, and he found it was the correct one. Lord Ticehurst did not knock him down, or fling a chair at him, or take any other prompt and decisive step. His cheek flushed angrily, certainly, but he only said:

"Major Dobbs might have been a duffer, as you say he was, but at all events he did not pitch into people who were kind to him, didn't

blackguard them before their faces, as some people do, or what's worse, make game of them behind their backs."

He laid such stress on this last sentence that Gilbert Lloyd looked hard at him, and said, "Make game of you behind your back! What do you mean by that?'

"What I say," said Lord Ticehurst; "chaffin' about my not being able to do anything without asking you, and you being my dry-nurse, and all that kind of thing!"

"Ah, ha!" said Gilbert Lloyd; "you haven't dined with our friend Bobby Maitland for nothing! That's his stab, I'll swear. Now look here, Ticehurst, you've talked about our parting, and I never let a man threaten me twice. So part we will. We must wait over Doncaster, because there are some things coming off there in which we are mutually interested; but after that I'll square up all the accounts and hand over everything to you."

He looked hard at his pupil as he said these words, expecting that the announcement would

evoke a burst of protestations and disavowals. But Lord Ticehurst merely said "Very well; all right;" and took up his candle and left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

PERPLEXITY.

Lord Sandilands was looking and feeling ill and feeble, and was mainly occupied, as he hobbled across the not-magnificently-proportioned drawing-room of that most desirable lodging-house, with an unrivalled view of the Esplanade, in so putting down and moving his feet as to cause himself the least possible pain, when he came, leaning on the arm of his housekeeper, to meet Mrs. Bloxam and Miss Lambert. But he was a man of too quick perception at all times, and his mind had been dwelling of late with so much anxiety upon Gertrude and her interests, that he was additionally keen in remarking every incident in which she was concerned. As he put out his disengaged hand and took Gertrude's, he glanced from her face to that of the housekeeper, and back

to hers again, and saw that each recognised the other.

"You know Mrs. Bush?" he asked, still holding Gertrude's hand in one of his, still leaning with the other on Mrs. Bush's arm.

"Mrs. Bush and I have met before," Gertrude answered calmly; "but she does not know my stage name. I am a singer, Mrs. Bush," she added; "and my stage name is Lambert."

"O, indeed, ma'am!" said Mrs. Bush, in a singularly unsympathetic voice, and with an expression which said pretty plainly that she did not think it signified much what the speaker called herself.—"Shall I put your lordship in the chair near the window?"

"Yes, yes," said Lord Sandilands testily; and then he added, with the perversity of age and illness, "and where did you know Miss Keith, Mrs. Bush?" He seated himself as he spoke, drew the skirts of his gray dressing-gown over his knees, and again looked from one to the other. Mrs. Bloxam, to whom the scene had absolutely no meaning, stood by in silence. Gertrude was

very calm, very pale, and her eyes shone with a disdainful, defiant light, as they had shone on the fatal day of which this meeting so vividly reminded her. Mrs. Bush smiled, a dubious kind of smile, and rubbed her hands together very slowly and deliberately, as she answered:

"If you please, my lord, I didn't never know a Miss Keith. It were when the young lady was Mrs. Lloyd as she come to my house at Brighton."

"When the young lady was Mrs. Lloyd!" repeated Lord Sandilands in astonishment, and now including Mrs. Bloxam, who looked extremely embarrassed and uncomfortable in the searching gaze he directed towards the housekeeper and Gertrude. "What does this mean?"

"I will explain it to you," said Gertrude firmly but very gently, and bending over him as she spoke; "but there is no occasion to detain Mrs. Bush." The tone and manner of her words were tantamount to a dismissal, and so Mrs. Bush received them. She immediately retreated to the door, with an assumption of not feeling the smallest curiosity concerning the lady with whom she

was thus unexpectedly brought into contact, and left the room, murmuring an assurance that she should be within call when his lordship might want her. A few moments' pause followed her departure. The astonishment and vague uneasiness with which Lord Sandilands had heard what Mrs. Bush had said kept him silent, while Gertrude was agitated and puzzled—the first by the imminent danger of discovery of her carefully-kept secret, and the second by hearing Lord Sandilands allude to her as "Miss Keith." When she thought over this strange and critical incident in her life afterwards, it seemed to her that something like a perception of the truth about to be imparted to her came into her mind as Lord Sandilands spoke. Mrs. Bloxam experienced a sensation unpleasantly akin to threatened fainting. What was coming? Must all indeed be told? Must her conduct be put in its true light before both Gertrude and Lord Sandilands? Could she not escape either of the extremes which, in her mental map of the straits in which she found herself, she had laid down? But she was a strong

woman by nature, and a quiet, self-repressed woman by habit, and in the few moments' interval of silence she did not faint, but sat down a little behind Lord Sandilands, and with her face turned away from the light. As for the old nobleman himself, the mere shock of the dim suspicion, the vague possibility which suggested itself, shook his composure severely, through all the restraint which his natural manliness and the acquired impassiveness of good breeding imposed. Gertrude was the first to speak. She stood in her former attitude, slightly leaning over him, and he sat, his head back against the chair, and his keen, gray, anxious eyes raised to her handsome, haughty face.

"You sent for me, my dear lord, my good friend," she said,—and there was a tone in the rich, sweet voice which the old man had never heard in it before, and in which his ear caught and carried to his heart the echo of one long silent and almost forgotten,—"and I have come; in the first place to see you, to know how you are, and to satisfy myself that this illness has had nothing

alarming in it. In the second place, that I may hear all you mean to say to me; I know about what,"—her eyes drooped and her colour rose —"Mrs. Bloxam has told me; she has fully explained all your kindness, all your goodness and generosity to me. Will you tell me all you intended to say to me, and let me say what I meant to say to you, just as if Mrs. Bush had never called me by that strange name in your hearing, and then I will explain all." The lustrous earnestness of her face rendered it far more beautiful than Lord Sandilands had ever before seen it. Her mother had never looked at him with that purposeful expression, with that look which told of sorrow and knowledge, and the will and resolution to live them down.

"I will do anything you wish, my dear," said the old nobleman; and it was remarkable that he discarded in that moment all the measured courtesy of manner which he had hitherto sedulously preserved, and adopted in its stead the deep and warm interest, the partial judgment, the protecting tone of his true relationship to her. "Sit

here beside me, and listen. I have some painful things to say, but they will soon be said; and I hope—I hope happy days are in store for you;" but his face was clouded, and doubt, even dread, expressed itself in his voice. Gertrude did not exactly obey him. Instead of taking a seat, she placed herself on her knees beside his chair; and in this attitude she listened to his words.

"I know how it is with you and Miles Challoner, my dear, and Miles is dearer to me than any person in the world except one,—and that one is you."

"I!" said Gertrude, amazed. "I dearer to you than Miles Challoner, your old friend's child!"

"Yes," he said, with a faint smile, "for you are my own child, Gertrude; that is what I sent for you to tell you, and I want to make you happy if I can." So saying, the old man took her bent head between his hands, and kissed her. Gertrude did not evince any violent emotion—she turned extremely pale, and her eyes filled with tears; but she did not say anything for a little while, and she afterwards wondered at the quietness with

which the revelation was made and received. She was not even certain that she had been very much surprised. Mrs. Bloxam rose, opened the window, stepped out upon the balcony, and carefully closed the window behind her. During a considerable time she might have been observed by the numerous promenaders on the Esplanade, leaning over the railing, which was more ornamental than solid, in an attitude of profound abstraction. By those within the room her very existence was forgotten until, in the course of their mutual interrogation, her name came to be mentioned. Still kneeling beside him, but now with her head resting against his breast, and one long thin white hand laid tenderly upon the bright masses of her chestnut hair, Gertrude heard from her father the story of her mother's brief happy life and early death;—and the sternest might have forgiven the old man the unintentional deception which was self-delusion, which made him tell his daughter how only that early death had prevented his making Gertrude Gauthier his wife. For the first time he realised now in the keenness of his

longing, in the misery of his dreaded powerlessness to secure the happiness of his child, the full extent of the injury inflicted upon her by her illegitimate birth.

"I know," he said, "that Miles loves you, and I think you love him, and I know you would be happy. I have lived long enough in the world, and seen enough of it, to know how rarely one can say that with common sense and justice of any two human beings. Tell me, Gertrude, why it is that you have refused Miles,—why it is that you seem determined not to let me smooth away all obstacles to your marrying him?"

The conversation had lasted long, and had embraced many subjects, before it reached this point. Gertrude had undergone much and varying emotion, but she had not lost her calmness, partly because of her exceptional strength of mind and body, and partly because she never suffered herself to forget the danger of over-excitement to Lord Sandilands. She had listened quietly to the story of her mother (the idea of actually learning about her own parentage, and being able to realise

it, was quite new to her—and abstract sentiment was not in Gertrude's way), and had rendered to it the tribute of silent tears. She had heard her father tell how he had first recognised her at Lady Carabas' concert, and how he had felt the strong instinctive interest in which he had never believed, and which he had never practically experimented in, arise at the sight of her; how he had found, first with misgiving, and afterwards with increasing pleasure, ratified and approved by his conscience because of his knowledge of Miles Challoner's tastes and character, that his young friend and companion was attached to her. She had heard him tell how he had watched the ill-success of Lord Ticehurst's suit with pleasure, and how he had won Miles to confide to him his hopes and plans, and encouraged him to hope for success, and then had been induced by her refusal of Miles and his belief that that refusal was dictated by disinterested regard for Challoner's worldly interests, and in no degree by her own feelings, to take the resolution of telling her all the truth—upon which resolution he was now acting.

So far Gertrude had been wonderfully composed. Her father had said to her all he had urged with himself, when he had been first assailed by misgivings that his old friend would have resented his endeavouring to bring about a marriage between Miles and a woman to whom the disadvantage of illegitimate birth attached; and she had assented, adding that while she only knew herself utterly obscure, she had felt and acted upon the sense of her own inferiority. The conversation had strayed away from Gertrude's early life—the father met his acknowledged daughter for the first time as a woman, and they made haste to speak of present great interests. Mrs. Bloxam might have been quite easy in her mind about the amount of notice her share in any of the transactions of the past would be likely to excite. But now, when Lord Sandilands pleaded earnestly the cause of Miles Challoner, and in arguing it argued in favour of the weakness of Gertrude's own heart, her fortitude gave way, and a full and overwhelming knowledge of the bitterness of her fate rushed in upon her soul.

The veil fell from her eyes; she knew herself for the living lie she was; she realised that the unjustifiable compact she had made with her husband was a criminal, an accursed convention, bearing more and more fruit of bitterness and shame and punishment, as her father unfolded the scheme of a bright and happy future which he had formed for her.

"If he had been any other than Miles Challoner," she had said to Mrs. Bloxam, she would have married him, would have incurred the risk for rank and money—or she had thought so, had really believed it of herself. What had possessed her with such an idea? What had made her contemplate in herself a creature so lost, so utterly, coldly wicked? It was so long since she had permitted herself to think of her real position; she had deliberately blinded, voluntarily stultified her mind for so long, that she had ceased to feel that she was playing a part as fictitious off, as any she performed on the stage. But now, as her father's voice went on, speaking lovingly, hopefully, telling her how conventionalities should be

disregarded and wealth supplied in her interests; telling her she need have no fear in the case of such a man as Miles—had he not known him all his life?—of any late regret or after reproach; now the tide of anguish rushed over her, and with choking sobs she implored him to desist.

"Don't, don't!" she said. "You don't know —O my God!—you don't know—and how shall I ever tell you? There is another reason, ten thousand times stronger; all the others I gave were only pretences, anything to keep him from suspecting, from finding out the truth; there is a reason which makes it altogether impossible."

"Another reason! What is it? Tell me at once—tell me," said Lord Sandilands; and he raised himself in his chair, and held her by the shoulders at arms' length from him. Dread, suspicion, pain were in his face; and under the influence of strong emotion, which reflected itself in her features, the father and daughter, with all the difference of colouring and of form, were wonderfully like each other.

"I will tell you," she said; but she shut her

eyes, and then hid them with her hand while she spoke, shrinking from his gaze. "I will tell you. I am not free to be Miles Challoner's wife. I am married to another man."

"Married! You married?"

"Yes," she said, "I am married. Your housekeeper knows me as a married woman. The name she called me by is my real name. You know the man who is my husband, unhappy wretch that I am!"

"Who is he?" said Lord Sandilands hoarsely, his nerveless hands falling from her shoulders as he spoke. She looked at him, was alarmed at the paleness of his face, and rose hurriedly from her knees.

"You are ill," she said. "I will go—" But he caught her dress, and held it.

"Tell me who he is.'

"Gilbert Lloyd!'

Gertrude was horrified at the effect which the communication she had made to her father had upon him. He had set his heart strongly indeed

upon her marriage with Miles Challoner, she thought, when the frustration of the project had the power to plunge him into a state of prostration and misery. As for herself, the alarm she experienced, and the great excitement she had undergone in the revelation made to her by her father, the agony of mind she had suffered in the desperate necessity for avowing the truth, were quickly succeeded by such physical exhaustion as she had never before felt. This effect of mental excitement was largely assisted by the weakness still remaining after her illness, and was so complete and irresistible, that when she had seen the doctor hurriedly summoned to Lord Sandilands by Mrs. Bloxam's orders—that lady's meditations on the balcony had been terminated by Gertrude's cry for help—and learned that the patient was not in danger, but must be kept absolutely quiet, she yielded to it at once.

Not a word was said by Mrs. Bloxam to Gertrude concerning the disclosure made by Lord Sandilands. In the confusion and distress which ensued on the sudden attack of violent pain with

which her father was seized, Gertrude lost sight of time and place, and thought of nothing but him so long as she was able to think of anything. Little more than an hour had elapsed since Lord Sandilands had told her the secret of his life, and she was speaking of him freely to Mrs. Bloxam as her father, and the word hardly sounded strange. She could not return to Hardriggs; she was not able, even if she would have left Lord Sandilands. There was no danger of her seeing Miles if she remained at St. Leonards. Lord Sandilands had told her early in their interview that he had sent Miles up to town, and procured his absence until he should summon him back by promising to plead his cause in his absence. She and Mrs. Bloxam must remain—not in the house, indeed, but at the nearest hotel. She would send a message to that effect to Lady Belwether, and inform Mrs. Bush of her intention.

Mrs. Bush had not relaxed her suspicious reserve during all the bustle and confusion which had ensued on the sudden illness of Lord Sandilands. She had been brought into contact with

Gertrude frequently as they went from room to room in search of remedies, and ultimately met by the old nobleman's bedside after the doctor's visit. Mrs. Bush did not indeed call Gertrude "Mrs. Lloyd" again, but she scrupulously addressed her as "Madam;" and there was an unpleasant, though not distinctly offensive, significance about her manner which convinced Gertrude that not an incident of the terrible time at Brighton had been forgotten by the *ci-devant* lodging-house keeper, whose changed position had set her free from the necessity of obsequiousness.

Gertrude had taken a resolution on the subject of Mrs. Bush, on which she acted with characteristic decision, when at length her father was sleeping under the influence of opiates, and she and Mrs. Bloxam had agreed that their remaining at St. Leonards was inevitable. She asked Mrs. Bush to accompany her to the drawing-room, and then said to her at once:

"You are surprised to see me here, Mrs. Bush, no doubt; and as I understand from Lord Sandilands that he has great confidence in you, and

values your services highly, I think it right to explain to you what may seem strange in the matter."

Mrs. Bush looked at the young lady a little more kindly than before, and muttered something about being much obliged, and hoping she should merit his lordship's good opinion. Gertrude continued:

"It will displease Lord Sandilands, to whom I am closely related, if the fact of my being married is talked about. I am separated from Mr. Lloyd, and it is customary for singers to retain their own names. Mine is Grace Lambert. If you desire to please his lordship, you may do so by keeping silence on this subject, by not telling anyone that you ever saw me at Brighton under another name."

With the shrewdness which most women of her class and calling possess by nature, and which the necessities of her struggling career as a lodging-housekeeper had developed, Mrs. Bush instantly perceived her own interest in this affair, and replied very civilly that she was sure she should

never mention anything his lordship would wish concealed; and that she was not given to gossip, thank goodness! never had been when she had a house herself, and which her opinion had always been as lodgers' business was their own and not hers. Consequent, she had never said a word about the poor dear gentleman what had died so sudden,—at this point of her discourse Gertrude's jaded nerves thrilled again with pain, —although it had injured her house serious. With a last effort of self-command, Gertrude listened to her apparently unmoved, and dismissed her, with an intimation that she should return in the morning to take her place by Lord Sandilands. Mrs. Bush had both a talent and a taste for nursing invalids, and she established herself in the darkened room, there to watch the troubled sleeper, with cheerful alacrity. Her thoughts were busy with Gertrude, however, and with what she had said to her. "So she's his near relation, is she?" thus ran Mrs. Bush's cogitations. "*What* relation now, I wonder? Lambert is not a family name on any side, and

he called her Miss Keith too—and I'll be hanged if *he* knew she was married! I'm sure he didn't. There's something queer in all this; but it's not my affair. However, if his lordship asks me any questions, I'm not going to hold my tongue to him. Separated from Mr. Lloyd! I wonder was she ever really married to him? She looked like it, and spoke like it, though; a more respectable young woman in her ways never came to my place, for the little time she was in it. I wonder what she has left him for?—though in my belief it's a good job for her, and he's a bad lot."

The hours of the night passed over the heads of the father and the daughter unconsciously. With the morning came the renewed sense of something important and painful having taken place. On the preceding evening, Gertrude had entreated Mrs. Bloxam to refrain from questioning her. "I am too tired," she had said. "I cannot talk about it; let me rest now, and I will tell you everything in the morning." To this Mrs. Bloxam had gladly assented; she was

naturally very anxious, and not a little curious; but anxiety and curiosity were both held in abeyance by the satisfaction she experienced in perceiving that the revelations which had been made had not seriously injured her position with Lord Sandilands or with Gertrude. The mutual recognition between Gertrude and Mrs. Bush had been unintelligible to her. That it had produced important results she could not doubt; but on the whole, she did not regret them. The acknowledgment of Gertrude's marriage might prevent future mischief, in which she (Mrs. Bloxam) might possibly be unpleasantly involved, and at present it was evident that, in the overwhelming agitation and surprise of the discovery, her conduct had been entirely forgotten or overlooked. That she might continue to occupy a position of such safe obscurity was, for herself, Mrs. Bloxam's dearest wish; and Mrs. Bloxam's wishes seldom extended, at all events with any animation, beyond herself.

Lord Sandilands awoke free from pain, but so weak and confused that it was some time

before he could bring up the occurrences of yesterday, in their due order and weight of import, before his mind. He had received a shock from which his physical system could hardly be expected to recover; but the extent of the mental effect — the fear, the horror, the awakening of remorse, not yet to be softened into abiding and availing repentance—none but he could ever estimate. The past, the present, and the future alike menaced, alike tortured him: the dead friend, the sole sharer of whose confidence he was; the dead man's son, whom he loved almost as well as if he were of his own flesh and blood; the dead woman, whom he had deceived and betrayed (in the wholesome bitterness of his awakened feelings Lord Sandilands was hard upon himself, and ready to ignore the ignorance which had made her a facile victim); the dreadful combination of fate which had made the daughter whom he had neglected and disowned the wife of a man whose tremendous guilt her father alone of living creatures knew, and had thrown her in the path of that same

guilty man's brother, to love him and be beloved by him. In so dire a distress was he; and this girl whom he loved with an anxious intensity which surprised himself, imprisoned in the hopeless meshes of the net in which his feet were involved. No wonder he found it hard, with all his natural courage, and all the acquired calmness of his caste, to marshal these facts in their proper order, and make head against the dismay they caused him. But this was no time for dismay. He had to act in a terrible emergency of his daughter's life, and to act, if indeed it were possible for any ingenuity or prudence to enable him to do so, so that the real truth of the emergency, the full extent of its terrible nature, should be known to himself alone, never suspected by her. The housekeeper came softly to the old nobleman's bedside while his mind was working busily at this problem, the most difficult which life had ever set him for solution; and seeing his eyes closed and his face quiet, believed him to be still sleeping, and withdrew gently.

By degrees, the facts and the necessities of the case arranged themselves somewhat in this order. Gertrude had told her father of her marriage, of the misery which had speedily resulted from it, and of the strange bargain made between her husband and herself. She knew Lloyd's worthlessness then, though she had spoken but vaguely of him as a gambler and a reckless, unprincipled man, not giving Lord Sandilands any reason to think she could regard him as capable of actual crime. The shock of the disclosure Gertrude had imputed simply to his horror of the clandestine nature of her marriage, and the moral blindness and deadness which had made the bargain between her and Lloyd present itself as possible to their minds (the light of a true and pure love had shone on Gertrude now, and shown her the full turpitude of the transaction); his sudden seizure had prevented his hearing more than a brief, bare outline of the dreadful episode of his daughter's marriage. She knew nothing of the real, appalling truth; she was ignorant that the man she had married was a criminal of the deepest

dye, the secret of his crime in her father's hands, his own brother the object of her affections, and the only possible issue out of all this complication and misery one involving utter and eternal separation between her and Miles Challoner. If he and Gertrude ever met again, she must learn the truth; she must learn that Gilbert Lloyd was Geoffrey Challoner, and an additional weight of horror and anguish be added to the load of sorrow her unfortunate marriage—in which Lord Sandilands humbly and remorsefully recognised the consequence, the direct result, of his own sin—had laid upon her. If she could be prevented from ever knowing the worst? If he, invested with the authority and with the affection of a parent, could induce her to consent to an immediate separation from Miles Challoner, to a prompt removal from the possibility of seeing him, by strengthening her own views of the insuperable nature of the barrier between them? She would not, however, yield to Miles's prayer for their marriage; but that would not be sufficient for her safety: she must never see him more; she must

be kept from the misery of learning the truth. How was this to be done? For some time Lord Sandilands found no answer to that question; but at last it suggested itself. Miles—yes, he would make an appeal to him; he would tell him all the truth—to him who knew that Lord Sandilands also possessed that other secret, which, to judge by its consequences, must be indeed a terrible one; and Miles would be merciful to this woman, who, though she had sinned by the false pretence under which she lived, was so much more sinned against; and, appearing to accept her decision, Miles would not ask to see her again. Yes, that would do; he was sure that would succeed. And then he would acknowledge Gertrude as his daughter to all who had any claim to an explanation of any proceedings of his—the number was satisfactorily small—and he would leave England for ever, with Gertrude. It was wonderful with how strong and irresistible a voice Nature was now speaking to the old man's heart; how all the habits and conventionalities of his life seemed to be dropping suddenly away from him, and some-

thing new, but far more powerful, establishing itself in their stead as a law of his being. The tremendous truth and extent of his responsibility as regarded Gertrude presented themselves to him now in vivid reality, and the strongest desire of his heart was for strength, skill, and patience, to carry out the plan which presented itself for her benefit. He felt no anger towards her for what she had done. Poor motherless, fatherless, unprotected girl, how was she to understand the moral aspect of such a deed? He pitied the folly, but he did not seriously regard the guilt, while he deplored the consequences. Gertrude's professional career, he saw at once, must come to an immediate and abrupt close. There was no safety for her in the terrible unexplained attitude of the brothers Challoner, and her total unconsciousness of it and its bearing upon her own fate, but absence from the scene of the secret drama. With the grief of her hopeless, impossible love at her heart, and with the help and safety of her new-discovered relationship to him, security for her future and escape from the pre-

sent, Gertrude would not hesitate about abandoning her career as a singer. It had never had for her the intoxicating delight and excitement with which such a success is invested for the fortunate few who attain it; and as for the world, the lapse of the brilliant star from the operatic firmament would be a nine-days' wonder, and no more, like such other of the episodes of her story and his as the world might come to learn. That part of the business hardly deserved, and certainly did not receive, more than the most passing consideration from Lord Sandilands. It was all dreadfully painful, and full of complications which involved infinite distress; but Lord Sandilands began to see light in his difficult way. It was not until he had thought long and anxiously of Gertrude and of Miles that his mind turned in the direction of Gilbert Lloyd; and then it was with inexpressible pain that he contemplated the fact that this man, whom of all men he most abhorred, was the husband of his daughter; had had the power to make her girlhood miserable, to blight her life in its bloom, and to continue to blight it to the end.

How great a villain Gilbert Lloyd was, he alone knew; but no doubt Gertrude had had considerable experience of his character. On this point he would find out all the truth by degrees. His thoughts glanced for a moment at the probable effect it would have on Lloyd when he should discover that the one man in the world in whose power he was, was the father of his wife, and had constituted himself her protector. At least there was one bright spot in all this mass of misery: knowing this, Lloyd would never dare to molest Gertrude, would never venture to seek her or trouble her, in any straits, however severe, to which his unprincipled life might drive him. In this perfectly reasonable calculation there was but one item astray: Lord Sandilands had no suspicion of the state of feeling in which Gilbert Lloyd now was with respect to his wife. If he had known the fierce revival of passion for her, and the rage which filled his baffled and desperate heart, Lord Sandilands would not have looked with so much confidence upon the prospect of suffering no molestation from Lloyd. Whether

his tigerish nature could ever be wholly controlled by fear, was a question to which no answer could yet be given. But Lord Sandilands did not ask it, and his thoughts had again reverted to Miles, and were dwelling sadly on the caprice of fate which had brought his brother once more so fatally across his track, and had erected so strange a link between the calamity which had overshadowed his dead friend's life and that which must now be the abiding sorrow of his own, when the arrival of the doctor interrupted his musings, and obliged him to confess to being awake.

When the visit was concluded, with a favourable report but many cautions on the part of the medical attendant, Lord Sandilands inquired of Mrs. Bush when the arrival of the two ladies might be looked for. They had already sent to ask how his lordship was, and would be there at eleven. Lord Sandilands then bethought him that the recognition of the preceding day, which had no doubt led to his receiving his daughter's confidence, and being preserved from blindly pursuing a course of persuasion and advocacy of

Miles Challoner's suit, which might have led to most disastrous consequences, could now be made still more useful, as affording him an opportunity of learning more about his daughter's married life than she had had time or probably inclination to tell him.

The old man looked very weak and curiously older all of a sudden, and Mrs. Bush, a kind-hearted woman in her narrow little way, was sorry to see the change. The sympathy in her manner and voice inspired Lord Sandilands with a resolution somewhat similar to that one which Gertrude had noted on the previous day. He asked Mrs. Bush to take a seat, requested her best attention to what he was going to say, and then told her without any circumlocution that the lady called Grace Lambert, whom she had known as Mrs. Lloyd, was his daughter, whom he intended to acknowledge and to take abroad with him. The housekeeper showed very plainly the astonishment which this communication occasioned her, and her embarrassment was extreme when Lord Sandilands continued: "And now,

Mrs. Bush, I wish you to tell me all you know about my daughter, and all that occurred while Mr. Lloyd, from whom she separated immediately afterwards, lodged at your house at Brighton."

"Of course, my lord," replied Mrs. Bush, in a nervous and hesitating manner, "I cannot refuse to do as your lordship wishes, nor do I wish so to do; but Mrs. Lloyd did not lodge at my house at all in a manner; she only came there unexpected, and went away at night, after the poor gentleman died, as were took so sudden—dear, dear, how sudden he were took, to be sure!"

"What gentleman? I don't understand you. Pray tell me the whole story, Mrs. Bush; don't omit any particulars you can remember; it is of great importance to me."

Mrs. Bush possessed no ordinary share of that very common gift of persons of her class—circumlocution, and she told her story with a delightful sense of revelling in the fullest details. Her hearer, not under ordinary circumstances distinguished for patience, neither hurried nor

interrupted her, but, on the contrary, when he asked her any questions at all, put to her such as induced her to lengthen and amplify the narrative. When the housekeeper took her seat beside his bed, Lord Sandilands had been lying with his face towards her. As she progressed in her account of the sojourn of Gilbert Lloyd and Harvey Gore at her house, he turned away, and lay towards the wall against which his bed was placed, so that at the conclusion of the story she did not see his face. Ashy pale that face was, and it bore a fixed look of horror; for, bringing his own secret knowledge of Gilbert Lloyd to bear upon the story told by the housekeeper, Lord Sandilands readily divined what was that swift, unaccountable illness of which Lloyd's friend had died, what the irresistible power his wife had wielded in insisting upon the separation which had taken place. "The wretched girl! What must she not have suffered!" the father thought. "Alone, in the power of such a man, in possession of such a secret, whether by positive knowledge or only strong suspicion, no matter. Good

God, what must she not have suffered! What has she not yet before her to suffer!"

Here, as he afterwards thought, in reflecting upon the unconscious disclosure which Mrs. Bush had made to him — here was another barrier against any possible molestation of Gertrude by her husband, a horrible truth to grasp at with something like ghastly satisfaction. But horrible truths were all around them in this miserable complication, on every side.

"Thank you," said Lord Sandilands, when Mrs. Bush had concluded her narrative. "I am much indebted to you for telling me all these particulars. You will oblige me very materially by not mentioning the subject in any way to anyone."

Mrs. Bush was aware that Lord Sandilands not only possessed the means but the inclination to make it very well worth anyone's while to oblige him, so she immediately resolved upon maintaining undeviating fidelity to the obligation he imposed upon her; and she afterwards kept her resolution, which she found profitable.

When Gertrude arrived, Mrs. Bush met her with a request that she would go to his lordship at once, which implied that Mrs. Bloxam was to remain in the drawing-room. This she did, composedly occupying herself with needlework, and feeling her hopes that she should be entirely overlooked in the crisis of affairs growing stronger and stronger. It may as well be said here, once for all, that these hopes were justified. Mrs. Bloxam was never called to account by Lord Sandilands for his money, or her own conduct.

"I take it upon myself, my dear," said Lord Sandilands to his daughter, when many hours passed in close and mournful consultation between them had gone by; "as soon as I am able to move — and, you see, I am greatly better already — the arrangements shall all be made."

From the bed where he lay, the old man's eyes were turned anxiously, sadly, towards the figure of his daughter. Gertrude was seated in a deep chintz-covered chair, in the bay of the

window, which overlooked a small garden of the sterile and sandy order, familiar to the memory of occasional dwellers in seaside lodging-houses. She was leaning forward, her head resting on her hands, her arms supported by a little three-legged table, her attitude full of grace and dejection. The afternoon sun tinged her pale cheek and her clustering hair, but for the moment the brilliance that was so characteristic of her appearance was gone. But she touched the old man's heart all the more keenly for the lack of brilliancy, for she was more like her mother without it, — the dead mother whom she had never seen, and whose name had as yet been barely mentioned between them.

"Yes," she said absently, drearily, "I must leave it all to you. How strange it is to me to know that I have you to help me, to leave it all to!"

"You will not pine for the excitement and applause to which you are so accustomed, Gertrude?"

"No; they have been very wearisome to me

of late, since I have known how much might have been mine that never can be now."

"No indeed, my dear," said her father earnestly, "it never, never can be now; and your true courage, your true good sense is in acknowledging this at once, and consenting to turn your back upon it all promptly. You shall have none of the misery of severing these ties; I will write to Munns, and tell him I am ready to indemnify his real or imaginary losses."

"It will cost you a great deal of money," she said, still absently, still drearily.

"It is almost time that I began to spend it on *you*," said her father, with a very unsuccessful attempt at a smile.

The past, the present, and the future had been discussed during the hours they had passed together, and emotion had worn itself out. Steadily keeping in mind the concealment he desired to practise, and the effect he designed to produce, the old nobleman had received the confidences which his daughter—who more and more strongly felt the tie between them hour by hour, and

softened under its influence—imparted to him with the utmost tenderness and indulgence, but with as little effusion as possible. He had induced her to tell him the whole truth concerning her separation from her husband; and had received the terrible revelation with calmness which would have perhaps shocked Gertrude had she not been too much absorbed in the newer, sacred sorrow of her hopeless love to perceive as keenly as was her wont, had she not also been much exhausted physically, and thus mercifully less sensible to impressions. She had also told him of Gilbert Lloyd's late pursuit of her; and at that portion of her narrative Lord Sandilands ground his still strong white teeth with furious anger, and a thrill of exultation mingled with the rage and misery of the circumstances, as he thought how utterly this villain was in his power, how soon he would set his foot upon his neck and see him writhe in impotent anguish and humiliation. But this was one of the feelings which he had to conceal from Gertrude, and he did effectually conceal it.

The plan decided upon was that Gertrude and Mrs. Bloxam should return on that evening to Hardriggs, and terminate their stay there as soon as possible; and then go to London and occupy the interval which must elapse before Lord Sandilands could travel, in making preparations for departure. The pretty villa was to be given up; the household gods which Gertrude had gathered around her were to be dispersed, and her life was "to begin over again." Is there any drearier phrase than that? can words represent any harder fact, any more painful idea? Then Lord Sandilands and his daughter would go abroad, and leave the English world behind them, to think and say just what it might please. The place of their abode was not even discussed. All foreign countries were alike new to Gertrude, and old to Lord Sandilands. One little point of detail had been mentioned between them. If Gertrude wished it, her father would take Mrs. Bloxam with them. He inclined to the belief that it would be better not; better to be away from everyone connected

with the past, from which it was their wish, their object to escape. And his daughter agreed with him, as did Mrs. Bloxam, when the matter was mentioned to her. She hated foreign countries—her trip to Italy was a standing grievance—and she was very glad to retire from her post of *chaperone* to Miss Lambert, with such a handsome present in money from Lord Sandilands—an ill-deserved acknowledgment of her services—as, added to the savings she had accumulated at the Vale House, rendered her free from the presence or the apprehension of poverty. When the time of parting came, this lady, on the whole a not unfortunate member of society as human affairs are constituted, took leave of Lord Sandilands and his daughter with the utmost propriety; and it is more than probable that by this time she has ceased to remember their existence.

Gertrude took leave of her father, when the appointed time came for her return to Hardriggs, with little visible emotion. She was dazed and exhausted; and it was not until the events of the last few days were weeks old, and she passed

them in review under a foreign sky, in a distant land, far away from the man she loved and the man she hated, that she began to realise them in detail, and to feel that she had, indeed, "begun life over again."

When Lord Sandilands contemplated the prospect of the interview he was about to have with Miles Challoner, he shrunk from it with dread. But he had to go through with it; and perhaps the most painful moment of the many painful hours he and his friend passed together was that in which the young man advanced to him with beaming looks, with outstretched hand, with agitated voice, and said, "You have sent for me? you have good news for me?"

The task was done—the task in which the old man felt the hand of retribution striking him heavily through the suffering of those he loved—the pain was borne, and the day after that which witnessed the arrival of Gertrude and Mrs. Bloxam in London saw Miles Challoner leaving the great city for Rowley Court, where he shut himself up in such gloomy seclu-

sion that the people about began to talk oddly of it. Somehow the Court seemed an unlucky place, they said. First, the mysterious disgrace and banishment of the younger son; then the lonely, moping, moody life of the Squire; and now here was the young Squire going the same gait. There was surely something in it which was not lucky, that there was, and time would tell.

The world did talk, as they had anticipated, of the departure of Lord Sandilands and Miss Lambert for foreign parts; and as it was some little time before it got hold of anything like a correct version of the story, it started some very pretty and ingenious theories to account for that "unaccountable" proceeding. Managers were savage, *débutantes* delighted, and Lady Carabas, who knew nothing whatever of the matter, was charmingly mysterious, and assured everyone that her dear Grace had been guided in everything by her advice, and that that dear Lord Sandilands was the most perfect of creatures,

and had behaved like an angel. And then, in even a shorter time than Lord Sandilands and Gertrude had calculated upon, the world, including Lady Carabas, forgot them.

CHAPTER V.

AN EXPLOSION.

WHEN Gilbert Lloyd awoke the next morning after an excellent night's rest, his first impression was that something disagreeable had happened on the previous evening, but it was some time before he could exactly recollect all the circumstances and pass them calmly in review before him. Even when he had done so he felt by no means certain how far matters had gone. He had taken too much of that infernal brandy, he remembered with disgust —taken it because he had been brooding over that business at Brighton which happened years ago, it is true, but which some confounded fate seemed to have set people talking about lately. He had not thought about it, it had never troubled him, and now he found his mind continually running on that one subject. It must have been the

constant reference made by those about him to—to his wife that must have turned his thoughts in that direction. Curses on that Sunday regulation of shutting the telegraph-offices! If he had only been able to send that telegram as he had originally intended early in the morning, it would have stopped her coming down, and prevented her having that fatal hold over him, of which she is well aware, and which she is determined to exercise if necessary. It was thinking last night of all these things combined that had sent him to the brandy-bottle, a dangerous habit, which seemed to be growing upon him, he thought, and which he must at once break himself of, as ruinous and destructive of all chances of keeping that clearness of brain which was to him a vital necessity. He was muddled the previous night; he felt it then; he only saw through a glass darkly what had happened, and the retrospect was by no means agreeable. Etchingham had annoyed him, he recollected that; and he had replied without measuring his language, and the result had been that they had agreed to part. O yes, now he remembered what

Bobby Maitland had told Etchingham about him. What an idiot he had been to make a row about such a thing as that! He knew well enough that Bobby Maitland had been trying all he knew for years to supplant him in Etchingham's confidence, that he was awfully jealous of him, and would say or do anything to get a rise out of him. He must have taken an amount of brandy to have made such an ass of himself. It was a comfort to know that Etchingham was sure to be all right in the morning, and to be in a great fright at what had occurred. He knew his pupil well enough to be certain of that. No doubt his lordship had also dined, and had taken quite enough of Mr. Stackborough's wine. They were both of them excited, no doubt, but he must take care and stand on his dignity, and then Etchingham would come round at once.

So, thinking over these things, Gilbert Lloyd took his cold sea-water bath, which got rid of most of the ill effects of the previous night, and having leisurely dressed himself, descended to the room where breakfast was laid. He was the first; Lord

Ticehurst had not yet appeared. So Gilbert took up the newspaper, and after glancing at the state of the odds and the sporting-intelligence generally, remained expectant. He had not to wait very long. In a few minutes Lord Ticehurst, looking very white and seedy, and with his small eyes more tightly screwed up and sunk more deeply into his head than usual, entered the room. Gilbert bade him "good-morning," which his lordship, walking round the table and flinging himself into an easy-chair, only answered by a short nod. He then rang the bell, and, on the waiter's appearing, ordered brandy and soda-water. This, Lloyd argued to himself, was merely the effect of the "morning after," the result of too much indulgence in Stackborough's wines. His lordship's digestion was impaired and consequently his temper suffered: both would improve simultaneously. But after his brandy and soda-water, Lord Ticehurst pulled his chair to the table, and commenced and proceeded with a very excellent breakfast, during the discussion of which he said never a word to his anxiously-expectant confederate, while,

at its finish, he lit a big cigar, and, still mute, armed himself with a telescope, flung open the window, and stepped into the balcony to inspect the exhibition of the naiads bathing in the foreground.

For once in his life Gilbert Lloyd was nonplused. He had made perfectly certain that Etchingham would have cried peccavi, would have come to him begging to have their relations replaced on the old footing; and here was the recalcitrant apparently quite at ease, not taking the least notice of him, and obviously rather enjoying himself than otherwise. Had he been blind, or had Etchingham's character suddenly changed? One thing was quite certain, that all was going wrong, and that he must take prompt measures to set himself right. Gilbert Lloyd was not an adept at leek-swallowing. He had played his cards so well during the latter portion at least of his life that he had seldom been required to perform that humiliating feat, but he saw that he must do it now. Lord Ticehurst was, like most good-natured men, intensely obstinate and sulky when affronted, and though Lloyd had

had no experience of this state of his pupil's mood so far as he was regarded, he had seen it evidenced against others. It was perfectly plain that one of these fits, and a very strong one, was on Lord Ticehurst at present, and Lloyd was compelled to acknowledge to himself that if he wanted to retain his position in the future he must knuckle under unreservedly and at once.

He laid down the newspaper which he had made a pretence of reading, and looked towards the window. There, in the balcony, sat his lordship, the light-blue smoke from his cigar curling round his head, and his eye fixed at the telescope which he held in his hand. Gilbert rose and went behind him, but Lord Ticehurst, although he must have heard the footstep, never moved. Then Gilbert laid his hand on his pupil's shoulder, and said, "Etchingham!"

His lordship moved his eye from the telescope, and looked quietly at Lloyd. "Well?" said he, in a sufficiently sulky manner.

"I have come to ask your pardon. I—"

"O, there, that's all right," said his lord-

ship, preparing to recommence his performance with the telescope.

"No, it is not all right. You and I have been intimate allies for a very long time. Until last night there has never been a word of difference between us. Nor would there have been then but for the infernal meddling of people who—"

"O, just look here! I didn't name any names, remember. It was you who said you knew Bobby Maitland had been making mischief."

"It was I; I acknowledge it. You are quite right. You are far too good a fellow to say a word against even such a bad lot as that. I lost my temper, and I spoke out. But why? Because I was in a tremendous rage at the impudence of that fellow Maitland daring to put his own words and his own sentiments into my mouth, and to pretend that I had said them. His own words and sentiments, I say, and no one else's."

"What! Do you mean to say that you never said—all that confounded stuff about the 'nurse,' and all that?"

"I pledge you my word of honour I never said anything of the kind."

Lord Ticehurst looked straight at him as he said these words, but Gilbert Lloyd met the look firmly, without the smallest increase of colour, without the movement of a muscle in his face.

"Well," said his lordship, after a momentary pause, "of course after that I cannot say any more. I was most infernally riled when I heard you'd been chaffing about me, I'll allow; because, after all, don't you know, when you and a fellow have lived together, and been regular pals, and that kind of thing—"

"And you thought I could have been such a scoundrel as to do that? No, Etchingham, I don't pretend to be straitlaced, and I don't go in to be demonstrative and gushing in my affection for you, like those duffers who are always hanging about you in town, and whose game you see through perfectly, I know. My regard for you I endeavour to show in another way, in devoting myself heart and soul to the management of your affairs; and if you look into them I think you'll find that I am faithful and true to you."

Into his voice, as he uttered these last words, Gilbert Lloyd threw a little tremulous touch of

sentiment, which gave evidence of a hitherto undeveloped histrionic ability, and which was really excellent of its kind. It was so close an imitation of the genuine article that most people would have been taken in by it, and Lloyd looked to see a responsive twinkle in his pupil's eyes; but clever and telling as it was it failed to touch Lord Ticehurst. He said, "All right, Gilbert, old fellow; of course I know that. Here, there's an end of it!" and he stretched out his hand; but there was no heartiness, no enthusiasm in his tone, no warmth in the grasp he gave, and Gilbert Lloyd recognised all this, and began to feel a dim prescience that his hold on his lordship was beginning to wax faint, and that his position as chief manager of Lord Ticehurst's affairs was manifestly insecure.

Was Gilbert Lloyd's luck really beginning to fail him? Had the devil, who had stood his friend so long, and aided him in his advancement so wonderfully, grown tired of and forsaken him? It seemed like it, he was forced to confess to himself. By nature cool, crafty, and clear-headed, and from

long practice in matters in which the exercise of those qualities is constantly required, Lloyd was by no means a man to suffer himself to remain blind to any danger which might threaten him. There are men amongst us passing for sane, nay, even reputed to be clever, who obstinately shut their eyes against the sight of the chasm towards which they are pressing forward, who are obstinately deaf to the roar of the avalanche which in a few seconds must overwhelm them, when by merely striking out into a new path—not so pleasant indeed, and that is mostly what they look at—they might avoid their fate. These are the men who, Micawber-like, are always expecting something to turn up, who refuse to see the plainest portents, to listen to the most obvious warnings, who think that bills disregarded are payments indefinitely deferred, and who put away unpleasant-looking letters unopened with the idea that the bad news they bring will thereby be staved off, who go on *quo Fata ducunt*, and who are astonished when they find themselves involved in misery and ruin. Gilbert Lloyd was

very different from this. Let a cloud, even though it were "no bigger than a man's hand," appear above the horizon, and he took note of it instantly. He was specially observant of the slightest change in the character or demeanour of those with whom he was brought in contact, even of persons of inferior grade. In fact, although for a long time past his life had been one of comparative ease and undoubted luxury, he had never forgotten the habits acquired in the early days of poverty and shifting and scheming, when his hand was against every man and every man's hand against him, and he was prepared to go to the end of the world, or out of it altogether for the matter of that, if he saw plainly the necessity of absconding, or felt that his Fate had arrived.

Was his luck going? Was his game nearly played out? There had been a great change lately, without a doubt; he must not shut his eyes to that. Etchingham was certainly changed. Very civil and acquiescent in all that was suggested to him, never referring to their dispute on that unlucky night, but still without a particle of

the heartiness which formerly characterised him, and which was the salt of his otherwise unpleasant disposition. There had been a turn of luck, too, in turf-matters. Some of his own private speculations (for Gilbert had a book of his own in addition to the "operations" in which he had a joint interest with Lord Ticehurst, and was said also to do a great deal by anonymous commission) had been very unfortunate during the past season, and so far as he could see he was not likely to recoup himself by any success at Doncaster, where one of Lord Ticehurst's cracks had been disgracefully beaten for the Cup, while another, which had been one of the leading favourites for the Leger, had run down the scale in the most alarming manner, and was now, on the eve of the race, scarcely mentioned in the betting.

Was his luck going? was his game nearly played out? *Venit summa dies et ineluctabile fatum!* Where had he heard that, Gilbert Lloyd wondered as he sat on the edge of his bed at the Angel Inn at Doncaster, turning all these things in his mind. *Ineluctabile fatum.* He

gave a half-shudder as he repeated the words, and he gulped down half the tumbler of brandy standing on the table by his side. He felt a *frisson* run through him—that kind of creeping feeling which silly old women ascribe to the fact of someone "walking over your grave"—on which the brandy had no effect, and he stamped his foot in rage at his weakness. He was all wrong somehow; out of health, perhaps? But his clear sense refused to be deluded by that excuse. *Ineluctabile fatum!* that was it, the *summa dies* for him was at hand; he felt it, he knew it, and found it in vain to struggle, impossible to make head against it. The roar of the crowd in the street came through the open window of the room in which he sat, that hideous roar which fills the streets of every country town at race-time, and which he knew so well, with its component parts of ribaldry, blasphemy, bestiality, and idiotcy. The day was bright and hot and clear—what did the noise outside and the bright day remind him of? Something unpleasant, he felt, but he could not exactly fix it in his memory. He rose,

and his eyes fell on the big, heavy, old-fashioned four-post bedstead on which he had been seated, and on the table with the glass and bottles standing by it. And then in an instant what had been dimly haunting his memory flashed all bright across his brain: Brighton, the crowd of racing-men on the cliff in the hot, bright weather, and the lodging, with Harvey Gore dying on the bed! Gilbert Lloyd swallowed the remainder of the brandy, and hurried downstairs into the street. Immediately opposite the inn-door, and surrounded by a little crowd, a preacher—as is often to be seen on such occasions—was holding forth. The crowd mocked and jeered, but the preacher, secure in the stentorian powers of his lungs, never stopped in his attacks on the wickedness going on around him; and the first words which Lloyd heard as he issued from the inn were, "Prepare to meet thy God!"

The gentlemen who had "operated" against Lord Ticehurst's horse in the betting-ring were, on the succeeding day, proved to be perfectly correct in their prognostications; that eminent

animal being as far behind the winner of the Leger as his stable-companion had been in the race for the Cup. This result did not affect Lord Ticehurst much, so far as his betting losses were concerned; he had so much money that it mattered little to him whether he won or lost; but he did not like losing the *prestige* which had attached to his stable ever since Lloyd had succeeded poor old Dobbs and taken the stud in hand. And he particularly disliked the half-pitying, half-chaffing way in which several men condoled with him about it.

"What's come to you, dear old Etchingham?" said Bobby Maitland, who had been unable to withstand the fascinations of the Doncaster Meeting, and had accordingly persuaded Mr. Stackborough to leave the yacht at anchor off Dover while they came north; "what's come to you, old man? The white jacket and cherry spots seem now always to be where the little boat was —all behind!"

"We have not been very lucky lately, have we?" replied his lordship, with an attempt at a

grin—he writhed under Bobby's compassionate familiarity; "but we did very well early in the year; and you can't have it always, don't you know."

"Ah yes, to be sure, you had some little things, I recollect," said Bobby Maitland more furtively than ever.

"Don't know what you call 'little things,' Maitland," said Lord Ticehurst, twitted out of his usual reticence; "the One Thousand, and the Ascot Cup, with two of the best things at Stockbridge. That seems pretty good to me; but I suppose it's nothing to you. You never even won a donkey-race that I heard of."

"O yes, he did," said Gilbert Lloyd, who had come up to them unseen, and overheard the last remark; "O yes; Bobby won a donkey-race once, and he was so proud of it, he always takes the animal about with him. He's somewhere in the neighbourhood now, I'll swear!"

There was a shout of laughter at this remark from all the men standing round, which was increased to a roar as Mr. Stackborough, dressed most elaborately, was seen approaching the group.

It was always said that Bobby Maitland had never been seen to lose his temper. At that instant he was within an ace of it; but he controlled himself with an effort, and said, "That's not bad, Lloyd; not at all bad, for you. When you order Lloyd's man's new livery, Etchingham, you must have a cap and bells added to it. 'Gad, you're like one of those great swells in the olden time, who used to keep a fool to amuse their friends!"

"Haw, haw! Maitland had him there!" shouted "Barrel" Moss, a fat, handsome Israelite, ex-gambling-house-keeper, now racehorse-proprietor and betting-man, admitted into the society of the highest patrons of the turf.

"What are you grinning at, Barrel?" retorted Gilbert. "You may thank your stars you did not live in the days of those 'great swells of the olden time.' Why, when Jews wouldn't pay, they used to pull their teeth out; and what would have become of you when you were posted in Teddington's year? Why you wouldn't have had a single grinder left!"

Once more the laugh was on Lloyd's side, and taking advantage of his triumph he pushed through the knot gathered round him, and, taking Lord Ticehurst by the arm, moved off towards the hotel. The colloquy between the two, as they walked along, was brief. His lordship was more than a little "out of sorts." His rejection by Miss Lambert yet rankled in his mind; his recent want of success on the turf upset and annoyed him. He was fidgety and fretful, and when Gilbert asked him what they should do, and where they should go to next, he confessed as much, and said that he did not care so long as he was "out of the whole d—d thing!" Such a state of mind rather coinciding with Gilbert Lloyd's own feelings at the time, that astute counsellor, instead of opposing his patron's unmistakable though oddly-expressed views, fell in with them at once; declared that everything from British Dan to British Beersheba was barren, and suggested that they should go abroad for a month or two, lie fallow, and pick up health. Lord Ticehurst fully agreed with the idea of going

abroad, but "would not have any of your touring;" he had had enough of Switzerland, thank you; and as for any of those dead-alive old cribs where fellows poked about among pictures and those kind of things, well, he would as soon cut his throat offhand! He did not mind going to Hombourg or Baden, or one of those places where there was something to be done, and plenty of people to be seen.

It was Gilbert's policy just at that time to keep his pupil in good-humour if possible, so that even if the notion of a visit to Baden had not happened to be agreeable to him, he would doubtless have suppressed his own feelings and assented with a good grace. But situated as he was, wanting a thorough change, and yet so ill at ease as to fear being left alone to his own resources in a dull place, the gaiety of a foreign watering-place was exactly what he would have chosen. So, two days after, the *Morning Post* recorded that "the Earl of Ticehurst and Mr. Gilbert Lloyd passed through town yesterday *en route* for Baden."

Men of middle age, who recollect Baden before the fatal facility of travel, or the invention of Mr. Cook and his excursionists, must look back with deep regret upon the pleasant days when comparatively few English people found their way along the newly-opened railway that crept along the bank of the Oos. The place was known, of course; but the difference between the visitors then and nowadays was as great as between the visitors to the gardens of Hampton Court on any ordinary fine day in early spring or on Easter Monday. The style of the company, despite the importing of many of the great British aristocracy who in former years never visited the place, but now find it much cheaper and more amusing than "entertaining" for partridge-shooting at home, has gradually been decaying; but since the establishment of the races it has received a large proportion of that very worst ingredient, the sporting-cad. When Lord Ticehurst and Lloyd arrived, the races were just about to take place, and there was a strong muster of the "professionals" of high and middle grade, the worst being kept

away by the difficulty of obtaining means of transport from England, which is a mercy of which the Germans are not sufficiently aware to be properly thankful for. The lowest order of sporting-man is the lowest order of anything. If anyone wishes to be impressed with the depth of degradation to which the human species can be successfully reduced, he has only to go into the Strand on a day when some great "event" is coming off, and observe the persons gathered round the office of the great sporting-newspaper about four in the afternoon. He will see a crowd of men of all ages—wizened old creatures, big burly roughs, shambling knock-kneed hobbledehoys, in battered hats, in greasy, close-fitting caps, most of them shirt-collarless, but with belcher handkerchiefs twisted round their thick throats; many of them have the long, flat thieves' curl on the side of the face; nearly all have the hair cut close round the nape of the neck: costermongers, butchers, the scum and refuse of the population; dirty, half-starved, in clothes whose looped and windowed raggedness would be dear at half-a-crown for the whole lot.

These be the gallant sporting-men, without the slightest knowledge of or care for sport, who, in order to enable them to bet their half-crowns on a race, empty tradesmen's tills, burst into our houses, and "put the hug" on us in the open street.

Of course this class was unrepresented in the great gathering at Baden; but there was a large influx of people who had never been seen there before. They filled the hotels and lodging-houses; they swaggered over the promenades; they lounged about the Kursaal, outraging the dignity of the officials by talking and laughing loudly; and they played at the tables, slapping their coins down with a ring, or motioning and calling to the grave croupiers "just to hook 'em that louy they'd left behind." They were a cause of great offence to Tommy Toshington, on whom Gilbert lighted on the morning after his arrival at the springs, where the old gentleman was holding a tumbler of very nasty water with a very shaky hand, and, in default of having anyone to talk to, was vainly endeavouring for the five-hundredth time to find

out the meaning of some very tremendous frescoes in front of him.

"I've been in the habit of comin' to this place for an immense number of years, and thought I could go on till I died. Devilish comfortable quarters I've got at the Roossy, and nice amusin' place I've always found it; but I must give it up, by George! I can't stand the set of racin'-fellows that come here now, 'pon my soul I can't! God knows who they are, my good fellow. You, who go about to all these what-do-you-call-'em meetings, you may know some of 'em; but I, who only toddle down to the Derby and Ascot on Sumphington's drag, and get over to Goodwood when the Dook's good enough to ask me—I've never set eyes on any of 'em before."

"Well, but how do they annoy you, Toshington?" asked Gilbert, who was rather amused at this outbreak on the old gentleman's part.

"They don't actually annoy me, except by bein' such a dam low-bred lot, yahooin' all over the place. And to think of 'em comin' just now, when we were so pleasant. It's rather late in

the season, to be sure; but there's a very nice set of people here. My Lady Carabas is here, but that *you* knew, of course; and the Dook and Duchess of Winchester, and the Dashwoods, and the Grevilles, and the Alsagers, and Tom Gregory and half the First. It's monstrous pleasant, you can't think!"

"It must be," said Gilbert quietly. "So new and fresh and charming. Such a change, too, for you all, not to see anybody you are accustomed to meet in London,—it must be delightful. Good-bye, Toshington; I'm going in for rusticity, and intend to have a turn before breakfast."

Although Mr. Toshington's sense of humour was very slight, and although he took most things *au pied de la lettre*, he detected some sarcasm in Gilbert's remarks, and looked after him from under scowling brows. "That's another of 'em," he muttered; "another of your horse-racin' customers, though he is in society, and all that. Damme if I know how they let 'em in; I don't, by George! They'd as soon have thought of lettin' a fiddler, or a painter, or a fellow of that

sort into society when I was a young man. But it's best to keep in with this one; he has the orderin' of everything at Etchingham's, and might leave me out of many a good thing if he chose to be disagreeable." So saying, the old worldling finished his second glass of Brunnenwasser, paid his kreutzers, audibly cursed the coinage of the country in a select mixture of the English and German languages prepared expressly by him for his own use, and departed.

Mr. Toshington was perfectly right in stating that the Marchioness of Carabas was enthroned in great state at Baden, but wrong in imagining that Gilbert Lloyd was aware of that fact. Truth to tell, there had been a slight misunderstanding, what is vulgarly but intelligibly called a "tiff," between her ladyship and Lloyd, and for a few weeks past he had not been enlightened as to her movements. The fact was, that when Lloyd had sufficiently used the *grande dame* as a means to various business ends, as a stepping-stone to certain objects which without her aid he would have been unable to reach, he began to find his

position rather a wearying one. It was pleasant to be the custodian and hierophant of the Soul while it served his purpose, but it was dreary work when that purpose was achieved, and his interest in the Soul's owner was consequently gone. He attended at the shrine as regularly as ever for reasons of policy, but his policy was not sufficiently strong to keep him from occasionally gaping and betraying other signs of weariness. Lady Carabas was too observant a woman not to mark this immediately on its first occurrence, but she thought it might be accidental, and determined to wait a repetition of it before speaking. The repetition very shortly afterwards took place, and even then her ladyship did not speak. After a little reflection she determined on adopting another plan. She resolved upon taking to herself someone else who should be admitted into the mysteries of the Soul. This, she thought, would capitally answer a double purpose; it would tend to her amusement—and she was beginning to feel the want of a little novelty, she confessed to herself—and would probably

have the effect of rendering Gilbert Lloyd jealous. A little time showed the result. In the turf-idiom which she had learned of Lloyd, and which she sometimes used in self-communion, she acknowledged that "while the first event had come off all right, the second had gone to grief;" which, being interpreted, meant that while she (Lady Carabas) was thoroughly amused, and indeed at the height of one of her Platonic flirtations with the new possessor of the Soul (a young man in the Foreign Office, with lovely hair parted in the middle, charming whiskers, and brilliant teeth), he (Gilbert Lloyd) had not shown the smallest symptom of jealousy. On the contrary, Gilbert Lloyd was unfeignedly glad to find that his place had been satisfactorily filled up, and that he would no longer be constantly required to be on escort-duty. And when Lady Carabas found that this was the case—and she discovered it very quickly, being a woman of great worldly penetration and tact—she made up her mind that the best thing for her to do was to accept the position at once, and give Lloyd his liberty.

This accordingly she did; and when they met at Baden,

> "They seemed to those who saw them meet,
> Mere casual friends of every day;"

as Lord Houghton says in a very charming little poem, though there was an echo of bygone tenderness, of the voice of the Soul, in fact, pervading her ladyship's tones for many a day after. Meantime she was the queen of a very pleasant little coterie. Half the frequenters of Carabas House did a little passing homage at her ladyship's temporary court at Baden on their way to and from the other watering-places. The promenade contained types of all the people usually seen seated on the Hyde-Park chairs, with a large sprinkling of others never seen in that aristocratic locality. For though H.R.H. the Duke of Brentford, the captains and commanders and mighty men of valour, the senators, the clerks in the government offices, and the nothing-doers have plenty of time to lounge about in London, the working-bees—the judges and barristers, the doctors, the civil-engineers, the cunning workers

in ink and pigment, all of whom grind their brains to make their bread—have no such opportunity when in town, and are only seen idling in daylight during their brief autumn holiday. "Society"—except that Carabas-House set, which knew them very well—stared very much at most of these people, and called Jack Hawkes of the F. O. to its aid to explain who they were; and Jack Hawkes, who was only too delighted to act as cicerone to society when it had a handle to its name, explained, "Tall man with the round high shoulders and the long gray hair is great lady's doctor, don't you know? uses up three pair of horses a-day whippin' about town; that's his wife and daughter with him—think her pretty, the daughter? nice-lookin' they call her. The man with the red face, not him in the white hat—that's Kollum the portrait-painter; that one in the wideawake is Sir Blewson Bagge, one of the judges—say he knows more law than any other three men in England. The fat man with the cigar is Protheroe, and the man talkin' to him dressed all in black is Tuber-

ville; they're great engineers—one laid out the John o' Groat's and Land's End Extension Line, and the other designed the Channel-Islands Submarine Railway. Wonderful how they stick together, those railway fellows; if one knows a good thing he tells the other of it, and they hunt in couples to keep other fellows off the game. Tuberville's son has married Protheroe's daughter; and the money that's there passes all count. There are two writin' chaps comin' this way; they belong to the *Kreese*, that blackguard paper that attacks everybody, don't you know? Don't look bad fellows, do they? and they're always laughin' and keepin' it up at the Badischer. Who's the little round fat fellow they've stopped and are talkin' to?—that's Bellows of the Old-Bailey Bar; first-rate in his business, and such good company; and the man with him of course you know? No! Why that's Finchington, the light comedian of the Minerva. Yes, he does look different in the daylight, as you say. These? No, these are people who have come over for the races, and I don't know anything about them.

We must get Lloyd to give us that information. —Here, Lloyd, come and tell her grace who are these odd people who are coming this way; they're turf-people, I suppose, so you'll know all about them."

But Gilbert Lloyd, objecting very much to be patronised either by Mr. Hawkes or the great people to whom that social barnacle had temporarily attached himself, declared his inability to perform the duties assigned to him, and took himself off with a bow. It was the night before the first race-day, and all the Baden world was enjoying itself on the promenade in front of the Kursaal. There had been a grand excursion-party that day to the Favourite, a party of which Lady Carabas had been the reigning star, and after a delightful outing they had returned, and were now formed into a large group, laughing and talking loudly. Gilbert Lloyd carefully avoided these people, and steered equally clear of another group in the midst of which the Duchess of Winchester was enthroned. These two great ladies had never much liked each other,

and when they met at Baden their antagonism was patent, and their rivalry openly declared. Each had her circle of admirers, and whatever one did the other tried to outdo. The Winchester faction having heard that the Carabas people were going that day to the Favourite, had themselves had a pic-nic at Eberstein Schloss, and both were now planning their next day's diversion at the races.

Gilbert Lloyd was in no humour to join either of these parties at that moment, though each would have been glad to have secured him as an adherent. He was in a bad temper, having just had some sharp words with Lord Ticehurst on a question on which that young nobleman a few weeks since would not have dared to offer an opinion. Just before they left town for Doncaster, Lloyd had dismissed a groom; the man appealed to Lord Ticehurst in a letter. This letter Lloyd opened, read, and contemptuously threw into the fire. The man heard of this, and made a fresh appeal to his lordship, setting forth the treatment his former letter had received, and defying Lloyd to

deny it. This letter was forwarded to Lord Ticehurst at Baden, and made him exceedingly angry. He went at once to Lloyd, and spoke very plainly, said that he would not be treated like a child, that all letters addressed to him—no matter on what subject—should be brought to him, and even hinted that on their return to England Lloyd's position and responsibility must be more exactly defined.

"It was that infernal Maitland's hint that he can't swallow," said Lloyd, as he seated himself at an empty table on the verge of the crowd and ordered some brandy. "He referred to it just now when he said he wouldn't be treated like a child. O, my dear Bobby, if ever I have the chance to come down heavily on you, just see how I'll do it! I never saw Etchingham in such a rage, and he's never spoken to me like that since we've been together.—Here!" to the waiter who brought the brandy, "*encore;* another of these *carafons.* What's the good of a drop like that to a man!—He's never been the same since that night he dined with those fellows, after he had

been over to that place to—Lord! I forgot—to propose to *her!* Of course *she* must be mixed up in everything that's unlucky for me! How I wish I'd never set eyes on her! how I wish—What the devil does this fellow want!"

"This fellow" was a short, square-built man of about fifty years of age, with sunken eyes, a sharp-pointed nose, and a close-cut beard, the original red colour of which was fast fading into gray. His seedy clothes were of a foreign and fantastic cut, and round his neck he wore a long, dirty-white cravat, folded quite flat, and wonderfully neatly tied, and fastened in front with a flashy mock pin. "This fellow" had been hanging round the table for some time, dodging in and out so as to get a better view of its occupant in the dim light. At length, when Gilbert Lloyd raised his head and looked up at the strange figure, "this fellow" seemed to be satisfied, and shambling up to the table, placed his hands upon it, leaned over, and said in a thick, husky voice,

"Gilbert Lloyd!"

Lloyd looked at him steadily, and then said, "That's my name; who are you?"

"I thought you would not know me," said the stranger with a laugh, "none of my old pals do; at least, most don't, and some won't, so it don't make much—"

"Stay," interrupted Lloyd; "I know you now; knew you directly you threw your head back and I saw your cravat. There's only one man in the world can tie a neckerchief like that, or get its folds to lie as flat. You're Foxey Walker."

"I am that same," said the stranger; "at least, I was when I was alive, for I'm nothing but a blessed old ghost now, I verily believe.—Here, you fellow, bring some brandy; Cognac, you know! —I ain't of much 'count now, Lloyd, and that's a fact." He was shabby and bloated and shaky, altogether very different from the tight, trim little Foxey who was found leaning over the rails on Brighton Esplanade at the commencement of this story.

"Ah, I remember," said Lloyd; "you came

to grief the Derby before last, in the Prior's year?"

"I did so. Went a regular mucker. That was a bad business, sir; a regular bad business. I could show you my book now. There were men that I dropped my money to over that Epsom Meetin' that had owed me hundreds—ay, hundreds on other events. I'd always given them time, much as they wanted, I had; but when I asked 'em for it then—for I had a rattlin' good book for Ascot, and some good things later on in the season—O no, not a bit of it! 'Pay up,' they says, 'pay up!' All devilish fine; I couldn't pay up—so I bolted."

"Ah, recollect perfectly your being proclaimed a defaulter," said Lloyd pleasantly. "It made rather a talk at the time, you were so well known. What have you been doing since?"

"Well, I've been cadgin' about on the Continent, doin' what I could to keep body and soul together.—You're goin' to pay for this brandy, you know? I suppose you don't mind standin' another go? all right.—But there's little enough

to be done. I ain't much good at cards; and, besides, there's nothing to be done with them unless you get among the swells in the clubs and that, and that's not likely; and there's not much to be picked up off the foreigners at billiards, let alone their not playing our game. I've won a little on the red and black here and there, and I've come across an old friend now and again who's helped me with a fiver or so."

"You don't speak in riddles, Foxey," said Lloyd with a half-laugh. "You make your meaning tolerably clear. I must not be worse than the others, I suppose; so here, catch hold;" and he took a couple of bank-notes from his pocket-book and handed them to his companion.

"Thank'ee, Lloyd," said Foxey, pocketing the money. "I ain't proud, and hadn't need to be. Besides, you've become a tremendous swell since you got hold of young Ticehurst, eh? I see your name regular in *Bell* amongst the nobs. Rather different from what we reck'lect in the old days: 'Ten to one, bar one!'—don't you remember?" and Foxey put his hand to the side of his mouth

and shouted loudly in imitation of the worthies of the outer ring.

"Ye-es," said Lloyd, who did not at all relish being told that he had "got hold of" anybody, and who was much disgusted by Foxey's recollections and performance. "Yes," said he, rising from his chair as he spoke; "I think I must go now."

"Must you?" said Foxey, who had become very much flushed and invigorated by the brandy; "must you? That's a bore, that is, for I had somethin' very particular to say to you; somethin' that concerns you much more than it does me; somethin'," added Foxey, looking hazily at his companion, "that would be d—d awkward for you if it got blown. Don't you fear for me! I'm as close as wax, I am; only—however, I'll see you about it to-morrow or next day. Good-night, old fellow; compliments to my lord."

"Something that concerns me more than it does him? That would be awkward for me if it got blown? What the devil does he mean?" said Lloyd to himself, as he walked down the *allée*. "Awkward for me?—the old brute was drunk, and

did not know what he said. Probably a plant to get more money out of me. He *could* know nothing that would have the slightest bearing on me or my affairs. I daresay he'll try it on again when I see him next; but he'll find it difficult to draw me of any more money, more especially if he attempts to bounce me out of it."

The next day was bright and cheerful, and the little racecourse, though much sneered at by the "talent," served its purpose very well, and was thronged with a merry, animated crowd. The natives, to be sure, did not understand very much what it was all about. The women cried, "Ach, Herr, Je!" at the sight of the tight little English jocks stripping off their outer coats and appearing in all the glory of flashing silk; and the men took their pipes from their mouths and swore "Donnerwetter!" as the horses went thundering by. The Winchester and Carabas faction had each one side of the little stand, the leaders exchanged sweet hand-kissings, the followers bowed and grinned and nodded with all the warmth and sincerity which form the basis of our social relations. Lady

Carabas, as usual, wore pink; the Duchess of Winchester, who was very fair and *petite*, wore blue; and the retainers followed suit. Mr. Toshington was as much divided in his allegiance and as much perplexed to know which colour to sport as a London cabman on the morning of the University boat-race. He had enjoyed the hospitality of both houses, and indeed had earned many a good dinner by carrying tattle from one to the other; but up to this time he had never been called upon to make his election, to say "under which queen;" and those who were in the secret, in which category was included everyone present, were greatly amused to see the difficulty which the old gentleman had in trimming his sails and steering his course in safety. There were some who, unlike Tommy Toshington, were independent, who sided with neither party, but were friendly and familiar with both. Among those were Lord Ticehurst—who, though bound by family ties to Lady Carabas, never allowed his clanship to "mix him up in any of her ladyship's rum starts," as he phrased it—and Gilbert Lloyd,

whose worn and haggard appearance was the cause of much solicitude and anxious inquiry from Lady Carabas. Lloyd appeared rather annoyed at the *prononcé* manner which her ladyship adopted towards him, and at which some of the most daring followers smiled, more especially when the reigning favourite, the gentleman in the Foreign Office, looked very much displeased. He seemed very much happier when at a later period in the day he found himself seated by the Duchess of Winchester, who rallied him with much piquancy on his defection.

"I am astonished at you, Mr. Lloyd, quite astonished," she said laughingly. "Do you know we used to call you the Undying One!"

"Well, you could not call Toshington that, could you, Duchess?" said Gilbert; "look how very purple his whiskers are in the sunlight."

"No, no, of course I don't mean that; how can you be so absurd? You know our dear friend opposite is like somebody in old time I read of once, who used to kill her admirers regu-

larly at the end of a certain time. It's a notorious fact that—over there—no flirtation lasts longer than twelve months, and we call you the Undying One because you have held undisputed sway over that Soul for — O, it must be years! And now, after all this, you have the baseness to shut your ears to the voice of the charmer—we saw the spell tried on an hour ago—and to come over here!"

"I don't think there's much harm done, Duchess, even if all were as you say, which I am very far from admitting. Calypso is the only instance on record of a woman who '*ne pouvait se consoler après le départ*' of anyone she liked. I am certain that no lady of modern days would be so weak."

"Ah, I know what you mean; you mean Mr. Pennington. Well, he's very good-looking, certainly, in his own red-and-white way, but he's insufferably stupid; and a stupid man, however handsome he may be, always bores me to death. I— Who is this dreadful man down here? Is it to you or to me he's making those horrible grimaces?"

Lloyd looked over in the direction in which the Duchess pointed, and to his horror saw Mr. Foxey Walker, who apparently had had a great deal too much to drink, whose fantastic clothes looked infinitely shabbier and seedier in the daylight than they had on the previous evening, and who was throwing up his arms, endeavouring to attract the attention of someone in the stand. Foxey no sooner saw that Gilbert Lloyd had recognised him than he approached the stand, and called out, "Hi, Lloyd! hollo there, Lloyd! Just come and pass me up there, will you? I want to speak to you."

"It's to you he's calling, Mr. Lloyd!" said the Duchess, arching her pretty eyebrows and making a little *moue* of astonishment.

"What a strange-looking creature! who in the world is he?"

"He's a poor half-witted fellow, an old friend of mine, Duchess," said Lloyd with the utmost calmness. "He is a man of family, and once had a large fortune; but he lost every sixpence on the turf, and that quite turned his brain.

He's eccentric, as you see, but perfectly harmless; a few of us make him a little allowance, on which he lives, and he thinks this gives him a claim upon us, poor fellow! I—Yes, yes; I'm coming!" he called to Mr. Foxey, for that gentleman had recommenced bellowing, "Hi, Lloyd!" with redoubled vehemence; "I'm coming!—I think I had better go down and calm him, Duchess, if you will excuse me." And with a bow Gilbert Lloyd leisurely retreated from the stand.

He smiled so pleasantly—he knew he was still under observation—at Mr. Foxey, who was waiting for him in front, that that worthy, who had been somewhat doubtful of the wisdom of the course he had pursued, felt perfectly reassured and said, "Hallo, Gil., my boy! sorry to call you away from such stunnin' company; but I want a word with you." It was not until they had walked a few paces and were well out of sight of the people in the stand that Lloyd caught his companion tightly by the arm, and said, "You infernal drunken old idiot, how dare

you come and annoy me when you saw me with my friends?"

"Come, I say, drop that," said Foxey, "you're pullin' my arm off; don't you hear?"

"You scoundrel, I'll have your head off if you don't take care! What fool's game is up now? What do you want with me? Have you anything really to say, or is it only to repeat the rubbish of last night?"

"What rubbish? what did I say last night? I didn't—no, of course I didn't; I recollect now. I know what I'm doin' fast enough, and what I can do."

"And I know what I can do, and what I will do too, if you interrupt me again when I'm talking with friends, and that is, have you moved off the course by the gend'armes as a drunken nuisance."

"O, that's it, is it?" said Foxey, glowering at him, and speaking in a dull thick voice. "Moved off the course! a drunken nuisance, eh? You'll sing a very different toon to this, Master Lloyd, before I've done with you. O, you can't come the high jeff over me," he continued, raising his tone;

"for all your standin' in with big swells now; we know what you were once; we know—"

"Will you be quiet, you old fool, and say what you want?" said Gilbert, turning fiercely upon him.

"What I want? Ah, that's more like it! What I want? Well, that's easily told, and that's more than most people can say. What I want is money."

"I gave you money last night—more than you can have spent, or ought to have spent."

"Ah, that's more like it: what I *can* spend—Well, no matter. However, that's not the way I mean in which I want money. Look here, Gilbert Lloyd; I'm tired of this cadging life; I'm sick of hikin' up and down from one gamblin'-place to another; I'm disgusted with the Continent, and the foreigners, all the lot of 'em."

"O, you are, eh?" said Lloyd with a sneer; "I should scarcely have thought it."

"Yes," replied Foxey, in perfect good faith, "I am thoroughly. What I long for is to get back to England, to see my old pals, to lead my old life."

"Indeed," sneered Gilbert again; "but from what I understand from you there would be some difficulty in carrying out that pleasant little arrangement."

"None that you couldn't help me to settle at once. They all think their money's clean gone; but if I'm to come on the turf again, it would never do for me to come out as a welsher, so I must pay 'em something; but ever so little would square it. Then, if I just had a little trifle in hand to start with, and you gave me the office when you knew of a good thing—and you must hear lots, havin' the management of that young swell's stable—well, I should do as right as ninepence."

There was a minute's pause, and then Lloyd said:

"You are a great creature, Mr. Walker, a very great creature, and your power of sketching out a happy future is something wonderful. But to my great astonishment I find that I play a part in this notable scheme of your life, and that its being carried out successfully wholly depends upon me. Now, we may as well understand each other

clearly, and at once. From me you'll never get another sixpence."

Foxey started, looked hard at his companion, and said, "You mean that?"

"No," said Lloyd, "I don't mean it literally; I'll give you another ten pounds on the day I leave this place."

It was Foxey's turn to sneer now. "That's generous of you," he said, "regular generous; but you always were a free-handed fellow with your money, Lloyd. I reck'lect we used to say in the old days how pleased you always were to have to part. Now look here," he cried, changing his tone; "I will have all I've asked from you: the money to square it with those fellows, the sum to start fresh with the straight tips from young Ticehurst's stable; I'll have this, or else—"

"Or what else?" asked Gilbert Lloyd, without any alteration in his usual calm manner.

"Or else I'll ruin you, root and branch; horse and foot; stock, lock, and barrel! You laugh and sneer; you think I can't do it? I tell you I can."

"You tell me a pack of lies and blather. You begun last night, and you've done nothing else for the last half-hour. How can you do it?"

"By blowing the gaff on you; by telling something I know which would make all these swells cut you and hunt you out of society; which would—"

"There, there's enough of this!" cried Lloyd, interrupting him; "my time's too valuable to waste over such trash. It's the old game of hush-money for a secret, after all. I should have thought you would have known some better dodge than that, Master Foxey, after all the life you've seen. If you were going in for the extortion-of-money business in your old age, you might have learned something fresher than that very stale device. Now, be off, and give me a wider berth for the future, if you're wise. Your drunken stupidity—for I suppose you would not have acted thus if you had not taken to drink—has lost you ten pounds. Take care it does not get you a horsewhipping." As he said these words he turned shortly on his heel and strode away.

Foxey looked after him, his face lit up with rage and disappointment. "All right, my fine fellow," he muttered, shaking his fist at the fast-receding figure; "all right; you will have it, and you shall. It will be quite enough to cook your goose as it is; but if I'd only had time to learn a little more, I think I could have hanged you."

There was a little extra excitement in the rooms that night. Count Nicolaeff, a Russian nobleman who had on two previous occasions broken the bank, had returned to Baden, and was playing with a boldness and success which augured the repetition of the feat. A crowd was gathered round him as he sat, calm and composed, quietly gathering the *rouleaux* which the croupiers pushed across to him. In this crowd was Lloyd; the qualities which the Russian was displaying were just those to excite his admiration, and he was watching every movement and trying to account for each calculation of the gambler, when he felt a tap on his shoulder. He looked round

and saw Dolly Clarke, the sporting-lawyer, who beckoned him away.

Gilbert was annoyed at the interruption. "Not just now," he said impatiently; "I'll come to you later."

"Come this instant," said Dolly Clarke; and there was something in his tone that made Gilbert Lloyd leave the table and follow him into the open space outside. By the lamp-light Lloyd saw that Clarke was very pale; noticed also that he stood back as if avoiding contact with him.

"What is it?" asked Lloyd. "It should be something special by your tone and manner, Clarke?"

"It is something special," replied Clarke; "it is a matter of life or death for you. Do you know a man called Foxey Walker?"

"Pshaw! is that all?" said Lloyd, whose heart had failed him at the solemnity of his companion's manner, and whose courage now as suddenly revived. "Is that all? Yes, I know him; a defaulting ring-man, a mere common 'welsher.' I saw him on the course to-day, and he threatened

me that if I did not give him money he would expose something in my past life—some trick or dodge I practised, I suppose, when I was in the ring, and had to be a sharp practitioner to hold my own with my fellows. That's all, eh?"

"No," said Clarke earnestly, "nothing of the sort; the man has made a revelation, but not of the kind you imagine—a thousand times more serious. There's never been much love lost between you and me, Lloyd, and you may wonder why I'm here to counsel and help you; so understand at once, it's for Ticehurst's sake; you're so mixed up with him that any public *exposé* would be the deuce and all for him."

"What do you mean by public *exposé*, Mr. Clarke? what do you—"

"Stop; don't bounce—it won't do. Do you remember when we dined at Richmond six weeks ago, you answered me very sharply because I asked why you never went to Brighton now? I've always had my own opinion on that matter; but I don't chatter, and I kept it to myself. This man Walker stopped Ticehurst and me

as we were coming from the course, and begged so earnestly for an interview that Ticehurst listened to him. I need not go into all he said; it appears he had his suspicions too, and determined to trade on them; went the next year to your old lodgings, pumped the landlady; saw the doctor who attended Harvey Gore; has been working it since he left England through friends; and has made up a case which, if not positive, is at all events infernally suspicious."

"What—what did Etchingham say about it?" asked Lloyd.

"I never saw a fellow so completely knocked over in all my life. You know he is not strong-minded, and he—well, he funks death, and that kind of thing, and—"

"Does he believe it? what does he say about me?"

"He does believe it fully, and he says he will never set eyes on you again. I see—your eyes are blazing—you see there's nothing proved, and your place is too good a one to give up on mere suspicion? You'll say you'll have the

matter sifted, and all that. Don't; take my advice —given as a lawyer who sees queer things in his practice—drop it, clear out of this at once, get over to England, make up Ticehurst's accounts, and then get away to Australia, America—anywhere!"

"Thank you; and leave my 'place,' as you call it, to you, eh?" It was the last remaining touch of bravado in his voice, bravado belied by the ashy paleness of his face, and the set rigidity of his mouth.

"To me! I'm a lawyer, not a turfite. Pshaw! don't try to humbug any longer—you're too clever a man. You can post over to Carlsruhe to-night, and get straight through to-morrow. I'll come with you to the hotel; I promised Ticehurst I'd see you off. Come."

Gilbert Lloyd saw that there was no use in fighting the question any longer. He felt as though his career was at its close, as though he should drop as rapidly as he had risen. He turned on his heel and walked towards the hotel, Dolly Clarke walking by his side. It was

all over, then? The position he had gained for himself amid the envy and hatred of all his compeers was shattered at its base, and—

No! Before he reached the hotel-door, he had carefully searched his hand, and found in it one last trump-card, which he determined on playing directly he arrived in England.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST CHANCE.

Mr. Lloyd gone! They could scarcely believe it at Baden. Lady Carabas was in despair, and the Duchess of Winchester was vexed, for she was fond of flirtation, and she had found Mr. Lloyd "very nice." The led captains and the other male retainers of both factions looked on Gilbert as a dangerous rival, and were rather glad than otherwise that he was out of the way. Gone to England, eh? Yes. Summoned by a telegram on most important business, so Dolly Clarke said; he happened to be with him at the time the telegram arrived, and so of course knew all about it. On Lord Ticehurst's business, of course? Well, Dolly Clarke supposed so; in fact, he might go so far as to say "yes," and rather unpleasant business too. Lord Ticehurst was rather annoyed

about it, and so perhaps you would be so good as not to mention it to him? Needless to say there were some people who did not believe this statement, even when vouched for on such excellent authority as Mr. Dolly Clarke's. There are some people who will not believe anything. Mr. Toshington is one of them. He thinks it a "deuced odd story," and sets about to investigate it. He sees the landlord, porter, waiters, *hausknecht* of the hotel, every individual separately, and puts them through the strictest investigation in the most extraordinary *mélange* of languages; finally, he goes to the telegraph-office and ascertains triumphantly that for the Herr Lloyd, Englander, no telegraphic despatch received was. Tommy opines that Gilbert's absence has reference to some infernal chicanery connected with the turf, and sets that down as the reason why Ticehurst is so shy about speaking about it. Queer business for peers of the rel-lum to be mixin' up in such matters, Tommy thinks, and anythin' but a good sign in these infernal levellin' times. Lady Carabas is really very sorry. She had a sort of idea that Gilbert

was "coming round;" but his having gone away in this sudden manner, and gone away without a hint of his going, or word of adieu to her, was a death-blow to that hope. And Mr. Pennington, the gentlemanly creature in the F. O., though charming to look at and pleasant so far as his conversation lasted, was soon exhausted, and was not to be compared with Gilbert Lloyd as a bright and amusing companion. "He might have thought of me before he went away," Lady Carabas thought to herself. She had no idea that Gilbert Lloyd had thought about her, and with considerable earnestness too, as he was walking away from the Kursaal in company with Mr. Dolly Clarke, immediately previous to his quitting Baden. He had carefully weighed in his mind whether there was any use in getting her to appeal to Lord Ticehurst in his behalf, founding his appeal on a tremendous story of his innocence and of his being the victim of circumstances, which story he could arrange during the night. But he finally rejected the notion; there was something decisive and pitiless about Mr.

Clarke's manner, which told Lloyd it would be useless for him to indulge himself with any hopeful view of the case. As he travelled through the night, and turned all the events of the past days, of the past years, over and over in his mind, during his weary journey, he felt convinced that he had acted wisely in this matter. Only one thing annoyed him; if the worst came to the worst, and he was obliged, as Clarke had hinted, to go away to Australia or America, he should want all the money he could lay his hands on, and he might have "bled" her ladyship for a good round sum. He had letters of hers in his possession, written in all innocence it is true, but quite sufficiently compromising if read from the legal point of view, which ought to have effected that.

When Lloyd arrived in London, he did not go to Lord Ticehurst's house in Hill-street, where were all his goods and chattels; he would go there later, he thought, and see what could be done after a careful examination of the books and papers. He drove to a house in Duke-street, St. James's, where he had lodged years before; and the

landlady of which, looking scarcely a day older, came out to the door, told him his old rooms were vacant, and welcomed him heartily. Gilbert Lloyd always was popular with his inferiors; it was part of his policy in life to be so, and he took every opportunity of saying polite things to them, and doing them cheap civilities. Even now, as he jumped out of the cab, he told Mrs. Jobson how well she was looking, and how he felt quite pleased at the notion of coming back to the old rooms; and then he bade her take his luggage in, and ran upstairs.

The old rooms! He looked round them, and found them scarcely changed. The furniture was a little shabbier, perhaps, and looking through the window the opposite side of the street seemed, if possible, a little closer than before. The same slippery chintz on the sofa, the same regulation number of chairs, the same portrait of the Princess Charlotte, at which Gertrude had screamed with laughter, and called it a "hideous old thing," the first day he brought her there. Gertrude? Yes; that was their first lodging after their mar-

riage. He brought her there, and at that instant he seemed to see her as she was when she first entered the little room; how she looked round in surprise, and then ran to the window and knelt and looked up for the sky. The chain of his reflection was broken by the entrance of Mrs. Jobson, who expressed her delight at seeing him again.

"But, do you know, I did not reckernise you at first, Mr. Lloyd—I did not, indeed. Seeing you alone, I suppose it was. I hope you're not alone in the world, Mr. Lloyd?—that you've not lost that dear sweet lamb?"

"O no, Mrs. Jobson, thank you; Mrs. Lloyd is alive and very well."

"That's good hearing, I'm sure; and grown into a fine woman, I've no doubt. Those slight slips of girls with plenty of bone, when they fill out, improve wonderful;" and then Mrs. Jobson changed the subject, and launched into questions of domestic economy into which it is not necessary to follow her.

And the next day Gilbert Lloyd prepared to

play the last trump-card which he found in his hand when he so carefully examined it on the night he left Baden. He had given deep consideration to his plan since, had gone through every detail, had turned and twisted the intended mode of working his scheme, and had definitely resolved upon the manner in which he would carry it out.

And this was his resolution—to claim his wife. He had calculated exactly all the risk that was contained in that one sentence, and he had determined to brave it, or at all events to pretend to be prepared to brave it. From those few words which Gertrude had whispered to him, when in his rashness he had braved her at Mrs. Stapleton Burge's party, he knew that she was mistress of the secret of Harvey Gore's death. But the question then arose, would she dare to avail herself of the knowledge she possessed? Yes, he thought she would, sooner than be forced to return to him. Except during the first few months of girlish idolatry, she had never cared for him, and now she had many reasons for positively hating him. The

manner in which he had treated her would have been quite enough to a girl of her spirit, without the suspicion of his crime, the position which she had subsequently gained for herself in the world, and—her love for another man. Even in the strait in which he found himself, that last thought was sufficient to tempt him to run almost any risk to prevent her being anything to any other man, but to that man above all others in the world.

Another question then arose: how much did she know about what had transpired in those accursed Brighton lodgings? Foxey Walker, with all his knowingness, with all the means which he had employed, with all the tremendous inducement he had to endeavour to find out everything, to drag its deepest depths, and expose all he could rake therefrom in the light of day, had only been able to patch up a case of suspicion. So Dolly Clarke had said. To be sure he, Gilbert Lloyd, had taken fright at the bogey thus raised, and had run away; but he was taken aback, the charge was brought forward so suddenly, and it was impossible to face the *charivari* which would have risen round

him, or to silence the accusation offhand on the spur of the moment. Impossible, and not particularly worth his while. He had always thought that the connection between him and Lord Ticehurst must be brought to an end some day, and had often imagined, more especially during the last few weeks, that it would terminate in a row. Well, that could not be helped. He had had wonderfully good pickings for a very long time; and though he had lost all that he had put by in his recent unfortunate speculations, the mine was not yet exhausted, the milch-cow was not yet dry. In the message which Clarke had conveyed to him from Lord Ticehurst, he was directed to go to Hill-street, and make up the books and balance the accounts between them; and it was odd if he could not show a considerable balance due in his favour; ay, and claim it too, so long as a portion of his lordship's banking-account was responsive to cheques bearing Gilbert Lloyd's signature. The question remained then, how much did Gertrude know? He could not guess from the few words she had whispered to him that night, for on

that occasion also he had taken fright, and rushed off without probing the matter. But if Foxey Walker could bring forward nothing positive, nothing actually damnatory, the odds were very strongly against Gertrude's being able to do so. And it was a great stake he was going in for now. She could always earn a huge income by her voice; but this was not all. This old Lord Sandilands, who had almost adopted Gertrude as his daughter—so, at least, Lady Carabas had told him, and she ought to know—had the reputation of being immensely rich. He lived so quietly and unostentatiously, that the world insisted he had been putting by two-thirds of his income for years; and he had no relatives to whom to bequeath it. It would therefore probably all be Gertrude's, or of course, his identity once established, Gertrude's husband's. Now, what course would they adopt? Would they accept him; let him live with her during the old man's lifetime, and inherit with her at the old man's death? Even if all the capital were tied down, the interest would afford a splendid income. Or would they

offer to buy him off with a sum down and a yearly income? Either would do, though the first would be best, for—yes, by Jove! much best, for the second would leave Gertrude open to the attentions of his brother Miles. However, he was in a strait, and could not afford to be particular, unless they fought him, and then—well, he would risk that, and play his last trump-card.

So Gilbert Lloyd, on the morning after his arrival in London from Baden, sat down and wrote a long and elaborate letter to his wife. He told her that from the first he had never ceased to grieve over that unfortunate step which they had taken under the influence of temper and youthful folly. He did not repine; indeed, he had no doubt that the separation had had a properly chastening effect—had given them time and opportunity to see the mistake of indulging in headstrong passion, and had probably rendered them both—he certainly could speak for himself—worthier members of society; but the time, he thought, had arrived when it would be not merely advisable, but proper, to place themselves right with

each other and before the world. There existed between them a tie which was far more solemnly obligatory on them than any human-made law,—although he need scarcely point out to his wife that their marriage had never been legally dissolved,—and while both the spiritual and moral contracts were in force it was impossible to shirk their influence. He owned that he had been profoundly touched, on the several occasions on which he had met her recently in society, by the fact that he, her legitimate protector, who should have been at her side, whose proper position was at her right hand, should have had to stand aloof and look on, while others pressed round her, owing to the foolish step they had taken. She would agree with him, he felt sure, that this was a false position, and one which should be at once set right; and the only way in which that could be done would be by their at once coming together and assuming their proper relations before the world. He, on his part, would not object, if it was thought necessary or advisable, for an entirely fresh marriage between them; that detail

could be arranged afterwards. He was writing this in his old lodgings in Duke-street, which she would recollect, to which he had first taken her after their marriage. She was a *grande dame* now, but he did not think he wronged her, or flattered himself, in stating his belief that she had never known more real happiness than when inhabiting those little rooms. Might the omen prove propitious!—Ever hers, G. L.

"And for a sort of thing that's not the least in my line I don't think that's bad," said Gilbert Lloyd, as he read it over. "It seems to me to combine the practical with the romantic, a very difficult thing to hit off, and one likely to please both phases of Gertrude's character." Then he sealed it, and addressed it to Miss Lambert, to Sir Giles Belwether's care, despatched it, and waited the result.

There must be a clear day at least before he could receive a reply, and that day he found it very difficult to get through. He could not go to Hill-street, though there was plenty of work awaiting him there, because on the tone of Ger-

trude's reply to his letter would greatly depend the tone of his conduct towards Lord Ticehurst. If his wife, no matter from whatever motives of policy, thought it better to yield to his views, he would then be in a position to resent his sudden dismissal, and to speak his plain and unadorned sentiments to his lordship in equally plain and unadorned language. If, on the contrary, Gertrude temporised or refused point-blank, and he saw there was no chance of carrying out his wishes, then all he had left him was to go to Hill-street to see the very best arrangement he could make for himself, by which he meant to ascertain the largest amount he could draw on the fund for which his signature was good at Lord Ticehurst's banker's—other available funds he had none—and making the best of his way to Australia or America under a feigned name, begin life again *de novo*. So he mooned about during the dreary day—it was dreary enough; none of his friends were in London, and the aspect of the town was deserted and wretched in the extreme—and was not sorry when it was

time to go home and to bed. The next morning before he was yet up Mrs. Jobson knocked at his door, and pushed in a letter which had just arrived by the post. Lloyd sprang up, and seized it at once. It was a large folded letter, addressed not in Gertrude's hand, but in writing which had once been bold and was still large, but a little shaky and tremulous, and was sealed with a coronet and a cipher. Gilbert broke it open hurriedly, and read as follows:

"*Hastings, Sept.* 26, 186—.

"GEOFFREY CHALLONER,—*for it would be absurd in me to address you by any other name,—the lady who has the inexpressible misfortune of being your wife has placed in my hands the letter which you have addressed to her, and has begged me to reply to it. The reply to such a letter could not be confided to fitter hands than those of the lady's father, in which position I stand. The young lady whose professional name is Miss Grace Lambert is my natural daughter; the fact has been duly acknowledged by me, and the first act after the avowal is*

to champion my daughter's cause against a villain. For you are a villain, Geoffrey Challoner; though God knows it is with the deepest pain that I write such words of any man bearing your paternal name; for in applying this term to you I am not actuated by a remembrance of the wrongs you have done to Gertrude, I am not even thinking of the fearful crime which you committed, and which was revealed to her by your victim with his dying breath on the occasion of your final separation. I am looking back across a gulf of years to the time when the dearest friend I had in the world was your father. Now, Geoffrey Challoner, do you begin to understand? To me your father confided the narrative of the events which ended with your banishment from home, and your erasure from the family annals for ever. That narrative I have by me now. Your career has been hitherto so successful, you have gone so long unpunished, that you will be sceptical on this point, but I will prove it to you. That narrative, written in your father's own hand, sets forth your boyish disobedience, your tendency to dissipation, the impossibility to make you think or act rightly; and

finally, your awful crime. When you have read thus far you will still cling to the hope that the knowledge of the nature of that crime may have passed into the grave with him whose heart it broke, who never held up his head after its discovery. If any such hope arises in you, it is my duty to stamp it out. Geoffrey Challoner, in my possession, complete in every detail from its commencement to its frustration, is the story of your attempted fratricide. There can be read, couched in your father's homely, serious, truth-begetting phrases, the record of how you, finding it impossible to undermine your father's confidence in your elder brother by lies and slanders of the most malignant nature, at length determined to step into that brother's position by taking away his life by poison. Do you admit the force of my position now, or would you wish the details brought out one by one into the light of day, before the public eye?

"This letter is written in self-defence, or, what is the same thing, in defence of my child. The letter she has received from you, however pleasantly and skilfully worded, was a threat, an order to her

to receive you as her husband, a threat as to what she might expect if she refused. Now beware. Had you been content to leave Gertrude unmolested, had you shown the slightest remorse for the horrible crimes, one of which you contemplated, the other which, as I verily believe, you committed, I would have tempered justice with mercy, and left you to the never-failing retribution which your conscience would sooner or later have claimed of you. That is now impossible. By your own act you have prevented my using any such discretion in the matter. You have thrown down the gauntlet, however covertly, and must take the consequences. I have telegraphed to your brother and to my solicitor to come to me at once. I shall place before them your father's narrative, and shall tell them what Gertrude has told me. Do not flatter yourself with the notion that a wife cannot be a witness against her husband. There is plenty of other evidence, some of which I find has been already worked up; and we shall take such steps as may seem to us advisable.

"SANDILANDS."

"I've knocked twice with Mr. Lloyd's breakfast, and I can't make him hear," said Mrs. Jobson to her servant that morning; "and he such a light sleeper too, in general. I'll try once more, and if he don't answer, I'll peep in."

The landlady knocked again, but with no effect; and when she "peeped in" she found Gilbert Lloyd fallen prone on his face on the floor, with a letter grasped in his stiffened hand.

CHAPTER VII.

INELUCTABILE FATUM.

It was fortunate that Mrs. Jobson was a practical woman of resources and presence of mind, for the first thing she did was to fling the contents of the water-jug over Lloyd's head (he was a favourite with her, or she would scarcely have risked damaging the carpet by such a proceeding); the second was to open the window; and the third was to loosen his collar, and raise him into a half-sitting position. She then called out to the servant to run for the doctor; but Lloyd, who had by this time opened his eyes and come to his senses, vehemently opposed this suggestion, declaring himself to be quite recovered, and leading Mrs. Jobson to believe that these were attacks to which he was by no means unaccustomed—which, though unpleasant to the lookers-on, were not dan-

gerous to the sufferer, and that he knew how to treat himself, to prevent the recurrence of the seizure for some time to come. Mrs. Jobson was much pleased to hear this, for, with all her practicality, she had that vague fear of sudden death, and its necessitated coroner's inquest, which is so often found among people of her class. After her fashion, too, she really liked her lodger, for Gilbert Lloyd had always been civil and agreeable—had given little trouble, and paid his way with consistent punctuality; so she was glad to find him looking something like himself, and lightly treating what she had at first imagined would be a very serious matter.

But when he was left to himself, and the reaction after the cold water, and the mental spurt which he had put on to talk to the landlady, set in, Gilbert Lloyd felt that the blow which for the last few days he had been certain was impending, had fallen at last. The depression under which he had been recently labouring was then accounted for; that attempted crime, which had brought upon him the sentence of banishment from his

father's house, the loss of his ancestral name and family position, which had sent him forth into the wilderness of the world, there to stand or fall entirely by his own arts or luck,—this crime was to be visited on him again, just at the very time when everything else was going wrong with him!

Lord Sandilands, then, was the friend to whom his father had confided that horrible secret. He had often wondered to whom his father's letter had alluded, but had never thought of identifying the bland, pleasant old nobleman with the man who held the history of his dishonour in his keeping. His father's letter had said, "This friend is not acquainted with your personal appearance, and cannot therefore recognise you, should your future conduct enable you to present yourself in any place where he may be found." Even in the desperate circumstances in which he was placed, Gilbert Lloyd almost laughed as he recalled these words, and thought how frequently his conduct had "enabled him to present himself" in places where old Sandilands was to be found; how, indeed, he had been a leader and prime favourite in

the very society which the old nobleman most affected. "Not acquainted with his personal appearance:" of course not, or Lord Sandilands would never have consented to meet him on the terms on which they had met, and which, though not intimate, were sufficiently familiar; would never have suffered him to be the second-self of Lord Ticehurst—his lordship could endure Gilbert Lloyd the turfite, but Geoffrey Challoner——How had he learned about Geoffrey Challoner, then?—whence had come this secret information? Not from Gertrude: that little fact was yet to be broken to her, he thought with bitter delight. Who had been Lord Sandilands' informant? Miles, of course!—he had forgotten him, his dear, charming brother Miles! O, that boyish hatred had not been misplaced; there was something in it beyond the mere desire to get rid of one who stood between him and the estate. If Miles had been nothing to him, he should have hated him. Miles, of course! His father's letter had told him that this friend would be "always in close and constant intercourse with my son." Close

and constant intercourse!—that was true enough; and now this precious pair had put their heads together for the purpose of his humiliation. Why just at that time? It could only have been recently that Miles had told the old gentleman, though he had known it so long ago. Why had he only just told Lord Sandilands, when he had known it ever since Gertrude's first appearance at Carabas House? Gertrude—and Miles! was that the clue? Miles was desperately in love with Gertrude—he had seen that with his own eyes; and, besides, Toshington—everybody—had told him so. In their confidence on this point, can Miles have revealed this fact to his old friend? Gilbert did not see what end could have been gained by that, more especially as the greatest secret of all—the existence of the marriage between him and Gertrude—was evidently not yet known to Miles.

And Gertrude was Lord Sandilands' daughter? That was a surprise to Gilbert. That the old nobleman would have adopted her, and made her his heiress, Lloyd had expected; but the thought

that she was his natural daughter had never suggested itself to him. Ah, what an infernal fool he had been! All these years he had been congratulating himself on his good fortune, and now he found he had been merely running after the shadow and neglecting the substance. What a dolt he had been to allow Gertrude to leave him at all! He might have lived on her in a princely manner—first on the money which she made by her profession, and secondly by properly working this secret of her relationship to Lord Sandilands. And now he had lost all!

His time was come, he thought. *Venit summa dies et ineluctabile fatum!* That line remained haunting his brain. He felt that matters were closing round him very rapidly. What was that he had read in Lord Sandilands' letter about that cursed Brighton business with Harvey Gore? He could not distinctly recollect; he would read the letter again. He turned round to look for it; it was nowhere to be found.

He hunted for it high and low; searched every portion of the room again and again; ex-

amined, as people will do in the desperation of such circumstances, the most impossible places. He did not like to ask Mrs. Jobson about it. If she had seen it her curiosity might have been aroused; she might have read it, and then— At length he rang his bell, and Mrs. Jobson appeared; and Gilbert saw in an instant by her face that whatever might have happened she had not read the letter.

"When you were good enough to come to my assistance just now, Mrs. Jobson, when I had that little attack, did you happen to see an open letter lying about?" said Gilbert.

"A letter, sir?" said Mrs. Jobson dubiously; "there were no letter that I saw, 'cept the one in your hand."

"In my hand?"

"Clinched tight up, as was both your fists, so that I could hardly uncrook your fingers; and in one of 'em there *was* a letter all squeezed up."

"That must have been it. What did you do with it?"

"Put it on to the table by the window, just as it might be there," said Mrs. Jobson, taking an exact aim, and marking a particular spot on the table with her finger.

"It's no good looking there," said Gilbert testily—for Mrs. Jobson still kept peering on the table, as though she expected to see the letter swim up to the surface through the wood—"it's not there. What can have become of it?"

"Well, now I recollect," said Mrs. Jobson slowly, "that I thought you would be all the better for a puff of fresh air, so I opened the window, and the paper might have blowed out."

"Good God, woman, what have you done!" cried Gilbert, starting up and rushing towards the street, pushing past Mrs. Jobson, who this time began to be seriously alarmed, thinking her lodger was going out of his mind.

The street was tolerably empty when Gilbert Lloyd reached it. There is not much doing in Duke-street, St. James's, in the month of September—a slack season, when even the livery-stable-keepers' helpers are probably out of town,

and there were but few people about to express surprise at seeing a gentleman fly out of a house, and begin searching the pavement and the kennel with intense anxiety and perseverance. In the season, a dozen young gutter-bloods, street-boys, would have been round him in a moment, all aiding in the search for an unknown something, the probable finding of which, if seen, would bring them a few coppers, the possible stealing of which, unseen, might fill their pockets. But on this calm September morning a Jew clothesman going his rounds, the servant of a lodging-house opposite, and an elderly-gentleman lodger, who never went out of town, and who in the winter never got out of bed, and who at the then moment was calmly looking on at Lloyd's proceedings as at a show, were all the spectators of the hunt for the missing paper, in which none of them evinced anything but the most cursory interest.

Not so the seeker. He hunted up and down, poked in wind-swept corners, peered down rusty gratings, seemed to have at one time a vague idea of following the chase up the livery-stable-

man's yard, and glared at the barrel swinging in mid-air from the crane outside the oilman's warehouse-door, as though it might have sucked up the precious document. He must have it, Gilbert Lloyd kept repeating to himself; he must have it. But he could not find it, and at the end of an hour's search he returned to the house, worn out with fatigue, and in a state of feverish anxiety.

If it had blown out of the window, as the woman had suggested, into the street—and the probabilities were that it had done so—somebody must have picked it up. There was no wet or mud to discolour the paper or efface the writing; it was a peculiar and striking-looking letter, and anyone finding it would doubtless read it through. If such had been the case it was lost—irretrievably, for ever. Great beads of perspiration stood upon his pallid forehead as this notion flashed across him. His name headed the letter, the name of his accuser was signed at its foot, and its contents plainly set forth one attempted crime and hinted at the knowledge of another, which

had been more than attempted, which had been carried into effect. Anyone reading this would see the whole state of affairs at a glance, would feel it incumbent on them to give information to the police, and—he was a dead man! What was that Lord Sandilands had said about further inquiries relative to Harvey Gore? Foxey had been doing his best to find out something definite in that quarter, and had failed; but then Lord Sandilands was a man of influence, with plenty of money, which he would not scruple to spend freely in any matter such as this. That made all the difference; they might succeed in tampering with that wretched doctor fellow, who plainly had had his suspicions—Gilbert had often recalled his expression about the *rigor mortis*—and there would be an end of it. Pshaw! what a fool he was! He passed his hand across his damp brow, sprang from the chair on which he had been sitting, and commenced pacing the room. An end of it? No, not yet. He had always had his own notion of how that end should be brought about, if the pressure upon him became unbear-

able. Most men leading such precarious shifty lives have thus thought occasionally, and made odd resolves in regard to them. But there was hope yet. He was seedy, weak, and unhinged; a glass of brandy would set him all right, and then he would go off to Hill-street, look through the accounts, draw on the bankers to the uttermost farthing, and start for America. It was hard lines to leave town, where he had played the game so long and so successfully. However, that was all over, he should never play it any more, and so he might as well—better, much better—begin his new life in a fresh place.

He dressed himself, got into a cab, and drove to Hill-street. The house had been left in charge of some of those wonderful people who occupy houses during the temporary absence of their legitimate owners; but when Gilbert rang the bell the door was opened, to his intense surprise, by Martin, Lord Ticehurst's valet, whom he had left behind with his lordship at Baden.

"You here, Martin!" said Lloyd with an astonishment mingled with an uncomfortable

sensation which he could not conceal. "Why, when did you arrive, and what has brought you?"

"Arrived last night, sir," said Martin with a jaunty air, very different from his usual respectful bearing. "Came by his lordship's orders."

"By his lordship's orders?" echoed Lloyd. "That was rather sudden, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir; very sudden, sir; done all in a hurry, sir; after a long talk with Mr. Clarke the lawyer, sir."

"With Mr. Clarke, eh?" again echoed Lloyd, feeling more and more uncomfortable. "Well, no matter; it's all right, I suppose. Just come up to my room and tell me all about it;" and he was passing on into the house.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Martin, placing himself before him and barring the way; "beg pardon, sir, but you're not to come in; his lordship's orders, sir."

"Not to come in!" cried Lloyd, white with passion; "what the devil do you mean?"

"Just what I say, sir," replied Martin, with

perfect coolness; "his lordship's orders, sir; last words he said to me. Got a note here for you, sir. Lordship said if you was here I was to give it you at once; if you wasn't, I wasn't to trouble about finding you until you came here."

"Give it here!" said Lloyd savagely; and Martin dived in his pocket, fetched out the note, and handed it to him with a polite bow. It was in Ticehurst's unformed round schoolboy hand, which Gilbert knew so well; was very short, but very much to the purpose. It said that Lord Ticehurst had given orders that Mr. Lloyd should be denied access to the house in Hill-street; the question of accounts between them could be gone into on Lord Ticehurst's return from the Continent, which would be in the course of the ensuing week. Lord Ticehurst would remain a couple of days in London on his way to his place in Sussex, and would devote those days to settling all matters with Mr. Lloyd. It would be advisable, in the mean time, that Mr. Lloyd should draw no cheques on the account hitherto open to his signature at Lord Ticehurst's bankers', as Lord Ticehurst had

given instructions to his bankers to close that account so far as Mr. Lloyd was concerned.

"That's that infernal Clarke's doing," said Gilbert to himself; "Etchingham's writing, certainly, but Clark's suggestion and dictation; Etchingham would not have thought of the idea, and could not have expressed it half so succinctly. There's a chance yet. That order to the bankers could not have been sent by telegram. They would not have risked that. Perhaps I'm in time. —Martin, did you bring any other letters to England?"

"Yes, sir; one from his lordship to Messrs. Tilley and Shoveller. Delivered it at the bank at nine this morning, sir."

"Thanks; I'll write to his lordship. Good-day, Martin." He saw the man bow ironically and stick his tongue in his cheek, but he took no notice. He turned round, but had to make an effort to gather all his strength together and walk away without staggering. The pavement surged up in front of him; the houses on either side threatened to topple over him. When he got out

of sight of the valet still lingering at the door, he stopped, and leaned against some railings to recover himself.

It was all over, then! The last chance had been tried, and failed. A day sooner, and he could have carried out his notion of drawing on the bankers and escaping to America. That accursed couple—his wife and his brother—had been against him in that, as well as in all his other misfortunes lately. If he had not waited for that answer from Gertrude,—that answer which, when it came, filled him with so much anxiety,—he would have gone to Hill-street on the previous day, before Martin had arrived, have drawn his cheques, and made all square. Curses on them both! That letter from Gertrude—from Lord Sandilands rather—this last business in Hill-street had driven from his mind; but the thought of it now returned in tenfold agony. It was lost, with all its terrible accusations! Had been found and read, and was probably now in the hands of the police. And he had no means for providing for flight. The few pounds in his

purse were all he possessed in the world. He should be taken, and have to die on the scaffold! No, not that; he knew a better trick than that yet.

Once again he had to stop. His legs failed him; his head was burning; he felt his heart beating with loud thick throbs. A dizziness came over him, and it needed all his strength to prevent himself from falling. After a minute or two he felt a little relieved. He called a cab, and was driven to his club. The porter was away from his post, and his deputy, one of the page-boys, failed to recognise the dashing Mr. Lloyd in the pallid man who passed him with unsteady gait, and asked him for his name. He went into the deserted coffee-room, swallowed a glass of brandy, which revived him, then made his way to the writing-room, and wrote a note. It was to a sporting acquaintance of his, who happened at the time to be house-surgeon to one of our largest hospitals, and ran as follows:

"*Private.*

"DEAR PATTLE,—A nag that has carried my lord (and master) for ten years has become past work, and is dangerous to ride. But his l'ship won't give him up, and some day he'll get his neck broken for his pains. To prevent this I want to put the poor beast *quietly* out of the way, and I can't trust our vet., who is a blab. Nor do I want to buy any 'stuff' at a chemist's, as, if anything came of it, and it got wind, chemist might peach. Can you manage to send me a small bottle of strychnine by bearer? Do so; and the next good thing that comes off, you shall stand in with the profit. *Keep it dark.*

"Yours,

"GILBERT LLOYD."

"That's vague enough," said Lloyd, as he read the letter before placing it in an envelope. "But Pattle's a great ass; he'll be flattered to think he is helping my Lord Ticehurst's 'confederate,' and he'll have a dim idea that there's a chance of making some money—quite enough

to make him do it." And Gilbert was right. He stopped the cab outside the hospital, and sent in the note. Within five minutes the porter appeared at the door with a parcel, which he handed in "With Mr. Pattle's compliments," and with which Lloyd drove off to his lodgings.

His haggard looks on alighting alarmed Mrs. Jobson, who expressed a hope that he had been to see a doctor. This gave him the opportunity for making an explanation which he had been seeking to bring about, as he came along in the cab. He told the worthy landlady that he had consulted his physician, who told him that the attacks, one of which she had been a witness to, were highly dangerous, and that every means should be taken to check them. With this view the doctor had recommended him, if he felt one coming on, as was not unlikely, judging from the present deranged state of his health, to take a slight quantity of the medicine which he prescribed for him, and which would give him instant relief. Upon which Mrs. Jobson remarked that of course the doctors knew best. She did not herself

"hold with" sedatives, confessing at the same time that her experience as regarded their application was confined to certain interesting cases, in which she looked upon the taking of them as flying in the face of Providence, which would not have sent pain if it was not meant to be endured.

Gilbert Lloyd retired to his room, and did not see his landlady again until about nine o'clock that evening, when he sent for her to tell her that he felt a renewal of the symptoms of his attack, that he should at once get to bed, and that he begged he might not be disturbed. This Mrs. Jobson promised, and took her leave. When she was gone Gilbert opened his despatch-box, and commenced the following letter:

"My dear Lord,—You tell me you hear that my relations with Lord Ticehurst are at an end, and you ask me if I will undertake the management of your stud, and personally supervise your affairs. I need scarcely say that I am highly flattered by the proposal, thus repeated, I believe, for the third time. At present, however,

I must, in all respect, decline to entertain it. I have been so far lucky that my circumstances are such as to prevent any necessity for my doing any more work for the remainder of my life, while my state of health, especially during the last few weeks, peremptorily forbids my doing anything but nurse myself for some time to—"

Here he finished abruptly, leaving the sheet on the blotting-pad, by the side of the open despatch-box.

"They'll not be able to get over that," he said with a shudder; "and the woman's testimony will be concurrent. It's an odd thing that a man who can do it should care about what people say of him after it's done."

He shuddered again as from his dressing-case he took a small phial of medicine which he had purchased at a chemist's for the purpose, and from the drawer in which he had locked it the strychnine-bottle, and placed them side by side on the table. He then leisurely undressed himself, turned the bedclothes back, and rumpled the bed

to give it the appearance of having been slept in; then he extinguished the light, took the phial of strychnine in his hand, lifted it to his mouth, drained it, and with one convulsive spring managed to throw himself on the bed.

"And he's quite gone, sir?" inquired weeping Mrs. Jobson the next morning of the doctor who had been hastily summoned.

"Gone, madam!" said the doctor, who was a snuffy Scotchman of the old school—"he's as dad as Jullius Cæsar. And this is another case o' the meschief of unauthorised parsons doctorin' themsalves and takkin' medicines in the dark."

CHAPTER VIII.

A LAST MESSAGE.

WORDSWORTH has written of one of those beautiful scenes which he loved so intensely, and with whose loveliness he was so familiar—

> "The spot was made by Nature for herself;
> The travellers know it not. * * *
> * * * But it is beautiful,
> And if a man should plant his cottage near,
> Should sleep beneath the shelter of its trees,
> And blend its waters with his daily meals,
> He would so love it, that in his death-hour
> Its image would survive amongst his thoughts."

It was amid a scene to which these lines might be applied, that Lord Sandilands and his daughter were living, a year after the death of Gilbert Lloyd —a scene so grand, and yet so full of soft and tender beauty, that an English writer, who knew it better than anyone except the native Swiss dwellers in it, declared it to be, "even amongst the

wonders of the Alps, a very miracle of beauty." It was a nook in the Savoy Alps, near the Valley of the Sixt. It had needed both money and interest to enable the old English nobleman to make even a temporary "settlement" in the remote region; but he had used both to good purpose, when he found that the wounded spirit, the mind diseased, of his daughter were not to be healed by the distractions of travelling in the busy and populous centres of European life. They had tried many places, but she had sickened of all, though she tried hard to hide from her father—whose solicitude for her increased daily, as did her affection for him—that all his efforts to procure peace and pleasure for her were to a great extent ineffectual. The young English *prima donna*—whose brief and brilliant career, whose sudden, unexplained disappearance from the scene of her triumphs, had been the subject of much talk and many conjectures in London—was not identified on the Continent with the Miss Keith who kept so much to herself, but who was so very charming when she could be induced to enter into the pastime of the

hour. This was the more natural, as Gertrude never exerted her greatest, her most characteristic, talent—she never sang after she left England. The last occasion on which she had "tumbled," as she had said, to a limited but critical audience at Hardriggs, was the last appearance of Miss Lambert on any stage. Miss Keith looked well, when she was to be seen, and talked well, when she could be heard; but she never sang, and thus a kindly mist diffused itself over her identity.

It seemed incredible to Gertrude that the incidents which had occurred, the great emotions she had experienced, the various kinds of suffering she had undergone, could all have passed over her within so brief a period: that in so short a space of time the exterior and interior conditions of her life should be so completely changed. She had passed through many widely-varying phases of mind since she had left England with her father: the uncertainty of her life over, the necessity for personal exertion at an end, and the death of her husband—horrible and unlamented as it was—had produced a great effect upon her. It was like re-

lief from torturing, bodily pain, exhausting and constant; it made her feel the need of deep and prolonged rest, quite undisturbed and irresponsible. She turned impatiently, in the great relief of her freedom, from men and cities; and longed for the solitudes of nature, and the release from conventionalities, which she felt was needed to complete the sense of her emancipation. Lord Sandilands, who, though he had been very well since they left England, was sensibly older, and who had gradually come to centre all his interests in this woman—who, though a reproach, was yet a constant delight to him—instantly obeyed her wishes, and they went to Switzerland. The beaten track of the tourists did not content Gertrude, whose taste for the wild and solitary beauties of nature was thoroughly gratified in the Alp region; and at no late period of their wanderings, they found themselves in the neighbourhood of the beautiful and little-known valley of the Sixt. The place had an interest for Gertrude, from association with a favourite volume which she had read many a time, wondering whether the time would

ever come when the scenery of the great glacier-world should be other than a romantic, unattainable vision to her. Lord Sandilands found the air invigorating, and though he could not join Gertrude in her explorations, he made every possible arrangement for their being effected with comfort and safety; and by means of supplying himself with a number of truly English "comforts"—most of which were entirely unintelligible to the simple people of the district, and caused him to be regarded with more than common awe—he established himself very satisfactorily at the hospitable hostelry of the Fer à Cheval, formerly the Convent of Sixt. There had always been a good deal of philosophical contentment in the disposition of Lord Sandilands, and under his present circumstances this useful mental characteristic grew stronger and more ready at call. Reflecting, as he often did now, upon the past, it had an almost amusing effect upon his mind to remember how his time had formerly been passed—the people whom he had really thought of consequence to him, the things he had cared for and taken an in-

terest in. How far away, how along ago, it all seemed now—now that he cared for nothing but Gertrude: the memory of Gertrude's mother—ah, what a blunder his conduct to her had been, as well as what a sin!—and his dead friend's son, mysteriously involved in that sin's consequence. Who remembered him, he thought; and whom did he remember of the many who had been his associates, and had called themselves his friends? If tidings of his death were to be sent to England, how many would say or think more than—"Old Sandilands has popped off, I hear; deuced good thing for the parson's son in Dorsetshire, nephew or cousin, isn't it?" None he knew—and the knowledge did not pain him—except Miles Challoner. And of these phantom friendships, these several associations, he had made the pabulum of his life. What utter nonsense it seemed now, to be sure, when his daughter, sedulously kept out of sight and out of mind during so many years, was now the great central truth and occupation of his life, and his books and the eternal hills the quiet company in which he most delighted! To the

old man, too, the time seemed strangely short though eventful, since the whole aspect of his existence had been changed by the revelation made to him by his daughter. Since Gilbert Lloyd's death he had watched her even more closely than before, for the purpose of making up his mind whether she should be left in entire ignorance of who the wicked man who had blighted her young life, and was now removed from it for ever, really was, or whether she should be told the truth. He decided that the latter course should be pursued if Gertrude pined for Miles Challoner's presence, if she made any persistent attempts to break through the barrier of separation which circumstances and her own consent had placed between them. If change of scene, the excitement and interest of travel, and the natural influence of her youth and her recovered liberty should produce the effect he hoped for, should lead her to remember Miles with only a soft, kindly, painless regret, he would not tell her the truth at all; the whole mystery of Geoffrey Challoner's life should rest in his

grave with him, instead of only that dark secret which now Lord Sandilands could never by any possibility be forced to divulge. The purpose which his dead friend had had in view in imparting it to him had been faithfully served so long as the unhappy man lived,—it had died with him. Neither Miles nor Gertrude should ever learn *that* tremendous truth. Lord Sandilands took great delight in his daughter's society, and sometimes under its influence lost sight of the troubles of the past. But the future fate of Gertrude occupied his mind painfully. He had never felt very strong since the illness he had gone through at St. Leonards, and he had become sensible since then that his life was not likely to be much prolonged. He had said nothing to Gertrude of his conviction on this point, nor had he alluded to it in his communications with Miles Challoner. But in the quiet majestic region where they had now taken up their abode, Lord Sandilands found an influence which attuned his mind to very serious thought, and disposed him to the setting of his house in order. What was to become of Ger-

trude when he should be gone? The painful and peculiar circumstances of her former life disinclined her to seek the busy haunts of the world, and her disposition required companionship, sympathy, and affection. He could leave her in easy circumstances, to be sure,—and he was of much too practical a turn of mind to underrate the importance of such a power,—but he could not give her security or happiness for the future. His heart turned yearningly to Miles Challoner as this solicitude troubled him, and he wondered whether his daughter's heart turned in the same direction. It had not been mentioned between them for long. The death of Gilbert Lloyd had set Gertrude free, so far as she knew; but she felt that the barrier between her and Miles existed still. He had loved and wooed her under a false impression, and since he had known the truth had made no attempt to see or write to her. Lord Sandilands had not failed to discern that she suffered keenly from this cause, but he still believed that she would suffer more keenly had she known the truth—the imperative and insurmount-

able reason which prevented Miles from again seeking her presence. Thus on this subject—the most interesting, the most vital to the father and the daughter—there had been silence, and now Lord Sandilands wished to break it, but hardly knew how to do so.

The time since the travellers had set up their rest at the Fer à Cheval had passed tranquilly away, and Gertrude had frequently assured her father that she had never enjoyed her foreign tour so much as now, when she found herself among the solemn and majestic beauties of the Alpine lands, and surrounded only by associations with nature, and people of the simplest and most primitive habits. This assurance, so far as it went, was strictly true, and yet Gertrude was not quite happy. It was not altogether the shadow of the past which oppressed her—it was dark, and fell chill upon her, doubtless—but there was an actual haunting grief which was more painful even than that. She had loved worthily a man worthy of her love, she had loved him more than she had known or realised to herself, and he

was lost to her now,—a great gulf seemed to have fixed itself between them, and she was perforce condemned to stand upon the opposite shore and gaze vainly across it with longing eyes. What was he doing there, far away in the distance beyond her ken? She did not know, and now not to know was becoming unbearable Had he forgotten her? How had he borne the revelation which Lord Sandilands had made to him, and which had disclosed to him the terrible deception of her life? Her father had conveyed to her an assurance of his perfect forgiveness, and told her that he had said, hopeless as his suit was now, and void of expectation or happiness as his life must be, he could not regret that he had known and loved her. This was all she knew, and the need, the strong, desperate desire to know more became very potent as the time lengthened, and the first shock of her husband's death, with the revulsion of feeling it had caused, passed away. Thus it happened that by a somewhat analogous process a similar result was wrought in the minds of the father and the daughter, and it became

imminent that Miles Challoner should be spoken of between them.

The occasion arose on a splendid evening, late in the summer, when the beauty of the scene amid which they lived was at its height, when the peace and the majesty of the mountains filled their spirits, and the turmoil of the past in their lives seemed an impossible delusion. A time to think of the beloved dead with joyful hope as well as with poignant sorrow; a time to make eternity seem true and near, and hardly surprising; a time and a scene to soften and refine every feeling, and to put far away the passions and pursuits of the common world. Lord Sandilands was keenly impressed by this vague and beautiful influence of nature; and under the impression reverted, as the old do, to the long-past scenes of youth, its pleasures, its dreams, its occupations, and its companions. He talked a great deal to his daughter that evening of her mother, and of his own. The great wrong he had done Gertrude Gauthier once frankly acknowledged, and the sincere repentance he had

come to feel earnestly professed, Lord Sandilands had alluded to that no more. Gertrude's mother might have been his honoured wife for any tone of restraint or difference there was in his infrequent mention of her. Then he strayed into talk of the associates of his boyhood and his school and college days, and mentioned Mark Challoner, the "young Squire" of Rowley in those distant days. Here was Gertrude's opportunity, and she availed herself of it promptly.

"Tell me about the Squire," she said, looking up into her father's face from her low seat by his side, and laying her clasped hands upon his knee. "I should like to hear all about him. Miles Challoner used to speak of him with the greatest affection and respect."

"Yes," said Lord Sandilands, "Miles loved his father. He was a very good son."

Seeing that a thoughtful expression spread itself over his face, Gertrude was afraid he might lapse again into silence, and once more asked him eagerly to tell her about the Squire. He did so. He told her of the old times at Rowley,

of the geniality, heartiness, popularity, happiness of the Squire; of his pretty young wife, her death, the change it wrought in the friend he so loved; of the long-unbroken confidence which had existed between them, only disturbed by death; and as he told the story, and dwelt upon the affectionate remembrances which it revived, he felt how little death had really disturbed the tie between them, how faithfully he had kept his friend's secret, and how wonderful it was to think that his own daughter was so deeply concerned in it — quite unconsciously. As her mobile, expressive face lighted up with interest and emotion, he looked at her with deep tenderness and compassion, thinking of the common suffering which linked her with his dead friend, and made that secret more important to her than even it had been to him. For him it was over and done with for ever; for her its baleful and guilty influence lingered still.

"Is Miles like the Squire?" Gertrude asked.

"Yes," replied Lord Sandilands, "like him in face and in character, but of a milder tem-

per. Mark Challoner was very hot-tempered in his youth, quick, and impatient. Miles is more like his mother in his ways. She was a very sweet woman, and a terrible loss to her husband."

It was a relief to them to have thus slipped into an easy and familiar mention of him whose name had been for so long unspoken between them.

"Have you heard of Miles lately, father?" said Gertrude quietly, and without removing her eyes from Lord Sandilands' face.

"I am very glad you have asked me, my dear," replied her father. "I did not like to talk of Miles to you until you should mention him first. I have heard from him lately, and I don't like the tone in which he writes about himself."

"Is he ill?" said Gertrude, with quick alarm in her face and in her voice.

"No, not at all; but he is thoroughly discontented and unhappy. He has tried his very best and hardest to live the life of a moral English squire at Rowley, but he cannot do it;

he has no heart for it; and I should not be surprised any day to hear that he had given up the useless attempt. He has not forgotten you, Gertrude; and he cannot forget you."

"I am glad of that," she said in the same calm tone. "I suppose I ought to say otherwise; but it would not be true, and I cannot say it. I deceived him, and was forced to disappoint him, and bring a great cross on his life; but I *cannot* say that I should be glad to know he had forgotten me, and had found elsewhere the happiness he thought he might have had with me."

"I am glad you speak so frankly to me," said Lord Sandilands, laying his hand tenderly on the shining bands of Gertrude's dark-brown hair. "I have been thinking a great deal about you and Miles Challoner; and I should like to know exactly how you feel about him."

The answer was very plainly to be read in her face, but Gertrude did not hesitate to give it in words.

"There is no change in my feelings for him,

father," she said. "I shall never cease to love him."

"Would you marry him, Gertrude, if he came to ask you, though your marriage should involve your relinquishing all connexion with England, breaking entirely, even more completely than *we* have done, with old associations, and making quite a new life in a new country for yourselves? Don't start, my dear, and look so agitated; he has not told me to ask you this. You are not required to give a decision. I have asked you for my own satisfaction, because *I* want to know."

"I would marry him," Gertrude answered, "to go to the other end of the world with him, if it did not mean parting with you — but that can never be — without a scruple, without a regret, without a fear. But he could not marry me— have I not deceived him?—even supposing he cared for me now as he once did. No, no, that is over and I must not repine, blest as my life is far above my deserts."

She put her father's hand to her lips as she spoke, then laid her soft cheek tenderly upon it.

"And you think the obstacle which your hard fate raised between you and Miles is insurmountable?" said Lord Sandilands, thinking the while of that obstacle of which she was unconscious.

"I think so," Gertrude answered sadly. "Do not you? Have you any reason for thinking it is not so?"

"None that I can make you understand, my child," said Lord Sandilands. "But I have a strong conviction—a feeling which may not be reasonable, but is irresistible—that all this strange riddle of your life will yet work itself out to a clear and happy solution in your becoming Miles Challoner's wife. I understand the extent and force of the objections much better than you do, and give them their full weight in the estimation of the world. But (since I have been here particularly) I have for some time ceased to set very great store by the opinions of the world, and to believe that there is much happiness or even satisfaction to be got out of conformity to them. I fancy Miles is very strongly of my opinion, and in time—not a very long time either—I have a perfect

conviction that all will be well, and that when I leave you I shall do so in better hands than mine."

Gertrude's tears were falling before her father concluded these sentences, which he spoke with much earnestness, and for some time she did not speak. At length she said:

"When he writes to you, does he ever mention me?"

"Always, and always in the same invariable tone. No other woman will ever be offered the place in his home which he once hoped would have been yours. This he has told me often, and desired I should tell you, if ever, or whenever, you should again speak of him to me."

"He knows we have not spoken of him lately?"

"He knows that, and has been satisfied that it should be so; the time that has elapsed since the event that set you free has not been too long for a silence dictated by propriety; but it has expired now, Gertrude, and I think you and he might be brought to understand each other, and

make up your minds, like rational people, what extent of sacrifice you are prepared to make to secure the privilege of passing the remainder of your lives together."

"I have it not in my power to make any sacrifice," said Gertrude; "that must come from him, if it is to come at all. I wish I had; but it is he who would have all to forgive, all to forego, all to endure."

Lord Sandilands, with his secret knowledge of the truth, felt that she had reason in her words. But he had strong faith in Miles Challoner, and confident hope in the result of a plan which he had formed, and on which this conversation with his daughter finally determined him to act. He did not prolong their conference, but bade Gertrude be of good cheer, and trust in him and in the future. She gave him her ready promise, and a fervent assurance of the happiness and contentment of her life with him, and said a few earnest words of affection to him, which her father received with a fervour which would have astonished himself almost as much as it would have surprised

his London acquaintances. As the shades of evening deepened, silence fell upon Lord Sandilands and Gertrude once more, unbroken until he asked her to sing to him. She complied immediately (her father and the peasants were the only persons who now heard the glorious voice which had enchanted the most splendid, refined, and critical audience in the world), and the rich, thrilling strains soon floated out upon the pure mountain-air. Her father—lying on a couch beneath the window at the end of the long room, which commanded a glorious view of the valley leading up to the Col d'Auterne, and from whence Gertrude had watched many a sunrise, and gazed at many a moonlight scene, such as no words could convey a description of—listened to her singing, and was transported in fancy back to the long-vanished past. The last song which Gertrude sung that night was the first she had sung at the concert at Carabas House, when Miles Challoner had looked upon her to love her, and Lord Sandilands had looked at her and found Gertrude Gauthier's features in her face.

A few days later, when he had considered the matter maturely, and made up his mind that in the way which had suggested itself to him the happiness of his daughter and Miles Challoner might be secured, Lord Sandilands wrote to his dead friend's son. The letter was a long one, replying fully to the last which he had received from Miles, and giving him excellent advice, which the writer was thoroughly well qualified to offer, concerning the disposition and management of his property. It contained intelligence of Lord Sandilands' health, and a description of the *locale* and its resources. Then it continued:

"*I have purposely avoided mentioning Gertrude to you until the present stage of my letter should have been reached, because I have much to say concerning her of a more serious nature than the details of her daily occupations, and a report of her health and looks. The latter are good, the former are as usual. She still retains unaltered her pleasure in the mountain scenery, the primitive people, and the flowers. She is still the same to me—an affectionate daughter*

and a charming companion. But some time has now passed since the death of her unhappy husband, and its influence is telling upon her. I have not been blind to the change in her; and a few days ago, for the first time, I mentioned you, and elicited from her an avowal which I am about to disclose to you, addressing you in my double character (and of course without her knowledge) of Gertrude's father and your oldest, and I think I may add truest, friend. She is still attached to you—and in spite of all the sorrow and all the equivocal experiences which have been hers—with a fresh, vivid, and trusting affection, which would suffice, or I am very much mistaken in my estimate of both of you, to make your lives, if united, happy. I do not entertain any doubt that your feelings towards her remain unchanged, and it is on this supposition that I now address you. You have known me long, my dear Miles, and as well as a man of your age can know a man of mine; and when I tell you that I regret more deeply, bitterly, and unavailingly than anything else —it is my lot, the common one of old age, to look back upon the past with vain bitterness and regret—the

having hesitated before the opinion of the world in doing my duty by the woman I loved, and following to a practical issue my own conviction of the means by which my true happiness might have been secured, you will not suspect me of unduly underrating, or carelessly despising, the opinion and the judgment of the world. The circumstances must be very exceptional indeed under which I would counsel any man, holding a fair position in society and endowed with the duties and privileges of a landed proprietor as you are, to defy the opinion of society, and to turn his back on those duties and privileges. But yours is a very exceptional position, and I do counsel you to do both these things. Your heart is not in Rowley Court, nor are you capable of fulfilling your duties as you are at present. Make new ones for yourself, my dear Miles. Yield to the inclination which you have partly confessed, and which I have very distinctly perceived, and turn your back upon the scene which has been overclouded for you since your boyhood by a sorrow which has ever been, and must remain, a mystery to you. Geoffrey Challoner's crime is buried in the grave of Gilbert Lloyd; but

you will never lay its ghost while you remain at Rowley Court. I am neither a credulous nor a superstitious man; but I have seen more instances than one of the passing away of the 'luck' of an old place, and I feel that Rowley Court is one of those from which the old 'luck' has passed away. So far as leaving the place is concerned, I believe my advice will only anticipate, if even it does anticipate, the resolution I fully expect to hear you have by this time taken. And now to my other point. Society in England and English law do not recognise such a marriage as that of yourself and Gertrude would be; and under anything like ordinary circumstances I should be one of the first and strongest protestants against such a union; but as I have already said, yours are the most exceptional circumstances conceivable out of the region of the wildest romance. Your marriage with Gertrude could not injure any rights, or offend any principles or prejudices, as no one ever likely to see your faces again, or, if you did marry, ever to be aware of the fact, has the least notion of the existence of those circumstances. Sell the pro-

perty, leave England, and if you still love Gertrude, as she loves you, marry her, and seek happiness and home in a foreign land. I write now, you must bear in mind, remembering that she is entirely ignorant of the complication in your story and hers which sets it apart from perhaps any other human experience. She regards herself as a faulty woman, who deceived the man she loved by an assumption which she deems unpardonable, undeniable, even after that wretched man's death had set her free. You regard her as still (as I believe) the object of your truest love, but parted from you by the fact that the man who made her miserable, and might have made her guilty had not true love intervened to save her, was your own brother, the author of the misery which made the latter years of your father dark and cheerless. These are both substantial truths and phantoms,—the first in their simple existence, the second in the effect they ought to produce on such a mind as yours. The misfortunes of your life are irremediable; but they are also past and gone, and the future may still be yours—yours too, without a braving of opinion,

a defiance of the world to which you would probably not feel equal, if the selection of your future course of proceeding were put before you hampered with any such imperative condition. You might take wealth with you to a foreign land, and the antecedents of your wife could never be known there to anyone; here, only to me; and I am ready to give your determination to carry out such a scheme as this my warmest approbation and support, though, if you do it, I must lose the society of my child, which is inexpressibly dear to me. But I owe it to Gertrude, and still more to Gertrude's mother, that I should not rest content with a half-compensation to my daughter, that she should not be only half-happy. I know in what her true happiness would consist, and it shall not be wanting through any failure of self-denial on my part. My time here is not to be long; perhaps it may be peaceful, and less haunted by remorse, if my daughter becomes your wife. I have sinned much towards the living and the dead; and though there does not at first sight appear to be any reparation in the scheme which I propose, there is a

reparation which you will understand in part, and I entirely. If I am not in error in respect to your feelings, write to me, and say that you will join us here, when the necessary arrangement of your affairs will admit of your coming."

When Lord Sandilands had written this letter, he did not immediately despatch it, but laid it by for a few days, during which he deliberated with himself much and secretly. But the end of all his meditations, the upshot of all his close observation of Gertrude, was a conviction that the letter was an exposition of the truth, and ought to be sent. Accordingly, on the fourth day after he had written he despatched it, and it was fortunate that he had taken and acted upon the resolution at the time he did; for Lord Sandilands was not to act upon any more resolutions, or play any active part in the affairs of this world any more.

On the evening of the day on which his letter to Miles Challoner had been sent away, and while his daughter was singing to him, Lord Sandilands was taken ill with acute gout. The attack had

many features in common with that which had tried him so severely at St. Leonards, but was more severe and exhausting. The English doctor from Chamouni shook his head and looked very grave from the first,—he was naturally a gloomy practitioner, but in this instance his gravity was amply justified. There was not enough rallying-power in the constitution of the patient it seemed, and the illness rapidly assumed a fatal aspect. The intelligence was conveyed, not without humane gentleness, to Gertrude, on whom its effect was overwhelming indeed. A kind of stupefaction came over her; she could render but little assistance, but she never left her father, and even when his exhaustion was greatest he was conscious of her presence.

One day, when the end was only a few hours off, she was sitting by Lord Sandilands' bed, holding one of his thin hands in hers, and gazing with looks expressive of such anguish as only such a vigil knows, on his sleeping face. A slight noise at the door disturbed her, but she merely raised her hand with a warning gesture, and did not

turn her head. In another moment a man's form approached her with swift, noiseless strides, and she was silently clasped in the arms of Miles Challoner.

Thus sheltered, thus comforted, her father found her when he awoke, and a little while after Lord Sandilands died.

CHAPTER IX.

TWELVE MONTHS AFTER.

More than twelve months had rolled away since the man called Gilbert Lloyd had been found dead in his lodgings in Duke-street, when the medical journals improved the occasion and had a word of advice for the general public, and a good many words of abuse for each other, and when the affair created a little sensation; for amongst a certain set Lloyd was very well known, and on the whole very much hated for his success in life. The fact of his quarrel with Lord Ticehurst had got wind, though the cause of it was kept secret, and had been duly rejoiced over; but the man must have had extraordinary luck, everyone said; for the newspapers, in their account of the inquest, published a half-written letter which

was found in his room, and on which he had evidently been engaged when seized with the spasm which he sought to allay with that confounded poison, which he had evidently taken in mistake for the medicine standing by it, in which he alluded to the offer made to him by some nobleman, of an appointment exactly like that which he held with Lord Ticehurst, and which, the latter said, the state of his health made him decline. At the inquest Mrs. Jobson gave her evidence as to the fit with which her lodger had been seized on the morning previous to his death, and as to the remedy which he told her had been prescribed for him; a practical chemist gave professional evidence; Mr. Pattle produced the letter he had received; the coroner summed up, and the jury returned a verdict that the deceased had died from a dose of poison taken accidentally. But this was more than twelve months since, and the manner of Gilbert Lloyd's death was never spoken of; and the fact of his ever having lived was almost forgotten by the members of that busy, reckless, stirring world

in which he had moved and had his being; that world which calls but for the "living present," and carefully closes its eyes against both the past and the future.

That world which never makes the smallest difference in its career whether old members drop out of it, or new members are caught up and whirled along with it, was pursuing its course in very much its ordinary way. The Marchioness of Carabas still had a Soul which required male supervision, and still found somebody to supervise it; though Mr. Pennington's year of office had expired, another charming creature reigned in his stead. Mr. Boulderson Munns still drove his mail-phaeton, still told his foreign artists that he didn't understand "their d—d palaver," and still managed the Grand Scandinavian Opera, though not with so much success as formerly. There had been a reaction after Miss Lambert's secession from the boards; people began to think there was something good at the Regent, and went to see; and the heart of Mr. Munns was heavy under his gorgeous waistcoat, and he had

half made up his mind to retiring from management, or, as he phrased it, "cuttin' the whole concern."

A change had come over one person who has played an important part in this little drama—Lord Ticehurst. Gilbert Lloyd's place in that young nobleman's establishment never was filled up, much to the disgust of Bobby Maitland, who wrote off directly he heard of the quarrel, volunteering his services, and being perfectly ready to throw over his then patron, Mr. Stackborough, at a moment's notice. But the news of his old companion's death acted as a great shock upon the young earl, and those reflections which had come upon him during that homeward drive from Hastings, after his refusal by Miss Lambert, came upon him with redoubled force. His life was purposeless, and worse than purposeless; was passed in a not very elevated pursuit among very degrading surroundings. He had a name and position to keep up; and though his brains were not much, he knew that he might do something towards filling his station in life, and, please God,

he would. From Mr. Toshington you may gather that Lord Ticehurst has carried out his intention. "God knows what has come to Etchingham, sir!" the old gentleman, who has grown very shaky and senile, will say; "you never saw a fellow so changed. He's cut the turf and all that low lot of fellows—deuced good thing, that; lives almost entirely at his place down in Sussex, and has gone in for farmin', and cattle-breedin', and that kind of thing. What does it mean, eh? Well, I don't know, more than that there's never a sudden change in a man that I've ever seen, that there wasn't one thing at the bottom of it. A woman?—of course! They do say that Grace Belwether, niece of my old friend Sir Giles, is a devilish pretty, sensible young woman, and that Etchingham is very sweet on her."

And Miles Challoner, was he changed? He was sobered and saddened, perhaps; for a great deal of the gilding, which is but gum and gold-paper after all, but which makes life seem bright and alluring, had been ruthlessly rubbed off dur-

ing the past two years, and he bore about with him what was at once the greatest sorrow and the greatest joy—his love for Gertrude. This absorbing feeling influenced his whole life, and so engrossed him that he gave up everything in which he had formerly taken interest, and passed his time in recalling fleeting recollections of the happy days he had spent in the society of his beloved, and in endeavouring to arrange the wildest and most improbable combination of chances under which those happy days might be renewed. Long since he had fled from the "gross mud-honey of town"—where almost every place was fraught with bitter memories not merely of the loved and lost, but of the wretched man his brother, whose career of crime had been so suddenly brought to a close —and had established himself at Rowley Court in the hope that the quiet life and the occupation which his position required, and in which he would involve himself, would bring about a surcease of that gnawing pain which was ever at his heart.

All in vain. The ghost of the dead Past was not to be laid by change of scene; nor in the clear air of the country did the uncompromising Future loom brighter and more rosily than it had in murky London. Nor horse, nor dog, nor gun afforded the smallest pleasure to Miles Challoner, who said "Yes" or "No," whichever first entered his head when his steward made suggestions or asked for instructions, and who walked about his estate with his head hanging on his breast and his hands clasped behind him, chewing the cud of his bitter fancy, and wondering whether this purposeless, useless existence would ever terminate, and whether before his death he should ever have the chance of playing a part in the great drama of life.

One day he took a sudden determination. It was useless, he felt, remaining inert, inactive as he was, ever pursuing a vain phantom and letting his energies rust and his opportunities of doing real good pass by. He was a young man, and there was a life before him yet. Not there, not in his old ancestral home, hampered by "proud

laws of precedent" and conventionality, dragged down by old memories and associations with things bygone, but in the New World. Why should he not yet make his life a source of happiness and comfort to himself and others? He had no sentimental notions about parting with his family acres. He should never marry, of that he was firmly convinced, and at his death they would go to someone for whom he cared not one jot. Better to part with them at once, and take the proceeds with him to Australia, where at least he should be free from haunting memories of the past, and have the chance of making a career for himself.

This determination he at once proceeded to carry into effect, writing to his lawyer, and giving him instructions for the sale of the Rowley-Court property so soon as he could find a purchaser. Find a purchaser! It was difficult to make a selection. The Walbrooks and the Walbrooks' friends, who had bought land in the neighbourhood on Sir Thomas Walbrook's recommendation, and the friends who had been staying with the

Walbrooks, and thought they would like to have property in the neighbourhood—all self-made men who came up to London with half-a-crown and were then worth millions — all wanted to buy Rowley Court. Eventually, however, Miles gave the preference to Sir Thomas himself, and the arrangement had just been concluded between them when Miles received the letter with which the reader has been made acquainted in the previous chapter.

In one of the wildest and yet most peaceful scenes of the Alpine land, the grave of the English nobleman was made, by his own desire. He had no wish that his remains should be brought to England, but desired that they should be suffered to remain where his last quiet days of life had been passed in the society of his daughter. Under the shadow of the rustic church he rested; and when all had been done, Gertrude and Miles found themselves alone. It was a solemn time and a solemn occasion; and their utter isolation from all whom they had ever pre-

viously known, the strangeness of the scene, and the urgency and uncertainty of the future, oppressed them; while the loss of the best friend either had ever possessed so darkened the horizon for them, that not even their mutual and avowed love could brighten it.

By Lord Sandilands' desire Miles Challoner had sent for his solicitor, who arrived at the Fer à Cheval in time to be present at the funeral, and to whom Gertrude confided all the papers which her father had with him. Their contents were explicit. The greater portion of Lord Sandilands' property he had had the power to dispose of, and he had left it unreservedly to his daughter. There was no mention made of any other person; and Mr. Leggatt, the solicitor, was charged by his late client with the administration of the bequest.

The evening had fallen on the day whose morning had seen Lord Sandilands' quiet and simple funeral. Mr. Leggatt had explained to Gertrude her very satisfactory position in worldly affairs, and had received the few instructions

she had to give him. He then stated that he should be obliged to start on his homeward journey on the following day, and inquired Gertrude's immediate intentions with regard to her own movements. Gertrude replied that she could not tell him until the morning. Then Mr. Leggatt discreetly retired, and the lovers and mourners were left alone.

"I sent you from me because I had deceived you," said Gertrude, when the conversation, after long lingering upon the details of the past and upon the friends they had lost, was flagging. "And I thought you stayed away and made no sign because you could not forgive me."

"I stayed away because you had been deceived," said Miles, "and the time had not come when I could tell you the truth and ask you to aid me in making the best of it for us both. You know it all now." He took the letter Lord Sandilands had written to him from her hand. "You know that the miserable man who was to both of

us a rock ahead through life was my brother—the shame and misfortune of our family."

Gertrude bowed her head and covered her face with her hands.

He continued: "All that can be said, except how truly and devotedly I love you, is said in this letter—the last message of your father, of my best friend. There is nothing in England for which we care: we have no ties there; we are bound to each other only by ties of love and sorrow in all the world. No one knows, no one can ever know, what that unhappy man was to you and to me. Will you let me try to make you forgive and forget it all in a happier marriage? Ours is an exceptional case. The world would condemn us, if the world knew all it could, which would be only half the truth; we know all the truth, and are free from self-condemnation. Say yes, Gertrude; not to me only, remember, but to him whom we have lost; and we shall never see England any more, or part again in this world."

Gertrude made him no answer in words. Her

head was still bowed, and her eyes hidden by one hand; but she placed the other in his, and he knew that she was won.

Their marriage took place at Berne, and they are lost in the crowd.

THE END.

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