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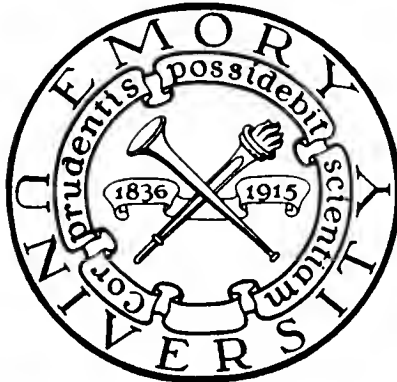
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ETC. ETC. ETC.

Stereotyped Edition

LONDON
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TO
SIR EDWIN LANDSEER R.A. D.C.L.
ETC. ETC. ETO.
THIS STORY IS DEDICATED
AS AN
HUMBLE TRIBUTE OF ADMIRATION
TO
HIS GREAT GENIUS

CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. "HE IS BUT A LANDSCAPE-PAINTER" . . .	1
II. LORD ASPENDELL'S DAUGHTER . . .	14
III. HECTOR . . .	26
IV. LOVE AND DUTY . . .	42
V. AT THE FOUNTAINS . . .	48
VII. WEDDING CARDS . . .	64
VII. THE GREAT O'BOYNEVILLE . . .	68
VIII. THE DOWAGER'S LITTLE DINNER . . .	84
IX. LAURENCE O'BOYNEVILLE'S FIRST HEARING . . .	95
X. THE RICH MR. LOBYER . . .	103
XI. AT NASEDALE . . .	112
XII. MR. O'BOYNEVILLE'S MOTION FOR A NEW TRIAL . . .	121
XIII. CECIL'S HONEYMOON . . .	131
XIV. MR. LOBYER'S WOOING . . .	140
XV. DELILAH . . .	151
XVI. AT HOME IN BLOOMSBURY . . .	163
XVII. POOR PHILIP . . .	174
XVIII. TOO LATE FOR REPENTANCE . . .	188
XIX. TIDINGS FROM INDIA . . .	198
XX. AT PEVENSHALL PLACE . . .	213
XXI. SIR NUGENT EVERSHERD . . .	220
XXII. MRS. LOBYER'S SKELETON . . .	233
XXIII. "HOW SHOULD I GREET THEE?" . . .	252
XXIV. BETWEEN CARTHAGE AND KENSINGTON . . .	266
XXV. THE EASY DESCENT . . .	279
XXVI. A MODERN LOVE-CHASE . . .	292
XXVII. "HE COMES TOO NEAR, WHO COMES TO BE DENIED" . . .	298
XXVIII. "WERE ALL THY LETTERS SUNS, I COULD NOT SEE" . . .	308
XXIX. A TIMELY WARNING . . .	313
XXX. "HE'S SWEETEST FRIEND, OR HARDEST FOE" . . .	319
XXXI. ON THE BRINK . . .	324
XXXII. BY THE SEA . . .	338
XXXIII. A COMMERCIAL EARTHQUAKE . . .	346
THE EPILOGUE . . .	361

THE LADY'S MILE.

CHAPTER I.

“HE IS BUT A LANDSCAPE-PAINTER.”

It was high tide—spring tide, if you will—at half past-six o'clock on a warm June evening: not the commonplace ebb and flow of a vulgar river; but the mighty tide of fashion's wonderful sea, surging westward, under the dusty elms and lindens of the Lady's Mile. If you had driven round this very park between four and five on this very afternoon, you would have been gratified by the sight of some half-dozen nursemaids with their straggling charges, an occasional girl and perambulator, a picturesque life guardsman here and there, making a little spot of crimson amongst the wavering shadows of the trees, a few hulking idlers in corduroy and bluchers, and a tipsy female sleeping on the grass. Now the excited policemen have enough to do to keep the four ranks of carriages in line, and to rescue foot-passengers from the pawing hoofs of three-hundred-guinea steeds. The walk under the trees is as crowded as the enclosure at Ascot, and the iron chairs are as fully occupied as the seats in a fashionable chapel. The pouncing proprietor, with the leathern pouch at his side, has hard work to collect his rents, so rapidly do his customers come and go, and is distracted by vague fears of levitating tenants and bad debts. On all the length of the rails between Hyde-Park Corner and the Serpentine there is scarcely room for one lounge more, for the rule of fashion is so subtle a bondage, that it has compelled millions of people who never in all their lives have spoken to one another to wear the same order of garments, and talk the same slang, and ride in the same kind of carriages, and eat the same class of dinners, and

congregate in the same places, at the same hour, year after year, and century after century, from the earliest dawn of civilisation until to-day.

The uninitiated lawyer's clerk from Holloway, lounging in the same attitude, and wearing the same pearl-grey gloves, and the same pattern of whisker as the initiated young patrician from the crack West-end clubs, may wonder whether the occupants of the splendid equipages rolling slowly by him are there by right divine of noble birth and lofty position, or by virtue of that golden 'open sesame,' that wonderful *passe partout*, which success bestows so often on the struggling plebeian. The Uninitiated from Holloway sees that there is not so much interchange of becks and nods, so friendly greetings, as might be expected if those elegant barouches and useful landaus, those dashing mail-phaetons and dainty little broughams, belonged only to the privileged classes whose highest privilege is the honour of being known to one another. Perceiving this, the Uninitiated perceives also, with astonished aspect, certain inhabitants of the Eastern Hemisphere, known to himself in their form of money-grub, but transformed here into butterflies of fashion, and driving mail-phaetons. Advertising agents, money-lending lawyers, professional betting-men, dashing brewers, popular distillers, pass before him side by side with dukes and duchesses, and only to be distinguished therefrom by an impalpable something which has no name. The Uninitiated, growing melancholy, begins to think that it is a hard thing not to have high-stepping horses and a mail-phaeton, and turns sadly from so much splendour to wend his way northwards, while high-born elbows close in upon the half-yard of railing which he leaves vacant. There are few places more calculated to inspire discontent than this Lady's Mile. Pale Envy stalks to and fro under the sheltering trees; Greed of Gain lurks invisible behind the iron chairs; Disappointed Ambition waits at the corner, ready to whisper in the poor man's ear, "Time was when you thought it such an easy thing to win a place amongst those favourites of fortune. Time was when you thought to see your wife sitting behind high-stepping horses, and your boy trotting his pony in the Row. Go home, poor drudge, with your blue-bag on your shoulder, and look at the slatternly drab leaning over the washtub, and the shabby whelp gambling for marbles in the gutter. Compare the picture of the present with the vision you once made for yourself of the future; and then be an agreeable husband and an indulgent father, and enjoy your domestic happiness and your penny newspaper, if you can."

We are a wealthy nation, the political economist tells the poor man, and our superfluous wealth must find employment

somehow or other. Hence the crush of high-stepping horses, the crowd of three-hundred-guinea barouches; the flutter of costly garments rustling in the summer air, the glitter and splendour which pervades every object, until it seems almost as if the superfluous gold were melted into the atmosphere, and all the female population were so many Miss Kilmanseggs. The loungee on the rails may for the moment find it almost difficult to believe that hungry women and gaunt haggard-looking men can have any place in the world of which this dazzling region is a part: but he need only look backward, under the shadow of the trees, to see poverty and crime prowling side by side in their rags. Yet at the worst, the dazzle and the glitter are good for trade; and it is better that the tide of wealth should be rolling to and fro along the Lady's Mile than looked in a miser's coffers or given in alms to professional beggars at a church-door. Some part of the superfluous gold must pass through the horny hands of labour before it can be transmuted into C-springs or patent axles, Honiton lace or Spitalfields silk; and perhaps the safest of all philosophy is that which accepts the doctrine that "whatever is, is right."

But amongst the loungees on the rails this summer evening there was one person stationed with his companion some little distance from the rest of the idlers, who was very much inclined to quarrel with this easy-going axiom, or with any other sentiment that involved contentment. The eyes with which Philip Foley contemplated the world were young, and rather handsome eyes; but they saw every thing in a jaundiced light just now. He was a painter, self-contained and ambitious as a disciple of art should be. But he had not yet learnt the sublime patience of the faithful disciple; and he was angry with Fortune because she hid her face; forgetful that if she is a churlish mother, she can also be an over-indulgent one, and sometimes destroys her fairest favourites by smiling upon them too soon. Philip Foley was in love, and the girl he loved was the most capricious little enchanteress who ever studied the prettiest method of breaking her adorers' hearts. The summer light which should have shone upon the back of his shabby painting-jacket, as he stood before his easel, dazzled his eyes as he looked along the Lady's Mile, seeking her carriage among the crowd.

"I say, Foley, old fellow, when are you coming out of this, eh?" demanded Sigismund Smythe, the novelist, who had abandoned the penny public to court the favour of circulating-library subscribers, and had sublimated the vulgar Smith into the aristocratic Smythe. Mr. Smythe the author and Mr. Foley the painter were sworn friends; and the placid Sigis-

mund was recreating himself after a day's hard labour on the "Testimony" of his latest hero, "Written in the Hulks."

"Out of which?"

"The reflective line. You haven't spoke for the last quarter of an hour. That's a pretty girl with the strawberry-ice coloured parasol. I say, though, old fellow, you don't suppose I've written two dozen three-volume novels without knowing something of the human mind when contemplated in relation to the tender passion. I know all about it, you know; and it's not the least use your abandoning yourself to melancholy meditation on *that* subject. She's all your fancy painted her, &c. &c., I allow; but she's the coldest-hearted and most mercenary little scoundrel in creation, and she never can be yours. Put a clean sponge over the tablet of your brain, dear boy, and turn your attention to some body else."

"What new imbecility has afflicted your feeble intellect?" asked the painter indignantly. "I don't know what you're talking of."

"Oh yes, you do, dear boy, and it's the same thing that you are thinking of, and its name amongst the vulgar is Florence Crawford; but it is better known in polite society as 'Flo.'"

The young painter gave a sardonic laugh.

"I should be a fool to trouble my head about *her*," he said contemptuously.

"So you would be a fool, old fellow; and so you are a fool, for you do trouble yourself about her. You've been on the watch for her carriage for the last half-hour, and she has not gone by; for instead of tormenting creation at large by driving here, I dare say she is torturing mankind in particular by stopping at home. Don't be an idiot, Phil, but come to Greenwich and have some dinner."

"No," cried Philip, "I will stop here till she passes me by, with her insolent little affectation of not seeing me, and all the pretty tricks that constitute her fascination. You think me a fool, Sigismund; but you can never think so poorly of me as I think of myself when I find myself here day after day, while the very light I want is shining into my wretched painting-room at Highbury. Do you remember what Catullus says?"

'Odi et amo; quare id faciam, fortasse requiris:
Nescio, sed fieri sentio, et exerceor.'

Do you know that it is quite possible to love and hate the same person at the same moment? I love Florence Crawford because she is Florence Crawford. I hate her for the fatal bondage in which she holds me. I hate her for her evil in-

fluence upon my career. I hate her as the slave hates his master. Do other men suffer as I do, I wonder? or has feeling gone out of fashion, and am I behind the time? The most devoted lover nowadays only calls his betrothed a 'nice little party,' and hopes the 'governor will do the right thing.' The men whom I meet take pains to advertise their contempt for any thing like real feeling; and girls of eighteen tell you with a smile that a love-match is the most preposterous thing in creation. The women of the present day are as heartless as they are beautiful; as artificial as they are charming,—the Dead-Sea fruit of civilisation, the——"

"The natural growth of the age of sixty-mile-an-hour locomotives," rejoined the placid Sigismund. "Do you forget that man is an imitative animal, and that the rate at which we travel has become the rate at which we live? Steam is the ruling principle of our age, and the pervading influence of our lives. Depend upon it, that ever since mankind began to exist, every succeeding age has lived faster than its predecessor. 'Time was that when the brains were out the man would die,' says Macbeth; 'but now,' &c. &c. He isn't a bit surprised at Banquo's appearance, you see. A ghost more or less is nothing extraordinary in a fast-going age. And we've been accelerating the pace ever since Macbeth's day. It used to take a man a week to go from London to Lyme Regis, and the best part of a lifetime to earn the few thousands which in his simple notions constituted a fortune. Nowadays a man goes from London to New York in less than a fortnight; and he expects to make his half-million or so while the purple bloom is on his locks, and the light of youth in his eyes. Steam is every where and in every thing. We educate our children by steam; and our men and women want to grow rich at the rate of sixty miles an hour. Every man has the same tastes, the same aspirations. There is no such person nowadays as the Sir Balaam who thought it a grand thing to have two puddings for his Sunday dinner. Sir Visto is not the exception, but the rule; and the poor man ruins himself by blindly following the rich. Sir Balaam has a man cook, and dines *à la Russe*. Sir Balaam's cashier has his dinners from the confectioner, and dines *à la Russe* too. Sir Visto, the Manchester cotton-spinner, is a patron of the arts, and buys largely at Christie's. His clerks follow in his wake, and cover the walls of their little suburban dining-rooms with impossible Cuyps and sham Backhuysens, bought in Wardour Street. Before we die we may see Sir Balaam and Sir Visto in the *Gazette*, with all their followers at their heels. Look at the dresses and carriages passing by us. I know most of the people, more or less; and I can see the wives and daughters of

hard-working professional men vying with the peerage and the autocracy of the money market. Don't rail against the women, my dear Philip; the women are—what the men make them. You must have *Lui* before you can have *Elle*. Aspasia is impossible without Perieles. You could never have had a Cleopatra unless you had first your Cæsar; or your Marian de Lorme without Cinq Mars. The lives of the women of the present day are like this drive which they call the Lady's Mile. They go as far as they can, and then go back again. See how mechanically the horses wheel when they reach the prescribed turning-point. If they went any farther, I suppose they would be lost in some impenetrable forest depth in Kensington Gardens. In the drive the rule has no exception; because, you see, the barrier that divides the park from the gardens is a palpable iron railing, which the stoutest hunter might refuse. But on the highway of life the boundary line is not so clearly defined. There are women who lose themselves in some unknown region beyond the Lady's Mile, and whom we never hear of more. Ah, friend Philip, let us pity those benighted wanderers whose dismal stories are to be found amongst the chronicles of the Divorce Court, whose tarnished names are only whispered by scandal-loving dowagers between the acts of an opera, or in the pauses of a rubber. On this side, the barrier they pass seems so slight a one—a hedge of thorns that are half hidden by the gaudy tropical flowers that hang about them—a few scratches, and the boundary is passed; but when the desperate wanderer pauses for a moment on the other side to look backward, behold! the thorny hedgerow is transformed into a wall of brass that rises to the very skies, and shuts out earth and heaven."

It was not often that Mr. Smythe indulged in any such rhapsody as this in ordinary society; but Philip Foley and the novelist were sworn friends and brothers, united by that pleasant bondage of sympathy which is a better brotherhood than the commoner bond of kindred. Sigismund had brothers and sisters in Midlandshire, but there was not one of them who could be as much to him as Philip the painter.

It is doubtful whether Mr. Foley had heard much of his friend's oration. He had been leaning on the rails in a moody attitude, watching the carriages go by. And now, when he spoke, it seemed as if he were replying to some question that had been brooding in his own mind, rather than to the observations of his friend.

"Do you think I don't know Florence Crawford?" he said, "and know that she is no wife for me—if she would have me—and she would as soon think of marrying me as the earver and gilder who makes her father's frames. Indeed, I dare say she'd

rather marry the frame-maker, for he earns more money than I do, and could give her finer dresses. She has told me a hundred times that she will marry for money; that when she leaves her father's house—a bride, with innocent bridal-flowers upon her brow—she will bid farewell to her home on the same principle as that on which her housemaid leaves her—to better herself. Think of her in my carpetless painting-room at High-bury, looking up from her work to watch me at my easel, and beguiling me with hopeful speeches when I am depressed. One reads of that sort of wife in a novel. But can you find me such a one nowadays, Sigismund? The women of the present day live only to look beautiful and to be admired. They are pitiless goddesses, at whose shrines men sacrifice the best gifts of their souls. When I look at the splendour of these carriages, the glory of the butterfly creatures who ride in them, I think how many plodding wretches are toiling in Temple-chambers, or lecturing in the theatres of hospitals, or pacing to and fro on the dusty floor of the Stock Exchange, racked by the thought of hazardous time-bargains, in order that these frivolous divinities may have gorgeous raiment and high-stepping horses, and plant the arrows of envious rage in one another's tender bosoms. I think they learn the love of splendour in their cradles. They are proud of their lace-frocks and gaudy sashes before they can speak: their dolls are duchesses; or, what is worse, as Hippolyte Rigault has said, ‘*poupées aux camélias.*’ And then they grow up, and some fine day a poor man falls in love with one of them, and finds that it would have been infinitely wiser to have dashed out his brains against a stone wall than to have been beguiled by the mad hope that a penniless lover's devotion could have any value in their sight.”

“Wait till you have made a name, Phil, and can afford as grand a place as the Fountains, and then see if Miss Crawford won't be civil to you. Come, we may as well slope, old fellow; it's nearly seven o'clock. The enchantress will not appear to-night. Let us go some where and dine, and forget her.”

“Dine by yourself, Sybarite,” answered the painter. “A man whose most laborious picture sells for a ten-pound note has no right to whitebait and Moselle. I can buy half a pound of damp beef at the cook-shop as I go home. It will not be the first time that the silk-lining of my coat has been greased by a parcel from the cook-shop. I dare say I smell of beef sometimes when I call upon Florence Crawford.”

“But, Phil, when you know I'm so glad to stand Sam—” remonstrated Mr. Smythe.

But he remonstrated in vain. Philip Folcy rejoiced in his poverty and his deprivations as a gladiator might rejoice in the

training that he knew must insure victory. To suffer and be strong was the young painter's motto, and he took a boyish pride in his bare rooms and his scanty dinners, the feat of pedestrianism that saved him a half-crown in cab-hire, the heroism which enabled him to carry his head loftily under a hat whose bloom had vanished. He was very young. His faults were the faults of youth—his graces the graces that perish with youth. He had all the insolent confidence in his own judgment and the contempt for other people which seems the peculiar attribute of five-and-twenty. He would point you out the feeble drawing in a fresco by Michael Angelo, or the false lights in a Rembrandt, with an utter unconsciousness that he was making a fool of himself. Hot-headed, generous-hearted, impulsive, undisciplined, candid, and true, Philip Foley was the incarnation of ambitious youth before the fiery steel has been thrice refined in the furnace of disappointment. He had only just begun the great battle, and as yet he saw in failure the evidence of the popular error, and not of his own weakness. The vision of his own future shone before him—only a little distant, and with no hindering clouds between. He was ready to paraphrase Cæsar's despatch, and cry aloud to all the world, "I am coming—I shall see—I shall conquer!"

The painter did not turn his head to bid his friend Sigismund adieu; he was looking along the line of carriages for that one equipage, to behold which was so thrilling a pleasure that it was worth his while to waste half a day for the chance of obtaining it.

The fairy chariot came by at last, with the fairy in it, and all the mortal coaches melted into air. The fairy was a pretty, coquettish-looking girl, who seemed scarcely eighteen years of age, and whose dark-grey eyes and black eyelashes were rendered doubly enchanting by the piquancy of their contrast with her rippling golden hair. The fair one with the golden locks has become quite a common young person in these days of eunning hair-washes and Circassian waters; but Florence Crawford's waving tresses had been tinted only by the hand of Nature, and she was by no means proud of their sunny hue. She would have preferred to be a heavy-browed person of the masculine order, with blue-black hair and an aquiline nose, instead of that dear little insolent *retroussé*, which seemed perpetually asking questions of all humanity.

Yes; Miss Crawford's nose was decidedly *retroussé*; but it as little resembled the vulgar snub, or the lumpy pug, or the uncompromising turn-up, as a pearl resembles a lump of chalk.

It was the dearest and most delicate little nose that ever

inhaled the odours of a costly bouquet in a box on the grand tier, or buried itself between the flossy ears of a Maltese terrier. It was an aristocratic nose, and could be as imperiously disdainful as the stateliest Roman; but whatever it was, its delicate outline was engraved on Philip Foley's heart too deeply for his worldly welfare or his bosom's peace. She was as far away from him as the young June moon that glimmered pale in the daylight above the Lady's Mile. And yet she was only a painter's daughter; but then there was all the distance that divides the topmost pinnacle of Fame's mighty mountain from the lowest depths of obscurity, between William Crawford, R.A., of the Fountains, Kensington, and Philip Foley, of Adelgisa Crescent, Highbury.

That he was clever, every body who knew any thing about the art he loved was ready to acknowledge; that he had something in him that was of a grander and sterner stuff than cleverness, Philip Foley himself knew very well. If he had been only clever, success would have been a much easier thing for him; and he knew this too.

Owen Meredith has very nobly said that "genius does what it must, and talent does what it can." And Philip Foley obeyed the ungovernable impulse within him, and flung gloom, and darkness, and meteoric skies, and raging seas, and all manner of Titanic grandeur upon his canvases, when he should have been painting inevitable rustic maidens in scarlet cloaks, trotting meekly across the wooden bridges that span placid mill-streams, or fishermen's white-sailed craft bobbing up and down upon bright blue-and-opal seas. If it had not been for the patronage of two or three north-country magnates, whose boyhood had been spent on the bleak shores of the German Ocean, and who bought Philip's rugged cliffs and darksome seas for love of their own vanished youth, the young painter would have found life's battle a sore and difficult fight; but with a little income of his own, the grace of these rich patrons, and the help of considerable employment from Mr. Crawford, for whom he sometimes painted backgrounds, Philip Foley was rich enough to have leisure to declaim about his poverty,—and your real poverty has no time for declamation. He was rich enough to live without care, to entertain his friends with unlimited bitter-beer from the nearest tavern, and to keep an un-failing supply of mild tobacco in the French china jar that adorned his mantelpiece. He could afford to dress like a gentleman, and to waste a good deal of his life in haunting the places where Florence Crawford was likely to be met; and, good year or bad year, he never failed to carry a rich silk dress, or a handsome shawl, or a wonderfully-inlaid casket, or workbox, or portfolio, or tea-caddy, to a maiden lady in a

sleepy little village deep down in a pastoral valley some ten or twelve miles from Burkesfield, Bucks,—a valley that lay out of the track of coach-road or railway, and had made no more progress within the last forty years than if the inhabitants had been so many Rip Van Winkles.

The maiden lady was Philip Foley's aunt, and the only near relation he possessed. That she loved him to distraction was the most natural thing in the world, for she was a gentle and loving creature, and for the last five-and-twenty years of her life had concentrated her affection upon the orphan boy who had come from India a frail nursling to be committed to her charge by his sickly father, who went back to Bengal to die, within the year of his return, on a dismal march through a cholera-haunted district. Whence the child derived his love of art, no one knew. His father had been an ensign in the Company's service; his mother, a frivolous young person, with thirteen hundred pounds in Indian Stock, a tendency to consumption, and not two ideas of her own. But the divine afflatus that gives life to the nostrils of painters and poets is no hereditary possession to be handed from father to son, like so many acres of common earth, or so much money in Consols. From the hour in which Philip Foley's baby fingers first tightened round a pencil, he was an artist. He drew houses, and apple-trees, and straggling reptiles which he meant for horses, before he could speak; and then when he was old enough to buy his first colour-box, he went out into the woods and fields, like Constable; and alone, amongst the beautiful mysteries of nature, his soul and mind expanded, unfettered and untaught.

The time came, as it almost always does come, sooner or later, in the lives of gifted creatures, when the appreciative stranger came across the boy's pathway. An elderly gentleman came suddenly upon young Philip one day, as he sat on a fallen tree in a clearing, painting the glade that stretched before him, darkly mysterious in its sombre shadows. The elderly gentleman asked the boy more questions than he had ever been asked consecutively in his life before; and as it generally happens to a lad who is tolerably well connected, it happened in this case. The elderly gentleman had known a member of Philip's family, and was inclined to be interested in him on that account.

"But a great deal more so on account of those purple shadows," said the stranger pleasantly. "One may meet young sprigs of old families any day in the year; but a lad of fourteen who has such nice ideas about light and shade is by no means a common person. And your aunt is using all her interest to get you to Addiscombe, is she? so that you may

follow in your father's footsteps, and die of cholera at sunrise, to be buried in the sands before sunset. Let your aunt use her interest to get you into Mr. O'Skuro's academy, and she'll be employing it for some purpose. Your mother had some money, hadn't she?"

"Fifty pounds a year," answered the boy blushing. He had all the grand notions which are common to extreme youth, and was almost ashamed to proclaim the pitiful amount.

"And very nice too," returned the stranger briskly; "I have known men whom fifty pounds a year—yes, or five-and-twenty—would have saved from ruin,—clever men who have starved for want of ten shillings a-week. A man with a pound a-week, secured to him for his lifetime, need never commit a dishonourable action, or accept an insult. Take me to see your aunt, Mr. Foley; and if I find her a sensible woman, we'll have you sitting behind your drawing-board at O'Skuro's academy before the year is out."

The elderly gentleman was as good as his word. He turned out to be an amateur landscape-painter, who united untiring industry to the smallest amount of ability, and who, with a very limited income, had contrived to collect a wonderful little gallery of what he called "bits," broker's-shop and obscure sale-room acquisitions, which adorned the walls of a tiny cottage at Dulwich, and which he was wont to exhibit every Sunday to admiring friends or sceptical connoisseurs.

Before the year was out Miss Foley had consented to a bitter sacrifice, the sacrifice which she knew must come sooner or later, and had packed her boy's trunks, and stood on the platform at Burkesfield to watch the departure of the train that carried him away from her.

Mr. Theophilus Gee, the amateur and connoisseur, had talked her into the belief that her nephew was an embryo Turner; and she had bidden the boy go forth upon the first stage on the great highway that leads to glory, or to disappointment and death. He left the simple elegance of his aunt's cottage, and the tutorship of the Burkesfield curate, to plunge into the universal Bohemia of art; and for four years he worked conscientiously under the fostering care of Mr. O'Skuro. Then came foreign travel, and then pedestrian wanderings on the wildest shores of England and Wales, Highland rambles, excursions in Western Ireland, a long apprenticeship to that grand mistress, Nature, who is a better teacher than all the masters who ever created academicians. And at last the young painter established himself in a lodging at Highbury, and began to paint for his daily bread.

Then it was that his friend Mr. Gee introduced him to William Crawford, the great painter, who employed the em-

bryo Turner to paint backgrounds for delicious little sketches that could have been covered half-a-dozen inches deep by the sovereigns that were given for them.

The young man accepted the employment, but disdained himself for accepting it, until there came an angel into the painting-room one day to take the painter's soul captive, and reconcile him to any lot that brought him near her. The angel was Florence, only child and spoiled darling of William Crawford, who came to ask her father for a check for her milliner. She was an angel with a tiny *retroussé* nose, and dark-grey eyes, that were generally mistaken for black; an impulsive angel with a temper that was more capricious than an April day.

For some time after that meeting in the painting-room, Philip believed that he admired Miss Crawford only as the most beautiful thing he had ever seen; but he woke one day to the knowledge that he loved her to distraction, and that the happiness of his life was as utterly at her mercy as the little golden toys hanging from her chatelaine, which she had so pretty a trick of trifling with when she talked to him.

Of all men upon earth, perhaps William Crawford was the least tainted by any odour of snobbishness. No intoxicating sense of triumph bewildered him on the giddy height to which he had risen. He stood serene upon the mountain top; for he looked upward to the starry Valhalla of dead painters—whose glory seemed as high above him as the stars in which he could fancy them dwelling—and not downward to the struggling wayfarers he had left behind him.

"If people knew as much about painting as I do, they wouldn't believe in my pictures," said Mr. Crawford.

He had rivals—rivals whom he envied and adored—against whose giant hands his own seemed to him so feeble and puny; but their names were Rembrandt and Velasquez, Rubens and Reynolds, Titian and Correggio, Guido and Vandyke. To him art seemed a grand republic, a brotherhood in which success had no power to divide a man from his brethren. He was rich, and he spent his money royally, for he was as fond of splendour as Rubens himself; and he had not Peter Paul's affection for gold. Perhaps no man who was equally successful ever had so few enemies as William Crawford. Young men adored him, struggling men came to him for advice, disappointed men poured their wrongs into his ears and took comfort from his sympathy. He was the ideal painter, and he ought to have sat in the pillared hall of some old Roman palace, with a band of faithful followers watching the free sweep of his inspired hand, and an emperor in attendance to pick up his maulstick. In this man's house Philip Foley

came and went as freely as if he had been a kinsman of the host ; and coming from church on a Sunday evening, the pious inhabitants of Adelgisa Crescent were apt to be startled by the apparition of the young painter dressed in evening costume, and bending his footsteps westward in the dusty summer twilight. Sunday evening at the “ Fountains ” was a grand institution. On that evening the painter was at home to his friends ; and as the name of his friends was legion, very pleasant company was to be met at Kensington between nine and twelve on every Sabbath in the season. Rank and fashion, literature and art, war and physic, law and diplomacy, poverty and wealth, jostled one another in those bright, airy drawing-rooms. The painter’s fame was cosmopolitan, and foreigners from every court and capital brought him their tribute of admiration ; and amidst this elegant crowd Florence floated hither and thither, radiant in the most dazzling toilettes that Madame Descou could devise, and inflicting anguish upon the souls of her adorers by the capricious distribution of her smiles. And Philip, who could find no phrase too bitter for his denunciation of her follies, came every Sunday evening to tell her he hated and despised her, and would henceforth make it his business to forget her existence, remained to adore her, and went back to Highbury more utterly her slave than before.

She saw him as he lounged against the rails that bright June evening, and greeted him with a condescending little gesture of her head,—adorned with Madame Ode’s last madness in the shape of a bonnet,—and then the barouche rolled by and she was gone. The carriages were growing thin. It was scarcely likely that she could return, for it was close upon her father’s dinner-hour. Poor Philip wondered what party she was going to—with whom she would dance. He fancied her smiling destruction upon the gilded youth of Tyburnia and Belgravia. He thought of those charmed circles in which she was as remote from him as if she had gone to parties in the Pleiades ; and then, as he crossed the park on his pilgrimage northwards, he set his strong white teeth together fiercely, and muttered :

“ *I will succeed !* ”

It was not to have his name inscribed upon the mighty roll where blaze the names of Raffaele and Correggio that the young man aspired with such a passionate yearning, but to have an *entrée* in the West-end mansions where Florence Crawford was to be met.

CHAPTER II.

LORD ASPENDELL'S DAUGHTER.

WHEN the brilliant stream of carriages had poured out of Apsley Gate ; when the Serpentine blushed redly in the low western sunlight ; when the fashionable world had gone homeward in barouches and landaus, britzskas and phaetons, to dash through the dusky park two hours hence in tiny miniature broughams, with lamps that flash like meteors through the night ; when a solemn twilight calm had come down upon the dusky greensward, and the tinkling of a sheep-bell made a rustie sound in the stillness ; when a town-bred Gray might have sat beside the plaicid water meditating an elegy in a West-end park,—a lumbering old chariot was very often to be seen creeping up and down the Lady's Mile. It was a shabby old carriage, with a ponderous drab hammer-cloth which the moths had eaten away in bare patches here and there,—a faded old carriage which might have been bright and splendid long ago, when lovely Margaret, Countess of Blessington, was to be seen in the Lady's Mile, and genial Lord Palmerston was called Cupid. But now in the still gloaming this dismal equipage might have been mistaken for some phantom chariot haunting the scene of departed glories. The pale face looking out at the window would have assisted the delusion, so lifeless was its changeless calm—a beautiful, melancholy, patrician face. You might have fancied you beheld the unreal image of a forgotten belle, a ghost of beauty gliding in her shadowy chariot beneath the spreading branches which had looked down upon her triumphs years and years ago.

You might have thought this if you were prone to sentimental musings in the tender twilight ; but if you were a sober, practical person, you would most likely have found out who the lady was, and all about her. She was Lady Cecil Chudleigh, orphan daughter of Lord Aspendell ; and she was the unpaid companion, the unrecompensed dependant upon the elderly dowager to whom the phantom chariot belonged, and who sat far back in the vehicle, while her beautiful niece looked sadly out upon the rosy bosom of the Serpentine.

In all the world Lady Cecil had no other friend or protector than the dowager, who was the widow of an Anglo-Indian general, and only surviving sister of the dead Countess of Aspendell. The Anglo-Indian warrior had distinguished himself at more places ending with "pore" and "bad" than can

be numerated without weariness, had lived a life of reckless and barbaric extravagance in despite of all feminine remonstrance, and had died, leaving his widow very little except his pension and a house-full of Indian shawls, embroidered muslins, sandal-wood boxes, beetle-baskets, and Trichinopoly jewelry.

After the General's death, Mrs. MacClaverhouse—the warrior was of Scottish extraction, and claimed kindred with the hero of Killiecrankie,—after her husband's death the widow had sold the lease of the great house in Portland Place, in whose pillared dining-room the General had been wont to entertain all the notabilities of the three presidencies, and beneath whose sheltering roof he had staggered half tipsy to bed every night for the last ten years of his life. She sold the lease, and the furniture, and the very curious old ports, and constantias, and madeiras ; but she kept all the bangles and sandal-wood, the beetles' wings and gorgeous scarfs, and shawls and table-covers, and a very nice little selection from the rare old wines, and a small stock of the plate, and glass, and china, and table-linen, which the magnificent General had chosen, of such splendid quality ; and with these she retired to furnished apartments on the quietest side of Dorset Square. She kept the chariot in which she had driven and visited for the last twenty years of her life, and the fat grey horses that had drawn it ; but she sent the equipage to a livery-stable in the neighbourhood of her new abode, and she bargained with the proprietor for a sober coachman at five-and-twenty shillings a week ; a coachman who wore the stable-yard livery, and was sometimes almost disreputable about the legs and feet.

And then one day she went down to Brighton, where the Earl of Aspendell and his only daughter had been living for the last ten years, in a tiny cottage on the Dyke Road, with a little grass-plat before the windows, and dimity curtains fluttering from the open casements—so poor, so friendless, so dignified in their unpretending seclusion. There was very little trouble connected with pecuniary misfortune which Cecil Chudleigh had not known. The extravagance of a father's youth, repented of too late ; the wild follies of a brother's mad career—never repented of at all, but cut suddenly short by a fatal false step on a frozen mountain-side, amidst the desolate grandeur of the Alps ; a cheerless home ; a mother's slow decay, half physical, half mental ; and the weary task of be-guiling the monotonous days of a ruined and remorseful spend-thrift : sorrows such as these had darkened the young life, and hushed the silvery laugh, and transformed the girl of seventeen into a woman drooping under the burden of a woman's heaviest cares.

It was only when the Earl of Aspendell and his folly were

buried together in a corner of the little hill-side churchyard where Captain Tattersall the loyal, and Phoebe Hessel the daring, sleep so quietly ; it was only when Cecil was quite desolate, and sat with the *Times* newspaper in her lap, staring hopelessly at the advertisements, and wondering whether she was clever enough to be a governess,—it was then only that Marion MacClaverhouse thought fit to trouble herself about the fate of her dead sister's only surviving child. Her brother-in-law's death happened "fortunately," as she said herself, in the Brighton season ; and as she had no invitation for the current month, Mrs. MacClaverhouse decided on paying a brief visit to Brighton. The widow was of a prudent turn of mind, and contrived to save money out of her limited income ;—for a rainy day, she said. She had been saving odd pounds and shillings and sixpences for this anticipated wet weather ever since her marriage, and as yet Jupiter Pluvius had been pitiful, and had restrained his fury.

She went to the little Dyke-Road cottage to see Cecil Chudleigh—to inspect her, it may be said, so sharply did she scrutinise, so closely did she interrogate the girl. But Lady Cecil's mind was too candid to shrink from questioning ; and she thought her aunt most nobly generous when that lady proposed to adopt her henceforward as companion, reader, amanuensis, and prop and comfort to her declining years. Lady Cecil certainly did not happen to know that the widow had been for some time on the look-out for a suitable person as companion and drudge, and had only failed to suit herself because, in her own words, "the impertinent creatures wanted such preposterous salaries, and asked if I allowed port at luncheon, as their physicians had ordered it. Their physicians, indeed ! a dispensary-surgeon, or the parish apothecary, I should think !" cried the widow, impatiently ; for she was an energetic and plain-speaking person, who was always proclaiming her want of "common patience" with the failings and follies of her fellow-creatures.

Lady Cecil went home with the dowager, and ministered very patiently to her wants and pleasures, and read the newspapers to her, and beat down the tradespeople, and disputed about stray entries of mutton-chops and half-pounds of tea that had or had not been supplied, and counted the glass, and was responsible for the spoons, and trembled when the widow's own parlour-maid chipped a morsel out of one of the General's tumblers ; for was it not her duty to see that neither glass nor china was broken, and that the silver *entrée*-dishes, salvers, butter-boats, and tea-trays were rubbed with the hand only, and not scratched and smudged with a greasy, gritty leather ? Cecil's own pretty pink palms helped to clean the

dowager's plate sometimes when there was a festival in Dorset Square.

Mrs. MacClaverhouse was very fond of society, and entertained innumerable elderly warriors and judges of the Sudder, with their wives and daughters, in her stuffy little dining-room. The splendid silver and glass were set forth, the rare old wines were brought out very often in the London season, and Lady Cecil bowed under the burden of a new kind of care, and went to sleep oppressed by the terror of a tablespoon missing from the plate-basket, or a butter-boat that had not been put away.

Sometimes she felt a sick yearning for the old monotonous days with her father; for when they were saddest there had been a tender quiet in their sadness. In the new life there might be no sorrow, but then there was such continual worry. The burdens laid upon her were very small ones, but then there were so many of them; and every day it seemed as if the last straw would be added to the heap, and she must sink down in the dust and die.

The dowager was not unkind to her niece; for she was too much a woman of the world not to know when she had a good servant, and to rejoice in the fact that she possessed that treasure at the cheapest possible rate. She was not unkind, but she was pitiless. She called Cecil "my dear," and bought her pretty dresses—pretty dresses that were to be had cheap after stock-taking at the West-end haberdashers', dainty gauzes with the bloom off them, and muslins with soiled edges; she gave her good food, and persuaded her to take half-glasses of tawny port, which the girl, in her secret soul, thought more nasty than physie; but if Lady Cecil had been dying, Mrs. MacClaverhouse would have come to her death-bed to demand the inventory of the china, and to ask if it were six or eight shell-and-thread pattern salt-spoons that had been intrusted to the parlour-maid for the last dinner-party.

For three years Lady Cecil had lived on the dullest side of Dorset Square, and counted the glasses and spoons, and battled with the Marylebone tradesmen, and ridden in the phantom chariot. In all those three years there had been only one break in the drudgery of her life, only one glimpse of sunshine; but then it was such a dazzling burst of light, such a revelation of paradise. Ah, let my pen fall lightly on the paper as I write the story of that tender dream.

It was the habit of Mrs. MacClaverhouse to spend as much of her time in visiting as was thoroughly agreeable to her acquaintance. She liked visiting because it was pleasant and cheap; but she was too wise a woman to wear out her welcome, and no one had ever uttered the obnoxious word 'sponge'

in conjunction with her name. She was lively and agreeable—rather vulgar perhaps, but then genteel people are permitted to be vulgar—clever, well dressed, of high family, and acknowledged position, and she gave cosy little dinners in the season; so there were many houses in which she and her niece were favourite guests in the cheery winter days when an old country-house is such a paradise. Poor Cecil found herself sometimes looking anxiously after other people's spoons and forks in these pleasant holiday times, or taking a mental photograph of a cold sirloin or a raised pie as it was removed from the breakfast-table; for one of her home duties was to register the appearances of joints and poultry before they descended into the territory of the landlady, who might or might not be honest. Mrs. MacClaverhouse made a point of never quite believing in people's honesty.

"Don't tell me that I have known them for years and never known them rob me!" exclaimed the widow. "They may have robbed me without my knowing it, or they may not have robbed me because I never gave them the opportunity; and they may begin to rob me to-morrow if they get the chance. Look at the Bishop of Northlandshire's butler, who had lived with him thirteen years, and ran away with five hundred pounds' worth of plate in the fourteenth. Look at Sir Harry Hinchcliffe's valet, who was such a faithful creature that his master left him an annuity of two hundred a year; which he would have enjoyed very much, no doubt, if he hadn't stripped the house while his benefactor's corpse was lying in it, and had not been transported for life in consequence. Don't talk to me about honesty, Cecil. If Mrs. Krewson is an honest woman, why do her eyes sparkle so when I order a large joint, and why are two quarts of Bisque barely enough for six?"

In the autumn Mrs. MacClaverhouse generally retired to some marine retreat unfrequented by cockneys or fashionables, where lodgings were to be had on reasonable terms, and where she could recruit herself and her niece for the winter campaign.

"I really don't see why you shouldn't marry well, Cecil,—though Heaven knows what will become of the General's diamond-cut glass when you leave me,—and I sometimes wonder how it is you haven't made a good match before now," said the widow. "I think it's that cold manner of yours that keeps the men off; and then you don't talk slang, as some of the women do nowadays. You're not dashing, you know, my love; but you are very handsome, and elegant, and accomplished; and if any one of those flippant minxes can sing Rossini's music or write an inventory of china as well as

you, I'll eat her—pearl-powder and all," added Mrs. Mac, with a wry face.

It was very true that as yet no pretender of any importance had appeared for Lady Cecil Chudleigh's hand. It might be that lovers were kept off by the cold reserve of her manners, the shrinking dislike to take any prominent part in society which is apt to affect those whom poverty has always kept more or less at a disadvantage, or it might be in consequence of that panic in the matrimonial market of which we have heard so much in these latter days.

The dowager had been quite sincere when she spoke of her niece's beauty. There were few handsomer faces to be seen in the Lady's Mile than that which looked wistfully out of the phantom chariot. It was a pale face—pale with no muddled sickly whiteness, or bilious yellow, but that beautiful pallor which is so rare a charm,—a pensive patrician face, with a slender aquiline nose, and dark hazel eyes. People liked to see Lady Cecil in their rooms, even when she wore her plainest white muslin, and kept herself most persistently in a shadowy corner, so unmistakable were her rank and breeding. Young men who complained that she had so little to say for herself, and lamented the absence of a mysterious quality called "go" in her manners, confessed that her profile was more beautiful than the finest cameo in the Louvre, and her style unexceptionable.

"If polygamy were admissible, I'd marry Lady Cecil to-morrow," remarked a gentleman of the genus Swell. "She is the woman of women to sit at the head of a fellow's table and do him credit in society; but if I were going home half-sea-sick after a four-in-hand club-dinner at Richmond, I'd as soon have Lady Maebeth sitting up for me as Lord Aspendell's daughter. Not that she'd be coarse or low, like the Scotch-women, you know—not a bit of it. She'd receive me with a stately curtsy, and freeze me to death with her classic profile. Egad! when you come to think of it, you know, old fellow, there must be a hitch somewhere in the matrimonial law. Society doesn't confine a man to one horse; society doesn't compel him to ride his park-hack across country, or harness his racing stud to his drag; and yet society limits an unhappy beast to one wife; and if he marries a nice little indulgent creature who won't look black at him when he goes home late or smokes in the dining-room, the odds are that she'll freeze his marrow by dropping her h's and talking of her par—who was something in the soap-boiling way—at an archbishop's state-dinner."

In the second autumn of Lady Cecil's dependence the dowager carried her niece and her parlour-maid to a pretty

little village on the Hampshire coast—a sleepy little village, where the fruit was blown off the trees in farmers' orchards by the fresh breath of ocean breezes—a village nestling under the shadow of brown, sun-burnt hills, a long, straggling street of rustic cottages, with here and there a quaint old gabled dwelling-place of a better class, shut in by moss-grown walls, and nestling in such gardens as are to be seen on that southwestern coast. Very few cockney visitors ever invaded the drowsy hamlet of Fortinbras, where the watering-place *habitué* would have looked in vain for the cliffs or the jetty, the brazen band and the buff slippers, the Ethiopian serenaders and the wheel of fortune—so dear to his cockney soul. At Fortinbras there were only two bathing-machines, and the sole attraction which the place possessed for sightseers was a grand old Norman castle, whose mighty keep towered high above the farmyards and orchards, and within whose walls red-shirted cricketers met on sunny summer afternoons, and whither village Sunday-school children came now and then to feast on buns and tea.

The coast of Fortinbras was low and flat and weedy, and sometimes a faint odour of stale seaweed floated up from the shining sands on the evening air. Your cockney would have fled aghast from the place as “un’healthy;” but for Lady Cecil the rustic village and the weedy coast had an odour of Longfellow and Tennyson that was delicious to her soul, and she felt as if she would have been unutterably happy if she could have bidden an eternal farewell to Dorset Square and Mrs. MacClaverhouse’s plate-chest and china-closet, to take up her abode under the shelter of the Norman castle and the grassy hills for the rest of her life.

She wandered alone on the wet sands while her aunt took an after-dinner nap on the first evening of their arrival. She lingered by the cool grey sea, and watched the changing glories of the low western sky in a kind of rapture.

“And there are people who like Dorset Square better than this,” she thought. “Oh, dear, dear lonely place, how I love you!”

Was it only a sensuous delight in the beautiful sky, the cool breezy atmosphere, the rustic calm? or was it because the happiest days of her life were to be spent on this weedy shore? If a coming sorrow casts its ominous shadow on the foredoomed creature who is to suffer it, should no prophetic sunshine herald the coming of a joy? Lady Cecil was happier that August evening than she ever remembered having been in her life, and there was a faint bloom on her cheeks, like the pink heart of a wild rose, when she went home to the pretty cottage, half grange, half villa, which Mrs. MacClaverhouse

had hired for the season—"for a mere song, my dear; and a duck, for which that extortionate Jiffles would have the audacity to charge me four shillings, I get here for half-a-crown," wrote the dowager to a friend and confidante.

Cecil found her aunt in very high spirits.

"You've heard me talk a good deal of my husband's nephew, Hector Gordon, the only son of Andrew Gordon, the great contractor. Yes, I know that a person who contracts seems something horribly vulgar, and that's what Margaret MacClaverhouse's grand friends said when she married him. But Andrew Gordon was as polished a gentleman as ever sat in parliament—and he did sit there, my dear, and he does to this day; and Scotchmen, whose pride has a good deal that's noble in it, don't think it a more degrading thing to make money honestly by straightforward commerce than to get rich by time-bargains and rigging the market. I know there are people to this day who are inclined to look down upon Hector, and when he joined the Eleventh there was one man—a freckled, flaxen-haired creature with weak eyes, whose father was a money-lending attorney—who tried to get up a laugh against our boy by asking some questions about Andrew's business transactions. I don't know *what* Hector said or did, Cecil; but I know the young man never tried to sneer at him again, and sold out shortly afterwards because his sight was too weak for India. You've heard me talk about the boy till you are almost tired of his name, I dare say, my dear."

Cecil smiled. She was thinking how many of Mrs. MacClaverhouse's pet subjects she had grown weary of within the two years of her slavery, and that this womanly talk of the favourite nephew was the least obnoxious of them.

"It is only natural that you should be fond of him," she said.

"You'd have some reason to say so, Cecil, if you'd known him when he was four years old," answered her aunt. "At four I think he was the loveliest child that ever was created. Such blue eyes! not your wishy-washy, milk-and-water colour that some parents call blue, but as deep and dark as that purple convolvulus in the vase yonder." And then the widow went on to relate to Cecil the very familiar legend of how poor Margaret went off into a consumption soon after the infant's birth, and how she, being alone in England at the time, took up her abode in Andrew Gordon's house, to superintend the rearing of the child,—“which saved my expenses elsewhere, and was doing a favour to the poor helpless widower,” said Mrs. MacClaverhouse parenthetically; “and then, you know, my dear, the General, being particularly fond of children, like most people who have none of their own, took

a tremendous fancy to his poor sister's child; so nothing would do but that the boy must be continually in Portland Place whenever his uncle was in England, and I'm sure I wonder that darling child's constitution was not completely ruined by the mangoes and chutnee and raging hot curries the General allowed him to eat. And when Hector was at Oxford, and my husband had settled down after the last Affghan war, it was just the same. I think the young man spent as much of his time in Portland Place as at the University; and it was the General who put a military career into his head, much to his father's annoyance; for Andrew would have liked him to go into the house and preach about poor-laws, and national surveys, and main-drainage and such-like. However, whatever Hector wished was sure to be done sooner or later; for I do believe there never was a young man so completely spoiled by every body belonging to him; and the end of it was that his father bought him a commission in the 11th Plungers, as you know."

Yes, the story was a very old one for Cecil. She had listened with unflinching patience to her aunt's prosy discourses about Hector Gordon; and as the dowager was generally in a good temper when she talked of him, her niece had no unpleasant association with his name. But familiar as his graces and merits had become to her, through the praises of his aunt, Cecil felt no special interest in the young Captain. She knew that he had been a good son and a brave soldier, but then there are so many good sons and brave soldiers in the world. She knew that he had distinguished himself in India by doing something desperate in connection with a fort; but then young men in India are always doing desperate things in connection with forts. If ever any image of Hector Gordon presented itself to Lady Cecil's imagination, it took the shape of a clumsy Scotchman, with high cheekbones and sandy hair. Mrs. MacClaverhouse called his hair auburn; but then that word auburn has such a wide signification.

Cecil listened to the old, old story of Hector's childhood tonight as patiently as she had been wont to listen any time within the last two years; but even calm queenly Lady Cecil Chudleigh was a little startled when the dowager exclaimed:

"And now, my dear, I am going to surprise you. Hector Gordon will be here to breakfast with us to-morrow morning——"

"Auntie!"

"He will arrive with the London papers, at a quarter before twelve o'clock. We must have fried soles, and mutton cutlets, and Worcester sauce, and potted game, and all those coarse high-seasoned things that men like; and you can put a

little fruit on the table to make it look pretty ; which, of course, will do for dessert afterwards ; and you will have to give out the tea and coffee service, and half-a-dozen large forks. I only hope and pray the servants here are honest. If it wasn't for that tiresome lion prancing upon every atom of silver, one might persuade servants and people that it was all electro——"

"But, auntie," said Cecil, heedless of the housekeeping details, "I thought Captain Gordon was in India."

"And so did I, my dear : but it seems he has come home on sick leave—not ill, he tells me, but only knocked up by climate and hard work ; and he went to Dorset Square yesterday morning unannounced, on purpose to surprise me—the consequence of which was that he found me out of the way, as people generally do when they plan those romantic surprises ; and he has brought me an Indian shawl, because I am so fond of Indian shawls, he says. That's always the way with people. If they see you suffering from a plethora of any kind of property, they take it into their heads that you have a passion for that especial class of property, and rush to buy you more of it. I've no common patience with such folly."

Perhaps Mrs. MacClaverhouse said this because it was her habit to be sharp and unsparing, and she found herself too much inclined to melt into weak motherly tenderness when she spoke of her nephew. Now the hero of all the old nursery and schoolboy stories was so near at hand, Cecil Cludleigh began to think of him a little more seriously than ever she had done before. He was weak and ill, no doubt, his aunt said, in spite of his assurances to the contrary ; and in that ease he must be kept in the sleepy Hampshire village, and nursed till he was strong again.

"And you must help to nurse him, Cecil," said the widow, "and if by any chance he should happen to fall in love with you, be sure you remember that he's a better match than one out of fifty of the young men you meet in London—and Heaven knows they are scarce enough nowadays. If you weren't my sister's own child I wouldn't throw you in his way, for Hector might marry any woman in England ; but at the worst it would sound well for his wife's name to have a handle to it."

Lady Cecil's face was dyed with a hot, indignant blush.

"I am not the sort of person to be fascinated by Captain Gordon's money, Aunt MacClaverhouse," she said.

"Perhaps not," answered the old lady, coolly ; "but you may fall in love with him."

Cecil was too angry to answer. That the dowager should talk coolly of Hector Gordon, the contractor's son, as a great

catch for the descendant of Aspendells and Chudleighs who had helped to vanquish his countrymen at Flodden, stung the Earl's daughter to the very heart. She had so little but her grand old lineage left her, that it was scarcely strange she should be proud of it. There came a time, not many weeks after this August evening, when she looked back thought what a delicious thing it must have been to have her name coupled with *his*, and to be ignorant that there was any wrong in the association.

But to-night she was wounded and indignant, and though she went out into the kitchen-premises by-and-by to give orders about the cutlets, and the soles, and the potted meats for the Plunger Captain's breakfast, her heart was not in the duty, and she sent none of those little messages to the butcher which a woman would have done who loved the coming cutlet-consumer. She thought how unpleasant it would be to have a clumsy Scottish invalid lying on the sofa in the cosy little drawing-room, where she had hoped to read Tennyson and Owen Meredith all by herself in the warm, drowsy afternoons. And the time came, and so soon, when no sofa that Gillow could devise would have seemed soft enough for so dear a visitor; when every glimmer of sunshine or breath of summer air in that cosy drawing-room was watched and calculated as closely as if a valuable life had depended upon the adjustment of the Venetians, or the opening and shutting of the French windows.

Lady Cecil went out upon the seashore after an early cup of tea on the morning that was to witness Hector Gordon's arrival. She had arranged a pile of dewy plums nestling in their dark green leaves, and a basket of hothouse grapes, with her own hands, for she had the magical touch whereby some women can impart beauty to common things. She had surveyed the breakfast-table, and had given orders as to the moment at which the tea and coffee were to be made; and the fish put into the frying-pan; and she left a message for her aunt to the effect that she was gone for a long walk, and would not be home to breakfast. It would be so much better, she fancied, to leave the widow and her nephew *tête-à-tête* on this first morning of the soldier's arrival. She had done her duty conscientiously, and having done it, she went out to breathe the sweet morning air, and shake off the unpleasant idea of the coming Scotchman.

"I have been tolerably comfortable with my aunt so far," she thought, "in spite of the spoons and forks; but now I shall only interfere with her enjoyment of this dreadful Scotchman's society. Oh, papa, papa, how I miss you, and the dreary little house on the Dyke Road, where we lived so peacefully together, with all the winds of heaven howling

round us, and rattling our windows in the dead of the night!"

She went under the ponderous archway beneath which a portcullis still hung, and into the grassy enclosure which had once been the muster-ground of the castle. At this early hour there were neither Sunday-school children nor exploring visitors among the old grey ruins. The fresh sea-breezes fluttered the little plume in Lady Cecil's hat, and blew all thoughts of vexation out of her mind. She mounted the winding stair of the keep—a dangerous, treacherous stair, which had been worn by the tread of mailed feet in the days that were gone, and the buff boots of excursionists from the Isle of Wight in this present age. She went to the very top of the great Norman tower, high up above all grievances about Hector Gordon and his breakfast, and emerged upon the battlements, a fragile, fluttering little figure, amid that massive mediæval stonework, whose grey ruin was grander than the most elaborated glories of modern architecture.

She had heard the whistle of the engine as she entered the castle, and she imagined that at this moment Hector Gordon must be installed at the breakfast-table; "devouring chops," she thought, with a contemptuous little grimace. It is so natural for a girl of nineteen to think meanly of a man who is below her in social status. To Philip Foley, painting in his Highbury lodging, and dressed in a threadbare shooting-jacket, Lady Cecil Chudleigh would have been unspeakably gracious; but for a scion of the Caledonian plutocracy she had nothing but good-natured contempt.

"He is an invalid, poor fellow," she thought; "I am sure it is very wicked of me to think his visit a bore."

She settled matters with her conscience by determining to be very attentive to the physical comforts of her aunt's favourite.

"I dare say he would like some salmon for dinner," she thought; "I'll call at the fishmonger's as I go home."

And then she took a volume of Victor Hugo's poetry from her pocket, and began to read.

The noble verse carried her aloft on its mighty pinions, high up into some mystic region a million miles above the battlements of the Norman tower. She had an idea that she could not leave her aunt and Captain Gordon too long undisturbed on this particular morning, and she abandoned herself altogether to the delight of her book. It was so seldom that she was able to entirely forget that there were such things as silver forks and dishonest servants in the world.

Even to-day she was not allowed to be long unconscious of the outer world, for when she had been reading about twenty minutes she heard a voice close beside her exclaim :

"I am so glad you like Victor Hugo. Pray forgive me for being so impertinent as to look over your shoulder; but I have been searching for you every where, and I am to take you home to breakfast, please; if you are Lady Cecil Chudleigh, and I am almost sure you are."

She started to her feet, and looked at the speaker. He was the handsomest man she had ever seen—tall, and grand, and fair, the very type of a classic hero, she fancied, as he stood before her on the battlements, with the winds lifting the short auburn curls from his bare forehead. He was no more like the traditional Scotchman than the Duke d'Aumâle is like one of Gilray's Frenchmen. There was no more odour of the parvenu about him than about a Bayard or a Napier. In all her life she had never seen any one like him. It was not because he was handsome that she was struck by his appearance; for she had generally hated handsome men as the most obnoxious of their species. It was because he was—himself.

For once in her life, Lord Aspendell's daughter, whose calm reserve was so near akin to *hauteur*, was fairly startled.

"And are you really Captain Gordon?" she asked, amazed.

"I am indeed; and that question tells me that I was right, and you are Lady Cecil, and we are—at least we ought to be—cousins, since dear Aunt MacClayverhouse stands in the same relation to both of us."

CHAPTER III.

HECTOR.

THE trio in the little breakfast-parlour in Sea-View Cottage, Fortinbras, was perhaps one of the pleasantest parties that ever met at so simply furnished a board. The spirit of the immortal Cliquot, whose vintages have made his widow's name so celebrated, may have smiled contemptuously at such a breakfast-table, on which the strongest beverages were tea and coffee; the mighty chiefs of Philippe's and the Maison Dorée would have held up their hands and shrugged their shoulders with amazement if told that these benighted insulars could really enjoy these coarse viands, and feel no national craving for suicide, or national tendency to spleen, before the barbarous meal was concluded. And yet there are few *cabinefs particuliers* on the Boulevards whose gaudily-papered walls have ever

echoed to happier laughter than that of the young Indian hero as he gave a serio-comic rendering of his adventures, warding off all praise of great and gallant deeds by the playful tone which made peril seem a joke, and desperate valour the most commonplace quality of man.

Mrs. MacClaverhouse would have been pleased to listen all day to the voice of that charmer of six feet two, but her sharp matronly eye perceived presently that the stalwart Plunge looked pale and worn, and was by no means unqualified for the sick-list; so she sent Lady Cecil to the drawing-room to see to the arrangements of the Venetians, and then she led the boy to the sofa, which was not nearly long enough for him and had to be eked out with chairs. The Captain remonstrated energetically against this Sybarite treatment, but his aunt was inflexible; and as he was very familiar with the strength of her will, he laid himself down at last as meekly as a child.

"And you can read to us, Cecil," said Mrs. MacClaverhouse producing her knitting-needles, and an uncompromising grey-worsted sock, such as Robert Burns may have worn when his plough turned up the immortal daisy. The dowager knitted these worsted instruments of torture for a Dorcas society which she honoured with her patronage and a very small annual subscription.

"Come, Cecil," she said presently, when her niece came softly into the room after a mysterious visit to the cook "Hector has been amusing us all the morning, and the least we can do is to amuse him this afternoon. Suppose you read him to sleep."

If the Scottish warrior had been any thing like the image she had made of him in her mind, Cecil Chudleigh would have been very much disposed to rebel against this command. But there are some people born to walk upon roses and to inhale the perfumed breath of incense; and Hector Gordon was one of them. His nurses had idolised him, his father had worshipped him, his uncle and aunt had spoiled him, his brother officers of the Plungers loved him, and dressed after him, and talked after him, and thought after him; and with that feminine admiration, that subtle and delicious flattery which is the most intoxicating of all earthly incense, Hector had been almost surfeited. He was very delightful. The freshness and brightness of an unsullied youth pervaded every tone of his voice, every thought in his mind, every ringing note of his genial laugh—so hearty without loudness, so exuberant without vulgarity. Perhaps his greatest charm lay in the fact that he was young, and did not consider his youth a thing to be ashamed of. And there are so few young men

nowadays. Much has been said about the irresistible witchery of a polished Irishman, the delightful vivacity of a well-born Frenchman. But has any one ever sung the graces of a high-bred Scotchman? What words can fairly describe the nameless fascination which has a dash of the Irishman's insidious flattery, a spice of the Frenchman's brilliant vivacity, but which has a tender softness possessed by neither, a patrician grace not to be equalled by any other nationality in the world? In all the history of modern Europe, the two people who, by manner alone, have exercised the most powerful influence upon their contemporaries, have been Mary Queen of Scots, and her great-grandson Charles Stuart. Of all the poets, who has ever so enthralled the hearts of women as George Gordon, Lord Byron, whose maternal lineage was Scotch? Of all lovely and fascinating women whose names will be remembered in the future, is there any fairer or lovier than Eugénie Marie de Guzman, Countess of Teba, Empress of the French, and scion of the Kirkpatricks of Closeburn?

There are flowers that flourish in the sunshine, and flowers that thrive only in the shade; and as it is in the vegetable, so is it in the animal kingdom. There are men whom a perpetual atmosphere of adulation would have transformed into supercilious fops or selfish profligates. Hector Gordon made no such vile return for the tenderness which had been so freely lavished upon him. High-minded and generous-hearted, brave as a Leonidas or a Clyde, he was no bad example for the young men who formed themselves upon him. It was said that there was less bill-discounting and card-playing amongst the officers of the 11th Plungers than in any other cavalry regiment in the service; for it is your dashing young captain rather than your middle-aged colonel who gives the tone to the youngsters of a mess. They may obey their commanding-officer, but they will copy their brilliant companion.

But it must not be supposed that under any circumstances Hector Gordon could have come under the denomination of "a good young man;" for it seems an understood thing that the typical good young man must be nothing but good. Hector was neither evangelical nor Puseyite in his tendencies; but rather of that good, easy-going broad Church, which winks good-naturedly at a parson in "pink," and sees no criminality in a cheerful rubber. He went to church once or twice on a Sunday, as the case might be; and did his best to join earnestly in the service, and to listen with sustained attention to the sermon. If his thoughts wandered now and then to the Highland peaks, amidst whose lonely grandeurs he had once shot a mighty white eagle, or to the deer-stalking adventures or grouse-shooting of the last autumn; if his fancy played him

false and brought some bright girlish face before him, with the memory of one especially delicious waltz, and one peculiarly intoxicating flirtation—if such small sins as these sullied his soul now and then when the sermon was duller and longer than it should have been, it must be remembered that he was very young, and that the chastening influence of sorrow had not yet shadowed his life, or lessened his delight in the common pleasures of his age.

Lying on the sofa, in the low-roofed, old-fashioned drawing-room at Fortinbras, and shrouded by a leopard-skin railway rug, which Mrs. MacClaverhouse had insisted on casting over him, the young Captain looked like an invalid Titan; but a Titan with a nimbus of waving auburn hair about his head, and the brightest blue eyes that ever took a fierce light amid the glare of battle, or softened to feminine tenderness when they looked on a woman's face. Lady Cecil contemplated her aunt's favourite at her leisure as she sat by an open window, with her face quite hidden in the shadow of drooping curtains and closed Venetians. And she had fancied him such a vulgar, clumsy creature—a freckled, red-haired object,—like a tobaccoist's Highlander in modern costume, a loutish Caledonian Hercules, with a Gaelic sing-song in his voice, and with no belief in any thing but the grandeur of Princes Street, Edinburgh, and the immortality of Robert Burns. Cecil Chudleigh looked at him slyly from beneath the shadow of her long lashes, and smiled at the recollection of her old fancies.

“As if one's idea of a place or person were ever any thing like the reality,” she thought. “I ought to have known that Captain Gordon would prove the very opposite of the image I had made him.”

She took up some books presently from the table near her, and looked at the titles.

“How can you ask me to read to Captain Gordon, auntie,” she demanded, archly, “when you know we have no books or papers that can interest him? We have neither *Bell's Life*, nor the *United-Service Gazette*; nor yet ‘Post and Scarlet,’ or ‘Silk and Paddock,’ or whatever those barbarous books are called that gentlemen are so fond of. I think there are some odd numbers of *Mr. Sponge's Sporting-Tour* in a cupboard in Dorset Square, and I dare say we could get them sent down by post; but for to-day——”

“Will you read some of Hugo's verses?” asked Captain Gordon. “I mustn't talk slang to a lady, or I would entreat you not to chaff me while I'm on the sick-list. I have read as much sporting literature as any man, I dare say, in my day; and *Post and Paddock* is a capital book, I do assure you, Lady Cecil; but I think I know my Tennyson too. I have recited

'Locksley Hall' from the first line to the last, out yonder, when we've been dreadfully hard-up for talk. And you should have seen how seared my *Kilmutghar* looked! I think he fancied our great Alfred's masterpicee was a volley of bad language; they're so unaccustomed to hear any thing *but* bad language from Englishmen, poor fellows. If I am really to be treated as an invalid, and dear foolish auntie here insists upon it, I will exerceise my prerogative, and demand one of Hugo's odes."

Cecil opened the little volume that she had carried to the top of Fortinbras Keep, and turned the leaves listlessly, with slim white fingers that sparkled faintly with the gems in quaint old-fashioned rings.

She paused, with a volume open at those wonderful verses in which the classic Sybarite bewails the weariness of his felicity; and, pushing the Venetian shutter a little way open, she began to read, with a half-smile upon her face. The summer sunlight flooded her face and figure, and the summer air fluttered one loose tress of her dark-brown hair, as her head drooped over her book.

"D'implacables faveurs me poursuivent sans cesse,
Vous m'avez flétri dans ma fleur.
Dieux! donnez l'espérance à ma froide jeunesse,
Je vous rends tous ces biens pour un peu de bonheur."

When Cecil came to these closing lines of the Sybarite's complaint, the Scottish Hereules flung off his leopard-skin, and walked across the little room to the open window by which Lady Cecil was seated.

"It's no use, auntie," he said; "I'm not an invalid. If I loll upon that sofa, Lady Cecil will take me for a modern Celsus; and, upon my word, I *have* felt like that fellow once or twice in my life. I've never been exactly savage with Providence for giving me so many blessings; but I have felt as if I should like to have had a little more of the fun of wishing for things. Look at my position. I'm not used up, and I don't affect to be used up, like some fellows. I don't make a howling about having lost the faculty of pleasure, or the belief in my fellow-men, or any thing of that kind. I'm no disciple of Alfred de Musset, or Owen Meredith; but I really have run through the better part of the pleasures that last most men their lifetime. There's scarcely any thing in the way of adventure that you can propose to me that I haven't done, from tooling a drag along the Lady's Mile when the carriages were thickest, to ascending Mont Blanc or scaling a red-hot brick wall on a fireman's ladder. There's scarcely

any route you can suggest to me for a holiday tour that I'm not as familiar with as Murray. And yet I'm only seven-and-twenty. So long as we have plenty to do in India I shall be right enough ; but if our fellows should ever come to be planted in country quarters, without any prospect of work, what's to become of me? And then I've promised to sell out in a few years," he added, in a much graver tone.

"Promised to sell out!" screamed Mrs. MacClaverhouse. "That's your father's doing, I know ; but you won't leave the army until you marry, I suppose?"

"Oh no, not until I marry."

He took up the volume of poems which Cecil had laid down.

"Let me read to you, ladies," he said ; "am I not here to minister to your pleasures and obey your behests? Tell me your favourites, Lady Cecil."

They discussed the book in his hand, and Cecil discovered that Captain Gordon was very familiar with the poet. He read well, and good reading is such a rare accomplishment. His accent was irreproachable ; and if there was a charm in his full rich voice when he spoke English, the charm was still greater when he spoke French. He spoke French and German to perfection, for he had been well grounded in both languages, though not very materially advanced in either at Eton or Oxford ; and he had spent a considerable part of his youth wandering from city to city with a private tutor, a retired Austrian officer, who was both learned and accomplished, and who adored his pupil.

When two people, both under the age of thirty, discover that they admire the same poet, they have gone half-way towards a pleasant intimacy. After that discussion of Victor Hugo, and the reading aloud that followed, and the desultory talk about Germany and German literature, India and Indian politics, London, and common friends and acquaintances who were to be met there, that succeeded the poetical lecture, Lady Cecil Chudleigh quite forgot all her old fancies about Captain Gordon, and resigned herself to the idea of his visit.

And after this they were the best friends in the world, and Mrs. MacClaverhouse was quite contented to allow Cecil a share in her boy's society. She was a very sensible woman in her way, and liked the society of young people when it was to be had cheaply. Hector and Cecil's animated discussions upon almost all subjects to be found between earth and heaven amused the widow as she basked in the sunshine, seated in her pet chair before a window with her favourite aspect. She astonished the young people very often by the shrewdness of the remarks with which she cut in upon them, smiting their

pretty fanciful theories into atoms with the sledge-hammer of common-sense. Altogether she was very well satisfied with the aspect of affairs. If the motherless lad whom she loved so tenderly, and thought of as a lad in spite of his seven-and-twenty years—if Hector Gordon had been a landless younger son, with his fortune to carve out for himself, Mrs. MacClaverhouse would no doubt have loved him dearly, for the sake of his blue eyes and his frank handsome face, his generous nature and gladsome soul; but she would scarcely perhaps have loved him quite so much, or looked for his coming quite so gladly under such circumstances as she did now, when all the blessings or pleasures that wealth can purchase attended his footsteps wherever he went, and created an atmosphere of luxury around and about the dwelling in which he lived. A hungry nephew, always hard-up, and in need of pecuniary assistance, would have been a heavy trial to Mrs. MacClaverhouse.

Nothing could have been more delightful to the dowager than the Captain's manner of opening the campaign on the morning after his arrival. They had breakfasted early this time, for Hector insisted that he was well enough to get up with the birds if necessary, and that so far as any claim to feminine compassion or to sick-leave went, he was the veriest impostor in existence. It was after the little party had dawdled considerably over the breakfast-table, and when Cecil had departed to hold solemn council with the cook, that Hector addressed his relative:

"Now, my dear auntie," he said, "it's essentially necessary that you and I should understand each other. In the first place, I adore Fortinbras. I think it the most delightful place in the universe; and if the possessor of that delicious old castle would only be good enough to conceive an aversion for it, or find himself hopelessly insolvent, or something of that kind, I'd buy it of him to-morrow—Consols have risen an eighth since last Tuesday, and it's a good time for selling out—and restore it. Queen Elizabeth's drawing-room would make an admirable billiard-room, if it only had those necessary trifles—a floor and a ceiling. I'd make my hunting-stables out of the banqueting-hall—imagine a loose box with a wall four feet thick!—and I'd sleep in the topmost chamber of the great Norman tower, with a flag-staff swaying close above my head, and a general sensation of inhabiting a balloon. But all this is beside the question, auntie. What I want to say is, that I have fallen desperately in love with Fortinbras, and as I am likely to stay here till you become unutterably weary of my society, I must insist upon your accepting this cheque which I wrote this morning—for you know of old what an expensive fellow I am, and I should feel perfectly

miserable if I felt myself sponging on you without the least chance of returning your hospitality."

The Captain crumpled the folded cheque into his aunt's hand. The widow began some vague protest, but her nephew suffocated her scruples by a sonorous kiss; and whatever objection she urged against the receipt of his money were lost in the luxuriance of his beard.

"And now the next question is, how we are to enjoy ourselves?" exclaimed Hector, while his aunt speculated upon the figures inscribed on that crumpled scrap of paper, which her fingers so itched to unfold. "In the first place we must have a carriage; and in an exploration which I made this morning before you were up, Mrs. MacClaverhouse, I discovered that the only vehicle we can have is a shabby old fly, which began life as a britzska, and a shabby old pair of horses, which, in their early days, I suspect, have been employed in the agricultural interest; but as the shabby old carriage is clean and roomy, and as I am told the clumsy old horses are good at going, and as a person in the position of that proverbial Hobson must not be fastidious, I have engaged the vehicle for the season. So now, my dearest auntie, prepare yourself for a chronic state of picnic. I have written to Fortnum and Mason to send us a cargo of picnic provisions—innumerable mahogany-coloured hams and tongues, and Strasburg pies, and potted fowl of all species, and all those wonderful preparations which taste of grease and pepper so much more than of any thing else. And I have found the most delightful nurseryman in the world, who will supply us with hothouse grapes and apricots; and the carriage will be here at twelve, so pray run away and put on your bonnet, auntie, and let Lady Cecil know all about our plans."

"You like Cecil?"

"Excessively. I think she is charming."

Mrs. MacClaverhouse shrugged her shoulders.

"You think every thing charming," she said.

She was familiar with his sanguine temperament, and his faculty for seeing every thing in its sunniest aspect.

"But I think Lady Cecil Chudleigh more charming than most things. I have seen very few women to compare with her, though she is by no means a showy beauty. I was struck by her profile as she sat in the sunlight yesterday. I never saw a more delicate outline, except in the face of the Empress Eugénie—and she has something of Eugénie's pensive gravity in her expression,—not pride, but the sort of thing which common-minded people mistake for pride. I think you have reason to be proud of such a niece. She ought to marry well."

"I hope she will," answered the widow.

If there was any special significance in her tone,

Gordon was too careless to be conscious of it. He walked to the open window, humming an Italian air from the last successful opera, and then he strolled out on the lawn, which was screened from the high road by a tall old-fashioned privet hedge and a modern bank of showy evergreens, across which the sea breezes blew fresh and cool. He was very happy, with an innocent, boyish happiness, as he paced to and fro upon the elastic turf, which seemed to spring under his light foot. In all his life he had never known any acute pain, any bitter grief. Of all possibilities in life the last thing which he could have imagined was that he had come to meet his first great sorrow here where he was happy in the planning of such simple pleasures as might have seemed insipid to a modern schoolboy.

"What an old-fashioned fellow I am!" he thought, as he stopped with his hand in his pocket, searching for his cigar-case. "If any of my chums in the Eleventh knew that I was looking forward to a day's ramble in a rumbling old fly with a couple of women, I think they'd cut me dead ever afterwards; and yet they're not such a bad lot of fellows, after all; only there's not one of them has pluck enough to own he can enjoy himself."

Captain Gordon had smoked out his cigar by the time the fly drove up to the garden gate. He threw the ash away, and shook the fumes of his cabana out of his hair and beard, and then went to meet the dowager and Lady Cecil; the dowager stately in black silk robes, which she possessed in all stages of splendour and shabbiness, and which she wore always, because it was "suitable for a person of my age, my dear, and by far the most economical thing one can wear," as she informed her confidantes. The Indian shawl—the shawl which the Captain had brought to Fortinbras in one of his portmanteaus—hung across Mrs. MacClaverhouse's arm, in compliment to the donor; and behind the widow came Cecil, in a pale muslin dress and scarf, and looking very lovely under the shelter of a broad Leghorn hat.

They drove away in the bright summer sunshine, through country-lanes, where the breath of the sea came to them laden with the perfume of flowers; where rustic children ran out of cottage-doors to curtsy to them as they drove by, or even to set up a feeble cheer, as if the fly had been a triumphal chariot. The drive was a success; as, indeed, almost all things were on which Hector Gordon set his desire. Mrs. MacClaverhouse was radiant, for her inspection of the cheque had proved eminently satisfactory; Hector was delightful, throwing his whole heart and soul into the task of amusing his companions—gay with the consciousness of pleasing, and

with the *insouciance* of a man who has never known trouble ; and if Lady Cecil was the most silent of the little party, it was only because she felt most deeply the delicious repose of the rustic scenery, the exquisite sweetness of the untainted atmosphere.

They had many such drives after this, exploring the country for twenty miles round Fortinbras. They held impromptu pic-nics on breezy heights above the level of the sea ; pic-nics in which the rector of Fortinbras and his two pretty daughters were sometimes invited to join, and which ended with tea-drinking at Sea-View Villa, and croquet on the lawn ; and then they had lonely drives to distant villages, where there were old Norman churches to be explored, under convoy of quavery old sextons, who always had to be fetched from their dinner or their tea ; dusky old churches which Mrs. MacClaverhouse declined to enter, and in whose solemn gloom Hector and Cecil dawdled together, discussing the dates of doors and windows, tombs and font, stalls and reading-desk, while the old sexton hovered respectfully in attendance, and while the dowager dozed delightfully in her carriage, lulled by the booming of excited bees. Sometimes Mrs. MacClaverhouse was too lazy to go out at all, and on those occasions the shabby fly and the shabby horses enjoyed a holiday, while Hector and Cecil strolled on the sands before the villa, or dawdled on the lawn.

They were very happy together. All Lady Cecil's proud reserve melted under the influence of the Scotchman's genial nature.

It was simply impossible not to like him ; it was very difficult to resist his fascination, the indescribable witchery that lurked in his manner when he wished to please. Lord Aspendell's daughter found herself forgetting how slight a link bound her to this pleasant companion, and admitting him to a cousinly intimacy before she had time to think of what she was doing ; and then it was such an easy brotherly and sisterly friendship, that to draw back from it would have seemed prudish and ungracious ; so Cecil walked and talked with the young Captain, and read and played to him in the evenings, and enjoyed to the full that delightful association which can only arise between two well-bred and highly educated people. If either of them had been ignorant & shallow, selfish or vain, such close companionship must have become intolerable at the end of a week. Every body knows how weary Madame du Deffand and President Heinault grew of themselves and existence in less than twelve hours, when they met in a friend's deserted apartment, in order to escape from their visitors for the enjoyment of each other's society ;

but then Madame and the President were middle-aged lovers, and the freshness of youth was wanting to transform the place of their rendezvous into a paradise.

It was when Hector Gordon had been staying nearly a month at Fortinbras that the sharp-spoken and worldly dowager suddenly awakened Lady Cecil from that mental languour which had stolen upon her since his coming. He seemed to have brought so much sunshine with him, and she had abandoned herself so entirely to the delight of its warmth and radiance, lulled by the belief that it was the change from Dorset Square to Fortinbras that had filled her heart and mind with such unwonted gladness.

Mrs. MacClaverhouse had a very acute perception of all matters in which her own interests were in any way implicated, and she had woven a little scheme in relation to her nephew and niece. The dishonest steward, who made friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, has many disciples in our modern day; and the dowager had certain views with regard to Captain Gordon's settlement in life—views which involved her enjoyment of a permanent home with the nephew she loved. It was for the furtherance of this little scheme that she sat at home so often while Hector and Cecil walked side by side upon the shore, or loitered in the garden; and this object was in her mind when she let them sing duets to her in the dusky drawing-room, and sank so often into gentle slumbers while they sang, or paused to talk in voices that were hushed in harmony with the still twilight.

"I suppose you will scarcely turn up your nose *now*, Lady Cecil, if I venture to tell you that my nephew will be a first-rate match," exclaimed the dowager one morning, when she found herself alone with her niece.

Cecil blushed crimson.

"I—I—don't understand you, auntie," she stammered.

"Oh, of course not, Cecil. I hate a sly girl; and I begin to think you are sly. Do you mean to tell me you don't understand the drift of Hector's attentions to you?"

"But, dear auntie, he is not attentive; at least, not more attentive than a man must be to any woman he meets. Pray do not take any absurd idea into your head. We are almost relations, you know; and we get on very well together—much better than I ever thought we should; but as for any thing more than a cousinly kind of friendship——"

"A cousinly kind of fiddlestick!" cried the energetic dowager. "Do you think I can believe that all that strolling on the beach, and all that dawdling on the lawn, and all that mumbling by the piano which I hear in my sleep, means nothing but cousinly friendship?"

"On my honour, auntie, Captain Gordon has never said a word to me which the most indifferent acquaintance might not have said."

"Then what in Heaven's name does the man mumble about?" demanded Mrs. MacClaverhouse sharply.

"Oh, we have so much to talk of—our favourite books, and pictures, and music, places we have both seen, old acquaintances, places that he only has seen, and people whom he only has known; and then sometimes we get a little metaphysical—or even mystical. You know how superstitious the Scotch are, and I really think Captain Gordon is almost inclined to believe in the spiritualists."

"That will do. Then Hector Gordon has not made you an offer?"

"No, indeed," Cecil answered, blushing more deeply than before; "nor have I any reason to suppose he has the faintest idea of doing so. Pray do not mention the subject again, dear aunt. I have such a horror of any thing at all like husband-hunting."

"As you please, my young lady. It's all very well to ride the high horse; but I think some day, when you find yourself unpleasantly close to your thirtieth birthday, and discover some ugly lines under those beautiful hazel eyes of yours—some day when I am dead and gone, and your delicate ivory-white complexion has grown as yellow as an old knife-handle—when you look forward to a dreary life of dependence upon others, or lonely struggles with a hard, pitiless world—I think then, Lady Cecil, you'll be inclined to regret that you were so contemptuously indifferent to Hector Gordon's merits. There, go and put on your bonnet, child; you may marry whom you please, or remain unmarried as long as you please, for all I care about it. And yet I had built quite a castle in the air about you, and I fancied how nice it would be for you and Hector to settle in Hyde-Park Gardens, or thereabouts, and for me to live with you. I should like to end my days with my boy; and those second floors in Hyde Park Gardens are very delightful—especially if you are lucky enough to get a corner house."

Mrs. MacClaverhouse's voice seemed to strike like some sharp instrument into Cecil Chudleigh's heart as she concluded this tirade. The girl had listened in proud silence, and retired silently when her aunt came to a pause. An excursion had been planned for the day; the fly was waiting before the gate, and Cecil heard Hector's step pacing to and fro on the gravel-walk below her open window, and smelt the perfume of his cigar as she put on her hat. But all the girlish joyousness with which she had been wont to attire herself for such

rustic expeditions had fled from her breast, leaving a heavy dull sense of pain in its stead.

"I dare say Aunt MacClaverhouse is right," she thought sadly; "and I shall feel a dreary desolate creature when I come to be thirty, and stand all alone in the world. But it is so horrible to hear her talk of good matches, just as if every girl must always be on the alert to entrap a rich husband; when I know too that Captain Gordon does not care for me——"

She paused, and a vivid blush stole over her thoughtful face—not the crimson glow of indignation, but the warm brightness which reflects the roscate hue of a happy thought. Did he not care for her? That phrase about "caring for her" is the modest euphemism in which a woman disguises the bold word "love." Was he really so indifferent? Her protest to Mrs. MacClaverhouse had contained no syllable of untruth or prevarication. In all their intercourse, throughout all that cousinly intimacy which had been so sweet a friendship, Hector Gordon had not uttered a word which the vainest or most conscious coquette could construe into a confession of any thing warmer than friendship.

"Ah! yet—and yet—and yet!" as Owen Meredith says, there had been something—yes, surely something! no spoken word, no license of glance, no daring pressure of a yielding hand—something fifty times less palpable, and yet a hundred times sweeter than any of these—a lowering of the voice—a tender tremulous tone now and then, a dreamy softness in the dark-blue eyes—a silence more eloquent than words—a sudden break in a sentence, that had a deeper meaning than a hundred sentences.

"Poor auntie!" thought Lady Cecil, "it was silly of me to be so angry with her; for, after all, I think he does care for me—a little."

Did she think of the contractor's wealth, or remember how high above poverty and dependence she would be lifted by a marriage with Hector Gordon? Did any vision of the corner house in Hyde-Park Gardens, the noble windows overlooking the woods and waters of Kensington, the elegant equipage and thoroughbred horses, arise before her side by side with the image of the young soldier? No. Through that most terrible of ordeals the furnace of genteel poverty—Lady Cecil had passed unscathed. When the remembrance of Hector Gordon's position flashed upon her presently, all her pride rose in arms against her weakness.

"I would die rather than he should know that I care for him," she thought. "He might think me one of those calculating mercenary girls one reads of."

Thus it was that, when Lady Cecil took her seat in the carriage that day, there was an air of restraint, a cold reserve in her manner, that Hector Gordon had never seen before.

He also was changed. He had thrown away his cigar while Cecil was lingering in her own room, and had gone into the little breakfast-parlour, where his aunt sat with an unread newspaper in her hand, brooding over her niece's folly. She looked up as Hector entered, and began to talk to him. The conversation was a very brief one, and the Captain had little share in it; but when he went back to the garden his face was grave and downcast; and when he handed Cecil into the carriage, she was struck by the gloomy preoccupation of his manner. Of all the excursions they had enjoyed together, that excursion was the least agreeable. The September wind was bleak and chilly, penetrating the warmest folds of Mrs. MacClaverhouse's Indian shawl, and tweaking the end of her aristocratic nose. The brown moorlands and bare stubble-fields had a barren look against the cold grey sky; and the Captain, generally as much *aux petits soins* with regard to the two ladies as if he had been the adoring son of the one and the accepted lover of the other, sat in a gloomy reverie, and seemed to arouse himself by an effort whenever he uttered some commonplace remark upon the weather or the scenery. There was very little conversation during dinner; and Captain Gordon made so poor a pretence of eating that the dowager became positively alarmed, and declared that her boy was ill.

"It is no use talking, Hector," she exclaimed, though her nephew had only made a half-articulate murmur to the effect that there was nothing the matter with him. "You eat no fish, and you only helped yourself to a wing of that chicken; and you sent your plate away with that almost untouched—a very extravagant mode of sending your plate away, I should say, if you were a poor man. You've not been yourself all day, Hector; so I shall insist on your being nursed this evening. You won't take any fruit, I know; for fruit is bilious.—Never mind the dessert to-day, Mowatt," the widow said, addressing her parlour-maid; "and be sure the fruit is kept in a cool dry place till to-morrow," she added *sotto voce*, as she cast a sharply-scrutinising glance upon the dishes of grapes and apricots. The widow insisted that her nephew was ill and tired; and as the Captain seemed oppressed by a kind of languor which made him quite unequal to offer any opposition to such an energetic person as his aunt, he gave way, and suffered himself to be installed in a reclining attitude on the most comfortable sofa, with an Indian shawl spread over him like the counterpane of a state bed.

"And now Cecil shall play us both to sleep," said Mrs. MacClaverhouse, sinking into her own chair.

The piano was as far away from the sofa as it could be in so small a room; but Cecil heard a faint sigh as she seated herself in the dusk and laid her hands softly on the keys. How many evenings they two had sat side by side in the same dusk, talking in hushed voices! how often she had felt his warm breath amidst her hair as he bent over her while she sang! But to-day he seemed changed all at once, as he might have changed on the discovery that the woman in whose companionship he had been so unrestrainedly happy was only a scheming coquette after all, and had been spreading an airy net in which to entrap his heart and his fortune. The thought that some chance word of the dowager's might have inspired him with such an idea of her was absolute torture to Cecil Chudleigh.

She felt half inclined to refuse to play or sing for the Captain's gratification; and yet to do so might be to make a kind of scene which would seem only a part of her scheme. So after sitting silently for some minutes she touched the keys softly, and began a little reverie of Kalkbrenner's; the simplest of melodies, with a flowing movement like the monotonous plashing of waves rising and falling under the keel of a boat; and then she wandered into a very sweet arrangement of that exquisite air of Beethoven's, "Those evening bells," a melody which Moore has made more exquisite by words whose mournful beauty has never been surpassed by any lyric in our language.

"Sing the song, Lady Cecil," said Hector, in a low pleading voice. "Let me hear you sing once more."

There was something in his entreating tone — something that seemed like humility, and which reassured Cecil as to his opinion of her. It was not in such a tone that a man would address a woman he had newly learned to despise. If Hector Gordon had been the suppliant of a queen his accent could have been no more reverential than it was.

"I am in a very melancholy mood to-night, Lady Cecil," he said, while she paused with her hands straying listlessly over the keys; "and I have a fancy for pensive music. Please let me have the song."

"Do you really wish it?"

"Really—and truly."

What common words they were! and yet how thrilling an accent they took to-night upon *his* lips!

Cecil sang the tender melancholy words in a voice that conveyed all their tenderness—she sang that ballad which in the quiet twilight has so sad a cadence, mournful as the dirge

of perished hopes and buried loves. If her low tremulous voice did not break into tears before the end of the song, it was only because, in her nervous terror of any thing like a scene, she exerted all the force of her will to sustain her tones to the close.

She paused when the song was finished, expecting some acknowledgment from Captain Gordon ; but the silence of the darkening room was only broken by the slumberous breathing of Mrs. MacClaverhouse. It was a little ungracious of him to utter no word of thanks, Cecil thought ; and then she began to wonder about the cause of his melancholy of this evening, and the subject of that moody reverie which had occupied him all day.

While she was wondering about this, the servant came into the room, bearing a tea-tray and a monster moderator lamp, that towered like an obelisk in the centre of the little table on which the dowager was wont to make tea. That lady was startled from her slumbers by the faint jingling of the tea-cups, and looked about her as sharply as if she had never been asleep at all.

"How quiet you have both been!" she exclaimed, rather impatiently. "I don't enjoy my nap half so much without the drowsy hum of your voices. What droning thing was that you were singing just now, Cecil?"

There was no answer. Cecil still bent abstractedly over the piano, touching the notes softly now and then, but making no sound. Hector Gordon lay with his face hidden by his folded arms. The fussy dowager darted across the room and swooped down upon her nephew.

"Hector," she cried, "what in goodness' name has been the matter with you all day? Why, bless my soul, what's this?—the pillow's wet. You've been crying!"

Captain Gordon got up from the sofa and laughed pleasantly at his aunt's scared face.

"It seems very absurd for a man to be nervous or hysterical," he said ; "but I have *not* been myself to-day, and Lady Cecil's song quite upset me."

"What, that droning thing?" exclaimed Mrs. MacClaverhouse. "It sounded to *me* like Young's *Night-Thoughts* set to music."

"I think I'll wish you good-night, auntie," said the soldier.

Cecil wondered whether it was the glare of the moderator lamp that made him look so pale as he bent over his aunt.

"I think you'd better," answered the dowager ; "and if you're not yourself to-night, I only hope you will be yourself to-morrow. I haven't common patience with such nonsense."

"Good-night, Lady Cceil." He paused by the piano to say this, but he did not offer Cceil his hand as he had been wont to do at parting, and he left the room without another word.

CHAPTER IV

LOVE AND DUTY.

THE Captain did not appear at the breakfast table next morning, and it was some time after breakfast when he came into the drawing-room where Cceil sat alone writing letters. He entered through one of the open windows.

"I have been exploring our favourite hills, Lady Cceil," he said; "I hope you did not wait breakfast for me?"

"No; auntie never waits for any onc. Shall I order fresh tea or coffee to be made for you?"

"No, thanks; I have no appetite for breakfast this morning."

Cceil went on writing.

"I hope you are better to-day," she said presently, the rapid pen still gliding over the paper, the graceful head still bending over the desk. There is nothing so charming as the air of indifference with which a woman inquires about the health of the man she loves; but the indifference is generally a little overdone.

"I was not ill yesterday," answered Hector. "There are some things more painful to endure than illness. Lady Cceil, will you do me a favour? I want your advice about a friend of mine, who finds himself in one of the most cruel positions that ever a man was placed in. Are those letters very important?"

"Not at all important."

"In that case I may ask you to put on your hat and come with me for a stroll—you have no idea how lovely the sea looks this morning—and you can give me your advice about my friend."

"I don't think I have had enough experience of life to be a good adviser."

"But you are a lady, and you have a lady's subtle instincts which honour is at stake; and this is a case in which experience of life is not wanted."

Cecil put aside her writing materials and took her hat from the sofa, where it had been lying. They went out together silently, and walked silently towards the water's edge. The wavelets curled crisply in the fresh autumn breeze, and the sunlit sea rippled as gaily as if the blue waters had bounded beneath the dancing tread of invisible sea-nymphs.

"I shall think of this cool, fresh English sea-shore very often when I am in Bengal," Hector said.

"You will go back to Bengal—soon?"

"Yes, I think very soon. My leave does not expire for some months: but as I came home on a doctor's certificate, and as the sea-air I got between Calcutta and Suez set me up before I reached home, I have no excuse for remaining away from my regiment much longer. I shall be glad to see all the dear old fellows again;—and—and—a man is always happiest when he is doing his duty."

"You speak as if you knew what it was to be unhappy," said Cecil; "and yet you must remember telling us, one day when you first came here, that you had never known any serious sorrow in your life."

"Did I say so? Ah! but then that was so long ago."

"So long ago! about five weeks, I believe."

"Five æons! a lifetime at the very least. I have been reading Tennyson on the hills this morning. What a wonderful poet he is! and how much more wonderful as a philosopher! I scarcely regret my forgotten Greek as I read him. To my mind he is the greatest teacher and preacher of our age,—stern and harsh, bitter and cruel sometimes, but always striking home to the very root of truth with an unerring aim. I grow better, and braver, and stronger as I read him. He is not an eloquent wailer of his own woes, like Byron—ah, don't think that I underrate Byron because he is out of fashion; for amidst all the birds that ever sang in the bushes of Parnassus, there is no note so sweet as his to my ear;—and yet Alfred Tennyson has set the stamp of his own suffering on every page of his poetry. Don't talk to me about inner consciousness—or mental imitation. A man must have suffered before he could write 'Locksley Hall;' a man must have been tempted and must have triumphed before he could write 'Love and Duty.' Do you know the poem, Lady Cecil? It is only two or three pages of blank verse; but I have read it half a dozen times this morning, and it seems to me as true as if it had been written with the heart's blood of a brave man. Shall I read it to you?"

"If you please."

Upon that solitary coast they had no fear of interruption. On one side of them lay stubble-fields and low flat meadows,

where the cattle stood to watch them as they passed; on the other, the cool grey sea. The autumn sunshine had faded a little, and there were clouds gathering on the horizon—clouds that Hector and Cecil were too preoccupied to observe. The faint hum of the village died away behind them as they strolled slowly onward. In a desert they could scarcely have been less restrained by any fear of interruption.

Hector Gordon read the poem—in a low, earnest voice—in tones whose deep feeling was entirely free from exaggeration. He read very slowly when he came to the last paragraph of the fragment :

“ Should my shadow cross thy thoughts
Too sadly for their peace, remand it thou
For calmer hours to memory's darkest hold,
If not to be forgotten—not at once—
Not all forgotten.”

He closed the book abruptly with these words, and for some minutes walked on in silence. This time it was Cecil who was ungracious, since she did not thank her companion for reading the poem.

“ And now, Lady Cecil, I will tell you my friend's story,” said Captain Gordon presently. “ It is a common story enough, perhaps; for I suppose there are few lives in which there does not arise the necessity for some great sacrifice.”

He paused once more, and then began again with an evident effort :

“ As my life for the last few years has been spent in India among my brother officers, I need scarcely tell you that the man of whom I speak is an officer. He is, like myself, the son of a rich man; and his military career has been unusually successful. When he joined his regiment he was one of the most thoughtless and impulsive fellows in the universe. He had been spoiled by indulgent friends, and had never in his life had occasion to think for himself. You may bring up a lad in a garden of roses to be a very well-mannered, agreeable fellow, I dare say; but I doubt if the rose-garden education will ever make a great or a wise man. That sort of animal must be reared upon the moorlands, amidst the free winds of heaven. As my friend was thoughtless and impulsive, it was scarcely strange that, when he found himself so idle as to want amusement, he should join in the first tiger-hunt that took place in his neighbourhood, nor was it strange that he should contrive to get seriously wounded by the animal. The wonder was that he escaped alive. He owed the life which his own reckless folly had hazarded to the cool daring of a friend

and comrade ; and when he woke from the swoon into which he had fallen immediately after feeling the tiger's claws planted in his thigh, he found himself in the coolest and shadiest room of his friend's house in Calcutta. He still felt the tiger's claws ; but it was pleasant to know that the sensation was only imaginary, and that the animal had been shot through the head by the brave young civilian—for his friend was a civilian, and a resident in Calcutta. He had just enough sense to murmur some inarticulate expression of gratitude—just enough strength to grasp his preserver's honest hand ; and then he grew delirious from the pain of his wounds, and then he had fever, and altogether a very hard time of it.

"I think you can guess what is coming now, Lady Cecil. In all the history of the world there never surely was the record of man's sorrow or sickness that was not linked with a story of woman's devotion. When my friend was well enough to know what tender nursing was, he knew that the hands which had administered his medicine and smoothed his pillow from the first hour of his delirium belonged to the civilian's sister ; a girl whom he had known only as the best waltzer in Calcutta, but whom he had reason to know now as an angel of pity and tenderness.

"Her attendance upon him was as quiet and unobtrusive as it was watchful and untiring ; and on the day on which his medical attendants pronounced him out of danger, she left his room, after a few half-tearful words of congratulation, never to enter it again. But she had watched by him long enough to give him ample time for watching her, and he fancied that he had reason to believe he was beloved for the first time in his life.

"When he was well enough to leave his room he found that she had left Calcutta for a visit to some friends at Simlah. She wanted change of air, her brother said, and it might be some months before she would return. My friend's impulsive nature would not suffer him to wait so long. How base a scoundrel he must have been if his heart had not overflowed with gratitude to the friend who had saved his life, the tender-hearted girl who had watched him in his danger ! You will not wonder when I tell you that his first impulse was to ask his friend to become his brother, his gentle nurse to take the sacred name of wife. What return could he offer for so much devotion, except the devotion of his own life ? And his heart was so free, Lady Cecil, that he offered it as freely as if it had been a handful of gold which he had no need of. The civilian acted nobly, declining to accept any pledge in his sister's name. I say nobly, because the soldier was a richer man by twenty

times than his friend, and had been the first prize in the Anglo-Indian matrimonial market. The soldier waited only till he was strong enough to bear the jolting of a palanquin before he went to Simlah. Ho found his nurse looking pale and anxious : little improved by change of air or scene. He came upon her unexpectedly ; and the one look which he saw in her face, as she recognised him, assured him that he had not made the senseless blunder of a coxcomb when he had fancied himself beloved. He stayed in the hill country for a fortnight, and he went back to his regiment the promised husband of as pure and true-hearted a woman as ever lived. I bear tribute to her goodness, Lady Cecil, standing by your side, here upon this English shore, so many hundred miles away. God bless her !”

He lifted his hat as he pronounced the blessing ; and looking at him with sad, earnest eyes, Cecil saw that his were dim with tears.

“ Oh, Cecil, Cecil !” he said, “ I haven’t finished my story yet. Can you guess what happened when the soldier came home, and chance threw him into intimate association with another woman ? Unhappily, it is such an old story. Ah ! then, and then only, his heart throbbed into sudden life. Ah ! then only he found how wide a difference there is between a grateful impulse of the mind and an absorbing passion of the heart. Careless and inconsiderate in all things, he abandoned himself to the charm of an association whose peril he never calculated ; and he awoke one day, like a man who had been dreaming pleasant dreams upon the edge of a precipice, to discover his danger. I cannot tell you how bitter that awakening was. There is an old Greek fancy—too foolish for me to tell you—which explains a perfect love as the reunion of two beings who at first were one, but who, separated by an angry deity, have wandered blindly through the universe in search of one another. But sometimes it happens, Lady Cecil, that the half-soul finds its other half too late !

“ I have told you my friend’s story. How dearly he loves the lady it was his sorrow to know and love too late, I can find no words to tell you. He is a soldier, and he calls himself a man of honour ; but he is so weak and helpless in his misery that he has need of counsel from a mind less troubled than his own. He is willing to do his duty, if he can be told where in his duty lies. Should he write to his betrothed, and confess the truth, trusting in her generosity to set him free ?—I am sure she would do so.”

There was a brief pause before Cecil said,—

“ I am sure of it too, though I do not know her. But do you think she would ever be happy again ?”

"I cannot answer for that. Ah, Lady Cecil, I know what you think my friend's duty is."

"There can be no question about it. He must keep his promise," she answered firmly.

"Even if in so doing he forfeits the happiness of his future life; if in so doing he ties himself for ever and ever to the dull wheel of duty; even if he dares to think that his love is not altogether unreturned by her he loves so truly and so hopelessly? Oh, Cecil, be merciful! Remember it is the fate of a lifetime you are deciding."

"I cannot advise your friend to be false to his word," replied Cecil. "I am sorry for his sorrow. But it is a noble thing to do one's duty. I think he will be happier in the end if he keeps his promise."

She looked up at him with a bright, brave glance as she spoke. Their eyes met, and her face changed, in spite of the heroic effort she made to preserve its exalted tranquillity. They stood alone on the narrow sands, with a mournful wind moaning past them, a drizzling rain drifting in their faces, as unconscious of any change in the weather as they were unconscious of all things in the universe—except each other.

"I am going back to London by the mail to-night, Lady Cecil. We shall be together for the rest of the day, I hope,—my last day; but we are not likely to be alone again, and I should like to say good-bye to you here."

He lifted his hat, and the wind and rain drifted his hair away from his face.

"Cecil, I am going back to India, to do my duty, with God's help. Say, God bless you, Hector, and good-bye."

"God bless you, Hector, and——"

She looked up at the perfect face, the dark blue eyes, so dim with tears, and could not finish the sentence. She turned from her companion with a passionate gesture, ashamed of her own weakness, and walked homewards rapidly, with Hector walking silently by her side.

They did not speak until they came to the idle boats, lying keel upwards on the beach, which marked the beginning of the village, and then Captain Gordon broke the silence by a remark which proved that he had only that moment discovered the change in the weather.

"If you'll stop under shelter of that yacht, Lady Cecil," he said, "I'll run on and get a shawl and umbrella."

"Thank you—no—on no account. I don't mind the rain—and we are so near home," answered Cecil, whose flimsy muslin garments were dripping wet.

CHAPTER V

AT THE FOUNTAINS.

HECTOR GORDON kept his word. He left Fortinbras by the evening train, in despite of his aunt's lamentations, and in despite of something which pierced his heart more cruelly than the lamentations of all the fussy dowagers in Christendom,—the still white look of sorrowful resignation in Cecil Chudleigh's face.

She loved him. He knew the truth and depth of her affection as well as he knew the truth and depth of his own. Love would be a poor divinity indeed, if, as some counter-balance to his physical blindness, he were not gifted with the power of second-sight. Hector needed no word from Cecil to tell him how much he resigned in doing his duty. The hour that had revealed to him the secret of his own heart had laid bare the mystery of hers. That subtle sympathy, which had seemed so sweet a friendship, had been only love in disguise, the wolf in sheep's clothing, the serpent in the semblance of a dove.

Ah, what utter despair possessed those two sad hearts on that chill September afternoon! what a cold, dreary future lay before those two helpless wanderers, doomed to bid each other farewell! The day might come, as it comes so often in the story of a lifetime, when to look back upon all this trouble and anguish would be to look back upon something as flimsy as a dream. But then what is more terrible than the agony of a dream?—ay, even though in the sleeper's breast there lurk a vague consciousness that he is only the fool of a vision. Brooding over his hopeless sorrow, as the express whirled Londonwards through the darkness, Hector Gordon thought of the stories of unhappy attachments and wasted devotion which he had heard told by his seniors over the mess-table, when the wine went round silently in the summer dusk, and men, whose faces were in shadow, talked more freely than was their wont in the broad glare of day.

“Shall I ever come to tell the story of my sorrow to my brother officers in the gloaming? Will the memory of to-night ever be a subject for friendly talk after a ponderous dinner, while the sentry's tramp echoes in the stillness, and the odour of cigar-smoke floats in from the balcony where the youngsters are lounging? Will they ever call me a dreary old bore, and try to change the subject when they find the

conversation drifting round to my dismal love-story? Ah, how sad to be old and a nuisance, and to have profaned the sanctity of my idol's temple!"

How sad to be old! Hector thought of the dull life of duty, the joyless, sunless, desert waste that lay between him and the time when he might begin to care for comet port, and dilate with an elderly dandy's fatuity on the tender story of his youth. He thought of his future until he began to fancy how blessed a thing it would be if his life could end that night in the chill darkness. The engine had but to swerve a hair's breadth, as it flew along the top of a steep embankment—and lo, the end of all his sorrows! A crash, a sudden agony perhaps—unimaginable in its infinity of pain, but brief as summer lightning,—and the enigma of his existence would be solved, the troublesome thread of his life dissevered.

"My poor Mary would be sorry for me," he thought, remembering the gentle betrothed waiting for him in India; "but she would fancy that I had died adoring her, and in a twelvemonth the memory of me would be a painless sorrow. Shall I make her happy by doing my duty? I have seen ruined men, whose ruin began on the day in which they sacrificed feeling on the shrine of honour. My Cecil, my Cecil, how could you be so cruel as to drive me away from you?"

The image of the pale, sorrowful face that had looked at him with such heroic calmness in the moment of parting arose before him now like a reproach. He knew that she had been right. He knew that her voice had been the voice of truth and honour, the voice of his own conscience. "God help me to be worthy of the love that never can be mine, and of the gentle darling I am bound to shelter!" he thought. And then a spirit of resignation seemed to exorcise the demon despair, and he took from his pocket-book a letter written on foreign paper,—a letter in a pretty womanly hand, not too easy to decipher,—a letter from his betrothed wife, which he had read hurriedly the day before, too cruelly preoccupied to know what he was reading.

The tender, trusting words were the most bitter reproaches that could assail him. His heart melted as he read the long, loving epistle by the uncertain light of the railway lamp. He could hear the voice, as he deciphered those simple girlish sentences. He could see her face—not beautiful, but very sweet and loving.

He was quite alone in the carriage, and when he had replaced the letter in his pocket-book, he detached a little trinket which hung to his watch-chain, and pressed the crystal face of it to his lips. Under the crystal there was a lock of

pale flaxen hair, which his own hands had selected for the shears the day he parted from his love at Simlah.

"Poor Mary!" he murmured softly; "poor Mary! it will be something at least to make you happy."

The dowager took her nephew's departure very deeply to heart; or it may be rather that she had set her heart on a suite of spacious apartments in Tyburnia, and was by no means disposed to return to Dorset Square. She questioned Cecil very sharply about Hector's proceedings, and succeeded in driving that young lady into a conversational corner, whence it was impossible to emerge without a revelation of the truth.

"You tell me you think he's engaged," said the dowager, impatiently, after forcing Cecil to admit so much. "And why do you think he's engaged? Did he tell you so?"

"He gave me to understand as much."

"And engaged to whom, pray?"

"A young lady in India."

"A young lady in India. Is that all you know about her?"

"Yes indeed, auntie."

"A nice designing thing, I dare say, and a nobody into the bargain, or of course he'd have told you who she was," cried Mrs. MacClaverhouse indignantly. "A stuck-up creature, who will contrive to keep her husband at a distance from his relations, no doubt, in order that she may surround him with a pack of harpies of her own kith and kin. And to think that my boy should never have so much as asked my advice before he threw himself away! If you knew how I had built upon you and Hector making a match of it, Cecil, you'd sympathise with my disappointment a little, instead of sitting looking at me in that provokingly placid way of yours. I could have ended my days happily under Hector's roof; I hoped he would have been glad to give his poor old aunt a home; and I don't think you'd have refused me a shelter in my old age—eh, Cecil?"

"Oh, auntie! auntie!"

Mrs. MacClaverhouse had no need to complain of want of sympathy this time, for Cecil suddenly fell upon her knees, and buried her face in her aunt's ample silken skirts, sobbing passionately. The thought of what might have been was so very bitter; and every word the dowager uttered sent the arrow deeper into the wounded heart.

"Oh, auntie!" she cried, "never speak to me about him again. Oh, pray, pray, do not speak of him again! I love him so dearly, so dearly, so dearly!"

It was the first and last passionate cry of Cecil Chudleigh's heart, and it quite melted the dowager; but there was a touch of sternness mingled with her emotion.

"I hope that designing minx will live to repent her artfulness," she said, spitefully ; for it is the peculiar attribute of a woman to empty the vials of her wrath on the passive and unconscious maiden for whose sake her plans have been frustrated, rather than on the activo masculine offender who has frustrated them.

The dowager and her niece went back to Dorset Square very soon after Hector's departure : and then came visits to country houses ;—a fortnight in Leicestershire, where poor Cecil had to endure the hunting talk of horsey men and fast young ladies, the perpetual discussions about dogs and horses and southerly winds and cloudy skies ; a month in an old Yorkshire grange, where there was a cheerful Christmas gathering, and where Lady Cecil had to act in charades and take part in duets—the dear old duets in which his melodious barytone had been so delicious. She looked round sometimes when she was singing, and almost expected to see his ghost standing behind her,—so cruel a profanation did it seem to sing the old familiar words. In all the morning gossip, and billiard-playing and fancy-work, the reading aloud—often from the very books which *he* had read at Fortinbras—in all the music and dancing, the impromptu charades, and carefully studied *tableaux-vivants* which enlivened the winter evenings, Cecil had to take her part with a smiling face. She wondered sometimes whether there were any other bright smiles which were only masks assumed for the evening with the evening dress. She wondered whether there was any other woman in all the crowd who saw athwart the lights and exotics of the dinner-table the vision of one dear face whose reality was thousands of miles away.

"He may be lying dead while I sit simpering here," she thought. "Yet that would be too dreadful. Oh ! surely, surely I should know it if he were dead !"

Bravely though she bore her burden, it was a very heavy one. No mother, pining in the absence of her only son, could have felt more poignant anxiety about the absent one than Cecil felt for the man who had loved her and left her to marry another woman. How often—ah, how often, amidst the hum of joyous voices, and the brilliant tones of a piano vibrating under masterly hands—how often the lamplight faded, and the faces of the crowd melted away, and the gorgeous drawing-room changed itself into that weedy shore at the foot of grim Fortinbras Castle, while the autumn rain drifted once more into Cecil Chudleigh's face, and *his* eyes looked down upon her dim with tears. Of all their gay and happy hours, their pleasant rambles, Cecil recalled no picture so vivid as that of her lover, in his sorrow, standing bareheaded in the drifting rain,

looking tenderly down upon her with fond despairing eyes. And he was gone from her for ever ; never, never, never, so long as she lived, was she to look upon his face again.

But she endured her life, and by-and-by, when cold gleams of February sunshine lighted the grey sky, the dowager carried her niece back to Dorset Square, and all the old sordid wearisome care about forks, spoons, and broken wine-glasses and incorrect butcher's bills, began again.

But even broken wine-glasses may be a distraction, and a young lady who has tradesmen's books and the contents of china closets to employ her mind suffers less than the damsel who has nothing to do but to sit by her easement, watching the slow changes of the heavens, and thinking of the absent one. Industrious Charlotte, cutting bread and butter for the little ones, is not so apt to fall in love with Werter as he is to be inspired by a fatal passion for her, since, paltry and sordid a task as Charlotte's may be, it yet requires some thought, or the lady will cut her fingers. A little wholesome household work would have saved poor Elaine from many of those long hours of brooding, in which the lily maid of Astolat contemplated the dark knight's image. Work, the primeval curse, may have been a blessing in disguise after all.

Lady Cecil bore her life. She went hither and thither to places in which she felt little interest, amongst people whose companionship seemed so poor a substitute for that brief, sweet friendship of the departed autumn. Ah, what could ever bring back to her heart the thrilling joy of that broken dream?

Yet her life was not altogether joyless. It was only the magical, mystical gladness, the delight too deep for words, which had gone out of her existence for ever in the hour of that irrevocable parting on the wet sea-shore. She had friends and companions, a social status, in right of her father's name and race, even amongst the vulgar who knew that she was only a penniless dependant upon the sharp-spoken dowager. Perhaps the friend with whom Cecil Chudleigh's proud reserve was most often wont to melt into tender sympathy was Florence Crawford, the frivolous divinity at whose shrine the young landscape painter had laid his heart and his ambition.

They had met "in society," as Flo said, with a little air, which implied that the only society in the civilised world was the circle wherein Miss Crawford revolved : and they had taken a fancy to each other, according to Florence, though it must be confessed the fancy had been chiefly on her own side, as Cecil was not prone to sudden friendships.

"But there was some one else took a fancy to you before I did," exclaimed Flo. "There's not the least occasion to

blush, Lady Cecil, for the some one else was only a middle-aged man, with such a shelf on his dear old back that I sometimes quite long to set a row of Carl-Theodore tea-cups on his coat-collar for ornamentation. It was papa who took a fancy to you. He's the most absurd old thing in the world, and he says yours is the very face he has been waiting for, for his new picture. He is going to paint the prison scene in *Faust*, and he declares that you have the exact expression he wants for his Gretchen. You have no idea what trouble he will take to get a sitting from any one whose face has fascinated him. Professional models are all very well, but you can't get a professional model to read Goethe, or to imagine that she sees an infant struggling in the water, for a shilling an hour. What papa wants is expression, and he was struck by your face the other night when you were singing at Lady Jacynt's; there was an exalted look about your eyes and forehead, he said, which would be worth a fortune to him; so I am to exert all my fascinations in order to induce you to give him a sitting or two; and I'm sure you will, won't you, Lady Cecil? for he really is a dear good creature."

Cecil assented very readily, flattered and honoured by the painter's request. She was a far more reverent disciple of art than Florence Crawford, who spoke flippantly of the greatest master of his age as a dear old thing, and was wont to frisk hither and thither in her father's painting-room, criticising his pictures as freely as if they had been so many Parisian bonnets.

It would have been very strange if Cecil had not been glad to exchange the sordid atmosphere of Dorset Square for the dreamy splendour of the Fountains. The hour or two which Mr. Crawford had entreated in the first place grew into many hours, and Cecil had spent half-a-dozen pleasant mornings in the great master's painting-room before the vague shadow which was so unintelligible to common eyes grew out of the canvas, and became a woman instinct with life and soul. Flo brought her box of water-colours on these occasions, and perched herself at a little table in a corner of the spacious chamber; for she made a faint show of devotion to art now and then as an excuse for intruding into the painter's sanctum. What place of retreat could be sacred from an only daughter, and such an only daughter as Florence Crawford?

So the young lady came very often to the noble tapestried painting-room, into which half the contents of Mr. Woodgate's shop seemed to have been imported, so rich was the gorgeous chamber in black oak cabinets and stamped-leather-cushioned chairs, coloured marbles and mediæval armour majolica vases and Venetian glass. The painter loved beautiful things, and

spent his money as recklessly as Aladdin or Alexandre Dumas. For how was it possible that a man could be careful of vulgar pounds and shillings under whose magic-working hand human grandeur and human beauty developed into being—who knew but two rivals, Rubens and Nature—and who could afford to stand comparison with the first?

William Crawford was a painter in the highest and grandest sense of the word; and he wasted his money and sold his pictures for a song when the whim seized him, and scattered little water-colour bits in the serap-books of beautiful high-born feminine mendicants, which, collected together, would have realised a small fortune at Christie's. It was only when judicious friends with business habits stepped in and insisted upon negotiating affairs for the great painter, that Mr. Crawford received large prices for his pictures, and found a satisfactory row of pencil figures under the last pen-and-ink entry in his banking book. The story of the painter's youth and manhood was not without a touch of sadness. It was the old, old story of a brilliant career and a broken life. William Crawford had not sprung into Fame's ample lap with one daring bound. His progress had been slow and laborious, and there had been a few silver threads mingled with his auburn hair before the laurel crown descended on his forehead, or the nimbus of glory made a light about his earnest face. He had seen other men pass him by—his companions of the Academy, the students who had sat by his side,—he had seen them go by him to take their places amongst the victors, great men in their way, most of them; but how weak and puny was the greatest compared to him!

He had so much to endure, and he bore it all so meekly! So patient was he in the sublime resignation of conscious genius, which knows that it *must* triumph, that he grew by-and-by to be set down as a dull plodding fellow, who would never do any thing worth looking at. Year after year—year after year—his pictures came back upon him from the Academy, from the British Institution, rejected! rejected! rejected! Yet he was William Crawford all the time, and knew himself, and the sovereign power of his hand.

Meek and mighty spirit to wait so long, to labour so patiently, hoarding thy strength, and adding to thy power day by day, as a miser swells his pile of vulgar gold!

The day came at last, but not all at once. Pictures were accepted, and "skyed:" critics talked about coldness, and blackness, and chalkiness: friends were compassionate, and shoulders were shrugged with polite despair. The poor man had really no idea of colour!

For a few years things went on like this, and then ap-

peared a gorgeous Rubens-like canvas, whereon Pericles reclined at the feet of Aspasia : and in a day, in an hour, the mighty master of all the secrets of colour revealed himself, and the world knew that William Crawford was a great painter.

After that day the men who had called Crawford a dull, plodding fellow, offered him monstrous bribes for the revelation of his "secret." He smiled at their ignorance. He had no secret except his genius. His mystic cabala lay in the two virtues that had made the law of his life—unremitting industry, undeviating temperance. In the chill early light of morning, in the warm glow of noon, in the deepening shadows of evening, in the artificial light of the night school at the Academy, William Crawford had toiled for twenty years, finding no drudgery too hard, no monotonous repetition of study too wearisome. And now at eight-and-thirty, he found himself a great man, and he knew that his hand was to be trusted, and that his feet were surely planted on the mountain he had climbed so patiently.

Alas, there are so many blessings in this life that come too late! many a vessel laden with the gold of Ophir only nears the shore when her owner lies dead upon the sands. When William Crawford tasted the first fruits of success, the wife—to have purchased whose happiness he would have sold his heart's blood—had been dead ten years. She had felt the cruel hand of poverty, and had withered under that bitter gripe ; but she had never complained. She had borne all meekly for his sake—for his sake.

Now, when people offered him large prices for his pictures, he felt half inclined to refuse their commissions in utter bitterness of heart.

"You should have bought my 'Pyramus and Thisbe' twelve years ago," he would have cried. "A fifty-pound cheque would have done that for me then which all the kings and princes of this earth could not do now. It would have brought a smile to the face of my wife."

The young wife whose death had left such a terrible void in the painter's heart had been of higher rank than himself, and had run away from a luxurious home to inhabit draughty second-floor lodgings in a street running out of the Strand. William Crawford had trusted in the strength of his hand to win a better home for his darling. But the blackest years of his life were those that immediately succeeded his marriage, and the poor loving girl had to suffer deprivations that were unfelt by the Spartan painter, but which fell heavily on the home-bred damsel who had sacrificed so much for him. She would have held the loss of position a very light one ; but she

found that she had lost all her home-friends as well, for her father shut his door upon her after her marriage, and she had no mother to plead for her at home, or to visit her by stealth in her husband's shabby dwelling. The father was a hard, obstinate man, who plucked his daughter's image out of his heart as coolly as he erased her name from his will. He begged that Mrs. Crawford might never be mentioned in his presence; and he threatened to horsewhip the painter in the rooms of the Royal Academy if ever he met him there.

Whether he relented suddenly when the young wife died, or whether his conscience had given him some uneasiness from the beginning, no one ever knew; but he wrote a civil letter to the widower, declaring his willingness to adopt and educate the little girl his daughter had left behind her.

There was some hesitation, a little parley as to how often the father should be permitted to see his child; a very manly letter from the painter, setting forth the condition on which he was willing to part with the little girl, that condition being neither more nor less than an understanding that she was *his* child, and his only, committed as a sacred trust to her mother's family, and to be claimed by him at any hour he pleased. And then he let his little Florence go. A year later he would as soon have plucked the heart out of his breast as he would have parted from her; but at this time he was utterly broken down in body and mind—so crushed, so desolate, that it seemed as if nothing could add to his desolation. He was even glad to get rid of the child. The sound of her young voice saddened him. There were tones in it that were like her mother's.

"I sat in my room and painted," he said afterwards, when he was able to talk of this dreadful time, "but I didn't know what I was painting, or whether it was winter or summer. People would come in and sit down and talk to me—they came to cheer me up a little, they said. I talked to them and answered them; and when they went away I didn't know who they were, or what they had been talking about. As for my work, the right colours came on my brush somehow; but when the faces looked out at me from my canvas, I used to wonder who had painted them, and what they meant. I don't know how long that time lasted. I only know that the best and dearest friend I ever had took me across the Channel with him, and on to Italy; and one morning, after landing at some place from a steamer in the darkness, I opened my window and saw the Bay of Naples before me. I burst into tears, for the first time since my wife's death; and after that I learnt to bear my sorrow patiently."

When William Crawford found himself a successful man, he built himself a house at Kensington from a design of his

own. After stating which latter fact, it is quite unnecessary to say that the Italian façade was perfection, that the Alhambra-like colonnade at the back was delicious, that there was a great deal of space wasted in unnecessary passages, and that there was neither a housemaid's closet nor a dust-bin in the original plan of the mansion. But then what a charming spot was that on which Mr. Crawford planted his temple! for he was far too wise a man to erect his dwelling on one of those patches of arid waste which are called desirable building-ground. He had discovered an inconvenient old house in a delicious garden between the old court suburb and Tyburnia, and had carted away the rambling, low-roofed dwelling, and set up his dazzling white temple in its stead. The crowning glory of the place was a pair of marble fountains which the painter had brought from Rome—fountains whose silver waters had made harmonious accompaniment to the voices of revellers in Tivoli fifteen hundred years ago.

It was to this pleasant home that William Crawford brought his beautiful daughter from the fashionable boarding school in which she had received her education. Her grandfather had died, leaving her the five thousand pounds that had once been allotted to her mother. Her aunts and uncles were scattered, and not one of them had been able to obtain any lasting hold upon the impulsive little heart which beat in Miss Crawford's breast. She came to the Fountains at her father's bidding, and her pretty caressing ways were very pleasant to him; but she did not fill the void in his heart. He looked in her face very sadly sometimes, for it recalled the vision of another face, with a tender, loving light in the eyes, which was wanting in Flo's flashing glances. She was such a frivolous creature compared with her mother.

The difference between them was as wide as the contrast between a tender cooing dove which nestles in your bosom and a beautiful butterfly that flits and skims hither and thither in the sunshine. Miss Crawford was fond of her father, and proud of him after a fashion; but she had no power to appreciate the sublimity of his art, the grandeur of his triumphs. She admired him, and was pleased with his success because it had given him wealth and fashion. Alone in a desert that *other one* would have rejoiced with him in the glory of his work, however unprofitable, however remote from the possibility of reward, because it was his, and because he loved it.

There were times when Flo's frivolous criticisms jarred on the painter's ear, for there were tones in her voice which even yet reminded him too painfully of the lost one. He was an

over-indulgent father, said people, who estimated a father's indulgence by the amount of a daughter's pocket-money; but it may be that he would have been less indulgent if he had loved his child better, or rather if she had been able to reach that inner sanctuary of his soul where the image of the dead reigned alone.

Lady Cecil felt a thrill of delight when the painter turned his easel and revealed his finished picture.

Ah, wonderful power, given to a man in such fulness as it had been given to William Crawford once in two hundred years, rarest of all earthly gifts, the masterdom of colour, the power which makes the painter's hand second only to the hand of the Creator who bade Eve come forth out of the shadow of night, and revealed to awakening Adam the perfection of womanly levelness.

In the prison scene the painter had full scope for his wondrous power of colour. The light in the picture was subdued. Only through the open door of poor Gretchen's cell one saw a lurid glimmer of the coming day. In this open doorway lounged Mephistopheles, with a horrible smile upon his face, and his figure darkly defined against that low lurid glimmer. The light of the prison-lamp shone full on the faces of the lovers, and the sickly yellow light made a kind of aureola around Gretchen's golden head.

While Cecil stood before the picture in rapt admiration, Miss Crawford laid down her brushes and came to look at her father's labour. The painter lounged against the wall opposite his easel, gazing dreamily at his completed work.

Oh, butterflies of fashion, driving mail-phaetons or teeling teams of four-in-hand in the Lady's Mile, Sybarites and loiterers in pleasant drawing-rooms, loungers in clubs, and triflers with existence, lotus-eaters of every species, have any of *you* ever known a joy so deep as this—the joy that drove Pygmalion mad, the intoxicating triumph of the creator who sees his work complete in all its beauty and perfection?

"H'm, yes, it's very pretty," said Flo, after contemplating the picture under the shadow of two pretty jewel-twinkling hands arched over her piquant eyebrows; but isn't Gretchen's arm a *leetle* out of drawing? I'm sure I could never get *my* arm into that position; but I dare say people's arms were more flexible in those days. How awfully blue you've made Mephistopheles; but I'm very glad you haven't allowed him to cross his legs. *Why* a diabolical person should always cross his legs is a mystery that I have never been able to fathom. It's very nice, papa; but I don't like it so well as 'Pericles and Aspa-

sia.' Your proclivities are classic, you dear old thing, so you had better stick to your Lempriere, and let us have rosy gods and goddesses *ad infinitum*."

"*Ad nauseam*, perhaps," said the painter sadly.

The critics had been very hard upon William Crawford; and there had been people besotted enough to utter the shameful word "sensualism" in connection with the purest and simplest creature who ever worshipped the divinity of beauty. And then there were all the host of funny little writers who wrote facetious little criticisms upon the great man's pictures. His Cupid had the mumps, his Psyche was in the last stage of scarlet fever, his Alcibiades was a butcher's boy, his Timandra a scorbatic shrew, his Boadicea a prize-fighter disguised in female raiment. The funny little writers who could not have sketched the outline of a pump-handle correctly, had fine fun out of William Crawford. He was happy in spite of all adverse criticism, and had succeeded in spite of his critics. Of course there were some who knew what they were writing about; and to such adverse opinion as he felt to be just William Crawford bowed his head meekly, not too proud to believe that he could have done better if he had "taken more pains." Who could be more acutely conscious than he was of his shortcomings? Whose eyes were keener than his to perceive the weak spots in his work? There is no finer tonic for the true worker than adverse criticism. The friend's lavish praise may enervate: the foe's hardest usage braces and fortifies. Guy Patin, in a criticism on Sir Thomas Brownie, which in the Christian benevolence of its tone is not altogether unlike some criticism of the nineteenth century—regrets that "the man is alive, because he may grow worse." How completely the slashing critics of the present day seem to forget that so long as the man is alive, it is possible for him to grow better!

William Crawford was very happy in the painting-room where the greater part of his life was spent. What man can be so happy as the triumphant artist?—convinced of the innocence and purity of his triumphs, assured of being remembered when all other labourers are forgotten, knowing that his glory will be revealed to posterity by no musty records written by a stranger, but by his own handiwork, instinct with his own soul, revealing himself in a language that needs no translation, and is almost as familiar to the savage as to the *savant*, so nearly does it copy nature.

Florence thought it a very hard thing that her father would not take her to perpetual parties, and grumbled sorely at being sent under convoy of any grumpy old chaperone who

might be available ; but on this matter the painter very rarely gave way.

"Do you know how long art is, as compared to a man's life?" he asked. "Can you guess what Raffaele might have been if he had lived to be as old as Titian? If there is any special strength in my hand, Flo, it is because in twenty years I have worked as hard as most men work in forty. When I paid fifteen shillings a week for my lodgings my landlord grumbled because I kept my fire in all night, in order that I might be at work before daybreak. I don't make any merit of having worked hard, you know, my dear. I have worked because my work pleased me ; and you would never believe how little I ever thought of the fame or money that success would bring me. I don't think your real artist ever sets much value upon the price of his labour ; he may want money as much as any other man, and of course he is glad to get it ; but it is the triumph of his art that he rejoices in, rather than any personal success. The creation of his work is in itself happiness, and would be though his picture were foredoomed to melt and vanish under his hand at the moment of its completion. I would answer for it that Michael Angelo enjoyed modelling his statue of snow quite as much as if he had been putting the finishing touches of his chisel to the fairest marble that ever grew into life under the craftsman's hand, to receive a soul from the last touch of the master. Don't worry me about parties, Flo. I will pay as many milliner's bills as you like, and I'll paint you in all your prettiest dresses, and your most bewitching attitudes, and give you the price of your beauty for pocket-money ; but I won't go to be crushed to death upon staircases, or martyred in the act of fetching an ice. I won't go to people who only want to see what the painter of Aspasia is like, as if I must needs be like something different from my fellow-men, and who will think me an insignificant-looking fellow, with very little to say for myself. What should I have to say to people who don't know the A B C of the language to the study of which I have given my life?"

So Flo was obliged to be satisfied, and was fain to go into society under the wing of benevolent matrons who had no daughters of their own to be crushed by Miss Crawford's beauty. Flo had her maid and her carriage and was quite a little woman of fashion ; while the painter lived his own life, opening his doors every Sunday evening to all who cared to visit him, and generally hiding himself in some snug little corner of his spacious drawing-rooms amongst the friends of his soul, while fashionable visitors who had been received with perfect *aplomb* by Florence, prowled about in search of

him, and stared at the wrong man through gold-rimmed eye-glasses, or pronounced adverse criticisms upon his own pictures under his very nose. Of course Florence Crawford was perfectly aware that her father's *protégé*, the landscape painter, was desperately in love with her. We live in a fast-going century, and though Flo was only eighteen, she was fully versed in the diagnostics of a hopeless passion of which she was the object. She knew poor Philip's weakness, and laughed undisguisedly at his folly. She was a very dashing young person, and she declared herself to be an utterly heartless young person whenever she became expansive and confidential. Whether the heartlessness were real or affected was an enigma which no one had yet been able to solve. Whatever were the follies of the age, Flo went with them at full gallop. She talked slang, and affected a masculine contempt for all feminine pursuits, had been heard to ask what bodkins were meant for, and whether shirt-buttons were fastened on their foundations with glue. She had a tiny, tiny morocco volume, lined with satin, and emblazoned with gold, and obnoxious with patchouli—a volume that was called a betting-book, and which had about the same relation to the greasy volumes kept by the bookmen who gather on the waste ground in Victoria Road, or meet one another furtively at the corner of Farringdon Street, as a rosebud has to a red cabbage. Dozens of Jouvin's or Dent's six-and-a-quarter gloves were the principal entries in this mystic volume; but Flo had been known to obtain an actual tip from some aristocratic member of the Jockey Club, by whose friendly agency real money had been wagered and won. She was very fast, and had once been seen under the marble colonnade at the Fountains puffing daintily at a coquettish little cigarette. But it is only fair to add that the daring exploit resulted in deadly pallor and unpleasant faintness, and that the experiment was not repeated. She had her horse, and her own groom,—a steady old fellow who helped in the garden, and of whose boots and costume poor Flo was inclined to be rather ashamed when she met her stylish friends in the Row.

Did she ever pause to think that her life was useless, and extravagant and unwomanly? Well, no, not yet. She was only eighteen, remember, the age when a woman has not quite ceased to be a kind of refinement upon a kitten—beautiful, graceful, capricious, mischievous, treacherous. She was at an age when a woman is apt to take pleasure in treading on masculine hearts, and if remonstrated with upon her cruelty, would be quite inclined to echo the question of the poetess, and cry,—

“Why should a heart have been there,
In the way of a fair woman's foot?”

Flo insisted on making a confidante of Ceecil.

“I'm the most mercenary of creatures, you know, dear,” she said, “and I made up my mind ever so long ago that I would marry for money, and nothing but money. All the nicest girls marry for money nowadays, and live happy ever afterwards. I dare say there was a time when it was quite nice to be poor, and live in a cottage with the husband of one's choice. What a rusty old Minerva Press phrase that is!” cried Flo, with a grimace,—“the husband of one's choice! But that was in the days when women wore cottage-bonnets with a bit of ribbon across the crown, or hideous gipsy hats tied down with handkerchiefs, and white muslin dresses with a breadth and a half in the skirt, and when a woman on horseback was a show to be followed by street boys. I suppose Lady Godiva and Queen Elizabeth were the only women who ever did ride in the Middle Ages. *Nous avons change tout cela.* A woman in the present day must have three or four hundred a-year for pin-money, if she is not to be a disgrace to her sex in the way of gloves and bonnets; and she must ride a three-hundred guinea hack if she wants to escape being trampled upon by her dearest friends; and she will find herself a perfect outcast unless she has a box in a good position at one of the opera-houses; and she must go in for dogs and china,—not vulgar modern Dresden abominations, in the way of simpering shepherdesses, and creatures in hoops drinking chocolate or playing chess; but old Vienna, or Chelsea, with the gold anchor, or deliciously ugly Wedgwood, or soft paste. In short, my dearest Ceecil, a woman nowadays is a very expensive creature, and love in a cottage is an impossibility. Why, there *are* no cottages for the poor lovers! The tiniest, tiniest villa on the banks of the Thames costs about two hundred a-year; and if the poverty-stricken creatures who marry for love want a house, they must go to some horrible place beyond the Seven Sisters' Road, and be happy amongst a wilderness of brickfields and railway arches!”

Lady Ceecil had seen Florence and Philip together, and had taken it into her head that they loved each other. Her own sorrowful love-story had made her very tenderly disposed towards youthful lovers, and she had ventured to remonstrate with Florence.

“One reads about cruel parents and heart-broken damsels, but I don't think your papa would set his face against Mr Foley so sternly as you set yours, Flory,” she said. “He was talking of the young painter the other day, and he told me

that your friend Philip has a great career before him if he works patiently."

"Yes, and when he is as old as papa he will be able to earn two or three thousand a-year, I suppose!" exclaimed Miss Crawford. "Do you think that is a brilliant prospect for a girl who cannot live out of society? People with any thing under five thousand a-year are paupers—in society. Do you know what it is that is bearing down upon us, and crushing us all, Cecil, like an avalanche of gold? It is the wealth of the commercial plutocracy. The triumphant monster, Commerce, is devouring us all. Ask papa who buys his pictures; ask where the gems from Christie's go when the great auctions are over; ask why diamonds are worth twice as much to-day as they were twenty years ago: it is all because the princes of trade have taken possession of our land, Cecil, and nowadays a girl must set her cap in the direction of Manchester, if she wishes to marry well."

"Florence, I can't bear to hear you talk like this."

"I am a woman of the world, dear, and I mean to do the best I can for myself. It is very dreadful, I know, but at least I am candid with you. I went to a fashionable school, and you've no idea how we all worshipped wealth and finery. Papa used to come and see me in horrid old hansom cabs, that jingled and rattled as if they would have fallen to pieces when he stepped out of them; but some girls had fathers and mothers who came in two-hundred-guinea barouches, and oh, what a gulf there was between us! and then, again, poor mamma's people live in Russell Square, and there were girls at that school who made me feel that it was a kind of disgrace to have friends in Russell Square. And when I spent the holidays with my uncles and aunts, I used to have mamma's foolish marriage dinned into my ears; and though I always took her part, and declared that it was better to marry papa than to marry a prince of the blood royal, I *did* think, in my secret soul, that it was very silly to go and live in shabby lodgings near the noisy dirty Strand. Is it any wonder that I have grown up heartless and mercenary, and that I want to have a fine house and horses and carriages when I marry? I hope you will marry a rich man too, Cecil, and give nice parties. You won't have Thursdays though, will you, dear? I have set my heart on having Thursday for my own, own evening."

To this effect Miss Crawford would discourse in her own vivacious fashion; and it was in vain that Cecil appealed to the unawakened heart.

"Philip Foley is a most estimable creature," said Flo; "and if he were not absurdly self-conscious—all young men

are so self-conscious nowadays; in fact, in a general way, I consider young men perfectly hateful,—and if he were a marquis with something under a hundred thousand a year, I should think him quite adorable. But then, you see, he isn't a marquis, and he will never earn any thing like a hundred thousand a year by painting those wild skies and dismal rocks of his. Do you know what the Princess Elizabeth, that dear sweet darling whom every one so admires, said when she saw one of Mr. Folcy's red-and-yellow sunsets hung next the ceiling in Trafalgar Square:—'Why, what do the Hanging Committee mean by sticking up pictures of eggs and bacon?' said the princess; and ever since that, the poor young man's skies have been called eggs and bacon."

CHAPTER VI.

WEDDING CARDS.

RETURNING from the Fountains one day after a pleasant morning spent half in the garden, half in Mr. Crawford's painting-room, Cecil found the dowager in one of her worst humours.

"Has any thing annoyed you while I have been away, auntie?" she asked, gently.

"Has any thing annoyed me, indeed, auntie!" echoed Mrs. MacClaverhouse, with unusual acrimony. "I begin to think that I was only sent into the world for the purpose of being annoyed. Do you know that the mail from Marseilles comes in to-day, Lady Cecil?"

Cecil's downcast face grew first crimson and then pale. The Indian letters? The very mention of the post that brought them set her heart beating fast and passionately; and she had no right to be interested in their coming: she had no right to be glad or sorry for any tidings that the Indian mail could bring.

"You have heard from Captain Gordon, I suppose, auntie?" she said, falteringly.

"Yes, I have heard from him," answered the dowager in her most snappish manner.

"I hope he is well?"

"Oh yes, he is *well* enough, or as well as a man can be who is such a fool as to become the victim of any designing minx who chooses to set her cap at him. What do you think of that enclosure, Lady Cecil?"

The dowager tossed an envelope across the table towards the spot where her niece was standing, downcast and sad. Cecil knew what the enclosure was ; yes, a little shiver went through her as she took up the envelope, for she knew only too well what it contained.

A glazed envelope with a crest emblazoned in silver was within the outer covering, and inside the flap of the glazed envelope was inscribed the name of Mary Chesham. Two limp, slippery cards dropped from Cecil's hand as she read the name of her rival ; the name which was hers no longer, for on the larger card appeared the more dignified title of the matron, "Mrs. Hector Gordon." She put the cards back into the envelope and laid it gently on the table.

"God grant they may be happy!" she murmured softly.

"Yes," answered the dowager ; "and we are to live in Dorset Square all our lives, I suppose. Upon my word, Cecil, you are enough to provoke the patience of a saint. You might have married Hector Gordon if you had liked. Yes, child, you might. I watched the man. I've known him since he eat his first top-and-bottom, and I can see him eating it, in my mind's eye, at this very moment ; so I think I ought to know his ways. He was over head and ears in love with you ; and if it hadn't been for some highflown nonsense of yours he never would have gone back to India to marry that designing minx. He was engaged, forsooth ! and if he was, I suppose he could have disengaged himself ! He was in love with you Cecil, and you know that you might have married him as well as I do. What was he whimpering about that night, I should like to know, when you sang him your doleful songs, if he wasn't in love ! No man in his proper senses would moon about all day with two women, reading poetry and listening to doleful songs, unless he was in love. However, I've no doubt some nonsensical scruples of yours sent him back to Calcutta to become the prey of a minx called Chesham. Who *are* the Cheshams, I should like to know ? It sounds a decent name enough ; but I don't know any Cheshams. Give me the first volume of Burke's *Landed Gentry*, Cecil, and let me see if there are any respectable Cheshams."

Lady Cecil went into an inner room to look for the volume her aunt required. She found herself standing before the bookshelves, looking dreamily at the backs of the books, and wondering what it was she had come to seek. For some few moments she was quite unable to collect her thoughts. Was she sorry that Hector Gordon had fulfilled his engagement ? Ah, no ! ah, no, no ! To have wished his promise broken would have been to wish him something less than he was.

"Oh, I am proud to think him good, and honourable, and

true," she murmured, in a kind of rapture; "I am proud and glad to think that he has kept his promise."

Ah, reader, can you not imagine that the pale girl in Mr. Millais' picture was in the depths of her soul almost glad that her Huguenot lover refused to have the white scarf tied about his arm? His refusal would cost him his life, perhaps, but oh, how proud she must have been of him in that moment of supreme agony!

Lady Cecil carried the volume of Burke to her aunt, and Mrs. MacClaverhouse set herself to discover the antecedents of Mrs. Hector Gordon, *née* Chesham.

"There's a letter from Mrs. Lochiel on the table there," she said, without looking up from her book, "with an account of this fine wedding. You can read it if you like."

The dowager was an inveterate gossip, and kept up a correspondence with a dozen or two other dowagers, who took a benign interest in all the births, marriages, and deaths that came to pass within their circle. Perhaps if Mrs. MacClaverhouse had not been soured by the bitter disappointment and mortification which had befallen the pleasant castle she had built in Hyde Park Gardens at her nephew's expense, she might have been a little more merciful to poor Cecil's wounded heart. But it must be remembered that she did not know how deeply the girl's heart was wounded.

Cecil read Mrs. Lochiel's letter. Is it necessary to say that she read every word of that gossiping epistle more than once, though the reading of it gave her exquisite pain? There are poisoned arrows for which some women bare their breast—there are tortures which some women will suffer unbidden. There never was a woman yet, in Lady Cecil's position, who was not eager to be told what finery her rival wore, and how she looked in the wedding splendour.

Mrs. Lochiel was very discursive on the subject of millinery.

"Dear Mary Chesham looked very *sweet*," she wrote. "She is not pretty, but remarkably *interesting*, fair, with soft blue eyes, and a very *winning* expression. I know you will be pleased with her when Captain Gordon brings her to England, and they *do* say that his regiment will be ordered home *next* year. I am sure you ought to be proud of such a nephew, for he is one of the most popular young men in Calcutta, and one meets him at all the best houses. Every one says that Mary Chesham has made a wonderful match, and of course there are *some* people who *insinuate* that her brother manœuvred very cleverly to bring about the marriage. But I have met Mr. Chesham, who seems a very superior young man, and not at all the sort of person to manœuvre.

"The wedding was one of the gayest affairs we have had in

Calcutta this season. Mary had six bridesmaids, some of the nicest girls in the city ; and of course the military and civil service mustered in full force. The bride wore white glacé, made with a high body and short sleeves, and trimmed with bouillonnées of *tulle illusion*, and a large *tulle* veil, which covered her like a cloud. The dress was very simple, and certainly *inexpensive*, but *quite Parisian* in style. Mary has a very lovely arm,—those pale, insipid girls, with fair hair, generally have lovely arms,—and she wore a *very superb* pearl bracelet, given her by her uncle, Colonel Cudderley, who is, I believe, expected to *leave her money*. So you see your nephew has not done so *very badly* after all, though people here say he might have made a *much better match*. However, I am told that he is quite devoted to Mary, and I'm sure his manner when I have seen them together, has been *most attentive*."

Lady Cecil laid down the letter. Was this jealousy, this cruel pang which seemed to rend her heart asunder, as she read of her rival's bliss ? Oh, surely not jealousy ! Had she not with her own lips bidden him to fulfil his promise ? and was she grieved and wounded now to find that he had kept the spirit as well as the letter of that promise ? Had she expected that he would marry the girl who loved him, and yet by his cold indifference bear witness that he loved another ? Surely she could never have thought he could be base enough to do that.

"What did I want ?" she thought ; "what did I expect ? I told him to go back to her ; and yet my heart aches with a new pain when I hear that he is happy by her side. Could I wish it to be otherwise ? Could I wish him any thing but what he is—good, and true, and noble—a royal lover—a tender husband ?"

Alone in her own room, in Dorset Square, Cecil Chudleigh knelt long and late that night, praying for resignation and peace of mind. But even amidst her prayers the face of Hector Gordon, looking down upon her with melancholy tenderness, came between her and her pious aspirations.

"Oh, I wish that I had never seen him," she cried passionately ; "what a happy thing it would have been for me if I had never seen him !"

The day came when Lady Cecil had need to utter this cry with a wilder meaning ; the day came when she had reason to think that she would have been a blessed creature if she had died before Hector Gordon came to Fortinbras.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GREAT O'BOYNEVILLE.

THE dowager was of a lively disposition, and by no means inclined to spend her evenings in the dusky solitude of her drawing-room in Dorset Square, where the departed General's monster mandarin-jars and Oriental cabinets loomed dark and grim in the twilight. In the halls and on the staircases of Tyburnia and Belgravia, in the deliciously-squeezy little drawing-rooms and ante-chambers of the tortuous by-ways in May Fair, wherever there was festivity or junketing in which a gentlewoman might share, Mrs. MacClaverhouse and her black silk and diamonds were to be seen. She took Cecil with her every where, and she informed the young lady that it was on her account that the phantom-chariot and the grumpy coachman with doubtful legs and feet were called into service every evening.

It was quite in vain that Cecil remonstrated, declaring that she was happier with her books and piano in the little back drawing-room in Dorset Square than at the most brilliant assemblage of the season. Was she happier at home than abroad, in this sad season, when it seemed to her as if all hope and gladness had utterly vanished out of her life? Was she happier? She employed the word in her remonstrance with her aunt; for she would fain have hidden her wounds from the sharp eyes of that unsentimental protectress. And at home she had at least the liberty of being unhappy. She could sit alone playing *his* favourite music softly to herself in the dusk, while the dowager dozed at ease in the adjoining chamber. In society, she felt like a slave crowned with roses, compelled to wear the same company-smile night after night, to affect an interest in the same frivolous subjects, to hold her own amongst brilliant young ladies, who would have laughed her girlish sorrow or scorn could they have penetrated beneath the frozen calm of her manner. The brilliant young ladies declared that Cecil Chudleigh was proud. "The Aspendell Chudleighs always have been poor and proud," it was said. There were faster spirits who called her "slow," and who were pleased to ridicule the black robes of the dowager and the pale face and white-muslin draperies of her niece.

And in the mean time Cecil went wherever the dowager

chose to drag her, with an uncomplaining patience which might have won for her the crown of martyrdom, if there were any crowns for the martyrs of every-day life. The slow season dragged itself out. Ah, how long and how slow it seemed to Cecil Chudleigh, while she heard so many voices declare how delicious a season it was—how especially gay and brilliant! It was over at last, and Mrs. MacClaverhouse conveyed her niece to Brighton, where, on the windy downs so familiar to her girlhood, Cecil found a pensive kind of pleasure in wandering alone, with her seal-skin jacket wrapped tightly across her chest, and the plumes of her little hat fluttering in the autumn blast. The weather could not be too cold or too dull for Cecil. She went to look at the little lonely house where so many years of her joyless life had been passed, and standing in the distance, she looked sadly at the familiar windows, the patch of lawn, where the salt sea-breezes had blighted her geraniums, where the cruel breath of the mistral had slain her pet-blossoms of rose and honeysuckle.

"I did not know *him* when I lived there," she thought. "What foolish creatures women must be! It seems to me now as if there could not have been a time in which I did not know him. Hector Gordon! His name would have meant nothing if I had heard it then; and now the sound of any other name at all like his sends a thrill of anguish through my heart."

After the autumn at Brighton, there came the dowager's customary winter round of visits, the Christmas festivities, the refined hospitality of a modern country-house, from which only the coarser elements of old-fashioned joviality have been eliminated. It was all very cheery and pleasant, and to any one but a young lady with a broken heart could scarcely have failed to prove delightful. Other people besides Lady Cecil had their troubles, and contrived to forget them. Gay young bachelors blotted from their memory the amounts of their tailors'-bills, and the threatening phraseology of lawyers'-letters, which had followed them even to that hospitable shelter; match-making matrons forgot the ages of their daughters and the failures of the past season, the tendency of dear Maria's nose to get a little red after dinner, and the alarming sharpness of poor Sophy's shoulders; Paterfamilias forgot the delinquencies of his favourite son—it almost always is the favourite son who turns out so badly; and the young Cantab, who had lately been plucked, lulled himself into a sweet unconsciousness of his featherless condition. Grim Care found the door of Annerwold Manor House shut in his face, and was fain to obtain an entrance to the hospitable mansion by sneaking down the chimney of Cecil's chamber to haunt the girl

with the memory of Hector Gordon's face as she lay awake in the dead of the night.

She could not forget him—yet. When the first snowdrops peeped pale and pure from their sheltering leaves, the dowager went back to Dorset Square, and all the old dreary round of housekeeping detail began again for Cecil Chudleigh. The spoons and the china, the butcher's uncertainty as to weight, and the poulterer's extortionate prices, seemed more than usually wearisome to Cecil this year. Her burden had been easy to bear before the coming of Hector Gordon—before that one bright interval in her life, by contrast with which the rest of her existence was so dull and joyless. He had loved her, and left her. It was her own decision which had separated them for ever. But sometimes—in some weak moment of depression, some foolish dreamy interval of reverie—there arose before her the vision of what might have been, if the man who loved her had refused to accept her decision; if love had been stronger than reason; if, in spite of herself, he had beaten down the barrier that divided them, and had stayed in England to make her his wife.

“How do I know that this girl loves him as well as I do?” she thought, bitterly. “My aunt may be right, perhaps, in her worldly wisdom, and this Miss Chesham may have only cared for him because he was a good match. Girls are sent out to India on purpose to get married, and how can it be expected they should be otherwise than mercenary?”

But in the next moment Lady Cecil reproached herself for having thought so basely of her happy rival. The heart of Lord Aspendell's daughter was brave and generous, womanly and true; but there are moments of weakness and uncertainty which overtake the noblest of the vanquished in the battle of life.

In these weak moments Cecil tried in vain to shut from her mind the picture of what her life might have been if Hector Gordon had been free to marry her. She had loved him for himself alone, and would have loved him as truly if he had been penniless; but in her thought of him she could not forget the fact of his wealth. That gold which is so sordid a thing in itself is also the keystone to many things that are not sordid; and the only man who needs be ashamed of his affection for the yellow dross is he who loves it with a morbid and diseased passion for the stuff itself, and not the noble uses that may be made of it.

Cecil remembered the Scotchman's wealth, and all the power that goes along with wealth, and there rose before her the vision of a spot in which her childhood had been spent, and which she loved with a passionate affection; a place she

never hoped to see again, except in her dreams; and the image of it haunted her in them when she was most sorrowful—most weary of the joyless gaieties of her London life.

The place was a long rambling white house, built under the shelter of woody hills, and surrounded by the loveliest gardens in North Devon. It lay hidden in the very heart of a wood, and was called Chudleigh Combe. You heard the distant roar of the waves breaking on a rocky shore, and only by that sound knew how near all that luxuriant pastoral beauty was to the mighty grandeur of the sea. Within a mile of Chudleigh Combe there was a tiny fishing-village, a steep hilly street almost inaccessible to any but its wild denizens, a bay of bright yellow sand, and a ruined fortress on a rock. The place had been invaded lately by exploring tourists, some of whom found their way to Chudleigh, where there were a few valueless old pictures, of the most severely-dingy school; a handsome collection of Oriental china, and a good deal of quaint old furniture; brass-inlaid chests of drawers, wherein Evelina and Cecilia might have kept their finery; Indian *secrétaires*, at which Clarissa Harlowe might have written her famous letters; high-backed chairs, on which Sir Charles Grandison might have sat, gentleman-like and unbending.

The exploring tourists of these latter days were told that the Chudleigh-Combe estate had been bought by the grandfather of the late Lord Aspendell, and paid for with his wife's fortune; and that the mansion had been built by the same Earl, and paid for with the same money. The estate had never been entailed, and had been sold by the last Earl, Cecil's father, to a wealthy citizen, who, after occupying the lonely mansion through a rainy summer, repented himself bitterly of his bargain, and tried to sell the estate; but an estate buried in Devonian woods, and twenty miles from a railroad, is not every one's money; and while Chudleigh Combe was yet in the market the merchant died, leaving a will so badly worded as to occasion a Chancery suit. This suit had been pending for more than a year, and the house was left in charge of a superannuated cook, and the grounds in custody of a couple of gardeners.

It was this place whose image haunted Cecil in her dreams, the scene in which her childhood had been passed, and the spot which was associated with the happiest period of her life. She thought how easy a thing it would have been for Hector Gordon to buy Chudleigh Combe, and to take her back to the familiar gardens—the dear old-fashioned rooms: how easy, if there had been no such person as Mary Chesham.

The old life in Dorset Square brought with it all the old responsibilities. The dowager's health had been very uncer-

tain all through the winter, and the dowager's temper was something worse than uncertain. She had founded high hopes on the chance of a marriage between her nephew and niece, a marriage which should bring Hector Gordon and Hector Gordon's wealth comfortably under her dominion : and now that all those fond expectations had been disappointed, she was inclined to resent her disappointment as a wrong inflicted upon her by Cecil.

In such pceevish lamentations did Mrs. MacClaverhouse bewail her poverty at this period, that Cecil began to feel herself a burden on her aunt's slender income, and to taste all the bitterness that poisons the bread of dependence. She did not know the world well enough to know that there are people to whom it is delightful to grumble,—mental voluptuaries, who would be unhappy if they could find no crumpled rose-leaf for the justification of their discontent. Cecil fancied that her protectress had substantial cause for her lamentations, and she began to be ashamed of her useless life and the trifling expenses which her presence inflicted upon her kinswoman.

"I am as well educated as most of the governesses I have met with, auntie," she said once ; "why shouldn't I go out as a governess, and earn my living?"

"What!" screamed the dowager ; "Lord Aspendell's daughter would be a nice sort of person to teach a regiment of tiresome brats for twenty pounds a-year. Upon my word, Cecil, I haven't common patience with you when I hear you talk such nonsense."

"But I needn't tell people who I am, auntie, if there's any reason why a nobleman's daughter shouldn't earn her living. I could call myself Miss Chudleigh—or Miss any thing—and I might earn more than twenty pounds a-year."

"Nonsense, child ; don't let me hear any more of such absurdity. What's to become of my silver, I should like to know, if you leave me? I consider it very unkind and heartless of you to talk of deserting me."

"But I wouldn't leave you for the world, auntie, if I really am any use or any comfort to you," answered Cecil, tenderly ; "only—sometimes I can't help thinking that I am a burden to you."

"Wait till I tell you that you are a burden, Lady Cecil," replied the dowager severely. "I have been disappointed about you and Hector, and I don't deny that I have felt the disappointment very deeply ; but—well, that's over, and I suppose I am to end my days in Dorset Square. It might have been all very different if the General had been tolerably prudent ; however, all I have to say is, that if I were as poor

as Job, no niece of mine should degrade herself by going out as a governess."

Lady Cecil bowed her head to this decision, but she remembered, with a sigh, how many governesses she had seen in the households of her friends, who were infinitely less dependent than she was, and whose lives were infinitely happier than hers. The sordid cares of Dorset Square were heavier than usual this year, for her aunt's feeble health threw the weight of financial and housekeeping arrangements entirely upon Cecil; and to this were added the constant anxiety of the sick-room, the long summer days spent in the stifling atmosphere of a sunny drawing-room, whose windows were rarely opened from dawn to sunset, the tension of the mind kept always on the stretch to amuse or soothe a peevish invalid; and Lady Cecil bore all her trials with meek uncomplaining patience. She was very patient; and in the unbroken round of her daily duties she found very little time to think of her one great sorrow,—so little time that the shadow of the past grew dim, and dimmer, until she was able to remember Hector Gordon with perfect resignation to the fate that had separated her from him, and to hear his name spoken suddenly without a painful consciousness of the hot blood rushing to her cheeks.

The season was drawing to a close, and the early glories of the Lady's Mile had faded, when the dowager was well enough to array herself in black silk and diamonds, and to go to parties once more. She was nothing if not a woman of the world, and the chief consolation of her sick chamber had been the friendly visits of other dowagers and gossiping maiden-ladies, who brought her the freshest scandals of the West End. To her the dulness of the Dorset Square drawing-room had been far more painful than to Cecil; and within a week from the day on which her medical man pronounced her well enough to take an airing in the phantom chariot, she buckled on her armour of state, and accompanied Cecil to a ball at the house of the fashionable physician who had attended her occasionally during her illness.

It was at this assembly that Cecil Chudleigh met the person who was destined to exercise a very powerful influence over her fate. Once in every season Dr. Molyneux's sombre old house in Harley Street burst into a sudden blaze of splendour and brightness. Once in every season the marble busts of divers pagan notabilities, more or less connected with the science of medicine, trembled on their scagliola pedestals as the light feet of fashionable beauty, and the varnished boots of gilded youth, trod the physician's stately chambers. The popular medical man gave many parties—snug dinners, at which the amber wines of the fair Rhineland, and the violet-scented vintages of

Burgundy, were consumed by connoisseurs who could fix the date of a vintage as easily as an archæologist decides the period of a frieze or a column. But these pleasant dinner-parties were given chiefly to learned old fogies of the doctor's own profession, and were given for the doctor's own pleasure. It was only once in a year that he flung open his house for the benefit of polite society in general, and his own patience in particular. Guntor had *carte blanche* on these occasions, and sent in a bill some six months afterwards, which was by no means a *carte blanche*. Groves of exotics and wagon-loads of evergreens came to Harley Street from unknown regions beyond the Edgware Road, and the doctor's patients, calling upon him on the morning before the festival, found the sombre hall a forest of moderator lamps, and candelabra, and the dining-room in which they were wont to wait the great physician's summons, completely abandoned to the possession of the confectioner's minions.

Every one who was worth meeting was to be met at Dr. Molyneux's parties. Fashionable countesses, and pretty daughters of nameless citizens from far northern regions of commercial splendour beyond Islington and Hackney; cabinet ministers and briefless barristers; a popular actor who had been taken up by the aristocracy; literary men and African explorers; the very latest celebrity in the musical world; and the last promoter of the last company for the cultivation of the art of lace-making by spiders, or the construction of a canal across the Isthmus of Panama—all these and many more were to be met in the Harley Street drawing-rooms, or on the Harley Street staircase; for it was only the more adventurous spirits who penetrated the drawing-room, or heard any thing but the highest notes of the last Scandinavian tenor. There were people who preferred the desultory snatches of conversation, and rapid circulation of new arrivals, on Dr. Molyneux's staircase to the splendid crush of his rooms. In the crowded drawing-rooms beauty waxed pale in the glare of lamps and tapers, but on the staircase wandering breezes from open windows and doors fluttered the gauzy draperies of youth and the stately plumage of age; and there was a dash of Bohemianism in the gaiety, which is apt to be pleasing to modern revellers. For a thorough-going, cross-country flirtation there was no place like Dr. Molyneux's broad landing. There were deep window-seats that must surely have been devised by some designing architect with a special view to the annihilation of masculine peace, and the triumph of feminine loveliness. There were stands of exotics whose friendly shade protected Edwin the briefless and Angelina the beautiful from the awful eye of Angelina's mamma. There were statuettes of marble

and Parian, in pretended contemplation of which Celadon and Amelia could bask in the light of each other's eyes, while Amelia's papa was powerless to tear her from the companionship of her penniless adorer. There were voluminous curtains falling artistically from the carved cornices of massive doorways, beneath whose shelter irrevocable engagements were made, only to be broken by death, or the distracting complications of an ensuing season.

Arriving late at Dr. Molyneux's assembly, the energetic dowager was fain to content herself with a resting-place in one of the broad window-seats, where she installed herself very comfortably, but much to the discomfiture of a young lady in pink *tulle*, spotted and festooned with innocent white daisies. The damsel in pink had been working the destruction—in a clubbable point of view—of an aristocratic Guardsman of six feet two and a half, but the advent of the Scottish widow scared her covey, and the irrevocable word remained unspoken. The dowager, who read almost every thing that was to be read, had fallen on a new view of some important feature in the science of physiology, and insisted upon discussing her theories with a distinguished surgeon; while Cecil, very weary and indifferent, found her way to a seat on the broad flight of stairs leading to an upper floor, and sat there above an animated group of pretty girls who were eating ices and talking through the banisters to the gilded youth upon the lower stairs. Sitting here, enthroned above the rest, as on a *daïs*, and fanning herself listlessly, Lady Cecil was seen by the man who was to make himself the master of her destiny.

Scarcely ten minutes had elapsed since the arrival of Mrs. MacClaverhouse and her niece, when the gilded youth upon the staircase were fluttered by the advent of a sturdy stranger, whose broad shoulders made a passage through the elegant crowd very much as a blundering collier might cut her way athwart a fleet of prize wherries; while a massive forehead, and a bush of straight brown hair arose above all those beautiful partings and ambrosial locks of exactly the same pattern.

The gilded youth, turning indignantly upon the pushing stranger with the stalwart shoulders and resolute elbows, beheld a man who was known to most people by sight, and to all England by the record of his doings and sayings in the newspapers. The pushing stranger was no other than Mr. O'Boyneville, Queen's Counsel, one of the most popular men at the English Bar, and the man whose reckless audacity and ready cleverness had won more causes than were ever gained by the eloquence of a Berryer or the splendid declamation of an Erskine.

The loungers on the staircase were almost reconciled to

being pushed when they discovered how popular a man had elbowed them; and several claimed acquaintance with the great O'Boyneville.

"Read your speech in that breach of promise case," said one; "never read any thing so jolly."

"I should like to have seen you and Valentine pitching into each other in the Common Pleas yesterday. It isn't every man who can shut up Valentine," said another.

Mr. O'Boyneville bestowed a friendly nod upon his admirers. He had all that easy consciousness of his own abilities, and good-natured wish not to be proud, which seems a distinguishing characteristic of the Hibernian mind. He pushed his way upward, nodding right and left, but his mind was at that moment full of a great case of Vendors and Purchasers, speedily to be decided in one of the Courts of Equity, in which some Irish slate-quarries were distractingly involved with the operations of a gigantic builder, and in which innumerable folios of affidavits had been filed on both sides. The great barrister was by no means a party-going man, and the gilded youth made merry upon the antediluvian cut of his dress-coat, the yellow tinge of his cambrie cravat, and the high shirt-collars which fenced his massive jaws, as he passed out of their ken. He came to Dr. Molyneux's ball only because the doctor was his personal friend, and had carried him through a very sharp attack of brain fever induced by overwork; but he would fain have taken his red bag with him, and, ensconced in some obscure corner, have refreshed himself with a dip into the great slate case.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with massively cut features, a mouth and chin that were almost classic in their modelling, strongly marked eyebrows, and large bright blue eyes—the eyes that are better adapted to "threaten and command" than to melt with tenderness or darken with melancholy. Nobody had ever called him handsome, nobody had ever called him plain. In his face and figure alike there was a daring that was almost insolence, a manliness that approached nobility. He was the man of men to wear a barrister's wig and gown, to wind himself into the innermost souls of irresolute jurymen, and to freeze the heart's blood of timid witnesses.

When something less than forty, Laurence O'Boyneville had found himself the most successful man of his age, far higher on the ladder of fortune than many men who were twenty years his seniors and who had worked well too in their time. But to the Irish lawyer had been given an indomitable energy, which is so good a substitute for the sacred fire of genius, that it is very apt to be mistaken for that supernal

flame. Nature had bestowed upon him, and education had sharpened, a rapidity of perception that was almost like inspiration ; and the more desperate the case he had undertaken, the more brilliant was his handling of its difficulties, the more daring his defiance of his opponent. He had the true warrior spirit, and rose with the desperation of anticipated defeat. His greatest triumphs had been achieved by movements as wildly hazardous as the charge of the six hundred at Balaclava.

He was a Charles the Twelfth, a Frederick the Great, a Napoleon of the Bar, and he enjoyed a good fight as only the born warrior can enjoy it. For seventeen years he had known no interest and found no pleasure outside his profession. Patiently and uncomplainingly he had passed through his probationary years of poverty and disappointment. He had seen his contemporaries—young men who had started with as much ambition as himself—grow weary of the long waiting, and turn aside to begin anew in other and easier paths the pursuit of fortune. But he held on ; and from the first insignificant chance that had been flung in his way, to the full triumphs of his present position, he never swerved by one hair's-breadth from the line he had drawn for himself, or neglected the smallest opportunity.

He found himself rapidly growing rich, for he had neither time nor inclination for the spending of money. He exacted his price, in that tacit manner peculiar to his profession, but he set little value on the produce of his labour when the golden stream flowed in upon him. He neither drank nor smoked. He rarely played at any game of hazard ; and though, while watching the Derby canter with ignorant eyes, his rapid perception showed him the one horse out of twenty whose build stamped him a winner, he had only been induced to visit a race-course some half-dozen times in the twenty years of his London life.

In all those twenty years Laurence O'Boyneville had been a voluntary exile from feminine society. The successful barrister has no time for flower-shows or fancy-fairs, morning concerts or archaeological-society meetings, picnics, kettle-drums, or *thès dansantes*. For him the days are too short for social intercourse, the nights too brief for rest. And Mr. O'Boyneville loved his profession, and had given all his mind to the labour of his love.

The years went by him with all their changes of fashion, and left him unchanged. His brief holidays were scarcely times of rest, for he carried his work with him wherever he went. Thus it was that at nearly forty years of age the mighty Laurence was still a bachelor. He had seen pretty women

and had admired them, with an artistic pleasure in a pretty face; but they had passed him by like the shadows of fair women in the poet's vision. He had no time for more than transient admiration—or let it rather be said that as yet the one face which was to awake his soul from its dull slumber had not dawned upon him.

Mr. O'Boyneville was rich, and was known to be rich; and on those rare occasions when he did appear in society he found himself received with extreme courtesy by some members of the gentler sex. There were mothers with unmarried daughters of five-and-thirty who would have been quite willing to cultivate Mr. O'Boyneville's acquaintance; but the Irish luminary appeared only to vanish; and the fair damsels of five-and-thirty who were so inclined to be interested in his triumphs, and so ready to talk of his last great success, had little opportunity of impressing him with their intellectual graces or charming him by their amiability.

For twenty years from the day in which he had come from the banks of the Shannon to drop friendless into the wilderness of London, with only one letter of introduction and one five-pound note in his pocket, until to-day, when his name was a synonym for daring and success, he had gone scatheless. Cupid's fatal shadow rarely darkens the sombre thresholds of the Temple, nor does the god care to penetrate those courts of law where his name has so often been taken in vain by mercenary damsels seeking golden ointments for the wounds inflicted by his arrows. Pretty witnesses had stepped into the box believing their charms invincible, and had retired weeping after a verbal contest with the great O'Boyneville, as some tender fawn may fly, mauled and torn by the mighty boar of the forest. Grecian noses and timid blue eyes, blooming cheeks rendered more blooming by the coquettish adjustment of a spotted veil, might exercise a charm of potent power in other regions; but they availed nothing when Laurence O'Boyneville rose to cross-examine the witnesses of his opponent.

"Put up your veil, Ma'am, and let us see your face, if you please," he said at starting. And then came the torture,—the scarching tone of voice, that seemed to imply an occult knowledge; the see-sawing of trivial facts, which seemed to transform the moral standpoint of the witness into a shifting quicksand of uncertainty; the frivolous questions beside the subject, that seemed so foolish and unmeaning, till all in a moment they wove themselves into a fatal web in which the witness was inextricably entangled. In such ordeals Beauty appealed vainly to the merciless advocate; and, having derived his chief knowledge of the fair sex from witnesses in

nisi prius, breach-of-promise, and divorce cases, it may be that Mr. O'Boyneville's estimate of womankind was scarcely an elevated one.

Of all living creatures, perhaps Laurence O'Boyneville would have seemed to a superficial observer the last to fall a victim to a sudden and unreasoning passion. When a man attains the age of forty without one pulse of his heart being quickened by any tender emotion, it is to be expected that he will jog quietly on to fifty; and that if then he dislikes the prospect of a lonely old age, uncheered except by the attentions of a housekeeper—who, if she does not poison him with subtle doses of tartar emetic, will most likely forge a codicil to his will, and possess herself of his goods and chattels when he is dead,—he will look out for some wealthy widow of his own age, and settle quietly down to the enjoyment of ponderous dinners and expensive wines. And yet, on reflection, it seems very probable that the busy man—the plodding labourer in the arid fields of life—is the most likely subject for that sudden love which springs into life vigorous and perfect as Minerva when she burst armed and helmeted from the brain of Jove. The man most apt to fall in love with unknown Beauty in an omnibus, is the man who has least time for the cultivation of accredited Beauty's society in the drawing-rooms of his friends. Sooner or later the god claims his prey; and the unbeliever who has gone seatheless for twenty years has good reason to dread the chances of the one-and-twentieth. Mr. O'Boyneville pushed his way up Dr. Molyneux's staircase at half-past eleven a free man; but he descended the same staircase at a quarter to one as fettered a slave as Samson when they bore him from the false embraces of Delilah; and yet no artful enchantress spread her nets for his entanglement, no mercenary Circe wove her spell for his destruction.

The crowd upon the landing-place grew closer as the night waxed older, and in the confusion occasioned by one set of people always struggling to get away, and another set of people always struggling to get into the drawing-rooms, to say nothing of chivalrous young men for ever striving to carry ices or other airy refreshments to distressed damsels, the loungers who did not care about dancing had enough to do to keep their ground. It was this perpetual motion that drove the mighty O'Boyneville on to the very flight of stairs where Cecil sat pensive and silent, while the buzz of voices around her grew every moment louder.

Having nothing better to do, the barrister lounged with his back against the wall and looked down at the fair aristocratic face of his neighbour, while he meditated upon the

great slate case. But being a student of character, he fell to musing on the lady sitting below him—sitting almost at his feet, as it were, with only the width of the stair-carpet between them.

"I shouldn't like to drive *her* too hard," he thought, "if I had her as a witness on the other side. She's the sort of woman who could keep her self-possession, and make a man look foolish. I saw Valentine tackle such a woman once, and he got considerably the worst of it."

"And then, after ruminating for some minutes upon an intricate point in the slate case, he took courage and addressed Lady Cecil. His Hibernian daring rarely abandoned him, even in that feminine society to which he was so unaccustomed; and yet there was a kind of restraint upon him to-night, and a strange schoolboy feeling took possession of him as he spoke to Cecil.

"Do you like this sort of thing?" he asked. "Molynceux saved my life three years ago, or I shouldn't be here: but he can't have saved the lives of all these people; and yet, if he hasn't, I don't understand why they come here."

"Dr. Molyneux is very popular," answered Cecil, smiling a little at the barrister's manner. "I think he almost saved my aunt's life in the spring; and if every body here has as much reason as I have to be grateful to him, they may very well endure a little crushing. Besides, one is crushed quite as much at other houses, where the parties are not so pleasant."

Mr. O'Boyneville shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I suppose there are sane people who consider this sort of thing agreeable," said he; "it is one of the enigmas of social life. I am a working man, and the mysteries of fashion are a sealed book to me. But of course, if it is the fashion to be hustled upon a staircase, people will submit to be hustled on a staircase, just as the Chinese women pinch their feet, and savages flatten their skulls and elongate their ears. So Molyneux attended your aunt, did he? Is she with you to-night?"

"Oh yes, she is here."

Cecil glanced unconsciously towards the embrasure between the curtains where the dowager was seated as she said this; and Mr. O'Boyneville, accustomed to watch the glances of witnesses and jurymen, was quick to interpret her look.

"The lady in black is your aunt," he said. "What's her name?"

"MacClaverhouse," answered Cecil, looking with some wonder at this uncivilised stranger who questioned her so coolly.

"I suppose he is an American," she thought; "and yet he doesn't talk like one."

"And you are Miss MacClaverhouse, of course?" said the presumptuous O'Boyneville. He was determined to know who this young lady was—this aristocratic beauty with the fair classic face and listless manner. Another man would have left Cecil unmolested, and would have stolen away to extract the information he wanted from the master of the house; but the unsophisticated O'Boyneville had no idea of any such diplomaey. He had been asking questions all his life, and he questioned Cecil almost as he would have questioned one of his own witnesses, with a friendly unceremoniousness.

"My name is Chudleigh," said the young lady, very coldly. "Why, that's the name of the Aspendell family; and you belong to that family, I suppose, Miss Chudleigh?"

"Yes; the late Lord Aspendell was my father."

"Indeed! Ah! I met the Earl once, ten years ago; and that unfortunate young man who ran through so much money, and was killed in the Alps?"

"He was my brother," murmured Cecil, rising as if she would have made her escape from this uncivilised monster.

"I beg your pardon a thousand times. Yes, to be sure, I ought to have remembered that. Your brother, of course; and I suppose he really *did* contrive to make away with every acre of the Aspendell property, eh?"

Lady Cecil looked indignantly at her questioner, and the stairs immediately below her being a little clearer just now, she moved downwards and made her way towards her aunt. The barrister looked after her with a bewildered aspect.

"I suppose she didn't like my talking to her about her brother," he thought. "He was a thorough young scamp, if ever there was one. And the present Lord Aspendell must be as poor as Job. And this girl's his niece, I suppose, or his cousin. Poor and proud—that's a pity! and she's a nice girl too."

He looked after her; she was entering the dancing-room on the arm of an irreproachable cavalier. Mr. O'Boyneville watched her till she disappeared, and then tried to take up the thread of his meditations upon the slate case at the exact point at which he had dropped it.

But for once in his life he found his thoughts wandering away from the contemplation of his professional duties. The image of the patrician face on which he had so lately been looking haunted him as no such image had ever haunted him before.

"I am sorry I offended her," he thought, "for she really seems a nice girl."

The doctor came out upon the landing in animated conversation with one of his guests at this very moment, and perceiving Mrs. MacClaverhouse in the shadow of the window-curtains, stopped to give her cordial greeting.

"I have seen Lady Cecil, and she told me where to look for you," said the physician. "Won't you come into the rooms? We're a little crowded, but I'll find you a comfortable seat; and Herr Kerskratten, the German bass, is going to sing his great drinking-song."

But before Dr. Molyneux could steer the dowager through the crowd about the doorway, Mr. O'Boyneville had pushed his way to the elbow of his physician, whom he saluted in that sonorous voice which was one of the most useful gifts a liberal nature had bestowed upon him. After a briefly cordial greeting, the Irishman bent his head to whisper in the ear of his friend:

"Introduce me to the old lady."

Dr. Molyneux looked at him in some astonishment as he complied.

"I know you are a hunter of lions, Mrs. MacClaverhouse," he said, "so I don't think it would be fair if I didn't introduce you to a gentleman whose name must be tolerably familiar to you in the law reports that enliven your morning papers. Mr. O'Boyneville—Mrs. MacClaverhouse."

The barrister, who had found so little to say to Lady Cecil, recovered the natural flow of his eloquence in the society of the dowager, and made himself eminently agreeable to that lady. He took her quite off the hands of her host, and contrived to find her a corner on a sofa near the piano, where some ladies of the wallflower species were primly seated. He talked with more animation than was pleasant to the German bass during that gentleman's great song; but Mrs. MacClaverhouse was one of those people who make a point of chattering throughout the progress of a musical performance, and praising it loudly when it is concluded. She was delighted with the Irish barrister, and from her he obtained all the information he wanted about Lady Cecil Chudleigh. Perhaps the wily dowager perceived that this uncivilised Hercules of the law courts was smitten by her niece's tranquil beauty, and knew that he was rich, and speculated upon the possibility of his being able to support that corner house in Hyde Park Gardens, for whose lofty chambers her spirit languished. However it might be, she was monstrously civil to the great O'Boyneville; and before her niece came to seek her she had invited him to dine in Dorset Square at an early date, to meet a distinguished luminary of the Sudder De-wance.

Cecil did not condescend to honour the Irishman by one glance as she talked to her aunt.

"Shall we go now, auntie? The rooms are very warm, and I am sure you must be tired."

"I suppose that means that *you* are tired," answered Mrs. MacClaverhouse. "However, I'm quite ready to take my departure."

"Shall I go and look for your carriage?" asked Mr. O'Boyneville.

"No, thanks," Cecil replied, very coldly. "Captain Norris has been kind enough to go in search of it. He will not fetch us till it is really at the door, auntie."

"I hope not," said Mrs. MacClaverhouse. "But I sometimes fancy Dr. Molyneux sows the seeds of his winter bronchitis cases while his visitors are waiting for their carriages in that windy vestibule of his. Perhaps you will be good enough to get me through the middle passage, Mr. O'Boyneville, while Captain Norris looks after my niece."

Captain Norris, the irreproachable gentleman who had walked the solemn measures of a quadrille with Cecil, arrived at this moment, flushed, but triumphant.

"The carriage is there, Mrs. MacClaverhouse. May I offer you my arm?"

But the dowager slipped her hand over Mr. O'Boyneville's sleeve, and the Captain took possession of Cecil. There were a good many pauses on the way, pleasant salutations, and friendly greetings; but in due time the ladies were safely installed in their chariot; and looking out into the summer night, Cecil was obliged to bow to Mr. O'Boyneville, who stood bare-headed upon the pavement.

"What a horrible man, auntie!" she exclaimed, with something like a shudder; "and how could you be so friendly with him?"

And Mr. O'Boyneville, on his way to a big house in Bloomsbury, where he ate his hurried meals and took his brief night's rest, and which was popularly supposed to be his home, abandoned himself to musings of quite a different fashion.

"If ever I were to marry," he thought—"and Heaven knows it's a remote contingency—I would marry such a woman as Lady Cecil Chudleigh."

Many men have pronounced such resolutions as this, and have lived to ally themselves to the most vulgar opposite of their chosen ideal; but then Laurence O'Boyneville was a man with whom will was power.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOWAGER'S LITTLE DINNER.

LADY CECIL was both surprised and annoyed when the dowager announced Mr. O'Boyneville as one of the guests at her next little dinner.

"How could you ask that dreadful man, auntie?" she said.

"Because the dreadful man is a very distinguished person—in the law; and as Mr. Horley, the Indian judge, dines with us next Wednesday, I thought I could not do better than ask this Irish barrister. I know those lawyer people like to meet one another; though goodness knows, with salmon at half-a-crown a pound, and ducklings at eight shillings a pair, I ought not to involve myself in the expense of dinner parties."

Cecil shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly as she seated herself at her piano after this little discussion. It mattered so little to her who came to her aunt's dinner parties. Imagine the indifference of Lucy Ashton as to the guests who partook of the Lord Keeper's ponderous banquets during that dreary interval in which Ravenswood was away. But poor Cecil obeyed her aunt's orders, and did battle with the poulterer for a reduction in the price of his ducklings, and went through all manner of intricate calculations as to the difference between the expense of lobster cutlets and fricandeau, or oyster patties and chicken rissoles.

"I think Spickson makes his lobster cutlets smaller than ever this year," said Mrs. MacClaverhouse, as she looked over the confectioner's list of made-dishes; "and as to his fricandeaus, I am always on tenter hooks for fear they shouldn't go decently round the table, and I can't get that man Peters to calculate his spoonfuls; and if he's weak enough to let people help themselves there's sure to be unfairness about the truffles; though what any one can admire in truffles is one of the mysteries I have never been able to fathom. As to dessert, Cecil, I shall take the carriage into the City to-morrow morning, and get what I want; for I've no notion of paying eightpence apiece in Covent Garden for peaches that I can get in Thames Street for threepence."

On the appointed evening Cecil was the first to enter the drawing-room; for the dowager had taken a siesta after luncheon, and was late at her toilette. Dressed in some transparent fabric of pale-blue, with a fluttering knot of ribbon here and there, and a turquoise cross upon her neck, Lady Cecil

looked very elegant, very pretty, with that delicate loveliness which so rarely kindled into brilliancy, with that patrician calm which so seldom warmed into animation. She looked at the clock on the chimney-piece as she took a book from a cabinet where a few of her aunt's choicest volumes were ranged on alternate shelves with china teacups and quaint old Oriental monsters. "Only seven; and the people are asked for half-past, which always means eight," she thought, as she sank listlessly into a low chair near the open window.

She opened her book and tried to read. It was a volume of Shelley; and the dreamy mysticism of the verse soothed her with its magic harmony. The shadows of her life had been fading gradually away from her within the last few months, but no sunshine had succeeded the darkness. She was too gentle and womanly to be cynical; but an indifference to every thing on earth—an indifference almost as profound as the dreary *ennui* of Hamlet—had come down upon her.

And yet she went to parties and danced quadrilles, and even waltzed on occasions. To dance and to make merry while the ruthless serpent gnaws at the heart is no new pastime. There is something pathetic in the simplicity with which Lucy Aikin tells us how the great Elizabeth went to a festival while her favourite—her Benjamin of favourites—the brilliant Essex, languished under the burden of her dread displeasure; while the imperious spirit of the Ruler was at war with the woman's doting heart, and the most terrible struggle of her life was going forward. There was dancing at my Lord Cobham's that night, and a masque performed by women, and one of these ladies wooed the Queen to dance. "Who are you?" asked the Sovereign. "My name is Affection," returned the masquer. "*Affection*," said the Queen, "*is false!*" And yet she danced, remarks the historian with unconscious pathos.

It was only ten minutes after seven, and Cecil was quite absorbed in the pages of *Alastor*, when the door was flung open with the stately swing peculiar to the accomplished dairyman who did duty as butler on the dowager's reception days, and the accomplished dairyman announced with perfect distinctness, "Mr. O'Boyneville."

Accomplished as the dairyman was, he might have made a mess of any other name; but the great barrister's appellation was "familiar in his ear as household words;" and he had many "household words" with his better half when the propensity for strong drinks, contracted in the riotous days of his butlerhood, beguiled him from the domestic shelter. He knew Mr. O'Boyneville, and had sat on juries in the courts where that gentleman was mighty, and had been cajoled by the Irishman's insidious eloquence and slap-dash mode of argu-

ment. Ho had laughed over Mr. O'Boyneville's speeches and cross-examinations recorded in the newspapers ; and he ushered the barrister into the little drawing-room in Dorset Square with all the respect duo to so brilliant a luminary.

Cecil was very much annoyed by the Irishman's early arrival ; but he was her aunt's guest, and she was bound to receive him courteously. She laid aside her book, and made the barrister a curtsy.

And the brilliant O'Boyneville—the man with whom cool impudence often rose to the level of genius—that luminary before whom the lesser lights of the bar waxed faint and pale, how did his familiarity with feminine psychology, as exhibited in the witness box, serve him in the dowager's drawing-room ? Alas for Hibernian wit and Hibernian audacity ! for Mr. O'Boyneville could think of no more interesting subject of remark at this moment than the fact that the day had been warm : and a warm day in the last week of June is not exactly a notable phenomenon.

Lady Cecil agreed to the barrister's statement with regard to the weather, and then went on to say that town was not so full as it had been : and this is again not exactly a phenomenon in the last week of June.

"I don't know about that, Lady Cecil," replied Mr. O'Boyneville. "If you'd been in the Court of Common Pleas this morning you'd not have thought London empty." And then there was a pause ; for the barrister, being more accustomed to browbeat and terrify the fair sex than to make small-talk for their amusement, found himself brought to a standstill ; and Cecil did not like her aunt's guest well enough to make any desperate conversational plunge.

He sat looking at her in silence ; not with the bold stare of admiration with which he was wont to take a feminine witness off her guard before entrapping her into prevarication or perjury, but with a more earnest gaze than he had ever fixed on any woman's face before.

"She reminds me of my mother," he thought ; "and yet it's only a pale shadow I can remember when I think of my mother. I was such a child when she died."

Lady Cecil glanced at her aunt's new acquaintance as he sat opposite to her. He was quite different from any one she ever had seen before ; and to her eyes—so accustomed to look upon the graceful perfection, the harmonious elegance of high-bred youth, there was something almost uncivilised in his aspect. He wore the high shirt-collars in which she had seen him at the doctor's ball, the tight-fitting dress coat of a departed age, a rusty black cravat, and boots of dubious symmetry. His brown hair was thick and long ; but the massive head had

something leonine in its character; the aquiline nose and large bright blue eyes had that stamp of power which is so near akin to beauty. That brief contemplation of Laurence O'Boyneville awakened Cecil Chudleigh to the consciousness that the "dreadful man" to whom she so much objected was not quite the kind of person to be despised.

"I dare say he is clever—in his own way," she thought; "but what could have induced my aunt to ask him to dinner?"

She was spared the trouble of finding some new subject wherewith to bridge the gulf of silence yawning so blankly between her and the barrister, for the all-accomplished cow-keeper announced Mr. and Miss Crawford; and wherever Flo went she put to flight the dull horror of silence. The Crawfords had been invited to please Lady Cecil; "and because Mr. Crawford is a nice sort of person to have, you know, my dear," the dowager said to one of her confidantes; "for there is such a rage about these painter people just now, and I assure you his place at Kensington is a perfect palace, with marble pillars in the hall, and old stained-glass windows, and carved oak panels, that he has picked up at Antwerp; and I hear the prices he gets for his pictures are *something fabulous*; but he's the dearest unaffected creature you ever met; and if you like to come on Wednesday night between nine and ten, you shall see him."

Flo greeted her dearest Cecil with enthusiasm, and saluted Mr. O'Boyneville with the faintest indication of a curtsy as she swept her silken skirts past him; and then, when she had shaken hands with her dearest friend, she turned to look at the barrister with a charming insolent little look, which seemed to express, "And what outlandish creature are *you*, I wonder?" Of course Mr. Crawford knew the great Q. C. Almost every male inhabitant of London was familiar with that ponderous figure and defiant face. Few were the dwellers in the mighty City who had not seen those big white hands waved in the face of an opponent, or lifted in the denunciatory periods of virtuous indignation. The painter began to talk to the barrister, and in a moment the great Laurence was at his ease. He knew how to talk—with men,—and there was no question within the regions of heaven or earth too mighty for his audacity, too small for his powers of argument. He would have talked to Herschel about the last discovery in the starry system; and it is ten to one but in a mixed company he would have made Herschel look foolish: he would have demonstrated before the face of Newton that his theory of gravitation was a false one; he would have offered for Mr. Paul Bedford's consideration new views upon the subject of "Jolly Nose;" or if a question of tailoring had arisen in an assembly of tailors,

he would have proved to the satisfaction of the company that he alone amongst them all had fully mastered the science of cutting out a coat. Was it not his business to know every thing, or to seem to know every thing? If any mad-brained counsel on the opposite side had been pleased to set a flute or "recorder" before him, would it not have been his duty to play a tune thereupon for the edification of the court? There was no subject that he had not been called upon to handle in the course of his legal career. He had pleaded the cause of a musician whose copyright in a ballad had been assailed on the ground of plagiarism, and—ignorant of a note of music—had talked the jury into idiocy with a farrago of sounding nonsense such as "the syncopated passage in the second bar of my client's composition, gentlemen, is said to resemble the third bar of Mozart's sonata in C minor; but to any one who is familiar with the first principles of harmony, gentlemen, the introduction of the supertonic in place of the subdominant must be a convincing proof of the falsehood of this assertion: and if any thing were required to demonstrate the puerility of the argument adopted by my learned friend on the other side, it would be the group of semiquavers which concludes the phrase." He had carried a French milliner triumphantly through all the intricacies of an action against an aristocratic customer for the recovery of a disputed account, and had demonstrated with crushing force the meanness of the lady defendant, and the honesty of his client's charges. To the lookers-on from the outer world his triumphs may have appeared easy. It seemed as if he had only to elevate his voice with a certain emphasis, and to look round the court with a certain self-assured smile, and lo, his audience rejoiced and were merry. "The great question at issue, gentlemen of the jury, is the question of '*trimmings*.'" (Laughter.) You have all of you heard, no doubt, of a leg of mutton and trimmings (renewed laughter); but the trimmings in question are of far greater value than the turnips of a Cincinnatus, or the potatoes of a Raleigh. The question in point, gentlemen, if I may venture upon that play of words which the great Samuel Johnson held in such detestation, is a question of point. The point-lace flounce, for which my client charges one hundred and thirty-nine pounds fourteen and sixpence, was, I am told, one of the rarest specimens of the workmanship of the Beguines of Flanders. And who and what are these Beguines, gentlemen of the jury, by whose patient fingers this delicate fabric was manufactured? Were they common workwomen, to be recompensed at a common rate? No, gentlemen of the jury, they were ladies—ladies of honourable lineage and independent means, who of their own free will retired into a

Beguinaage—a religious house, which was yet not a convent ; and there, free from the bondage of any formal vow, they devoted themselves to the consolation of the poor and afflicted, and the manufacture of that rare old lace which is now the proudest boast of our female aristocracy. Why, gentlemen, the price demanded by my client is something pitiful when we remember the circumstances under which that point-lace was made—the taper fingers that have toiled to fashion those intricate arabesques—the solitary tears that have bedewed the fairy fabric.”

And here it may be that the great O'Boyneville himself produced a palpable tear on the end of his finger, and gazed at it for a moment in absence of mind, as wondering what it was,—or seemed so to gaze, while in reality his piercing eye shot towards the jury to see whether they were laughing at him, or whether his rhodomontade had told. This was the man who had found himself so ill at ease in the society of one beautiful woman.

The dowager appeared presently.

“Oh, you too-punctual people!” exclaimed the lively Mrs. MacClaverhouse. “You come to see an old woman who lives in lodgings, and I dare say you expect every thing as well *réglé* as if you were going to dine at Mr. Horborough's palace in Park Lane. How do you do, Florence my dear?—How d'ye do, Crawford? So you and Mr. O'Boyneville are old friends? That's very nice; but I hope you're not going to talk about texture and modelling *all* the evening. Do you know we had a couple of musical celebrities once at one of the General's dinners in Portland Place, and they talked about harmony and composition all dinner-time; and as they sat on opposite sides of the table, it was so agreeable for the rest of the company. ‘Do you know what that fellow Simpkins will do?’ says Brown. ‘Why, he'll use consecutive fifths,—he's got them more than once in that last sonata of his.’ ‘God bless my soul!’ cried Smith, ‘I never thought much of him, but I did not suppose he was capable of *that*.’ And that's the way they went on the whole evening. So, you dear Crawford, tell us as many nice stories about your artist friends as you can—about their having their furniture seized by sheriffs' officers, and taking their pig pictures wet to that stupid pawnbroker, who rubs out a pig with his thumb; and dying in sponging-houses; and stabbing their models in order to get the proper contraction of the museles; but please *don't* be technical.”

The Indian notability made his appearance presently, with a very stately wife in brown velvet and carbuncles; a costume which Flo declared reminded her of haunch-of-mutton and

currant-jelly. To Mr. O'Boyneville's escort this stately matron was intrusted; an elegant young Belgian diplomatist, who spoke very little English, took charge of Florence, while Mr. Crawford devoted himself to Cecil, and the Judge of the Sudder Dewance offered his arm to Mrs. MacClaverhouse, whose brain was racked by doubts as to whether the salmon would go comfortably round, or whether those two ninepenny lobsters ordered for the sauce were equal to the eightpenny one which she had rejected, suspecting sinister motives lurking in the mind of the fishmonger who had recommended it. The dinner *à la Russe* is a splendid institution for the economical housekeeper, and might on some occasions be called a dinner *à la ruse*; so artful are the manœuvres by which half-a-dozen oyster-patties, or a few ounces of chicken and a handful of asparagus tops, can be made to do duty for a course; so inexpensive are the desserts, which consist chiefly of fossilised conserves and uneatable bonbons, and which are of so indestructible a nature that they will last a managing hostess as long as a chancery-suit.

The dinner went off well. Mrs. MacClaverhouse's little dinners were almost always successful, in spite of those conflicting emotions which agitated the heart of the hostess.

The Indian judge and the Irish barrister talked *shop*; and there was a very animated discussion of a great international-law case, the details of which had filled the columns of the *Times* for the last three weeks—a case in which masculine intelligence perceived a thrilling interest, but which to the female mind appeared only a hopeless complication of politics and ship-building. In so small a party the conversation was tolerably general. Mr. Crawford entered heartily into the ship-building case; and only Florence and the elegant young diplomatist were confidential, chattering gaily in that exquisite language which seems to have been invented in the interests of eocuetry. The gentlemen came to the drawing-room very soon after the ladies had settled themselves in opposite corners: Florence and Cecil on a cosy little sofa by the open window—a sofa just large enough to accommodate their ample skirts; the dowager and the judge's wife on easy-chairs near a ground-glass screen which concealed the empty grate. Florence had so much intelligence of a peculiarly confidential nature to impart to her friend, that she looked almost coldly on the elegant young Belgian when he presented himself before her. It is very nice for a young lady, whose French is undoubtedly Parisian, to discuss Lamartine and De Vigny, Hugo and Chateaubriand—and such other Gallic luminaries whose works a young lady may discuss—with an agreeable companion; but Florence Crawford had made a conquest

within the last week, and was bright with all the radiance of a new triumph, and unutterably eager to impart the tidings of her last success to Cecil.

"He has called on papa twice within the week, dear," said the animated Flo in that confidential undertone which is the next thing to whispering; "and papa says it is the most absurd thing in the world to hear him ordering pictures: he has asked papa to paint him two. And when he was asked if he had any special idea of his own about the subject, he said no, but he wanted them to fit the recesses between the windows of his billiard-room at Pevcnshall—he has a place called Pevcnshall somewhere in that dreadful north; for he is rich—*à millions*, you know—*tout ce qu'il y a de plus Manchester*. His father and grandfather made all the money, and he is to spend it. I am surc he would never have made any for himself. But papa has declined the unfortunate young man's commission. Fancy one of papa's Cleopatras stinging herself to death between the windows of a Manchester man's billiard-room. There are men in Manchester who know art thoroughly, papa says; and it is utterly absurd for a painter to turn up his nose at the patronage of traders; for if you go into the galleries of those dear old sleepy towns in Belgium, you'll find that the noblest works of your Van Eycks and Hans what's-his-names were paid for by wealthy citizens; and what a blessing the modern patrons don't insist on having themselves painted, looking through cupboards, or riding on horseback, in the corner of a picture. Imagine a Manchester man's head poking through a hole in the sky in Mr. Millais' 'Vale of Rest,' or peering out of a cupboard in a corner of Mr. Frith's 'Derby Day!' However, papa has declined to paint anything for Mr. Lobyer; so the unfortunate young man will have no excuse for calling on unorthodox occasions."

"But he must be a very stupid person, Florence. I cannot imagine your taking any interest in him."

"Nor can I imagine myself tolerating his society for half-an-hour, if he were not what he is," answered Flo blithely. "Don't I tell you that he is the rich Mr. Lobyer? Even his name is horrible, you see—Lobyer! He might make it a little better by tacking on some aristocratic *prénom*. Vavasor Lobyer, or Plantagenet Lobyer, or something of that kind, might sound almost tolerable. Yes, he is very stupid, Cecil; but he seems rather a good young fellow; he laughs good-naturedly when other people are laughing, and he gets on wonderfully with my cockatoos. There seems to be an instinctive kind of sympathy between him and cockatoos, and they allow him to rumple their feathers and scratch their foreheads in the most amiable manner. You know what a place the

Fountains is, and how often *I* sit in the conservatory that leads to the painting-room, or else just outside papa's bay-window ; so of course when Mr. Lobyer came to talk about the pictures, he loitered and hung about playing with the birds, and sniffing at the flowers in that horrible fidgety manner peculiar to some young men, until papa came out of the painting-room to tell me I had better go for a drive, which meant that Mr. Lobyer was to take his departure. And I really think, Ceecil, that if I had not kept him at bay that unfortunate young man would have made me an offer that very morning, after meeting me rather less than half-a-dozen times."

"But, Florence, you surely would never marry such a person ?"

"For goodness' sake, Ceecil, don't call him a person! Haven't I always told you that I meant to marry for money, and don't I tell you that Mr. Lobyer is preposterously rich? I acknowledge that he is stupid and ignorant—more Manchester than Manchester itself ; but are there not guardsmen with long pedigrees who are as boorish and ignorant as Mr. Lobyer? I am not like those absurd girls who look in the glass and fancy they are like the two beautiful Miss Gunnings, and have only to show themselves in the park in order to captivate marquises and royal dukes."

"And you would really marry for money, Flory?" said Ceecil very sadly.

"Is there anything so well worth marrying for? Who was that stupid old legal person who said that knowledge is power? Why did he take bribes and sell public offices if he thought that? Depend upon it, Ceecil, that money is power, and the only power worth wielding. Money is power, and beauty, and grace, and fascination. Do you think Anne of Austria fell in love with plain George Villiers? No, Ceecil ; she fell in love with the Duke of Buckingham, and his white uncut velvet suit, and his diamonds, and the jewels he dropped among her maids-of-honour, and all the pageantry and splendour around and about him."

Was it of any use to reason with a young lady who talked like this? Miss Crawford had enjoyed all those advantages of education which fall to the share of middle-class damsels of the present day, and the possession of which a century ago would have made a young lady a phenomenon. She spoke French perfectly ; she knew a little Italian, and had read the *Promessi Sposi*, and could quote little bits of Dante and Petrarch ; she could read German, and quoted Goethe and Schiller on occasions ; she played brilliantly, and painted tolerably, and waltzed exquisitely ; but of that moral education which some mothers and fathers bestow upon their children, Florence

Crawford was utterly destitute. She had brought herself up ; and she prided herself on that high-bred heartlessness, or affectation of heartlessness, which seemed one of the most fashionable graces of her day. She had founded herself, as she fancied, on the best models.

"Better to be Becky Sharpe than Amelia Sedley," she said ; "and the world is full of Beckys and Amelias."

She could find a very tolerable excuse for herself and her companions.

"The men complain that we are fast and mercenary ; that we talk slang, and try to make rich marriages ; and there are articles about us in the fashionable newspapers, just as if we were a new variety in animal creation, on view in Regent's Park. Do they ever stop to consider who taught us to be what we are ? Can the gentlemen, whose highest praise of a woman is to say that she is jolly, and has no nonsense about her, and sits square on her horse, wonder very much if we cultivate the only accomplishments they admire ?"

Cecil had often tried to remonstrate with her volatile friend, and had as often found her efforts utterly thrown away. So to-night she allowed Flo to devote herself to the Belgian *attaché*, and abandoned herself to her own thoughts, only making a little pretence of joining in the conversation now and then. Sometimes, while she listlessly turned the leaves of an album, whose every leaf she knew by heart, Lady Cecil glanced upward to the angle of the mantelpiece by which Laurence O'Boyneville stood, in conversation with the judge and the painter ; for, however charming the society of lovely and accomplished woman may be, men have an attraction for one another, in comparison with which all feminine witchery is weak and futile.

Looking at the little group by the chimney-piece, Cecil saw that the barrister had by far the largest share in the conversation. He was very animated, and those large white hands, which were so eminently useful to him in court, were considerably employed to illustrate his discourse. That he was talking well she could see in the attentive faces of his listeners, for Indian judges and popular painters do not listen with any show of interest to a man who talks nonsense. Lady Cecil began to think that after all there must be something a little out of the common in this dreadful man.

The evening came to a close presently, and as he bent over Cecil to say good-night, Mr. O'Boyneville's manner was very much out of the common.

"I have been talking to your aunt, Lady Cecil," he said, "and she tells me you leave town early next week. I have asked permission to call on you to-morrow, and Mrs. Mac-

Claverhouse has given it. So it is not good-bye, you see, but *au revoir*."

This was about the coolest speech which Cecil Chudleigh had ever had addressed to her. She looked at Mr. O'Boynville with an expression of unmitigated astonishment, but he gave her hand a gripe that wounded the slender fingers with the rings which adorned them, and departed.

"I've three hours' work to get through before I go to bed to-night," he said, as he went down stairs with the painter and his daughter; and so he had. The first hansom that he encountered conveyed him to that sepulchral mansion in Brunswick Square which he had chosen for his habitation; not because he particularly liked Brunswick Square, but because it was necessary for him to live somewhere.

He let himself into the gaunt stone hall with his latch-key, and walked straight to the library at the back of this spacious mansion—a gloomy chamber lined with law-books, and provided with that species of furniture which may be seen exhibited by the merchants of Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. This dismal apartment was the retreat in which Mr. O'Boynville spent the greater part of his home-life. He very frequently took his dinner on the library table, with his plate surrounded by papers, and an open brief propped up against his decanter of Manzanilla.

To-night he found the red bag, which his clerk had brought from the Temple, waiting for him on the table. He did not open it quite at once. He did not pounce upon its contents as he had been wont to do. He sat for some minutes leaning back in his chair, with a smile upon his face—a dreamy smile, which was new to that eager, resolute countenance, so well known to the legal world for its hawk-like glances and insolent defiance.

"My own sweet darling!" he thought; "and I shall have a wife and a home! Good Heavens! how many years of my life have I spent without ever dreaming of any such happiness! And now—now—I wonder that I could have lived so long as I have; I wonder that I could have lived without *her*."

And then, after abandoning himself a little longer to this delicious reverie, he roused himself with an effort, and opened his bag.

But as he took out the first handful of papers, he exclaimed with a sigh,

"And yet, God knows, I wish I had never seen her. I went on so well before, and my mind was free for my work; and now——"

He began to read, and in five minutes' time was as deeply absorbed in his papers as if no such person as Cecil Chudleigh

had existed. And yet he loved her—with that foolish and unreasoning passion called love at sight—with that love which, coming for the first time to a man of his age, comes as surely for the last.

CHAPTER IX.

LAURENCE O'BOYNEVILLE'S FIRST HEARING.

To the dowager Mr. O'Boyneville had been very confidential. He was as frank and ingenuous as some lovesick schoolboy in his revelation of that sudden affection with which Cecil Chudleigh's pensive face had inspired him. The unconscious audacity which was one of the chief attributes of his character supported him in a position in which another man of his age and habits would have suffered an agony of self-consciousness, a torturing sense of his own foolishness. He was close upon forty years of age. His childhood had been spent on the greensward of Irish hills and valleys, among the wildest of Hibernian agriculturists; his boyhood had been passed in an Irish city, far south of the brilliant capital; his manhood had been a long, scrambling, helter-skelter journey upon one of the dustiest and most toilsome roads of modern life. His habits were not the habits of the men who were to be met in Cecil Chudleigh's world; his cleverness was not their cleverness; and those graces and accomplishments which, in their education, had been the first consideration, were just the very points which in his rough schooling had been neglected or ignored.

Another man, under such circumstances—and even another Irishman—might have regarded Lady Cecil from afar with fond admiring glances, and returned to his law-library in Bloomsbury, or his dusty chambers in the Temple, not scatheless, but hopeless: and despair being a fever of but brief duration—it is your intermittent sickness of alternate hope and fear that hangs so long about the sufferer—the victim might have speedily recovered the wound inflicted by a flying Cupid's random shot. But it was not thus with Laurence O'Boyneville. He knew that he was eight-and-thirty, and that he looked five years older; nor was it long since the tailor, who made those garments which the barrister insisted should be constructed after the fashion of his youth, had sighed as he took his patron's measure, murmuring plaintively, "Another

inch round the waist, Mr. O'Boyneville! and, bless my heart, it seems only yesterday when twenty-five inches was your figure!"

The barrister, contemplating himself in the glass during the process of shaving, and scowling—not at himself, but at the visionary countenance of the sarcastic Valentine or the unctuous O'Smea, with whom he was to do battle before the day was done—might have perceived, had he chosen to consider the matter, that he was by no means the sort of person whom women call handsome. The strongly-marked eyebrows, so quick to contract above the cold blue eyes; the aquiline nose, the firmly-set lips, the massive chin, and the broad square brow, with its prominent range of perceptive organs overshadowing the eyes—these were not the component parts of a countenance on which women care to dwell with admiring glances.

But that which would most likely have discomfited other men had no power to abash or to disturb the resolute spirit of Laurence O'Boyneville. Perhaps the secret of his audacity was that he had never failed in any thing. From the boyish days when he had breasted the falls of the Shannon and done battle with the power of the waters, his career had been one long hand-to-hand struggle with difficulties. Penniless, he had succeeded where other men's money had been powerless to win them success. Friendless, he had trampled upon the fallen hopes of rivals who could boast of kindred and friendship with the mighty ones of the earth. A stranger and an alien, he had won for himself wealth and renown in a country in which vulgar prejudice had made the very name of his people a byword and a reproach.

Was this a man to be turned aside from his purpose because the woman with whom he had fallen in love happened to be above him in rank, and the daughter of a world with which his world had nothing in common? No. After seeing Cecil Chudleigh for the first time, Laurence O'Boyneville decided that he would never marry any other woman. On seeing her for the second time, he determined to marry *her*. The most presuming of coxcombs could scarcely have been more sublimely assured of his own invincibility. And yet the barrister had nothing in common with a coxcomb. He was only accustomed to succeed. If he wanted to do any thing, he did it; and opposition or difficulty only gave a keener zest to the process of achievement. He wanted to marry Lady Cecil Chudleigh, and he meant to marry her. She might object at first, of course. People almost always did object to his doing what he wanted to do; but he always did it. Had not his professional rivals objected to his success, and banded them-

selves together to keep him down, and had he not succeeded in spite of them?

In his native wilds Mr. O'Boyneville might have twirled his shillalah and screamed horoo! so light were his spirits as he set forth to call on the lady of his love. In civilised and crowded London he could only swing his stick loosely in his hand as he strode triumphantly from the hall of the wasted footsteps; whereby he drew down upon himself the maledictions of an elderly gentleman whose shins the weapon had smitten in descending. That the pavements of the metropolis had *not* been laid down for his sole accommodation was a side of the question which Mr. O'Boyneville had never taken the trouble to contemplate.

He had been to Westminster, had heard the opening of a case in which he was concerned, and had given his brief and whispered his instructions to Hodger, a painstaking junior, who was very glad to do suit and service to the great O'Boyneville. The great O'Boyneville's client—a soap-boiler in Lambeth, who was at war with his parish upon the question of whether he did or did not consume his own smoke—was by no means gratified by the substitution, and looked as black as if he had indeed, in his own proper person, consumed all the smoke of his furnaces. But the distinguished Irishman strode away from Westminster heedless of his client's rage. It was very rarely that Laurence O'Boyneville gave his work to another man. The solicitors who swore by him told their clients that if O'Boyneville undertook a case, he would see it through to the very end.

"There never was such a resolute beggar," said a fast young attorney, who had witnessed one of the Q.C.'s triumphs; "the more desperate a case is, the sweeter O'Boyneville is upon it. He has all the Hibernian love of fighting; and if any body says 'Pease,' he's ready to spill his blood in the cause of 'Beans.' Egad! if there were a Victoria Cross for desperate valour exhibited in the law courts, Larry O'Boyneville's silk gown ought to be decorated with it."

But to-day, for the first time in his life, the barrister neglected his work for his own pleasure. That solemn crisis, which for some butterfly creatures comes once or twice in every London season, came to this man for the first time after twenty years of manhood. He was in love, and he was going to ask the woman he loved to be his wife. He was going to ask her to marry him—and he had met her on Dr. Molyneux's staircase—and he had watched her at a dinner-party as she talked to her aunt's guests! He knew her so little, and yet was eager to win her for his wife. "Good Heavens!" exclaims Common Sense, "what a fool the man must be!" And yet

for once, dear, simple, straightforward Common Sense is out in her reckoning; for Laurence O'Boyneville knew Cecil Chudleigh better than she was known by her most intimate friends. It was a gift with him, this intuitive knowledge of human character, this rapid perception of human motive; and it was by the possession of this gift, quite as much as by his cool audacity of showy eloquence, that the Irish barrister had made for himself a name and a position. Before a witness had kissed the Book and answered a preliminary question or two, Laurence O'Boyneville knew what manner of man the witness was. Show him the most trumpery photograph that was ever bought for eightpence, and he would penetrate the inmost depths of that man's mind whose face was dimly shadowed in the smudgy portrait. It was doubtful if he had ever read Lavater—and yet more doubtful if he had waded through the big volumes of George Combe; and yet he was in his own person an unconscious Lavater, and to him the teaching of the great Combe could have imparted no new wisdom. A man's eyes are not overshadowed by a bumpy ridge for nothing; and to Laurence O'Boyneville had been given in excess that wondrous faculty called perception.

He had scrutinised Lady Cecil with eyes that were experienced in the reading of every expression the human countenance is capable of assuming. He knew that she was pure, and true, and generous, and high-minded. A little proud, perhaps, but only just as proud as a good woman has need to be in a bad world. He knew that she was a prize worth winning, and he meant to win her. No apprehension of failure troubled the serenity of his mind. He did not expect to win her all at once. Had it not cost him fifteen years of hard labour to obtain his silk gown? and could he expect that Providence would give him this far higher prize without inflicting on him some interval for the exercise of his patience—some manner of probationary ordeal for the trial of his faith and devotion? Mr. O'Boyneville did not believe in that French proverb which asserts that happiness comes to the sleeper.

"I will serve my seven years' apprenticeship—and my seven years after that, if necessary—but she shall be my wife before I die," thought Laurence. But it may be that Mr. O'Boyneville's fourteen years was only a figurative expression, for he said to himself presently:

"If I play my cards well, we may be married in the long vacation: and then I'll take my wife to Ireland, and get a glimpse of the Shannon for the first time these twenty years."

Arrived in Dorset Square, Mr. O'Boyneville did not en-

danger his prospects by any untimely modesty. He told the servant who opened the door that he came by appointment; and when the dowager's own maid emerged from some dusky back-parlour, whence issued that odour of heated iron and singed blanket which attends the getting-up of feminine muslins and laces, he brushed unceremoniously by that prim young person, and made his way up stairs. Fortune favoured him. She seems but a craven-spirited divinity, after all, and always places herself on the side of the audacious. Cecil Chudleigh was sitting at the piano, not playing, but leaning over the keyboard in a thoughtful attitude, with her head resting on one hand while the listless fingers of the other trifled with the leaves of her music-book.

She looked up as the door opened, and her face betrayed any thing but pleasure as she recognised her visitor. He had prepared her to expect such an intrusion, but she had not expected him so early, and had engaged an ally in the person of Florence Crawford, who had promised to come to her dearest Cecil directly after breakfast. Unfortunately, Flo's "directly after breakfast" meant any time between ten and two; and as the dowager rarely made her appearance before luncheon, poor Cecil had to encounter the great O'Boyneville alone.

But in spite of the special manner in which the popular barrister had announced his coming, Cecil had no suspicion that the visit itself was to be of any special nature. No eccentricity could have surprised her in the wearer of that tight-sleeved frock-coat and those exploded shirt-collars, in which Mr. O'Boyneville exhibited himself for the edification of modern society. His solemn announcement of course only referred to the conventional morning call of the grateful diner-out—the stamped receipt for an agreeable entertainment. Lady Cecil was prepared to be a little bored by the eccentric Irishman's visit, and "there an end."

"I wish Flo had been here to talk to him," she thought wearily; "Flo could receive a deputation of aldermen, or a Church-commission, whatever that is."

Mr. O'Boyneville murmured some feeble truism in reference to the weather. In spite of his audacity—in spite of his calm assurance and unfaltering faith in ultimate victory—his ease of manner, his popular swagger, and his ready flow of language abandoned him for the moment when he found himself in the presence of that unconscious enchantress who had awakened the soul of a middle-aged barrister from its twenty years' torpor.

But the paralysis called bashfulness was a very temporary affliction with Mr. O'Boyneville. Before he had been talking ten minutes to Lady Cecil, he had drawn his chair close to the

piano by which she was still seated ; before he had been talking to her twenty minutes, he had asked her to be his wife.

She looked at him with a smile of utter incredulity.

“Mr. O’Boynville,” she exclaimed, “you must surely intend this for a jest ! and believe me it is a very foolish one.”

“A jest, Lady Cecil ! What, don’t you know sincerity when you meet with it ? Well, I confess it was foolish of me to come to you like this, and to tell you I’d fallen over head and ears in love with you, before a fine gentleman of the modern school would presume to ask you how you are. But you see, Lady Cecil, I’m not a fine gentleman. For the first seventeen years of my life I lived amongst people almost as simple and primitive as those happy savages Columbus found in Hispaniola. For the last twenty years I have been too hard a worker in my own world to have any leisure in which to acquire the thoughts and ways of yours. I never thought that any break would come in the rapid current of my busy life, but—I suppose there is one fateful hour in every man’s existence. I, who so seldom go to parties, went to Molyneux’s ball ; I, who so seldom talk to young ladies, talked to you ; and before I turned the corner of Harley Street that night, my destiny was a settled thing. ‘She has come,’ said I, ‘and she brings my fate in her hand.’ To my mind, Lady Cecil, that which your romance-writer and your poet call love at sight—‘if not an Adam at his birth, he is no love at all ;’ and so on—is rather an intuitive consciousness, which a man has in the hour that brings him face to face with the woman who is to be the happiness or the misery of his life. I am not going to use high-flown language, Lady Cecil. Eloquence is my stock-in-trade elsewhere. The words cannot be too plain in which I tell you that I love you. There is very little to be said in my favour. I am what people call well off ; but you might reasonably expect to marry a much richer man. I come of a good old Irish family ; but proscription has diminished its lands to a single farm, and the taint of treason has blotted its name. I am nearly twenty years your senior, and I have few of the accomplishments which distinguish the young men of the present day. It is the cause of the leaden casket which I am pleading, Lady Cecil ; and against all the outward splendour of gold and silver which my rivals can boast, I can set nothing except the unselfishness of my love, the strength of my devotion.”

Cecil had listened very patiently to this address. She could not doubt the depth of feeling which was breathed in every accent of the barrister’s voice, subdued and grave in tone, and altogether different from the sonorous thunder which so often awoke the echoes of the law-courts. She was touched

by his appeal, though it stirred no warmer feeling than a gentle thrill of womanly pity. It is not in the nature of a woman to feel unkindly to the lowest of human beings who reveals to her a pure and noble affection. A Miranda will pardon and pity a Caliban if his devotion is instinct with the divinity of innocent love.

"Are you really in earnest, Mr. O'Boyneville?" asked Lady Cecil.

"I was never more in earnest in my life."

"I am very sorry for it—I am very sorry," answered Cecil, gently. "I am sure I need not tell you that I am touched and flattered by your preference for me, eccentric as it may be; but you must be indeed a stranger to the society of women if you can imagine that any woman, knowing as little of you as I do, could reply otherwise than in the negative to such an offer as you have made me."

"Yes, I dare say it's very absurd," murmured Mr. O'Boyneville, despondingly; "it's my headlong way of doing things—a national characteristic, I suppose, Lady Cecil. I ought to have waited a week or two—till we knew each other—intimately—and then—Would there have been any hope for me if I had waited a week or two?" asked the barrister, in that soft insinuating tone to which he had been known to drop after a burst of loud and lofty declamation, with a sudden transition of style that had often proved irresistible with an impressionable jury.

Cecil Chudleigh shook her head gently.

"I might have been less surprised by your flattering proposal, Mr. O'Boyneville," she said; "but no circumstances could possibly arise under which I could give you any other answer than that I have given you to-day."

"And that answer is 'No'?"

"It is, Mr. O'Boyneville."

"Irrevocably no?"

"Irrevocably."

"Lady Cecil, forgive me if I ask you a question. Is there any one—any one who occupies the place in your heart that it would be my dearest hope to win for myself? Ah, you don't know how patiently I would bide my time if there were ever so distant a gleam of sunshine to lure me on! Is there any one else, Lady Cecil?"

"No, there is no one else."

"Ah, then that's bad indeed," said the Irishman, with a sigh; "if there'd been any one else, I might have hoped—" Mr. O'Boyneville's habit of subduing the stolidity of a jury by a happy colloquialism, when all grandiloquence of language had failed to produce an effect, very nearly betrayed him into

saying, "to punch his head." He pulled himself up with an effort, and concluded, "I might have hoped to prove myself the worthier man of the two. But if there is no one, Lady Cecil, and you say the answer is irrevocable, my doom is sealed. I will not tell you that I shall die broken-hearted; for in this bustling nineteenth century men have no time to break their hearts in the old-fashioned way. They can only overwork their brains and die of some commonplace heart-disease. The effect of your rejection will be that I shall work, if any thing, harder than I have been accustomed to work, and go down to my grave a single man. And now I'll not bore you any longer, Lady Cecil, and I hope you'll forget that I've talked about any thing that isn't appropriate conversation for an ordinary morning call."

He held out his hand as frankly as if he had shaken off all sense of mortification or disappointment. Lady Cecil had received her due share of matrimonial proposals, and had been accustomed to see a rejected swain depart with an air of dignified sulkiness. There seemed to be something almost magnanimous in the Irishman's simple heartiness of manner. It appeared as if he were rather anxious to relieve Cecil from any natural embarrassment, than oppressed by a sense of his own humiliation. She shook hands with him very cordially, and thought better of him in this moment of parting than she had thought yet. But she did not make him any conventional speech about her desire to retain his friendship, or her anxiety respecting his ultimate happiness. She fancied that his sudden passion was only the folly of an overgrown schoolboy, and she had little fear of the consequences of her rejection.

"I dare say he falls in love with some one every week of his life, and passes his existence in making offers that are refused," she thought, as she sat down to the piano after he had left her.

But even after thinking thus of her departed admirer, Cecil could not altogether dismiss him from her mind. She might smile at the remembrance of his folly, but she could not question his sincerity. For the moment, at least, he had been in earnest. But then it is the nature of an Irishman to be desperately in earnest about trifles. The arrival of a bloom-coloured coat from Mr. Filby the tailor seems as great an event to Goldsmith as the grant of a pension can appear to the calmer mind of Johnson.

Mr. O'Boyneville walked away from Dorset Square vanquished, but not disheartened. He had been prepared for a rejection of his suit; but for him Cecil's irrevocable no was not entirely appalling. His experience had shown him many

a verdict set aside, many a decision appealed against. And are there not courts of appeal in the kingdom of lovers, as well as in the vulgar every-day world of lawyers? In spite of what the barrister had said to Lady Cecil, he had been much relieved by her assurance that her heart and hand were aliko disengaged. He had affected the resignation of despair, while a glow of hope had gently warmed his breast; and as he swaggered along the pavement of Baker Street on the watch for a passing hansom, he had by no means the appearance of a rejected and desponding lover.

"I dare say she'll think me a fool for my pains, but at any rate she *will* think of me, and that's something," mused Mr. O'Boyneville. "How prettily her eyelids drooped when she gave me her irrevocable answer—just as if she shrank from seeing the disappointment in my face! And how good and true and pure she is! There'd be little need for divorce-courts, and less work for the lawyers, if all women were like her; and I don't despair of calling her Lady Cecil O'Boyneville yet. There never was a good woman who wasn't to be won by the love of an honest man, provided there's no mistake about his love or his honesty. There's not a day of one's life but one hears of oddly-matched couples. What could pretty Mrs. Green have seen in that awkward lout Green? says Gossip. Why, what should she see except that he loved her better than any other man in creation? And then, if Fate is the master of men, Circumstance is the tyrant of women. A man may marry the woman he wishes to marry: a woman can only marry the man who wishes to marry her."

And at this point the barrister espied an approaching hansom, and beckoned to the driver.

"I may be in time to see the soap-boiler through his troubles yet," he thought, as he sprang into the vehicle. "Westminster Hall, cabby, and lose no time about it."

CHAPTER X.

THE RICH MR. LOBYER.

BEFORE the season was over, Lady Cecil enjoyed the honour of an introduction to Florence Crawford's wealthy admirer, Mr. Thomas Lobyer, of Pevenshall Place, Yorkshire, and of the Lobyer Mills in the cotton country. The dowager and

her niece were amongst the Sunday-evening droppers-in at the Fountains within a week of Mr. O'Boyneville's declaration ; and it was on that occasion that Cecil beheld her friend's admirer for the first time. The deeply smitten Lobyer had made good use of the Sunday-evening privilege, and every Sabbath found him lounging with a lumbering gait and creaking footsteps in the painter's pretty drawing-rooms, or lurking darkly in the dimmer light of the conservatories, where he held mysterious converse with the cockatoos. It was not that he so especially affected the society of cockatoos ; but he was a young man who always seemed restless and uneasy if deprived of the companionship of some animal. He carried a toy-terrier in his pocket when he made morning calls, and caressed the miniature brute stealthily in the frequent pauses of the conversation. He was dull and embarrassed in the presence of an accomplished young lady, but he got on admirably with a ferret or a weasel ; and there were people who said he could have made himself at home with a boa-constrictor. The cry of "Rats !" stirred him with as profound a thrill of emotion as that which vibrates through the frame of a thoroughbred Dandy Dinmont, or agitates the bosom of a sharp young bull-terrier.

He was fond of his horses, and still more fond of his dogs ; but the animals he affected were not the mighty natives of Newfoundland or the noble denizens of Mount St. Bernard. The dogs which Mr. Lobyer purchased at high prices from crack dog-fanciers were generally accomplished ratters, and miniature specimens of the bull-dog tribe, renowned for their tendency to attach themselves to the calves of unoffending legs, and their high-bred objection to being severed from their prey.

As the uncertain temper and occasional restlessness of his favourite terriers rendered it rather dangerous to take them to evening parties, Mr. Lobyer was always glad to fall back upon the society of any animal attached to the household in which he visited. He would retire into a dusky corner, and stir up the inhabitants of an aquarium with the point of his gold pencil, in the apparent hope of getting up intimate relations with a jelly-fish. He would beguile the golden inmates of a crystal globe by tearing up minute fragments of one of his visiting-cards, and passing them off for such edible morsels as unwise benevolence offers to gold-fish. His intercourse with the inferior animals was not necessarily of a friendly order. His hands were disfigured by the teeth of his dogs, goaded into desperation by his playful sallies ; for it was sometimes his humour to worry the distinguished ratters very much as the distinguished ratters worried the rats.

In sorrowful earnest, Mr. Lobyer was not a nice young man. He was rich; and there were many people who would have been very glad to think him nice, but who were fain to abandon the attempt, and to demand tribute of admiration for their favourite on other and loftier grounds. And this was very easily done. There is no cub so brutish, no lout so clumsy, uncouth, and insolent, who cannot be made to pass for a rough diamond. Society—especially represented by matrons with marriageable daughters—decided that Mr. Lobyer was a rough diamond, a dear good candid creature, who blurted out every thing he thought. He was an original character; and his unpolished manners were quite a relief after the *fade* graces and courtesies of over-educated young diplomatists and amateur *littérateurs*. This was what people said of Mr. Lobyer during the two seasons in which he exhibited his clumsy figure and his bullet head in the assemblies of second rate fashion—not the *crème de la crème*, but that excellent milk from whose surface a very decent layer of cream may be gathered in a second skimming—and society smiled upon the wealthiest bachelor from Cottonopolis. He was neither handsome nor clever; he was neither amiable nor well-bred; but he was the wealthiest available bachelor in the circles which he adorned.

The gold-worshippers, who saw in Mr. Lobyer the genius of commercial prosperity, were anxious to make the best of their idol. He had feminine admirers who called him handsome; he had masculine allies who declared that he was clever. His features were regular, but cast in that heavy mould which seems better adapted to a good-looking animal than a handsome man. He had big brown eyes; but so has a Newfoundland dog; and the eyes of an intelligent dog possess a beauty of expression which was utterly wanting in the round Vandyke-brown orbs of Thomas Lobyer. His complexion was dark and sallow—pale always—but capable of assuming an unpleasant livid whiteness when he was very angry. The physiognomists were tolerably unanimous as to the character of his thick red lips and sloping chin; but the fair denizens of the western suburbs were equally unanimous in their admiration of his carefully-trained moustache, and the luxuriant beard amidst which he was wont to entangle his fingers when temporarily excluded from animal society.

He dressed well, for he had just sufficient good taste to know that his taste was bad, and he delivered himself an unreasoning block of humanity into the hand of the most expensive West-end tailor.

“I don’t pretend to know much about the build of the thing,” he said, when complimented on the fashion of a new overcoat; “but my fellow charges me what he likes, and he

gets a cheque for his account by return of post. So I suppose I'm a good customer."

Mr. Lobyer had a lodging in Jermyn Street—a *pied-à-terre*, he called it. And it is to be set down to his credit that his French would have inflicted no outrage on ears accustomed to the pure accents of the Français. The days are past in which commercial wealth and ignorance have gone hand in hand.

The *parvenu* of to-day is generally an elegant and highly-accomplished gentleman, who has seen every thing that is to be seen, and been taught every thing that an expensive course of education can teach. Mr. Lobyer had played cricket with young lordlings on the meads of Eaton—he had been plucked at Oxford—he had scampered over Europe, and improved his mind in the society of the crocodiles of the Nile—he had steeped himself to the lips in the worst dissipations of Paris, and had given as much pain and anxiety to a very worthy father as can well be concentrated in the declining years of a parent's life.

There were scandal-mongers in the cotton country who said that Thomas Lobyer junior had broken the heart of Thomas Lobyer senior. He was an only son—an only child; and the wealthy manufacturer had beguiled the dull routine of his business life by a splendid dream during the years of his son's boyhood. If the boy had been a prince his education could scarcely have been more carefully supervised, or paid for with a more lavish hand. But conscientious tutors washed their hands of the profitable pupil when they found that he was stupid and arrogant, profligate and hypocritical, and that he was gifted with a bull-dog obstinacy which rendered all efforts at correction hopeless.

The time came before the death of his father, when there was no alternative but to let him go his own way.

"I might disinherit you, and leave my money to an hospital," wrote the old man in the last letter he ever addressed to his son; "and God knows you have given me enough provocation to do so. But if I could forget that you are the child of the wife I loved, I should still be deterred from such a step by the fear of its consequences. If you have done so badly with all the advantages of wealth, what would become of you exposed to the temptations of poverty? Your grandfather began life as a workhouse apprentice—there are plenty of people in Manchester who know all about him; but there wasn't a man in his native city who wasn't proud to shake him by the hand, or a woman who didn't point to him as an example to her sons."

Thomas Lobyer the elder died within a few weeks after the writing of this epistle; and his son who was giving a charm-

ing little dinner to some distinguished friends in the pavilion of the Hôtel Henri Quatre at St. Germain, while his father lay dying at Pevenshall, was summoned homeward by a telegram, and arrived to find himself sole master of the accumulated fruits of two industrious lives. The young man's acquaintances and neighbours, his agents and advisers, were loud in his praises during his brief residence at Pevenshall. It seemed as if the old story of Prince Henry's reform were going to be acted over again. Mr. Lobyer detained the lawyer who had made his father's will, and with that gentleman's assistance he entered into a searching investigation of his possessions. He, so dull to learn any thing appertaining to the graces of life,—he, so slow of intellect where the wisdom of sages or the harmonious numbers of poets were the subject of his study, proved himself a match for the keenest in all that affected his interests or touched his pocket. He, who had been so reckless in his extravagance while drawing on the resources of a generous father, astonished the family solicitor by the minuteness of his calculations, the sharp economy which prompted all the changes he made in his dead father's household, and the calm determination with which he announced that he should make a rule of only spending a third of his income during his bachelorhood.

"I don't wonder my father was always growling about my extravagance, considering the amount of money he contrived to get rid of here," said the amiable young man. "Two of the housemaids may go, and two of the grooms may go. One man will look after half-a-dozen horses in a livery-stable in London, and keep them in better condition than my horses are in; and one man can look after half-a-dozen here. I shall only come down in the hunting-season; and I don't want to pay lazy hulking fellows for gorging themselves with meat and making themselves dropsical with beer at my expense; and I don't want to pay young women for looking out of the windows and talking to them. In the gardens I shall not make any changes; but I must have an arrangement made with the fruiterers in the market-town by which the forcing houses may be made to pay their own expenses. When I marry and come to live here, I shall double the household, and build a new wing to the stables, for I like to see plenty of fellows, and horses and dogs, and that kind of thing, about a place; but for the present we must retrench, Mr. Gibson,—we must retrench."

Such was Mr. Lobyer. He came to London, and took his place in a certain circle of London society, with nothing to recommend him but a reputation for enormous wealth. There were those who remembered him in Paris, and who knew the manner in which he had completed his education in that bril-

liant capital. But if there went abroad the rumour that the millionaire's youth had been wild and foolish, feminine compassion and masculine generosity conspired to forget and ignore his early follies.

From a crowd of beautiful and intellectual women the Manchester man might have chosen the loveliest, and would have incurred small hazard of a refusal. There were women who scorned his money as utterly as they despised himself; but in the drawing-rooms of Tyburnia and Kensingtonia those women were few and far between. The value of wealth increases with the growing refinement of taste. The purest attributes of the human mind—the love of art, the worship of beauty, the keen sense of grace—combine to render intellectual man the slave of material prosperity. The gems of ancient art, the work of modern artists, the thoroughbred hack on which Beauty prances in the Row, the villa on Streatham Common or the cottage by Strawberry Hill, for whose shelter the soul of the retiring citizen yearns as the refuge of his declining age,—all command a higher price every year; and every year the steady march of intellect advances, and there are more connoisseurs to sigh for old pictures, more would-be patrons of modern art, more citizens whose cultivated sense of the beautiful inspires a yearning for villas on Streatham Common or cottages by Strawberry Hill, more ambitious middle-class belles who have seen from afar off the prancing of patrician Beauty's steeds, and who sigh for thoroughbred saddle-horses of their own.

Mr. Lobyer himself was unattractive; but in Mr. Lobyer's wealth there lurked the elements of all those costly treasures and refinements that make life beautiful. He was known to be stupid; and mercenary Beauty, jumping at a conclusion, decided that he was just the sort of person to submit himself unresistingly to the management of a wife. Under the wand of that enchantress, the dull figures in his banking-book might be transformed into the art-treasures of a second Grosvenor House, the gardens of a new Chatsworth, the stables of a Lord Stamford, a fairy boudoir which even the Empress Eugénie might approve, and jewels which the Duchess of Newcastle might admire and the Duke of Brunswick envy.

This was what portionless Beauty had in her mind when she smiled on Mr. Lobyer. Rich as he really was, the amount of his riches was doubled and trebled by the tongue of rumour. And there is really something interesting in boundless wealth, for its own sake. It is a kind of power; and there seems to be some slavish attribute inherent in the breast of man, which prompts him to fawn upon every species of power, from the physical force of a Ben Caunt to the intellectual supremacy of

a Voltaire. A flavour of Monte Christo hovered about the person of Thomas Lobyer; and though he had never been known to say any thing worth listening to, or to do any thing worth recording, he was interesting nevertheless. The men who had borrowed money from him, or who thought they might some day have occasion to borrow money of him, said that there was "a stamp of power about the fellow, you know;" and there was "something racy even in his cubbishness, you know, for it isn't every fellow would have the pluck to be such a thoroughbred cub."

There were people who called Mr. Lobyer generous; and there always will be people who will call the giver of sumptuous dinners a noble and generous creature. The man who keeps a drag for his own pleasure, and allows his friends to ride upon the roof of it, is likely to be considered more or less their patron and benefactor, though their companionship is as indispensable to his triumph as the slaves who attend the chariot-wheels of an emperor are necessary to complete the glory of their master. Mr. Lobyer was as generous as the man who never stints the cost of his own pleasure; as mean as the man who grudges the outlay of a sixpence that is not spent for his own gratification.

This was the individual who, after inspiring alternate hope and despair in unnumbered breasts by the fickleness of his clumsy attentions, succumbed at last to the piquant charm of Florence Crawford's bright hair and tiny *retrousee* nose.

She was insolent to him, and her insolence charmed him, for it surprised him, and stirred the dull stagnation of his brain with a sensation that was like pleasure. She laughed at him; and he, so keen in his perception of the weaknesses of better men than himself, was weak enough to think that she alone, of all the women he knew, was uninfluenced by any consideration of his wealth.

"The girls I meet make as much of me as if I were a sultan, and seem to be waiting for me to throw my handkerchief amongst 'em," said Mr. Lobyer. "I like that painter-fellow's girl, because she laughs in my face, and treats me as if I were a government clerk with a hundred and fifty pounds a-year. That's the sort of girl I call jolly."

The Sunday-evening visitors at the Fountains were not slow to perceive Florence Crawford's conquest. She was a coquette of the first water, and encouraged her loutish admirer by a persistent avoidance of him. If he hung over her piano, she rattled brilliantly through the shortest of *valse*s du salon, or sang the briefest and crispest of her ballads, and had risen from the instrument and flitted away before Mr. Lobyer had made up his mind as to what he should say to her. If he

worked his way to the sofa on which she was seated, or the open window by which she was standing, the lively Florence immediately became absorbed in confidential discourse with a feminine visitor, and intensely unconscious of Mr. Lobyer.

If Florenee Crawford—anxious to marry this man for the sake of his money—had acted on the most profound knowledge of his character, she could scarcely have played her cards better. A dogged obstinacy of purpose was the ruling attribute of Thomas Lobyer's mind; and the coquettish trifling of a schoolgirl aroused that bull-dog characteristic as it had seldom been aroused before.

Miss Crawford was eager to know what Cecil Chudleigh thought of her new conquest. She was childish enough to be proud of having made such a conquest. She was weak enough to be flattered by the admiration of a man whose sole title to respect was summed up in the figures in his banking-book.

"What do you think of him, Cecil?" she asked her friend.

"You mean Mr. Lobyer?"

"Yes, of course."

"I don't think he is particularly agreeable, Flory. He seems to me to be rather stupid and awkward."

"Oh, but he's not stupid. I hear that he has a great deal of common-sense. He's rather good-looking, isn't he, Cecil?"

"I suppose he would be called so; but I don't admire his face. Oh, Flory, you surely cannot be interested in my opinion of him?"

"Why shouldn't I be interested in your opinion of him?" Flo echoed, peevishly. "He is good-looking, and well dressed, and—by no means stupid. He may be a little clumsy, perhaps; but I have seen heavy cavalry officers quite as clumsy, and in them clumsiness is considered *distinguè*. However, I won't talk to you about him any more, Cecil. You are as romantic as a girl in a novel."

Amongst the witnesses of Miss Crawford's triumph was one in whom the spectacle inspired despair. Philip Foley, the landscape-painter, privileged to join the miscellaneous crowd at the Fountains, looked on from the shadowy corner where he sat unnoticed and little known, and ground his strong white teeth as he watched the tactics of the coquette and the hopeless entanglement of the cub. His old friend Sigismund was near him; but Sigismund Smythe the novelist was better known to fame than Philip Foley the unsuccessful landscape-painter; and some people were eager to be introduced to Mr. Smythe, and liked to talk to him for five minutes or so, after which they were apt to retire disappointed.

"It's no use disguising the fact," the young man said plaintively; "I do not meet their views, and they don't hesitate to

let me know that I'm a failure. I ought to be dark and swarthy, like Dumas ; or tall, and thin, and wiry, and hook-nosed, and satanic. What would I not give to Madame Rachel if she would make me diabolical for ever ! What recompense should I think too much for my tailor if he could build me a coat that would make me look like Mephistopheles ! I know a literary man who *is* like Mephistopheles, and a very handsome fellow he is too ; but he writes essays on political economy, and his demonic appearance is of no use to him."

In spite of Mr. Lobyer, poor Philip contrived to speak to Florence before he left the Fountains.

"So you are going to be married, Miss Crawford?" he said.

"Who told you any thing so absurd?" cried Flo, with a disdainful little laugh.

"Every body tells me so."

"Then every body is wrong," she answered, with an airy toss of her head ; "and even if every body were not as utterly absurd and incorrect as a stupid gossiping every body generally is, I don't see what right you have to catechise me, Mr. Foley."

"No ; I forgot my place. I forgot that I was only here on sufferance. What has an unsuccessful painter in common with the daughter of the most popular of modern artists ? And yet I have heard your father talk of his probation. I have heard him speak of the day when he went to Trafalgar Square, in a fever of hope and expectation, to find the picture he believed in, glimmering through the darkness of the octagon room, an unmeaning daub of red, and blue, and yellow."

"It is very good of you to remind me that papa was once a pauper," answered Florence haughtily ; and before Philip could say any thing more, she had turned away from him to shake hands with some of her departing guests.

After this the young man watched in vain for any opportunity of addressing Florence Crawford. He saw the rooms grow empty, and waited with the dogged determination of outstaying the cub ; but the cub made no sign of departure, though the last of the other guests had vanished, and though Flo, who sat in a listless attitude beside a stand of engravings, had yawned audibly more than once. The prince of the cotton country stood by her side, stolid and unabashed, pretending to be interested in the engravings, which she turned with careless hands, and glaring at Mr. Foley in the intervals of his conversation.

Florence yawned for the third time, and more audibly than before. Mr. Crawford, who had been walking up and down the room, with his hands in his pockets, staring absently at the pictures, and stopping before one of them every now and then to meditate, with bent head and moody brow, roused

himself suddenly from his reverie, and looked from the little group by the open portfolio to the spot where Philip Foley stood leaning against a low marble chimneypiece, glum and dejected of aspect.

"Come, young men," said the painter; "my daughter seems tired, so you had better bid her good-night, and come and smoke a cigar in my painting-room."

Florence rose and made a curtsy, which included both her admirers; but she did not seem to perceive Mr. Lobyer's outstretched hand, nor did she deign to reward Philip for the *empressement* with which he flew to open the door for her as she passed out of the room. But when she was alone in her own room, sitting before her pretty dressing-table, and looking at herself dreamily in the glass as she removed the slender golden necklace and glittering locket from her neck, it was of Philip and not of Mr. Lobyer that she thought.

"What a nice fellow he would be if he were rich!" she said to herself. "How frank and brave he is! I never like him so much as when he is uncivil to me. And if I were quite a different sort of girl, I can fancy that it would be very nice to marry him, and live in lodgings, and take an interest in his painting. But what would become of me if I were to marry such a man?—I, who haven't the faintest idea of a pudding, and never could sew a button on one of my muslin sleeves without spoiling half-a-dozen needles, and making myself like a murderer with blood. I never could marry a poor man after the things I've said. I can fancy how Lucy Chamberlayne, and those Verner girls, and Mary Masters, and all the girls who know me, would laugh. No, the day is past for that sort of thing: and as my heart is so free that I don't even know whether I've got a heart, and as Mr. Lobyer is by no means bad-looking, and as papa seems to like him—or, at any rate, doesn't seem to dislike him,—I suppose it is my fate to be mistress of Pevenshall."

CHAPTER XI.

AT NASEDALE.

MR. HORATIO MOUNTJOY, the Anglo-Indian judge for whom Mrs. MacClaverhouse had made her little dinner, had been one of the departed general's most intimate friends, and having

now returned to England to pass the rest of his days in peaceful retirement, was anxious to show all possible kindness to the general's widow.

He had bought an estate in Surrey since his return,—a charming old mansion of the Queen Anne period, with prim gardens of the Dutch school, a noble park, and a home-farm large enough to admit all the experiments of an amateur agriculturist, but not so extensive as to swamp the experimentalist's fortune. It was to this pleasant retreat that Mr. Mountjoy invited his old friend's widow and her niece.

"We are to have a very nice party," wrote the judge's wife; "and Horatio begs me to tell you that we shall expect *you* and dear Lady Cecil to stay till Christmas—even if our other friends grow tired of us, and run away before then. I thought your niece was looking pale and ill; but the breezes from the Surrey hills will set her up for next season."

"Now that's what I call hospitality!" exclaimed Mrs. MacClaverhouse; "but Mr. Mountjoy always was so magnificent in his way of doing things. 'That man has a regal mind,' I used to say to my husband, after one of the Mountjoys' Calcutta dinner-parties. And she's a good warm-hearted soul, though there's not much in her. There's nothing pays so well as a long visit, Cecil; and if the Mountjoys press us to stay till Christmas, I shall stay; for skipping about from one house to another eats into so much money in the way of travelling-expenses and servants' fees, that you might almost as well stop at home."

Cecil could only acquiesce in her aunt's arrangement. What was she but the handmaiden of her kindly protectress, bound to go wherever the lively dowager chose to take her, and to be pleased and merry at the will of others? She was very tired of her life. Driving through pleasant suburbs in the phantom chariot, she looked with sad yearning eyes at tiny cottages, enshrined in tiny gardens, and thought how simple and placid existence might be in such modest habitations.

"What happiness to be one's own mistress!" she thought; "never to be obliged to smile when one is sad, or talk and laugh for the pleasure of other people. If my poor father had left me a hundred a-year I might have lived in such a cottage, with my books and piano, and a few birds and flowers. I might have been good to the poor, even; for it is so easy for poor people to help one another. I envy the dowdiest old maid who ever eked out her tiny income. I envy any one and every one who can live their own lives."

But after indulging in such thoughts as these Cecil felt ashamed of the ingratitude involved in her mute repinings.

Was not her kinswoman good and affectionate after her own sharp fashion? and was it not the dependant's duty to be pleased and satisfied with the home that sheltered her? Even if there was some sacrifice of freedom demanded from her, Cecil could have made that sacrifice without complaining, if the dowager would only have let her alone. But to refrain from interference with the business of other people was just one of those things which Mrs. MacClaverhouse could not do. She had set her heart upon her niece making a good marriage, and to that end she kept watch upon every eligible bachelor who came within her ken.

It was in vain that Cecil protested against any thing like matrimonial scheming in her behalf. The dowager did not hesitate to remind her of the dull dead level of poverty that lay before her in the future.

"Do you happen to remember that my pension dies with me, Lady Cecil," she demanded angrily, "and that I have only a wretched pittance and a collection of obsolete Indian trumpery to leave you? So long as I live you will be able to keep afloat somehow in society; but I should like to know what will become of you when I am gone? You turn up your nose at my managing ways; but it is only by management that I have contrived to keep my head above water, and have my own carriage to ride in, and my own maid to travel with me. As for you, you are no more of a manager than one of those Indian idols; and a landlady who wouldn't dare to take half a glass of wine out of the cellaret or a spoonful of tea out of the caddy while I am alive, would pilfer you out of house and home before I'd been in my grave a month. It's all very well to talk about not wishing to marry, and being happy alone with your books and piano, and so forth; but you're not the stuff old maids are made of, Lady Cecil. The girls of the present day are not brought up to make old maids. They are like the houses that the cheap builders run up, that are made to sell, and not to last. The girls of the present day are delightful creatures, but they are brought up to marry rich men and live in fine houses, and be imposed upon by their servants. I pity the children of the rising generation, for they will have no maiden aunts to spoil them."

Mrs. MacClaverhouse had been shrewd enough to perceive the impression made on Mr. O'Boyneville by her niece's attractions. She knew that the barrister was rich—and, indeed, had sounded Mr. Crawford as to his probable income, which was of course exaggerated by the painter, who accepted the popular report of the lawyer's gains without that grain of salt with which all such reports should be taken. On questioning Cecil very closely respecting Mr. O'Boyneville's call, the dowager

had speedily perceived that something special had distinguished it from common visits.

"He asked my permission to call," said Mrs. MacClaverhouse; "and he said quite enough to convince me that he had fallen over head and ears in love with you. It's my opinion he came to make you an offer of marriage; and that's why I kept out of the way. But, bless my heart and soul! I needn't have taken the trouble—for of course you refused him; though I am told his income is little short of four thousand a-year. You are bent upon dying a homeless pauper, and all I hope is that they'll have improved the casual wards of the unions before your time."

Cecil tried to parry Mrs. MacClaverhouse's attack, but the elder lady was past mistress of the polite art of conversational fencing, and she did not abandon the assault until her niece had unwillingly confessed the secret of Mr. O'Boyneville's visit.

"And you refused him!" shrieked the indignant dowager. "That's what I call flying in the face of Providence. This is the second chance you've had within two years, Lady Cecil Chudleigh, and I hope I may live to wish you joy of the third; but I freely confess I don't expect to do so."

This sort of expostulation is by no means pleasant to hear, and poor Cecil had to listen patiently to much harping on the same string. She was familiar with every variation which such a theme can undergo in the hands of a skilful composer,—the minor wailings and lamentations, the brilliant crescendos of feminine mockery, the bass grumblings and sharp forte passages of anger, the peevish rallentandos and diminuentos. The unhappy girl bore it all, but she suffered acutely.

The change to Nasedale did not set her free from her aunt's lectures; for considerate Mrs. Mountjoy allotted two charming bed-rooms, with a pretty sitting-room between them, to the two ladies; and here, on rainy days, Cecil enjoyed a great deal of her aunt's society.

"I don't want to detain you here if you'd rather be in the billiard-room, or making yourself sticky with *décalcomanie* amongst those frivolous girls in the drawing-room. What regiments of girls there are in the world! and what in goodness' name is to become of them all, I wonder!" exclaimed the dowager, parenthetically. "As to the men the Mountjoys have collected, I never saw so many married fogies gathered together in one house; and the way they stuff themselves at luncheon is something dreadful. Tiffin, indeed! I'd tiffin them if they were my visitors. A glass of dry sherry at thirty-five shillings a dozen and a picnic biscuit is all they'd get between breakfast and dinner from me."

But Nasedale was a very pleasant place, in spite of the elderly fogies who over-ate themselves at luncheon, and the frivolous young ladies who devoted themselves to the decoration of cups and saucers that wouldn't bear washing, and dessert plates the painted splendours of which rarely survived the ordeal of preserved ginger or guava jelly.

Hospitality reigned supreme in the comfortable mansion. People did as they liked. The scenery for twenty miles round was superb ; and if Mr. Mountjoy was not quite so magnificent as the nabob who ordered "more curricles," the Nasedale stables supplied plenty of horses, and the Nasedale coach-houses contained every variety of modern vehicle for the accommodation of the visitors, from the omnibus which took the servants to church or the ladies to a county ball, to the miniature Croydon basket-chaise and the deliciously stumpy little pony, which the most timid of the décalcomaniacs was scarcely afraid to drive.

After returning from a hurried run up to town, the judge astonished the dowager, and considerably disconcerted Cecil, by exclaiming in the middle of dinner :

"Oh, by-the-bye, Mrs. MacClaverhouse, I met your friend O'Boyneville in Lincoln's Inn to-day, and I asked him if he could run down for a day or two. He seems to be full of business ; but when he heard you were down here, he evidently felt inclined to come. Not very flattering to me, you'll say. I told him of our archery-meeting on the twentieth, and he said, 'If it's possible, I'll be down in time for the archery-meeting ; but it's about as nearly impossible as any thing human can be.'"

Lady Cecil breathed more freely. She dreaded the appearance of her rejected suitor, and the friendly persecution to which his coming would inevitably expose her. But when the two ladies retired to their room that night, the dowager cried triumphantly :

"If Mr. O'Boyneville is as much in earnest as I think he is, he'll come to the archery-meeting, Cecil ; and I do hope, if he renews his offer, you'll be wise enough to accept it."

The archery-meeting of which the judge had spoken was to be a very grand affair, and the young ladies at Nasedale had made their fingers sore and their shoulders weary with the twanging of bows. The meeting was to take place on a noble plateau, at the top of the noblest range of hills in all Surrey ; and all the fun of a picnic was to be combined with the excitement of a toxophilite contest.

"We might have had our archery-meeting in the park," said the judge, when he explained to his guests the arrange-

ments he had made for their pleasure ; " but to my mind half the fun of these things is in the going and returning. The officers of the 14th are to drive over from Burtonslowe to meet us ; and I've invited all sorts of people from town. I won't say any thing about the two prizes I selected at Hunt and Roskell's this morning ; but I hope my taste will please the ladies who win them."

Cecil did not affect the twanging of bows, and was content to remain amongst the young ladies who, after vainly endeavouring to hit the bull's-eye, and losing their arrows in distant brushwood, without having so much as grazed the outermost edge of the target, retired from the contest, and declared that there was nothing so very exciting in archery after all, and that croquet was twenty times better. Amongst these milder spirits Cecil beguiled the fine summer afternoons with that gentle tapping of wooden-balls, and liberal display of high-heeled boots, which is the favourite dissipation of modern damsels ; and thus, amid quiet pleasures, with a good deal of riding and driving, and novel-reading and billiard-playing, and much good eating and drinking, time glided by at Nasedale until the nineteenth, and as yet there were no signs of the Queen's Counsel.

" If O'Boyneville had meant to be amongst us to-morrow he'd have made his appearance by this time," said the judge in the course of dinner. " He knows we start early to-morrow morning."

" I can't fancy O'Boyneville at a picnic," said a listless young gentleman who was amongst the new arrivals. " I can't fancy him any where except in the law courts. One sometimes meets him at men's dinners, but he never seems to enjoy himself unless he can talk *shop*, and he looks at the other fellows as if he'd like to cross-examine them."

The usual meanderings on the terrace outside the drawing-room windows, with which the younger members of the Nasedale party were wont to beguile the warm summer evenings, were impossible to-night, for at nine o'clock a violent clap of thunder shook the roofs and chimneys of the old mansion, and pretty little feminine shriekings and screechings fluttered the tranquillity of the party. The young ladies who were not afraid of the lightning made a merit of not being afraid ; and the young ladies who were afraid made a merit of being horribly frightened, and shivered and started in the most bewitching manner at sight of every flash. And one young lady who had written a volume of poetry, in which a weak solution of L. E. L. was artfully intermingled with a still weaker solution of Mrs. Browning, stood before a window and exclaimed about the grandeur and sublimity of the spectacle.

Cecil, sitting quietly at work under a reading-lamp, was rather rejoiced when she heard the violent downpour of rain which succeeded the storm.

"Mr. O'Boyneville will scarcely come to-night, at any rate," she thought.

There was a great deal of lamentation about the rain, and considerable discussion as to whether it augured ill or well for the morrow. It was a blessing to get the storm over. But then the grass would be damp, most likely, and so on. The young ladies thought of their delicate boots, their dainty dresses.

"My hat cost two guineas and a half," murmured one damsel to a sympathising confidante. "A ruche of peacock's feathers, you know, dear; and the sweetest mother-of-pearl butterfly, and a tiny, tiny green-chenille bird's-nest, with three gold eggs in it, at the side—and one shower of rain would utterly spoil it."

The rain came thicker and faster. Nothing short of a hurricane would serve to dry the grass after such a storm. But Cecil did not think of the picnic; she only congratulated herself upon the improbability that Mr. O'Boyneville would care to travel in such weather.

"No chance of O'Boyneville," said Mr. Mountjoy, as he stood before the fire which he had ordered to be lighted since the advent of the rain. "I told him to write and announce his coming, so that I might send a vehicle over to the station to meet him. It's a ten-mile drive, you know, and there's very seldom so much as a fly to be had at that miserable little station. However, the last London post is in, and there's no letter from O'Boyneville."

The pattering of the rain against the windows made itself heard in every pause of the conversation, and the noise of the pelting drops grew louder every moment. Cecil was still bending quietly over her work in a cosy corner near the angle of the wide velvet-covered mantelpiece, and the judge's guests had gathered in a circle about the cheery fire, when the bell of the great hall-door rang loudly.

"Who the deuce can that be, at this time of night, and at this time of such a night?" cried Mr. Mountjoy.

"Whoever he is, he is the owner of a tolerably strong arm, and he knows how to make his arrival public," said one of the listless visitors.

The drawing-room opened out of the hall; and in the silence that followed the clamour of the bell, Mr. Mountjoy and his visitors heard the opening of the ponderous door, the rapid accents of a sonorous bass voice asking questions, and a fluttering sound which resembled the noise made by an enor-

mous Newfoundland-dog who shakes himself dry after emerging from the water.

There was a pause of some ten minutes, and then the drawing-room door was thrown open, and the servant announced :

“Mr. O’Boyneville.”

“I thought as much,” said the dowager in an undertone, which was intended only for the ear of her niece.

The barrister made his appearance, a little damp and weather-stained, in spite of the hurried toilet he had made since entering the house, but with the freshness of the open air upon him, and the aspect of a man whose heart is aglow with triumph. He received the cordial welcome of his host, shook hands with the people he knew, offered a big cold paw to Cecil as coolly as if there had been nothing out of the common in their last parting, showed his white teeth, laughed at nothing particular till every crystal drop in the old-fashioned chandelier shivered and trembled, and, in short, made more noise in five minutes than the rest of the party had made in the whole of the evening.

“Yes, it certainly isn’t the nicest weather for travelling,” he said, in reply to his host’s eager inquiries ; but you see I said I’d come if it was possible ; and here I am. I was on a committee in Victoria Street at half-past five ; took a hansom, and told the man to drive to Brunswick Square like wild-fire ; packed my portmanteau and put on my dress-coat while the man waited ; drove to the Oriental Club, and left my portmanteau with the porter while I dined with the Governor-General of Seringapatam ; rose from the table at a quarter before nine, borrowed a railway rug from one of the waiters, and caught the nine-o’clock train at Waterloo ; found myself an hour after at a little station where there was one deaf porter, and no vehicle of any description whatever ; had considerable difficulty in getting any thing at all out of the deaf porter ; but finally extracted the pleasing intelligence that Nasedale was a good ten miles, and that, barring John Cole’s own bay mare at the Pig and Whistle, there wasn’t an animal of any kind to be had within a mile and a half. Of course, after hearing this, the best thing was to get John Cole’s bay mare ; and fine work I had with John Cole before he would let me have the beast, which he keeps for his own pleasure and convenience, and which has never been ridden or driven by man or boy except himself since he bought her at Barnet Fair, six years come next October. However, when he saw that I meant to have the animal whether he liked it or not, and when he heard where I was coming, he made a virtue of necessity, and brought her out—and here I am : and I think,

my dear Mountjoy, of all the lanes I ever had the pleasure of beholding, the lanes between this place and the station are the muddiest ; and of all the rain that ever reduced the civilised universe to pulp and slop, the rain I came through to-night has been the heaviest."

After this Mr. O'Boyneville took possession of the company, as it was his wont to take possession of any assemblage in which he happened to find himself. He went into society very rarely, and the laws of society had very little restraint for him. He could talk well, and he knew that he could talk well. The necessities of his professional career had obliged him to possess himself of a superficial knowledge of every subject, and some smattering of almost every science. A native audacity did the rest ; and a frank *bonhomie* of manner, a slap-dash mode of expression, which was too original to be vulgar, won the suffrages of people who would have tabooed a smaller man for lesser sins against conventionality than those which were permitted in Mr. O'Boyneville.

He talked well, and like most good talkers, he very often talked nonsense ; for the man who weighs his sentences before he utters them, who pauses to consider the force of an argument before he launches it, is rarely a brilliant conversationalist. And sometimes it seems as if the brightest creatures of the brain are those ephemeral and unconsidered trifles which a man utters haphazard in the heat of argument or the abandonment of purposeless small-talk. Posterity values Samuel Johnson rather for the happy sayings of a convivial evening than for the ponderous polysyllables of his most carefully considered compositions.

A silver salver, bearing a monster tankard of mulled claret, was brought into the drawing-room before the assembly dispersed ; and in the diversion afforded by the handing about of the wine, Mr. O'Boyneville contrived to seat himself between Cecil and her aunt ; and after artfully conciliating the elder lady, he drew his chair near to the little table by which the younger sat absorbed in her work.

"You don't know what difficulty I had to get here to-night, Lady Cecil," he said ; "and it was only because you are here that I came."

"Then I am very sorry you should have come," answered Cecil gravely.

"Are you still so hard-hearted ?"

"Mr. O'Boyneville ! Is it a gentlemanly act to follow me here, where I have no power to avoid you, and to talk to me in this manner ? If you come here for your own pleasure, to make one of an agreeable party, I am as happy to see you as any one else in this house can be. But if you come here to

persecute me by attentions which are as ungentlemanly as they are foolish, I shall beg my aunt to take me away from this house to-morrow morning."

The barrister looked at her pale proud face with an expression of profound sorrow.

"That will do, Lady Cecil," he said; "that is quite enough. I thought what you said the other day might mean only a lady's negative. I thought I was too abrupt—that I surprised and offended you by my way of plunging into the subject, and so on. But I see now that I was mistaken. Good-night, Lady Cecil; I shall never offend you again."

He held out his hand, but he scarcely clasped her slender fingers as they rested for one brief moment in his expansive palm. The sadness in his voice, the sorrowful expression of his face had touched her, and she felt the natural womanly desire to heal the wounds she herself had inflicted. But before she could think of any thing to say which should in some degree console the Irishman's wounded feelings, yet in no manner embolden him to renew his attack, Mr. O'Boyneville had left her, and was bidding his host good-night.

Lady Cecil had to endure a lecture from her aunt before she shut herself in her own room that night; and when she went to bed it was to think compassionately of the Irish barrister's sorrow.

And while she pitied him, Mr. O'Boyneville settled himself complacently to his placid slumber, and mused upon the evening's adventures as he fell asleep.

"You are very haughty and you're very resolute; but you'll marry me sooner or later, for all that, my bright Cecil, my beautiful Cecil. It isn't possible for a man to be as much in earnest as I am, and yet wind up by making a failure."

CHAPTER XII.

MR. O'BOYNEVILLE'S MOTION FOR A NEW TRIAL.

THE Nasedale picnic, or the Nasedale archery-meeting, was a success; but it may be that the noble supply of sparkling wines, the gorgeous banquet of delicate viands, set forth under a spacious marquee, contributed as much as the excitement of the toxophilite contest to the gaiety of the day. Mr. O'Boyne-

ville forgot his profession, and behaved as if he had spent the greater part of his existence at toxophilite meetings and picnics. Cecil heard more than one young lady declare that the Irishman was the life of the party, and she had reason to be grateful to him for his delicate avoidance of her; even though her good taste might compel her to condemn his too obvious flirtation with more than one fair damsel in Lincoln green.

But if Cecil was glad to be released from the attentions of the Queen's Counsel, Cecil's aunt was by no means pleased with the altered aspect of affairs. She glowered upon the unconscious O'Boyneville from the distance whence she watched his proceedings, and was snappishly disposed towards the young ladies with whom he had flirted whenever they happened to cross her path. Once only in the course of the day had she any opportunity of addressing her niece confidentially, and then her manner assumed its bitterest shade.

"I hope you are satisfied *now*, Lady Cecil Chudleigh," she said.

And at night, when the long day's festivity and flirtation, and archery and croquet, and dust and sunshine, had at length come to a close, Mrs. MacClaverhouse was eager to attack her dependant. But Cecil stopped her at the first word.

"Pray do not say any more about this business, auntie," she said, in a quiet resolute tone. "If you are angry with me because I am unwilling to marry Mr. O'Boyneville, whom you wish me to marry only because he is rich, I must submit to your anger, and leave you. I will not stop with you to be persecuted upon such a subject; and if I have displeased you, I can only thank you for all your past goodness to me and bid you good-bye."

If people ever said "Hoity-toity!" Mrs. MacClaverhouse was just in the humour to have indulged in such an ejaculation. But she contented herself with exclaiming,

"Well, I'm sure! The young women of the present day fly in a passion if you venture to say an unpleasant word to them. The world is moving on at a nice pace, upon my word. I wonder what the children of the rising generation will be like, and how *they'll* treat their mothers and aunts. I suppose they'll take the story of the Grecian daughter out of *those* children's story-books, and supply its place with 'The Obedient Father,' or 'The Dutiful Grandmother,' or 'Parental Submission,' or something of that kind. You may go to bed, Lady Cecil; and since you are bent upon ending your days as an indoor pauper, you must go your own way, and I wash my hands of all responsibility."

The dowager carried matters with a high hand, but Cecil

had vanquished her nevertheless ; and though Mr. O'Boynville had left Nasedale before the family met at the breakfast-table, Mrs. MacClaverhouse forbore to bewail his departure in her niece's presence. He had gone ; but when his circuit work was over he came back again, and made himself a favourite with all the household. He had his own little study, and he had some of the judge's law-books carried thither for his use. He spent three or four hours every morning in hard work ; and for the rest of the day was the life of the party, talking, arguing, disputing, putting down listless visitors, and laughing his great haw-haw laugh at their discomfiture ; cross-examining pretentious talkers, and bringing them to shame ; flattering frivolous matrons, expounding great political theories with much flourishing of his white hands, delighting the Anglo-Indian judge by respectful attention to his anecdotes, offending and pleasing people a hundred times a day, and making himself the principal figure in every group, his voice the ruling voice in every discussion.

And in all this time Lady Cecil had no reason to complain of his presence. He was true to the quiet tone of resignation with which he had received her reproof on the first night of his coming to Nasedale. If he addressed her now, it was as nearly in the ordinary tone of polite society as was possible to this rough diamond of the British law-courts. Nor did he in any special manner seek her society. Mrs. MacClaverhouse sniffed ominously as she watched the eligible bachelor's attentions to other young ladies, while Cecil sat unnoticed and apparently forgotten by her late admirer. But the dowager refrained from remonstrance, and only allowed stray allusions to the horrors of genteel pauperism, and the miserable destiny of the unprotected female, to crop up now and then in her confidential talk with her niece.

And Cecil was satisfied. She had subdued her aunt, and had freed herself from the unwelcome attentions of an audacious adorer. She was inclined to feel kindly disposed towards Mr. O'Boynville now that he no longer presented himself before her in the absurd position of a lover. She was able to appreciate his cleverness now that her aunt no longer harped upon the amount of his income. She owed to herself that many a girl in her position would have been glad to accept the hand and heart of this stalwart, good-looking, loud-voiced Irishman. She grew accustomed to his noisy laugh, his boisterous gaiety, his energetic declamation. His animal spirits in this rare holiday time made him as boisterous as an overgrown schoolboy ; and there is always something pleasant in the fresh joyousness of a schoolboy in the abstract, however obnoxious that member of society may make himself in the

concrete. Lady Ceecil, who had begun by thinking Laurence O'Boyneville the most unpleasant of men, came to consider him as a person whose friendship at least was worth possessing.

He had spent a week at Nasedale, talking every morning of leaving before night, and lingering day after day until the week was out! But at last he announced his departure so positively, that to have changed his mind after such an announcement would have been a weakness unworthy a man of business. A vacancy had arisen in a certain northern borough, and some of Mr. O'Boyneville's friends had persuaded him to allow himself to be put in nomination. To linger longer in that garden of Armida called Nasedale would be to endanger this new ambition. Every body was loud in lamentation of his departure, with the exception of those younger and more superciliously indifferent gentlemen whom he had made a point of annihilating once or twice in the course of every evening.

The feminine portion of the community was not behind-hand in the expression of regret. The young ladies declared they should miss Mr. O'Boyneville "terribly," "awfully;" one rather fast young lady went so far as to say "disgustingly." Had he not appointed himself the umpire of their toxophilite matches? Had he not learned the whole art of croquet in half an hour, and then insisted on playing after a fashion of his own, whereby he had split a dozen or so of walnut-wood balls in a week? Had he not thrown them into convulsions of laughter one evening by conducting a mock trial of a case of breach of promise,—the broken pledge being that of a botanically-disposed young gentleman who had promised to go out for a woodland ramble with three botanically-disposed young ladies, and had gone partridge shooting instead? Was he not the most delightful middle-aged creature in existence?—and not so dreadfully middle-aged either, for he could scarcely be forty—and what is forty, but the prime of life, the meridian of intellectual splendour?

To such discourse as this Ceecil had to listen during the rainy morning which succeeded Mr. O'Boyneville's departure. The feminine assembly in the pretty old-fashioned painted drawing-room enlivened the labours of *décalcomanie* and Berlin wool-work with their praises of the departed barrister.

The matrons were as enthusiastic as their daughters. Of all partners at whist there was no one they had ever met so invincible as Mr. O'Boyneville, although he had declared that he had not handled a card since his boyhood; and then he was so unlike the young men who call a middle-aged lady "a venerable party," and a sober married man a "dozy old bird."

And then—and then—and then—there seemed no end to the feminine laudation of Laurence O'Boyneville. Only two ladies in that assembly were silent, and those two were Cecil Chudleigh and Mrs. MacClaverhouse. But an occasional impatient sniff from the dowager gave evidence of her state of mind.

He was gone, and every one was loud in his praise. He was gone; and though Cecil Chudleigh had only been accustomed to his presence within the last six or seven days, the place seemed to her just a little dull and empty without him, and she was fain to confess to herself that she as well as the others missed the sound of his sonorous voice, the gaiety of his boisterous laugh.

And from thinking of the departed Queen's Counsel, she went on, by some indefinable train of thought, to pondering upon the dull blank life of spinsterhood and poverty that lay before her; to muse a little sadly upon the text of all her aunt's sermons—her lonely helplessness, her penniless dependence. The present was well enough so long as it lasted. She was happy, or at any rate, content, even though the dowager's temper grew sharper, and the dowager's tongue more bitter, every day. She was resigned to the prospect of alternating between Dorset Square and watering-places and other people's houses for the rest of her life. But there were times when her pride revolted against the whole scheme of her existence, and a vision of the future arose before her, blank and terrible. She was such an unnecessary creature, such a mere waif and stray, to be drifted hither and thither on every tide which carried her kinswoman; a lady's-maid without a lady's-maid's wages; a slave without a slave's apathy.

"Perhaps my aunt is right after all," she thought, bitterly, "and I have been foolish to throw away any chance that would have given me release from such an existence."

The day was wet, and dull, and miserable; the sort of day so harmoniously described in Mr. Longfellow's poem. The dead leaves fell from the dripping trees in the park, and the splash of the rain upon the terrace made a monotonous accompaniment to conversation. The gentlemen of the household had defied Jupiter Pluvius, and had set off at early morning, provided with water-proof garments and the clumpiest of shooting-boots, to wage war upon innocent young partridges in stubble and turnip-field. But they came home at three; and after a tremendous luncheon and a careful toilet, presented themselves in the drawing-room, where they proposed an immediate adjournment for a game of billiards.

The young ladies were delighted to accept the invitation. Two or three good-natured matrons consented to join the party; while less vivacious dames discovered suddenly that

they had important letters to write in their own rooms, which important correspondence was popularly supposed to be the ladylike excuse for an after-luncheon nap. Mrs. MacClaver-house was among the matrons who retired to her apartment.

"I suppose you'll come up stairs to have some tea at six, Lady Cecil," she said to her niece, whom she had addressed in this ceremonious manner throughout the visit of Mr. O'Boyneville.

"But you'll come and play, Lady Cecil?" cried one of the young ladies.

"No, thank you, dear; I, too, have got some letters to write."

"I don't believe a bit in people's letters!" exclaimed the impetuous young damsel. "Letter-writing in country-houses is nothing but an excuse for being unsociable;—isn't it, dear Mrs. Mountjoy? If I were you I'd put up an inscription over my hall-door: 'No letters to be written on any pretence whatever.' I would do away with the post-bag, and oblige my visitors to correspond with friends at a distance by electric telegraph."

After which the lively damsel skipped off with her arm encircling her dear Mrs. Mountjoy's waist, and Cecil found herself alone in the drawing-room.

Of course she had letters to write—if she found herself equal to the labour of writing them. Where is the civilised being who can honestly declare that he or she has wronged no man in the matter of neglected correspondence? Cecil was deeply in debt to half-a-dozen lively friends who wrote her long descriptions of the places where they were staying, and were eager to receive her account of the place where she was staying, and the people whom she met there. She was in debt to Flo, who sent her voluminous epistles from Brighton, with pen-and-ink sketches of eccentric costumes to be seen on the King's Road, and caricatures of Mr. Lobyer in divers attitudes. He passed the greater part of his existence on the Brighton Railway, Flo told her friend. "And if the Brighton line were not the best in England, the unhappy being would be reduced to a state of imbecility by the effects of railway-travelling," added Miss Crawford.

Cecil meant to write her letters before the first dinner-bell rang; but when the billiard-players had left her, she sank into a luxurious easy-chair by the fire, and sat looking dreamily at the red coals. She was in one of those melancholy moods which come upon a woman sometimes without any tangible reason, but which are not the less sad because their sadness is vague and intangible. For the moment she abandoned herself utterly to sorrowful musings. The past—that shadowy past

which always comes back to the gayest of us with a sorrowful aspect, returned to Cecil as she brooded over the low, neglected fire. Her father, her mother—the loved and lost—whose faces had once made the sole brightness of her life, looked at her once more out of the shadows. She thought of what her life might have been if her father's fortune had never been wasted. Before her sad eyes arose the picture of the home that might have been hers if her only brother had lived to mend his wild ways and hold his own among honest men.

"I should never have felt this bitter sense of loneliness if my brother had been my protector, she thought. "There is something in my aunt's kindness—even when she is most kind—that reminds me how little right I have to her love or protection."

Abandoned to such melancholy thoughts as these, Cecil kept little note of the progress of time. A servant came into the room to replenish the fire, but his coming and going did not arouse her from her sombre reverie. The dull afternoon sky grew duller, and her thoughts grew sadder as the sky darkened. A bell rang, but she took no heed of its ringing. What was it to her who came or went? In the utter solitude of her life there was no room for care, for there was no one upon earth except her aunt whose fate was in any way involved with her own. She heard a rapid footstep in the hall, a hand turning the handle of the door, and she shrugged her shoulders impatiently, knowing that she would have to put aside her sorrowful thoughts, to smile upon the intruder.

She looked up as the door opened, and it was with unmitigated astonishment that she beheld Laurence O'Boyneville.

"Mr. O'Boyneville! I thought you had left us for good?"

"And so I had, Lady Cecil, as I thought. But there are some places, or rather some people, whom it is very difficult to leave. I have been to London, got through a gigantic day's business, made arrangements for starting on my parliamentary work to-morrow instead of to-day, and have come back here—for an hour."

"For an hour?" echoed Cecil.

"Yes," answered the barrister, taking out his watch, and comparing it with the clock on the mantelpiece. "It's now half-past five by me; though it's only a quarter-past by my friend Mephistopheles and the ivy-leaves. At 7.36 the up-train leaves that miserable shed called Desborough station. I was lucky enough to get a fly this time, and the antiquated vehicle is waiting for me."

"I fear Mr. Mountjoy has gone out," said Cecil, who imagined that her late admirer must needs have some important business to transact with his host, since only some

affair of importance could have brought him back so hurriedly. "But you will find almost every body in the billiard-room, and no doubt some one there will be able to tell you where he is."

"You are very good; but I don't want to see Mr. Mountjoy."

"You don't?"

"Not——" Mr. O'Boyneville was on the verge of saying "Not a ha'porth," but he substituted, "not in the least. In fact, I'm very grateful to the dear old fellow for being out of the way. I have come back to see you, Lady Cecil."

There was a little pause. Cecil could find nothing to say. The sense of Mr. O'Boyneville's power subjugated her as she had never before been subjugated. She was like the weakest of little birds who was ever spell-bound by the gaze of a monster serpent.

Whether it was animal magnetism, whether it was the intellectual force of a dominant will, she never knew. From first to last, she knew only that Laurence O'Boyneville exercised an influence over her which no other living creature had ever exercised, and that she was powerless to resist his dominion.

The Irishman seated himself, and drew his chair close to hers.

"Cecil," he said, "why should we trifle with our destiny? In the first hour in which I saw you, something told me that you were to be my wife, and in pursuing you I have only obeyed the voice of my fate. I am not a romantic man, and the current of my life has taken its course between the most arid and blossomless shores that border the great river: but some remnant of my national superstition clings to me still; and from the first moment in which I looked upon you, I felt that you were something more to me than the crowds of pretty women whose faces have floated past me like the faces of a dream. You have thought me insolent, presumptuous! Believe me, Lady Cecil, I have been neither. It has been no confidence in my own merits that has made me so bold. I have been bold only because I believed in my fate. When I came here, I came at peril of hopes that had once been the brightest part of my life. The man whose dinner-table I left unceremoniously to come to this house is a man who can raise me to the bench. I, to whom social life is almost as strange as it would be to an Ojibbeway, have wasted a week in knocking about wooden balls and holding bad hands at long whist. And I have done this because I wanted to be near you, Lady Cecil. I knew from the first that you were intended to be my wife, and that it rested with me alone to win

you. Cecil, dear Cecil, are you going to fly in the face of your destiny?"

These were the tenderest words he had ever addressed to her. His voice, practised in every transition, sank to its most melodious tones as he uttered these last words. Perhaps there is some magnetic power in such a voice. Cecil, looking up at the earnest face that was bent towards hers, felt herself subdued by some wondrous fascination, and knew that she had found her master. Had he wooed her at any other moment it might have been different; but he came to her in an interval of depression, which had subdued her courage and crushed her pride. Never had the dull stagnation of her life seemed to her so dull and hopeless as it had seemed to-day. Never had the prospect of the future appeared so utterly blank and empty. Her aunt's sermonising, her sense of loneliness, her yearning desire for some change in the routine of her profitless life, all conspired to strengthen the cause of Mr. O'Boyneville.

"Cecil, are you going to send me away again?"

"Suppose I do not believe in your fatalistic theory?" she asked, with a faint attempt at a laugh.

"Your incredulity will not help you. What is it the Turks say? 'Kismet'—It is written. You are to be my wife, Lady Cecil. It is only a question of time, and why should we waste time in discussion? Sooner or later the hour of victory will come. Cecil, you thought me an impertinent fool when I first told you of my love; you know me better now, and you must know that I am in earnest. I have kept myself aloof from you during the last week in order to show you that I can obey you. If I disobey you in coming back to-day, it is because I obey my fate, which is stronger than you."

Mr. O'Boyneville had composed this little speech during his downward journey, and was rather inclined to be proud of it.

"Cecil, what is to be my answer?"

For some moments Lady Cecil was silent, her head averted from Mr. O'Boyneville, her eyes looking dreamily at the fire. She was so lonely, so unprotected; and here was this man, whose intellectual power impressed her with a sense of protection and support; here was this man, whom she had scorned and rejected, once more at her side, too faithful to accept repulse, still eager to give her shelter and affection, to lift her from the dreary uncertainty of her position into woman's most fitting sphere. An hour ago, and she had felt herself so utterly friendless; and now here were the love and devotion of a lifetime lying at her feet, to be again rejected if she pleased. It seemed almost as if Providence, taking compas-

sion upon her loneliness, had thrown this one last chance in her way.

Her voice trembled a little as she answered her lover.

"I do not know what I have done to deserve your love," she said; "but I suppose love never yet was measured by desert. I do know that I cannot give you what the world calls love in return. The only person I ever loved left me to marry another woman. He left me because it was his duty to do so; and I was proud of him because he was so good and true. He is married now, and I have every reason to believe he is happy. There is little chance that he and I will ever meet again; but if we do, we shall meet as strangers. It was my bounden duty to tell you this, Mr. O'Boyneville, before I answered your last question. Has my confession altered your sentiments towards me?"

"No, Lady Cecel; it has only made me admire you a little more than I did before. Do you think I expected to win the whole heart of such a woman as you, all at once? No, Cecel; when a man loves the woman he marries as truly as I love you, it must be his own fault if he does not teach her to love him before the end of the chapter, always provided she is a good woman."

"And you still offer me your affection?"

"I do. As heartily and as unreservedly as I offered it to you in the first instance."

"And you will be my friend, my protector, my counsellor, all the wide world to me—for I am very friendless—and will be contented with such gratitude and such affection as a woman gives to the best and dearest friend she has on earth?"

"More than content! unutterably happy!" cried Laurenee O'Boyneville; "and by Jove it's a quarter to six, and it's as much as I shall do to catch the up-train," he added, in his most business-like manner, as he started to his feet. He only lingered long enough to take Lady Cecel in his arms, as if she had been a baby, to imprint one resounding kiss upon her forehead, and to exclaim, "God bless you, and good-bye, my darling!" and lo, he was gone.

"And I shall have a friend—a husband and protector—a home," thought Cecel, with a thrill of happiness, such as she would a few hours before have been slow to believe could have been inspired by Laurenee O'Boyneville.

She was glad to be bound to some one, to have some one bound to her; glad to be the promised wife of this Irish barrister, whom she had so lately spoken of shudderingly as a dreadful man.

CHAPTER XIII.

CECIL'S HONEYMOON.

BEFORE the end of the year Cecil Chudleigh had become Cecil O'Boyneville. The barrister was not a man to lose time in making himself master of the citadel that had capitulated, and having once obtained Cecil's consent to be his wife, he moved heaven and earth to bring about a speedy marriage. The powers that be were in this instance represented by Mrs. MacClaverhouse and the Mountjoys. The dowager was delighted to marry her penniless niece to a man who confessed that his professional income was over two thousand a-year, and that he had invested between ten and fifteen thousand in certain very profitable railway shares, the interest of which he was prepared to settle upon Lady Cecil during his lifetime, while the principal would be hers at his death. The Mountjoys and all the Nasedale visitors were delighted by the idea of a wedding, and young ladies who had heard of Cecil's engagement from Mrs. Mountjoy, and were anxious to disport themselves as bridesmaids, besieged the poor girl with entreaties, and bewildered her with their praises of Mr. O'Boyneville.

*Against so much friendly persuasion, with the mighty O'Boyneville swooping down upon her suddenly by all manner of express trains, and by every complication of loop-line and junction, Cecil was powerless to make any successful resistance. She had promised to be his wife. She was grateful for his affection, and she looked forward with a sense of relief to the marriage which was at least to be the end of her dependence. And then Laurence O'Boyneville's influence was not without its weight. From the hour in which Cecil had promised to be his wife, his power over her had grown stronger with every moment she spent in his society. The strength of will which had carried him triumphantly over all the obstacles in his path sustained him here; the singleness of his purpose, the depth of his feeling, invested him with a kind of dignity. That combined force of a strong will and brilliant intellect had an almost magnetic influence over Cecil. If she did not love her future husband, she at least felt that it was something to be loved by such a man, and the strong current of his will drifted her along with it. Walking in the avenue of Nasedale, under a dull October sky, with her hand under Laurence O'Boyneville's arm, and inspired with some vague sense of protection by the stalwart figure that sheltered her from the

autumn wind, Cecil consented that the wedding should take place early in November. She could not oppose her lover's wishes. From the moment in which she had accepted his devotion, Mr. O'Boyneville had in a manner taken possession of her judgment and her will ; and it mattered little when he claimed her entirely for his own.

"You are so good, Laurence," she said once, "and I have such a sense of protection in your presence, that I sometimes fancy you are like a new father to me. Indeed, you have more influence over me than my father had, though I loved him very, very dearly. I suppose it is because your will is so much stronger than his."

Mr. O'Boyneville nodded, and pressed the little hand resting on his arm. Another man of forty engaged to a woman of twenty-two might have been slightly disconcerted by Cecil's speech ; but Laurence had implicit faith in the divine right of honest love, and in his thoughts there was no shadow of fear for the future.

"I must be a fool indeed if I can't teach her to love me, loving her as I do," he thought.

Backwards and forwards, by loop-line and junction, by midnight express and morning mail, rushing through the chill mists and fogs of autumnal dawn, sped Mr. O'Boyneville, all through that bleak October. He took his rest in snug corners of railway carriages, and lived upon sandwiches, peppery soups, and adulterated coffee. His electioneering business went on as smoothly as his love-suit, and provincial electors yielded readily to the beguiling accents of the Hibernian candidate. But the candidate's heart was at Nasedale, and he sacrificed his parliamentary ambition to his love for Cecil. He made light of two or three hundred miles of cross-country travelling, if thereby he could obtain a quiet day with his future wife. To walk with her in the long avenue ; to stand with his back to the fire, talking to her as she bent over her work ; to drive her in a mail-phæton, with a couple of merry girls in the back seat, and a pair of the most unmanageable horses in the judge's stables devouring the road before him,—these things delighted the man who had spent the best years of his life amidst the clamour of law courts, and in the dull quiet of dingy chambers. There was very little in common between himself and the woman he loved. But he had that dash of romance which the hardest friction of a practical existence cannot entirely obliterate from the composition of an Irishman ; and he was really and truly in love.

So one misty morning in November the bells pealed gaily from the village church, whose Norman tower loomed dark above the leafless woods of Nasedale Park ; and the Nasedale

servants were gay and busy. It was to be a quiet wedding. Cecil had been earnest in her entreaties that there might be no unnecessary trouble incurred by her cordial friends; but the childless Mountjoys were as pleased as if they had been arranging a daughter's marriage ceremonial.

"I shall be quite angry if you talk about trouble, my dear Cecil," said the kind-hearted hostess. "Here have Moratio and I been puzzling our brains to find out something or other to enliven the house in this wretched weather; and just at the very time when we were most at a loss for amusement and occupation, this marriage of yours happens to afford us both. You don't know what it is, my dear, to have nine marriageable girls in a house, with only three unmarried men, and those three more listless, and lazy, and stupid than words can describe, or you wouldn't talk of giving trouble. All I dread is the reaction which we shall suffer when it's all over, and you and Mr. O'Boyneville have gone to Ireland."

Thus it happened, that although it had been promised that the wedding should be a private one, the programme of the day grew to an alarming extent before the day arrived. The officers who had assisted at the archery meeting were invited to the breakfast, much to the delight of the nine young ladies, and much to the aggravation of the three listless young gentlemen, who gave utterance to the most crushing sarcasms when the martial visitors were alluded to, and affected to consider the profession of arms entirely incompatible with the faintest scintillation of intelligence, or the smallest modicum of education.

"Yes," drawled the most listless of the listless ones, "Captain Harduppe is a remarkably fine fellow. Of course it's a great merit in a man to be six foot two and three-quarters, and a merit which society is bound to recognise. But did any body ever hear the captain read? or did any body ever see the captain write? It's my belief that the greatest pull the Jew-bill-discounters have over their military customers lies in the fact that they witness the agonies which the martial mind experiences in the process of signing its name; and it's also my belief that when a cavalry officer takes up the *Times* and throws it down again, exclaiming, 'Haw! nothing in the papaws to-day, I s'ppose,' he docs so simply because he can't read."

Of course Mr. O'Boyneville, happening to overhear some such speech as this, arose in his might and crushed the scorner, proving that from the days of Cæsar, whom in the excitement of argument he called "Sayzer," to the time of the conqueror of Waterloo, soldiers had been even more renowned for the power of their intellect than for the prowess of their arms,

and that the helmet and buckler of Minerva were only typical of the fact that from the earliest period of history, wisdom and valour had gone hand-in-hand.

Through the misty November morning went the train of carriages to the little church where Mr. O'Boyneville awaited his bride, after spending the night on loop-line and at junction, and after making a hurried toilet at the village inn.

There was no rain, only a soft autumnal mist, which took the fresh crispness out of tulle bonnets, and the artificial undulations out of feminine *bandeaux*. But the wedding was a success in spite of the weather. There was no weeping during the ceremonial, and it was only when the dowager kissed her niece in the vestry that one solitary teardrop glittered in each of that matron's piercing eyes. The bridegroom was in the highest spirits, though in the midst of his gaiety a very close observer—if such people ever were to be found in a wedding-party—might have detected an under current of deeper feeling near akin to tears.

There was the usual monument of crystallised sugar, and silver foliage, and artificial orange-blossom; the usual combination of the savoury solidity of Fortnum and Mason, with the airy frivolity and bilious sweetness of Gunter; the usual popping of corks, and pleasant sound of frozen liquids trickling into cool, fragile glasses; the usual protestations from young ladies who infinitely preferred tea or coffee to sparkling hock or moselle, but who, overcome by masculine persuasion, generally ended by drinking the latter; the usual open renunciation of her sex from the one fast young lady generally to be found in every party, who always happens to sit next an officer, and who tells him confidentially that she likes sparkling moselle, and doesn't believe in the girls who pretend not to like it.

Nor could the breakfast reasonably be expected to come to an end without a little speechifying. The judge, in a few appropriate, well-rounded sentences, invoked for his guests all those impossible blessings which it is the fashion to pray for at a wedding-breakfast; while, in the heat of returning thanks for these good wishes, Mr. O'Boyneville was betrayed into speaking of his host as "his ludship," and on more than one occasion addressed his audience as "ladies and gentlemen of the jury." And by-and-by appeared the traditional chariot and post-horses, driven by that blue and antique postillion who seems to emerge from the shadows of the past only on such occasions. And then there was a little animated flirtation in the hall among the nine unmarried young ladies and the cavalry officers; while the listless young gentlemen looked on with countenances expressive of unutterable scorn; and elderly An-

glo-Indian merchants and lawyers, and red-faced Anglo-Indian colonels and majors gathered comfortably round their host at one end of the long table in the dining-room, telling old Anglo-Indian stories, and laughing at old Anglo-Indian jokes.

In due time Lady Cecil came down the broad old-fashioned staircase, dressed in pale-grey silk, and wearing an airy bonnet that seemed constructed solely with a grey feather and a large full-blown blush-rose, while the handsomest of her aunt's Indian shawls draped her slender figure like a classic mantle of scarlet and gold. Mrs. MacClaverhouse had insisted upon her niece wearing this shawl and no other.

"It's the last but one that stupid extravagant Hector sent me, and if I know *any thing* about Indian shawls, I know that this one must have cost him something like a hundred guineas; and as I'm not rich enough to buy you a wedding-present, you must take this, Cecil,—though why the fact of a person being married should oblige other people to half ruin themselves in the purchase of bracelets and dressing-cases is more than I can understand. However, that has nothing to do with you and me, Cecil. I'm your aunt, and your nearest living relative, so it would be hard indeed if I couldn't give you something; and if you don't take Hector's shawl I shall be very much offended: and mind you don't go wasting your husband's money on trumpery Dresden china; for when I'm dead and gone you'll have more mandarin jars, and carved ivory chessmen, and inlaid caskets, and envelope-boxes, than you'll know what to do with."

Whereupon Mrs. MacClaverhouse kissed her niece, shed one more solitary tear, which she brushed away sharply, and followed the bride down the staircase. And so it happened that Cecil went to her husband wrapped in the shawl which Hector Gordon had chosen in Calcutta three years before.

The traditionary chariot and post-horses drove away amidst a volley of cheers; and the very fast young lady, who was rather proud of her foot, launched a fairy bronze boot into the air as the bridal chariot departed, the heel of which fairy boot coming in contact with the eyebrow of one of the listless gentlemen, inflicted a blow that ultimately resulted in that vulgar appearance of mingled blues and greens which is popularly described as a black eye.

The last which the Nasedale party saw of the bride and bridegroom was Mr. O'Boyneville's radiant face at the carriage-window, and Mr. O'Boyneville's big white hand waving a parting salutation. And then the Irishman realised the fondest desire of his later years. He went back to the land of his youth, and with his young wife by his side trod once more the country of his birth. He had consulted Cecil's wishes as to

that honeymoon tour ; but as he had previously revealed his own yearning for a glimpse of his native town, the river and mountains so familiar to his childhood, she set aside all thought of her own inclination.

"Let us go to Ireland," she said ; "I know you wish to see your own country once more, and it will be all new ground to me."

"You really wish to see Ireland ?"

"Really."

"Then we will go there—but only on one condition. There is a place in Devonshire I have heard you talk of—the place where your childhood was spent. We will get across country somehow or other from Holyhead, and we will visit it together, Cecil."

She looked up at her lover, and smiled. Of all pleasures that he could have offered to her this was the sweetest. The thought was one of the inspirations of love.

So Mr. O'Boyneville took his wife to Ireland in the dull November weather. There are autumnal seasons in which "the rain it raineth every day" in this green isle encircled by the sea ; and it seemed to Cecil as if a new deluge were about to blot fair Hibernia from the universe. It was no fitting season, nor had the barrister sufficient leisure for the ordinary pleasure-seeker's tour. The newly-wedded pair spent a few wet days in Dublin, driving in the Phoenix Park, where the autumn sunsets were very beautiful to behold in the brief intervals of the rain ; and then one bleak early morning an express train bore Cecil and her husband southward to Shannonville, and under the cloudy November skies Laurence O'Boyneville once more beheld the city of his youth. He had looked forward with such a fond yearning to the day in which he should tread those familiar streets once more ; and now the day had come, and the long dreamed-of pleasure was a very sad sensation after all. The glory of Shannonville had fled since the Irishman last had looked upon it, and the sight of its decay smote him to the heart. Modern civilisation and the mighty steam demon who makes naught of distance, and but little of time, had left Shannonville far behind. Commerce had no longer need of that far southern port ; and where rich granaries had stored the wealth of southern Ireland, empty storehouses looked blankly on a deserted quay. There, where the vessels of many traders had jostled one another in the crowded docks, a fisherman's *Briccawn* was slackly moored by a rotting rope. The broad streets were standing yet, but the crowd that had once made them gay had vanished. The elub-house was still called a club-house ; but where were the noisy revellers who had once made its

walls resonant with their boisterous laughter? And the dashing young men, and the lovely blue-eyed maidens, whose presence had rendered the chief thoroughfare of Shannonville so delightful a promenade—where were they? Gone—gone! Only pinched faces looked up at the hotel-windows where Cecil gazed sadly out upon her husband's native city. Only squalor and misery, ruin and decay, greeted Laurence O'Boyneville as he walked slowly along the deserted quays, looking for the vanished brightness of his youth. He went back to his wife sick at heart.

"The place is as dreary as a city of the dead, Cecil," he said. "I have brought you to desolation and ruin, my darling. We'll leave Shannonville by the first train to-morrow morning. The sight of the old place cuts me to the heart."

But Mr. O'Boyneville grew tolerably cheerful by-and-by, and took his wife to dine with the oldest friends he had—the oldest surviving friends, for there was a sad list of the dead whom he had known and loved in Shannonville. Lady Cecil was pleased with the kind simple people, who received her with open arms, and were unceasing in their praises of her husband's youthful virtues. The twenty years of his professional career seemed to melt away like a dream as he sat in that Shannonville drawing-room, where tall young ladies whom he had dandled in his strong arms looked at him wonderingly, and where youthful matrons, whom he remembered as tiny toddling children, brought their tiny toddling children to his middle-aged knees.

People talked as if events of a quarter of a century back had been the events of yesterday. "And don't you remember the picnic at Nikdeilslootheram, Laurence?" "And I'm sure you've not forgotten the dance at Mr. O'Hennesy's, when Patrick MacShindy proposed to Flora Machrae in the little back-parlour, and old Mr. O'Kelly caught him on his knees?" "And don't you remember the murder at Castle Sloggerom, and Major O'Wokes riding fifty miles across country on his chestnut mare, Devil's-hoof, to take the scoundrel that did it? Ah, Laurence, Shannonville's but a quiet place now, and you'd scarcely know it if you came back amongst us again."

But even that genial evening amongst old friends could not quite restore Mr. O'Boyneville's spirits.

"I'm sure you won't care to stay here, Cecil," he said, as they drove home to the hotel; "and I think my heart would break if I spent a week in the place."

So in the bleak November, under another cloudy sky, and with another day's ceaseless rain pattering against the windows of the railway carriage, Cecil and her husband went back to Dublin, and from Dublin to Holyhead, and thence across

country to Excter, and then to Chudleigh Combe. Here there was no sign of decay, save the beautiful decay of nature. Commercial civilisation had never approached within twenty miles of the secluded old mansion half buried in the woods; and the eternal loveliness of nature is subject to no changes, save those gradual transitions through which she passes for ever and ever, serenely beautiful in every phase.

The old woman who had charge of the deserted mansion was very glad to admit Mr. O'Boyneville and his wife; for the portly presence of the barrister, and the carriage and pair that had brought them from the nearest post-town, augured a handsome recompense for her trouble. She led the visitors through the empty rooms, where the atmosphere was chill and musty, and where the mice behind the wainscot scampered away at the sound of the intruders' footfall. The old-fashioned furniture had a wasted, half-starved look to modern eyes. It seemed as if the chairs and tables had been sentient things, and were slowly perishing from inanition. As the aspect of Shannonville had depressed Mr. O'Boyneville, so the cold dampness of this untenanted mansion depressed Cecil.

"I can't bear to see the dear old rooms looking so cold and cheerless," she said. "I can show you the very chair in which grandmamma used to sit; the little table on which I used to write."

She opened an old-fashioned square piano, and ran her fingers gently along the keys; but, tenderly as she touched the notes, the instrument gave out a shrill discordant wail that was almost like the shriek of a banshee. But if the aspect of the place saddened Mr. O'Boyneville's young wife, her sadness was not all pain: there was a tender pleasure mingled with her regret.

"You could never guess how often I have seen the old place in my dreams, Laurence," she said, "amidst all the confusion, and contradiction, and absurdity that make dreams so bewildering. I have seen dead people restored to life, and have felt no surprise in seeing them. In a dream one always seems to forget that there is any such thing as death. I thank you a thousand times for bringing me here, Laurence. You could never believe how much I have wished to see the dear old home again."

"And now you see it in the hands of a stranger, and going to ruin, Cecil," said Mr. O'Boyneville. "The water comes through all the ceilings up stairs; and if the man who owns the place doesn't take care what he's about, there'll be a new roof wanted before very long."

But the old woman hereupon explained that the ownership was at present vested in the Court of Chancery. A suit was

in progress, and had been in progress for the last three years, on settlement of which the entire property was to be realised for the benefit of the disputants.

"And if the place is to be worth any body's buying, it had need be sold soon," said the old woman, "for the rain do come in here and the rain do come in there, and the wind do come in everywhere, and the rats gnaw holes in the wainscot, and eat their way through the flooring, and the windows rattle of a winter's night to that degree, that the house isn't fit for a Christian to live in."

"A few hundreds laid out upon it would make it comfortable enough," said the practical Mr. O'Boyneville; "but I don't see how the place could ever be worth more than a hundred a-year at this distance from London; and it must sell as cheap as rags to give you five per cent. for your money."

Oh, if I had only been rich enough to buy it! she thought. She did not know any thing about percentages or profitable investments; but if she had been free to do her own will, she would have given every sixpence she possessed in the world to be owner of Chudleigh Combe.

And yet she never thought of asking Mr. O'Boyneville to purchase the dwelling-place she loved with some portion of the money he had settled upon her. She had tried with all her might to prevent the making of that settlement, and had told her lover that under no circumstances could she ever bring herself to look upon the money as her own.

"I have very little use for what people call pin-money," she said, "for you know, Laurence, that I have been accustomed all my life to be economical. Let me have fifty or sixty pounds a-year for my clothes if you like, and I will dress as well as I have ever been used to dress. But I don't want to be extravagant because you are generous."

The barrister kissed his affianced bride, and told her that she was an angel, and that she dressed exquisitely; but the settlement was made nevertheless, and Mrs. MacClaverhouse declared that Laurence O'Boyneville had acted nobly.

And during the visit to Chudleigh Combe he was very kind and very patient; though he examined the window-sashes, and sounded the partitions, and rattled the locks, and poked the ceilings, and peered up the chimneys, and jumped upon the floors with a view to testing the strength of the timbers, and altogether behaved in a more practical way than quite harmonised with Cecil's pensive spirit: but he gave her plenty of time for tender meditations while he prowled amongst stables and offices, tasted the water from a couple of pumps in a long stone courtyard, and measured the length and breadth of the grounds with a surveyor's accurate three-foot stride

It was only when the autumn afternoon was deepening into evening that he swooped down upon Cecily, as she stood on the lawn by a rustic basket—that had once held such a wealth of geraniums, and in which now only a few straggling sprigs of mignonette lingered amid a wilderness of weeds—and asked her sharply if she was ready to go away.

"Yes, Laurence," she said, "quite ready."

And then, as they walked back to the carriage, she said, rather to herself than to her husband:

"I wonder who will buy Chudleigh Combe?"

"Ah, so do I," cried Mr. O'Boyneville, swinging his stick; "he'll have to spend something like a thousand pounds upon the place before he makes it habitable, whoever he is."

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. LOBYER'S WOOING.

ANOTHER season had commenced. The carriages in the Lady's Mile were gathering thicker every day, though as yet there was not a leaflet on the trees in Hyde Park, nor a ray of warm sunshine on the Serpentine. January the bitter had given place to February the uncertain, when Florence Crawford tore herself away from the blustering delights of the Brighton Esplanade, in obedience to her father's summons. She had been staying with some stylish friends, who had taken a house on the East Cliff; while William Crawford made the best of the dark short days, working steadily at a picture which was to be one of the glories of the Academy in the coming season.

Florence Crawford had not exaggerated her wealthy admirer's devotion. Mr. Lobyer had spent the winter in perpetual rushing to and fro between London and Brighton. Another man, as deeply smitten as Mr. Lobyer, would have been content to have taken up his abode at Piccadilly-supernumery, and to have devoted himself entirely to the society of his enchantress. But Miss Crawford's admirer could not altogether tear himself away from the companions of his bachelor life. There were winter races, and mysterious pugilistic meetings, and secret cock-fightings, and divers other entertainments connected with the animal creation, from the delights of which beauty was powerless to beguile Mr. Lobyer.

He wanted to marry Florence Crawford, and he meant to marry her. The more completely she held him at bay, and defied him by her coquetry and insolence, the more dogged he became in his determination to win her for his wife. He ad-

mired her beauty, her grace, her piquancy ; and he thought it would be a fine thing to have such a woman seated at the head of his table, or sitting by his side in his mail-phaeton, with the most thoroughbred of bull-terriers on her lap, and a forty-guinea tiger-skin over her knees. He admired every thing that was gorgeous and expensive, and out of the reach of that large class of humanity whose members did not possess bankers' books, and whom he contemptuously generalised as "cads." He admired Florence Crawford because, in his own phraseology, she was the best thing he had seen in the way of girls. But he had carefully considered the prudence of the step before he committed himself by any deliberate avowal of his admiration.

"I might marry a woman with plenty of money," he thought ; "but then I shouldn't have much of a choice. I like to choose my horses and dogs, and I should like to choose my wife. Florence Crawford must have *some* money, for she's an only child, and those painter-fellows make no end of money nowadays ; and as Crawford has been a widower sixteen or seventeen years, I don't suppose there's much chance of his making an idiot of himself by marrying again."

After regarding the matter with extreme deliberation, Mr. Lobyer arrived at the conclusion that he might as well gratify his own inclination and marry the painter's daughter, whose bewitchingly disdainful airs gave a zest to his courtship.

So when Florence went back to the Fountains, she returned as the affianced wife of Thomas Lobyer ; and she carried in one of her pormanteaus a casket of jewels which winked and twinkled in the cold winter sunshine when she lifted the lid to peep at her treasures.

She had left the East Cliff radiant with feminine vanity, bright with the golden halo of success ; for her friends knew that before the year was out she would be mistress of Pevcnshall Place and a West-end mansion ; and she knew that they envied her good fortune. Mr. Lobyer's society was not eminently delightful ; but Mr. Lobyer's mail-phaeton and thoroughbred steppers were absolute perfection. Mr. Lobyer's conversational powers were very limited ; but the establishments of Brighton jewellers are more fascinating than any other jewel-shops in England, and are scarcely to be surpassed by the glories of the Rue de la Paix. And Mr. Lobyer had been a liberal customer in Castle Square.

William Crawford had heard of his daughter's conquest, and had been congratulated upon the brilliancy of her prospects ; but he had not taken upon himself to interfere with her arrangements. The manners and ideas of modern young ladies were something past the pure-minded artist's powers of

comprehension. He remembered his wife with her primitive notions and womanly tenderness, so fond, so clinging, so loving, so girlishly sentimental, so quick to be pleased with any simple pleasure, so ready to be frightened by a harsh word, or moved to tears by a tender thought; and remembering her, he was utterly bewildered by the daughter, who was so like and yet so unlike that lost darling. Whether the sentiments which Florence openly professed were the expression of her real feelings or only the fashionable cant of her sex, Mr. Crawford was at a loss to imagine; but the tone of her conversation gave him unspeakable pain. This daughter, who spoke of him as "a dear old party," and who pronounced his best picture to be "awfully jolly," was so unlike the daughter he had dreamed of welcoming to the home of his prosperity.

He knew that she was charming; that slang from her lips took a new accent, and assumed a pretty quaintness in place of its native vulgarity. He had seen that her heart needed only to be awakened by some piteous appeal, some sorrowful spectacle, to reveal itself rich in all womanly tenderness and compassion. But she was not the daughter of his dreams.

"I am punished for my cowardice," he thought. "I was afraid to face the struggles of poverty with my child in my arms. I gave her into the hands of strangers, and I am fool enough to wonder now that she is strange to me."

Miss Crawford tripped into the painting-room immediately after her arrival at the Fountains, and elevated herself on tiptoe in order to embrace her father.

"You dear old darling, how you do smell of varnish!" she cried, after bestowing a kiss upon each of his cheeks. "Are you using copal for your new picture?—dreadfully stiff stuff to work with, isn't it? And what is the new picture? You didn't tell me that in any of your letters, and I've been dying to know. I suppose I may look?"

Before the painter could reply, his daughter had planted herself before the easel, and was contemplating his unfinished work.

"As long as it's nothing about Marie Antoinette, Mary Queen of Scots, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, or the Vicar of Wakefield, I'm satisfied," she said.

She stood looking at the picture for some minutes, and then shrugged her shoulders impatiently as she turned to the painter:

"I must give it up, papa," she exclaimed. "It's rather nice; but you must have half a page of description in the catalogue if you want people to know what it all means."

It was the picture of a page holding a horse in a woody landscape. The page wore the costume of Charles the Se-

cond's court ; but the loose tumbled hair falling about the fair neck, the small jewelled hand that grasped the bridle, the delicate curves of the figure, the disorder of a dress that seemed to have been arranged by unaccustomed hands, and the shrinking terror of the pose, betrayed the sex of the pretended page. The attitude of the horse expressed as intense a terror as that which agitated the woman. The bright chestnut of his sides was darkened with sweat, the distended nostrils were flecked with foam, the eyes were dilated. The woman's face was exquisitely beautiful ; but it's loveliness was of the diabolical rather than the angelic order. The eyes of the disguised beauty were turned with a look of unspeakable horror towards a woodland glade, which stretched away in the background, and her disengaged hand was pressed convulsively upon her breast, as if to control the beating of her heart. On the grass, near the horse's feet, there lay an embroidered glove, and a cavalier's cloak, whose rich purple velvet and gold embroidery made a mass of colour in the foreground.

"Who is she, papa?" asked Flo. "Her dress is unutterably jolly, and her hair looks as if you had painted it with a patent tube of liquid sunshine. What a wonderful old thing you are! But allow me to inquire for the second time what it all means. A pretty woman doesn't dress herself in a ruby-velvet doublet, and hold a horse in a wood without a motive."

"The woman is the Countess of Shrewsbury, who disguised herself as a page, and held the Duke of Buckingham's horse while he fought a duel with her husband. It's not a very moral story, and I doubt if I shall exhibit it."

"But you needn't tell people what it means, papa, and I'm sure they'd never find out. Call it Lady Rachel Russell. You can invent a story about an attempted escape of her husband, or something of that kind, you know. But if you've any difficulty about the picture Mr. Lobyer shall buy it of you, papa," added Florence, with a tone that sounded rather like patronage. She was quite capable of patronising her father.

"Thank you, my dear ; the picture is sold already to a person who understands pictures," answered Mr. Crawford gravely. He was standing with his back to his daughter, washing his hands in a basin that formed part of the paraphernalia of a stand on which he kept the implements of his art. The winter twilight was thickening, and the light of the low fire was hidden by a crimson screen. Flo stood in the bay window, looking out into the garden with a meditative air.

"You speak of Mr. Lobyer as if he were quite your own property, Florence," said the painter, as he walked to the fireplace and pushed away the screen. The firelight showed him

his daughter's profile—her head bent, her eyes downcast, the small gloved hands trifling with her bonnet-strings.

She did not make any reply to her father's remark, and yet he could scarcely doubt that she had heard him.

"Do you really mean to marry this Mr. Lobyer?" William Crawford asked presently.

"I wish you wouldn't call him *this* Mr. Lobyer, papa," cried Flo impatiently. "What has he done that he should have a relative pronoun tacked on to his name, as if he were some new kind of wild animal. He has asked me to marry him ever so many times, and—and I suppose I do mean to marry him, papa—if you have no objection," added Florence dutifully.

"If I have no objection!" exclaimed the painter. "What influence have the fathers of the present day over their children that their opinion should be asked or their wishes consulted? Don't look at me so imploringly. I am not angry with you, my dear. I am only an old-fashioned fellow, and there are many things I see nowadays that mystify me. If you like Mr. Lobyer, and Mr. Lobyer is, as he seems to be, very much in love with you, I cannot make any objection to your marrying him, though I will tell you frankly——"

"Oh, pray don't, papa," cried Florence,—“pray don't tell me any thing frankly; when people talk about being frank, they are always going to say something disagreeable. It's very odd that the truth always should be so unpleasant. I know what you were going to say, papa, almost as well as if you had said it. You were going to tell me that I may marry Mr. Lobyer if I please, but that you don't like him, and that you never have liked him, and so on. The moment a girl is engaged to be married to a man, people seem to think they are privileged to abuse him.”

"I don't wish to abuse Mr. Lobyer, my dear. If you are really attached to him"—Flo shrugged her shoulders impatiently—"and if you really think you can be happy as his wife, I have nothing to say against the marriage. I suppose if I were a very prudent man, I ought to rejoice at the idea that my little girl can never know what worldly misfortune is; but——"

"But what, papa?" cried Flo. She had untied her bonnet-strings, and had thrown the fragile structure of velvet and feathers aside in her impatience. The fact is, Miss Crawford had not returned from Brighton in the best possible humour, and her father's grave manner annoyed her. "The Hinchliffe girls were never tired of congratulating me, papa," she said; "and Mrs. Hinchliffe declared I was the luckiest creature in Christendom. And Aunt Jane called—she has taken a house in

Marine Square for the children—and the Hinchliffes asked her to dinner, and of course they would tell her all about Mr. Lobyer, and she was delighted, and went away in such spirits, declaring that if I have a town-house she will make my uncle move from Russell Square to Tyburnia. But now I come home you snub me and throw cold water upon me, and make me feel as if I were a kind of criminal. It's very cruel of you, papa."

"My dear child, I have no wish to be cruel. And so the Hinchliffes are delighted, and Aunt Jane is delighted, because you are going to marry Mr. Lobyer. It is not because he is handsome, I suppose, for I have seen much handsomer men; and it can't be because he is clever, for I must confess that to me he seems rather stupid. Why is it such a grand thing to marry Mr. Lobyer, Flo? and why are the Hinchliffes envious, and Aunt Jane in spirits? Is it because he is rich? Ah, to be sure, that's what it is, of course. He is rich, and we are a wealthy nation; and to marry the wealthiest bachelor of the season is the supremest felicity to which a young lady can attain. I begin to understand it all now; but I am such an old-fashioned man, Flo, that I like the old idea of love in a cottage best."

"Papa," said Florence, after a pause, "mamma's marriage was a love-match, and she loved you very dearly—as you deserve to be loved, you dear disagreeable old darling—and I know that she never repented having married you; but when you were very, very poor, did you never feel sorry for having taken her from the comfortable home in Russell Square, and the carriage, and the servants, and the friends, and all that she lost when she became your wife?"

"Yes, Flo," answered the painter sadly; "God knows I had my hours of remorse and bitterness."

"But you had no need to be remorseful, papa," cried Flo, who perceived that she had touched too sad a memory, "for mamma loved you dearly, and she was happier with you than she would have been in a palace—even if people were generally happy in palaces, which, as far as I can ascertain, they are not. But I'm not like mamma. I have been brought up among rich people, and the thought of poverty frightens me. I look at houses sometimes in which people exist, and are tolerably happy, I suppose, in their own miserable way; and I think that I *couldn't* live in such a house or in such a neighbourhood. Do you remember taking me up to some place near Islington to see one of Mr. Folcy's pictures? Islington seemed like a new world to me, and I felt that I should commit suicide if I lived there a week. To be out of reach of the parks, to have no horse to ride, no pretty dresses to wear, no nice fashionable

friends to visit, to ride in omnibuses, and wear old-fashioned bonnets, and go through life shabby and dowdy and neglected—oh, what utter misery it all seems! I know all this sounds selfish and horrible, papa; but I have been brought up to be selfish and horrible.”

“I dare say your feelings are perfectly natural, my dear,” replied Mr. Crawford, “but I don’t understand them. I don’t understand you. I understand nothing about the age in which I live. All I can say to you is to implore you to think seriously before you take so serious a step as that you talk of so lightly. It seems the fashion to talk lightly of solemn things nowadays; and no one would imagine from the manner in which people discuss a marriage that it was to be the affair of a lifetime. You are very young, Flory, and you can afford to wait. If you feel that you can be happy with Mr. Lobyer, marry him: but if you have the slightest doubt up to that point, let no inducement upon earth tempt you to become his wife. The unhappy marriages of the present day end in the divorce court. But, as I said before, you can afford to wait.”

“Oh, yes, papa,” cried Miss Crawford, “and while I am waiting and deliberating, some designing minx will pounce upon Mr. Lobyer and marry him before I know where I am. What a dear, unsophisticated thing you are, and what a dreadful worldly wretch I am, papa! But you see I am not so much worse than other people. There is your model Gretchen, your favourite Cecil Chudleigh, who was always lecturing me about my merenary sentiments; yet you see, after all, she has married a great lumbering Irish barrister, only because he has two or three thousand a-year.”

“But Lady Cecil may be very much attached to Mr. O’Boyneville.”

“Yes, papa,” answered Flo pertly, “she may; but then, on the other hand, she mayn’t. Attached to him, indeed!—a man whose coats and collars were made in the year one, and must have been old-fashioned then, I should think, if Adam had decent taste in dress.”

“But he can change his coats and collars. And really O’Boyneville is a very good fellow, and a very clever one.”

“Yes, papa, but what woman ever cared about such cleverness as that? A man whose greatest achievement is to cross-examine some stupid witness, and set a stupid jury laughing at his stupid jokes. No, you dear innocent parent, Cecil did not care two straws about that uncultivated Queen’s Counsel; but she married him because he is well off, and can give her what people call a good home. A good home in Brunswick Square! Poor Cecil, I am dying to call upon her, and I hear how she endures her existence in Bloomsbury!”

After this Miss Crawford contrived to turn the conversation. She talked of her father's pictures,—the Countess of Shrewsbury, the larger classical subject which he was going to finish before the first of May,—any thing and every thing except Mr. Lobyer: and after dining *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Crawford, Florence retired to array herself in blue gauze, and returned to the drawing-room to await a friendly dowager, who was to call for her at ten o'clock, and beneath whose sheltering wing she was to appear at a party to which Mr. Lobyer had also been bidden.

The master of Pevenshall Place and the Lobyer mills called on the painter next day, and made a formal demand for the hand of his daughter.

"You won't find me illiberal in the matter of settlements, Mr. Crawford," said the rich man, as the painter deliberated with a clouded brow and a thoughtful aspect. "Let your lawyer name his own terms, and fight the business out with my fellow. When I fall in love with a beautiful woman I'm not the sort of man to spoil my chance by a niggardly policy," said Mr. Lobyer, whose tone was rather calculated to convey the idea that Florence Crawford was not the first beautiful woman with whom he had fallen in love.

But the painter was too much struck by the first part of the young man's speech to pay much attention to the latter portion.

"My dear Sir," he exclaimed, "I dare say what you have just been saying is very generously intended; but you must remember that we are not making a bargain. My daughter is not one of my pictures, to be disposed of to the highest bidder; and I assure you I have my fancies even about the disposal of them, and don't always care to sell them to the person who offers me most money. If I consider your proposal at all, I must consider it as it affects my daughter's future happiness, not her purse. I suppose a settlement is a usual thing with a man of your wealth; and in that case I am willing that you should do what is fair and just, if you marry my daughter. But I cannot for a moment allow you to put forward your money as an inducement to me, when you propose to become the husband of my only child."

Mr. Lobyer, for once in his life, was thoroughly astounded. Here was "a painter-fellow, who would sell you a picture, by God, Sir, and thank you humbly for your patronage, ridin' the high horse and givin' himself the airs of a dook!"

This was what the great Lobyer said afterwards to his chief toady and confidant; but he was completely subdued at the time, and was fain to sue most humbly for permission to make Florence Crawford his wife.

"I do not see very well how I can withhold my consent," returned the painter, with a sigh, when he responded to Mr. Lobyer's very meekly-worded appeal. "You have already proposed to my daughter, and she has accepted your proposal—subject to my approval, she tells me very dutifully. I think it is rather too late for me to interfere, Mr. Lobyer, especially as there seems no particular reason why I should interfere. If my daughter loves you, and if you love her as truly and purely as a man ought to love the woman he marries, I cannot say no. All I ask is that you will not be in a hurry, that you will wait—a year at the least. I want to know you better before I trust my daughter's happiness to your keeping.

But Mr. Lobyer protested that a year under such circumstances would be an eternity, or something to that effect; and after considerable supplication on the part of Miss Crawford's lover, who talked of himself in a dejected way,—as "the most devoted fellow that ever was, you know;" and as "a fellow who wanted to settle down in his own home, and all that sort of thing, you know,"—the painter consented that the year of probation should be reduced by one-half, and that at the end of six months Mr. Lobyer might claim his bride, always provided that his future father-in-law had reason to think well of him in the mean time.

After this the young man departed triumphant, but with a certain air of sulky discomfiture about him in the midst of his triumph.

"If a fellow were a pauper there couldn't be more row about the business," he muttered, as he stepped into that unapproachable phaeton which had been such a success on the West Cliff. "I never knew before to-day that fellows with half-a-million of money were so plentiful that people, whose daughters they want to marry, need turn up their noses at 'em."

Mr. Crawford went back to his painting-room, after the interview with his future son-in-law, very grave of aspect. He went to his painting-room for comfort as a devotee might go into a church. His largest easel occupied the centre of the room, with a great blank canvas upon it, while the Countess of Shrewsbury was turned ignominiously to the wall.

He took some dingy brownish tint from his pallet, and sketched the outline of a woman's form upon the fair white canvas. No map of confused and wavy lines preceded the perfect outline, but every stroke was sharp, precise, and permanent. Where other men indulged in a chalky network of vague curves and undulations, William Crawford drew a firm and lasting outline with his brush. The long labours of years had made him the first of modern draughtsmen, as well as the greatest of modern colourists.

But to-day Mr. Crawford's work did not afford him that serene pleasure which it was his wont to feel when he stood before his easel. His brush was less rapid than usual; and after standing for some moments staring at his canvas without seeing it, he turned with an impatient sigh, and began to walk up and down the room.

"I do not like thee, Dr. Fell," he muttered, with his hands plunged deep in the pockets of his velvet morning-coat. "I'm not at all clear about the reason, but I do *not* like thee; and I wish—I wish—my pretty little impertinent Florence were going to marry any one else in this world rather than you, my worthy Fell. But the girls of the present day are past my comprehension—and the women too, for the matter of that. Yes, Mrs. Champernowne, the women too!"

The painter sighed more heavily than before as he said this. He took a little note from his waistcoat-pocket presently, and from the half-listless, half-unwilling manner in which he unfolded the miniature sheet and glanced at the half-dozen lines inscribed thereon, it was evident that he had read the note before.

And yet it was no very important document. It was only a woman's epistle—half of remonstrance, half of invitation. But the tiny sheet of paper was a marvel of delicate emblazonry in the way of crest and arms, monogram and address, and the paper exhaled a rare and subtle perfume, as of myosotis or orange-blossom.

"What are you doing, Mr. Crawford," began the painter's correspondent, in a hand which was firm without being masculine, bold and yet neat; a hand which had an originality and character of its own, and which once seen was rarely forgotten or confounded with any other caligraphy,—“what are you doing, and why have I seen neither you nor Florence since my return to town? I am anxious to hear all about your pictures for this season, or to see them; but I shall not come to your painting-room uninvited. And in the mean time you and your daughter know where to find me.

“Always truly yours,

“GEORGINA CHAMPERNOWNE.”

“Shall I go to her?” thought the painter. “I made up my mind to keep clear of her for this year at least, and already I am tempted to waver. She won't leave me alone; she won't let me work in peace, and forget her if I can. What is it to her that I have worked and waited for twenty years to win the place I hold? What is it to her? She likes to see me in her drawing-room, and to exhibit me to the people amongst

whom she lives. I suppose I am a kind of lion in my way, and that she likes to show me in my cage. What does it matter to her if she distracts me from my work? It pleases her to keep me in an intermittent fever of perplexity and despair. What am I to her amongst a hundred admirers? I am only something different from the rest of them. She has her museum of lovers, as she has her cabinets of china, her collection of antique silver, her orchids, her Angora cats; and I am a curious specimen of the genus painter—very hopeless. Shall I go to her to be fooled, as I have been fooled, year after year, ever since I have been worth a place in her exhibition? No, no, Mrs. Champernowne. *Nenni*, as the citizens of Ghent said to Philip van Artevelde. One might do something with Van Artevelde, by-the-bye, and the quaint old costumes, and the queer peaked roofs of the houses, and the infuriated *burghers*, clamorous for their leader's blood. *Nenni*, Mrs. Champernowne, I will not go near you. I have my great picture to paint between this and the 25th of April, and I have to hold my own against the critics; so I will send you my daughter with a pretty message, and I will invite you to my painting-room on the last day in April, with the connoisseurs and the amateurs, and the art-critics on the newspapers, and the unknown strangers who come to stare at the painter, under pretence of looking at his pictures."

But when Mr. Crawford had spent about three hours at his easel, he laid down his pallet and brushes, and looked at the clock upon the mantelpiece—the infallible clock upon which weary models cast furtive glances as the day wore on, to see when another hour had expired, and another shilling had been earned.

"I can't go on any longer without a young person, as Flo calls my professional model," said Mr. Crawford; "and I think I should like to show *her* my sketch before I go seriously to work at the picture. Her taste is perfect, and she might suggest something; besides which it's getting too dark for work," added the painter, rather irrelevantly.

The "she" of whom he spoke so vaguely was Mrs. Champernowne, and he wanted to find an excuse for going to her. He took a small canvas from amongst others leaning against the wall, and slipped it into a green-baize cover. He rang the bell, told the servant to fetch a cab, and then retired into a dressing-room that adjoined the larger chamber, where he exchanged his velvet painting-coat for the broadcloth of every-day life.

CHAPTER XV.

DELILAH.

AFTER driving about half-a-mile Mr. Crawford halted in a little lane leading out of the high road, and within five minutes' walk of Hyde Park,—an obscure corner, in which one would scarcely expect to find a decent house, but which was, nevertheless, one of the choicest spots at the West-end. It was close to the park; and the maximum of earthly bliss seems to be involved in that fact. The painter alighted before a stout wooden door, set deep in a wall, above which appeared the branches of leafless sycamores. The garden within that circling wall was rather less than half-an-acre in extent: the house that nestled amid those leafless trees was only a cottage; but the rent which Mrs. Champernowne paid for this retreat was something like seven hundred a-year.

It was a retreat—a little hermitage half hidden amidst a dreary wilderness of stucco—a pearl of price amongst the meretricious splendours of Birmingham jewellers' ware—a place, whose parallel was not to be found within the charmed circle in which alone Mrs. Champernowne could exist—and Mrs. Champernowne's landlord knew the value of his treasure. Such a cottage and such a garden at Highgate, or Kew, or Ealing, or Isleworth, might have been worth a hundred and fifty pounds a-year: but such a cottage, within ear-shot of the sparrows of Hyde Park, was worth almost any thing its owner chose to ask for it.

Mrs. Champernowne was elegant, Mrs. Champernowne was fashionable. She was a widow—the widow of an elderly man, who had left her what was supposed to be an inexhaustible fortune. But it may be that this idea had arisen in the public mind rather from the reckless expenditure of the widow than from any exact knowledge of the late Mr. Champernowne's resources. With this gentleman had expired one unutterably ancient lineage, and in the person of his widow was represented another. Backward, through the misty regions of the past, Mrs. Champernowne traced the currents of her own and her husband's blood, winding, by separate ways, into the remote darkness of a legendary age. The history of modern Europe had a personal interest for the elegant widow, and Froissart was a family record. But she rarely spoke of these past glories. Only now and then, when the name of some aristocratic conspirator or court-poet, some distinguished politician, or general, or admiral of a mediæval age arose in a discussion, Mrs. Champernowne might be heard to murmur

softly, as to herself, "His great grandson married my mother's great aunt;" or, "Poor fellow, how fond my ancestor Ralph Hyde's youngest daughter was of him! I have the ring he gave her the night before his execution,—a posy ring with the motto, *Memoria in aeterna.*"

If Georgina Champernowne had secured for herself a certain position in the fashionable world, she had secured it entirely without effort. She had pleased others by pleasing herself. During her husband's lifetime she had been buried alive in a gloomy old Northumbrian castle that rose black and bare above a great expanse of hill and dale, sparsely wooded here and there, and dignified with the name of park. Those who knew most about her—and even they seemed to know very little—declared that the elegant Georgina had known the bitter gripe of poverty's stern hand before she married Mhuu Champernowne, of Champernowne Castle. Her father, Ambrose Arseott Pomeroy, was the last representative of a grand old Cornish family, and had carried his three sons and five daughters to a sleepy Belgian town, where the grass grew in the deserted highways, and where the halls in which feudal commerce had displayed her richest treasures amidst clamorous crowds of buyers and sellers, served for the storerooms of petty manufacturers or the habitations of lonely old women. Georgina had been educated in a convent within a few miles of Brussels, at a cost of about forty pounds a year, and had emerged therefrom more accomplished than one out of twenty of the damsels who leave a fashionable finishing-school, where the annual stipend is something over three hundred. An accidental meeting between Ambrose Pomeroy and his old friend Mohun Champernowne had brought about the marriage of Georgina; and after performing the duties of a devoted wife, and enduring the humours of an invalid husband and the unspeakable dulness of a Northumbrian mansion for ten years, Mr. Pomeroy's daughter found herself mistress alike of her own destiny and of every shilling that her husband had to leave. Her father had died within the last few years; her brothers and sisters had scattered far and wide, some doing badly, some doing well, but none of them holding their own in the sphere to which Mohun Champernowne's widow belonged. She was quite alone in the world. There was no one who had any right to question her actions or interfere with her caprices. She was thirty-two years of age, and in the dull period of her seclusion her taste had refined itself, and her intellect had ripened.

Then it was that Mrs. Champernowne came to London, and began to live her own life. For her, who had been so long an exile from society, the laws of society had little weight. She

took a house in a fashionable neighbourhood because the neighbourhood was pleasant, rather than because it was fashionable. She sent for one of her nieces, and made the girl a permanent inmate of her house, not because she feared to face society without the protection of a female companion, but because she wished to benefit her sister's child. She rarely went into society. She was never seen at horticultural *fêtes*, or fancy-fairs, races, or lawn-parties; but at the private view of every exhibition of pictures, at the opera, on the first night of a new piece at a fashionable theatre, at a few of the choicer morning concerts in Hanover Square, she initiated recognised Mrs. Champernowne, and pointed her out to uninitiated friends as one of the most elegant women in fashionable London. She was not a dashing woman; no flutter of lace or rustle of silk, no musical tingling of bracelets or bangles, or perfume of jockey club attended her entrance into any public resort. Country cousins, staring at the patrician beauty of West-end belles and the splendour of West-end millinery, were apt to overlook Mrs. Champernowne; but if a connoisseur in the trifles of life had been told to look for the woman whose toilette most successfully combined the extremity of rigid simplicity with the perfection of elegance, he would inevitably have selected the widow.

This was the woman who had been one of the first to recognise the genius of William Crawford, who had given him a high price for one of his earliest successes, and who had been pleased to set him down upon the list of her intimates. And this last boon was no small privilege, for Mrs. Champernowne did not crowd her drawing-room with acquaintances of a season's standing. She lived her own life, and she chose her own friends.

The chosen few who had at first constituted her circle grew into many; but there was none amongst the many who had not some claim to distinction. If the door of the Hermitage had been freely opened to every comer, Mrs. Champernowne might have found it difficult to sustain the tone of distinction which she had so unconsciously acquired. But in shutting her door upon people whose acquaintance another woman in her position might have courted, the widow invested her receptions with a piquancy which fascinated the privileged ones who were free to come and go as they pleased. To be free of the Hermitage was *d'être de Marly* over again; for, once admitted within those walls, all ceremony was done with. No invitation-cards ever issued from Georgina's fair hands. She was an inveterate tea-drinker; and to linger by her side as she dispensed fragile cups of egg-shell china that held about a table-spoonful, was to be carried back to the days of patch

and hoop, and to be subjugated by the charms of a new Belinda—a Belinda of five-and-thirty years, well sounded, but the most bewildering of enchantresses nevertheless.

In the evening Mrs. Champernowne was at home to her intimates, and from ten until twelve the little lane leading out of the Kensington Road was luminous with the lamps of broughams.

“I reserve no particular evening for my intimates, for I know so few people,” said the widow—she always made a strong point of her limited circle—“and I so rarely go out. People know they can find me whenever they choose to come, and that I like to see them come in and out of my rooms as they please.”

Placed on this easy footing, Mrs. Champernowne's friends found the Hermitage one of the most agreeable houses in London. The best music to be heard at the West-end was to be heard at Mrs. Champernowne's; the freshest photographs of new pictures, that had been the gems of the season in continental exhibitions; the last political pamphlet that had aroused the indignation of the Parisian police; the last comedy by Sardou or Augier, that had succeeded at the Française or Gymnase,—were to be found scattered on her table; and all the lions and lionesses of London roared their mildest roar for the pleasure of their accomplished hostess. Some delicate instinct of her own enabled her to discover nice people. She developed talents that had never been brought to light before. The ice of a reserved nature melted under her genial influence; the most afflicted of bashful men found courage in her presence. People who were utterly subjugated by her fascination sought in vain to define its nature, and were content at last to declare her the most charming of women. Her intimates were pestered by the supplications of outsiders, who wanted to penetrate the magic circle: but that circle was not to be entered easily.

People pleaded hard to be allowed to introduce such and such a friend who was dying to make Mrs. Champernowne's acquaintance, but she was seldom charitable enough to say with Rogers, “Let him live.” “Come to see me whenever you like,” she said; “but don't bring me any strangers; I detest strangers. The only people I care to know are people I can know before I see them. I read a book or see a picture, or hear a sonata on the violin; and I know in a moment whether I shall like the man or woman who writes, or paints, or plays. I knew by the turn of his Iphigenia's head that I should like Mr. Glendower the sculptor, and now he is one of my best friends. And there is Mr. Crawford,” added the widow, smiling sweetly as she turned to the painter; “I knew

him intimately from the moment in which I stood riveted before that wonderful *Aspasia*."

It was at the call of this enchantress that Mr. Crawford had left his painting-room in the bleak February afternoon. He rang the bell, which tinkled with a subdued sound in the distance, for the genius of noise was banished from the Hermitage. Once within those sheltering walls, the visitor recognised an atmosphere which had nothing in common with the vulgar air without. A solemn hush reigned as in a cathedral. No shrieking birds, no yelping lapdogs broke the serene stillness. A man admitted Mr. Crawford into a long glazed corridor, where there were hothouse flowers, the frailest of exotics, whose waxen petals glimmered whitely amidst foliage of dark shining green; and at the extreme end two marble figures seemed to keep guard over a pair of dark-green-velvet doors; which divided the corridor from the inner sanctuary. One of the statues was the Genius of Night, with starry veil and extinguished torch; the other, a Silence, with lifted finger pressed upon closed lips. The subdued tone of the vestibule, the dark foliage and colourless petals of the exotics, the chill whiteness of marble against a background of sombre green, possessed a harmony of their own; and the visitor who entered the Hermitage for the first time felt, before he reached the end of the vestibule, that he was in no common abode. For the painter, acutely alive to the sense of external beauty, the surroundings of Mrs. Champernowne had an irresistible intoxication.

"Why do I come here?" he asked himself, as he followed the servant to the end of the vestibule. "There is an odour in the very atmosphere that stupifies and bewilders me. Take away a wall here and there, and open barbaric colonnades to the glare of an Eastern sun, and I can fancy Samson coming to visit *Delilah* in this house. I have half a mind to leave my card, and go away without seeing her."

The servant looked back at this moment, as wondering why the visitor did not follow him; and after a little movement of hesitation, Mr. Crawford passed into the hall. Need it be said that Mrs. Champernowne's man-servant was not a common man-servant? He was a most gentlemanly creature, upon whom a livery would have been as much out of place as upon a bishop. A little powder in his hair was the sole badge of his servitude, and became him admirably. For the rest, his costume was such as might have been worn by the ideal curate or the poetic doctor of a young lady's novel. The grave dignity of his manner was more impressive than the concentrated insolence of twenty over-fed Jeameses. As you looked at him you were overpowered by a sense of your own inferiority.

You felt instinctively that he had been intended for a higher sphere; that he, too, could number conspirators and court-poets amongst his ancestors; that his tastes were as refined as his manners and appearance; that he devoted his Sabbath leisure to the perusal of the *Saturday Review*, and would have fainted at the sight of a *Daily Telegraph*.

The entrance-hall of the Hermitage was by no means spacious. A Persian carpet of moderate dimensions covered the centre of the floor, and protected the unwary stranger from the slipperiness of a tessellated pavement. The same subdued colour which pervaded the vestibule reigned in the hall, where there were yet more pale exotics and antique bronzes looming duskiy through the shade. Curtains of soft grey silk shrouded a doorway, through which Mr. Crawford passed into the drawing-room, where there were again dark foliage and starry-white blossoms in the dim shade of grey-silk curtains lined with a pale rose colour, that faintly tinted the subdued light, and where two white Angora cats were sleeping peacefully amidst the fleecy fur of a huge polar-bearskin spread upon the hearth. It might have been the chamber of the Sleeping Beauty which Mr. Crawford had penetrated; and to support the delusion, a lady with closed eyes sat half-buried in the softest and deepest of easy-chairs. But she lifted her eyelids as the gentlemanly servant announced Mr. Crawford, and rose to receive him. She was tall and slender—a stern critic would have called her thin. She was dark and pale, with thick bands of black hair carried behind her ears, and gathered in a compact knot at the back of her head. If she had not been Mrs. Champernowne she would scarcely have been called handsome; but a plainer woman than she might have appeared beautiful amidst her surroundings. Whatever charm there was in her face was not to be traced to any perfection of feature; but in the shape of her small head, the perfect grace of her throat, the varying expression of her countenance, the refinement of her appearance, there lurked a charm rarely to be found in the splendour of perfect loveliness.

This was the woman who had enslaved many men, but for whom independence was too dear a treasure to be bartered lightly. She had been the slave of an old man's caprices, and had endured her slavery with all womanly patience and gentleness; but having won her freedom, she was not inclined to accept any new bondage. Her friends declared that she had refused more than one brilliant proposal within the few years of her widowhood, and she had already acquired the reputation of a widow who would never choose a second husband. This was the woman whose fascinations were acknowledged by all who came within her influence, but amongst whose victims

there were very few so utterly helpless, so entirely hopeless, as William Crawford.

He had begun by being grateful to her for that early recognition of his genius which had borne witness to her taste. He had allowed himself to be beguiled into a friendship for her, which speedily became the chief delight of his life. He had wondered at her; he had admired her; he had ended by adoring her. Whether she was fully aware of his weakness, or utterly ignorant of it, was one of the great perplexities of his existence. No word of his had ever declared his passion. He was content to be her friend and guest on sufferance. A word, and he might have been expelled from her presence for ever. There were times when he grew desperate, and was inclined to make the declaration which, as he thought, must inevitably banish him from the smiles of his enchantress, and thus make an end of his love and his despair. There were times when he made a solemn vow that he would abstain from her society, as a drunkard vows that he will abstain from the fiery spirit that destroys him, and, like the drunkard, broke his pledge, before it was many days old.

The idea that any other result than disgrace and banishment could follow the declaration of his love for Mrs. Champernowne never entered the painter's mind. Her grace, her fashion, her wealth, constituted a kind of royalty, which separated her from William Crawford as completely as if she had been a queen. Sometimes, as he worked alone in his painting-room, he thought of all the men who had been bewitched by the light of royal beauty's glances, and had suffered the penalty of their presumption. He thought of the legendary knight who loved Queen Guinevere, of Rizzio and Chastelard, wild Buckingham and fated Konigsmark, foolish Rohan and devoted Fersen.

Fanciful, as the man who lives by the cultivation of his fancy must naturally be, the painter tried in vain to shut the image of his enchantress from his thoughts. The simplicity of his life, the singleness of his ambition, had preserved the freshness of his youth. He was as romantic as a lad fresh from college, and his worship of his divinity was pure and unselfish as the love of sentimental youth.

Mrs. Champernowne smiled her sweetest smile as she gave her hand to William Crawford. She was not a vivacious enchantress. Her feminine detractors had been heard to wonder what gentlemen could see in Mrs. Champernowne, who had really no animation, and gave herself the languid airs and graces of a person who was in the last stage of consumption. But the devotees who worshipped at the Hermitage found a charm in the widow's repose of manner which infinitely sur-

passed the frisky fascinations of livelier belles. The touch of her soft cool hand had a kind of mesmeric influence. The harmonious tones of her low voice were like the dropping of water in some sylvan fountain. She excelled rather as a sympathetic listener than as a brilliant talker; but as she talked little, and never talked at random, she had a reputation for sound judgment and refined taste rarely accorded to a brilliant talker. For her adorers she was always charming; and though she was alike to all, there was so subtle a fascination in her manner, that there was scarcely one among her band of worshippers who did not fondly cherish the delusion that he was the most favoured, and that there were specially melodious accents and particularly delicious smiles reserved for him alone.

Accustomed, in the ten years of her wifehood, to study the whims and gratify the peevish fancies of an elderly invalid, Mrs. Champernowne had acquired the power of pleasing people who were hard to please. Never since she had reigned in her little world had she wounded the self-love of one of her subjects. People left her presence delighted with themselves, as well as charmed with her, and eagerly returned to renew the impressions that were only to be experienced in her society.

"I thought you were never coming to see me again," she said, as the painter seated himself opposite to her; "and yet you must know how anxious I always am to hear about your new pictures, and to see you," she added, in a softer voice; and then there was a pause, during which one of the Angora cats had crept to her knee to be caressed. There were disappointed worshippers at the Hermitage, who, in the peevishness of despair, declared that Mrs. Champernowne cherished her Angora cats with a view to the aggravation of mankind; and that she knew she never looked prettier than when one of her favourites was perched upon her shoulder, making itself into a fleecy-white background for the jet blackness of her shining hair and the pale olive of her complexion.

"I believe in the transmigration of souls, and that Mrs. Champernowne is Cleopatra," said a young poet whom the widow had admitted into the innermost circle of her intimates. "It's not to be supposed that such a woman as that is only meant to last half a century. There must be a principle of economy in nature by which the souls of the mighty are utilised. I know where to put my hand upon all the great men of the past. I have dined at the Garrick with Shakespeare, and I can show you Snyder's house in St. John's Wood; and I have smoked a pipe with Murillo at Kensington, and have seen John van Eyck putting the last touches to his draperies on the Sunday before he sent his picture to the

Academy. I used to lift my hat to poor Harry Fielding, who now lies buried at Kensal Green; and I have bought a cigar-case of genial-hearted Peg Woffington at a fancy fair. Mrs. Champernowne is Cleopatra. You can see the Egyptian tint in her complexion after eighteen centuries; and her cats are lineal descendants from the sacred animal of Memphis. She sits in her easy-chair in the very attitude in which she sat in her galley when she went to meet Antony; and sometimes, when she is *distract*, I fancy she is thinking of Actium."

In the presence of his divinity for the first time after some months, William Crawford strove in vain to suppress all semblance of emotion. She was dearer to him than he had ever dared to confess to himself. He tried to beguile himself with the belief that he was only fascinated by her, that the admiration which he felt for her arose only from his artistic sense of her grace. But in her presence all reasoning was vain, and he knew that he loved her. To be near her was so deep a joy that he feared to speak, lest in some wild impulse of rapture he should reveal his secret. He sat opposite to her in silence, with the faint glow of the fire upon his face.

"I hope you have not been working too hard," she said presently, when the cat had clambered upon her shoulder, and she had leant her head against the soft white fur.

It was very little to say, and it was an expression of sympathy that William Crawford was in the habit of hearing from all manner of people; but from this woman it seemed so much.

"No, indeed," he answered, almost sadly; "the error of my life is that I don't work enough. Do you know, Mrs. Champernowne, that since my good fortune I have sometimes wished myself back in my second-floor lodging in Buckingham Street, in the blankest and dreariest interval of my life, only because then at least my mind was free for my work? I fancy that a painter ought to live on the top of a column, like St. Simon Stylites; or if he is a sybarite, and must have shelter from the sun and rain, let him beg a lodging in the octagon tower in Windsor Forest, and spend his life there, with the keeper's children and the deer for his only society. I think the old painters must surely have lived lonely lives, and that the secret of their superiority to us must lie in the fact of their seclusion. We live too much in the world, and have too many distractions. The gleam of sunshine in a landscape, or the smile upon a face which we have been trying vainly to produce for weeks, is just beginning to beam upon our canvas, when a servant opens the door of our painting-room and tells us that Mr. Smith has called, and wants to see us most particularly,

and will not detain us a moment. We groan, and go to Mr. Smith, who detains us a quarter of an hour; and when we return to our easel the power is gone out of our brush, the divine light has vanished from our canvas."

In speaking of his art the painter had for the moment forgotten his enchantress, but all the old weakness came back to him as Mrs. Champernowne responded, with the low voice that seemed made to express sympathy :

"I can fancy how annoyed you must be when commonplace people intrude upon you. I hope you are going to do something great this year. You have brought me a sketch to look at: that is indeed kind. I feel such a privileged person when I see the germ of the masterpiece that is to delight the world."

The painter looked at the speaker half incredulously; but the gentle gravity of her manner gave evidence that she had no consciousness of uttering an exaggerated compliment.

"My masterpieces are very poor achievements, Mrs. Champernowne," he said; "and I shall begin to doubt the infallibility of your judgment if you show too much indulgence for my shortcomings."

"I believe implicitly in the genius of my friends, and I will cherish my faith as long as I live," answered the widow; and then she extended her hand with an impatient gesture. "Let me see your sketch, if you please, Mr. Crawford; and when you have told me all about it, I will make you some tea."

There was considerable discussion about the future picture. The subject was Cybele and the infant Jupiter, and the idea was taken from an old play of Thomas Heywood's. Relentless Saturn had commanded the destruction of the child, but the bright smile of the young god disarmed the hand that would have slain him.

Mrs. Champernowne was not a "gushing" person. She gave utterance to no rapturous praises of the sketch; but every word she said went to prove how deeply she was interested in the painter's workmanship. An inner door was opened while she was still bending over the canvas, and a bright-looking, blooming young lady appeared, and greeted the painter with frank cordiality. Some women might have feared the rivalry of such a blooming niece as Miss Helen Vicary, but Mrs. Champernowne had no mere terror of her niece's fresh young beauty than Mary Queen of Scots felt when she contemplated the charms of her four fair namesakes. She liked to have a pretty niece about her, just as she liked the sleek beauty of her Angora cats, the delicate tints of her grey-silk draperies, the turquoise blue of her Sevres china.

"Tell them to send us some tea, Helen," she said; "I am

going to give Mr. Crawford an old woman's entertainment ;— and you know this is not the fashionable tea before dinner," she added, turning to the painter. "The rest of the world may eat supper at eight and call it dinner, if they like ; but Helen and I dine at four, and doze by the fire till six, and then we drink tea for the rest of the evening. I know that a modern Brummel would be unutterably shocked if he heard our degraded mode of life ; but my tea keeps me awake, and I am always ready to enjoy the society of my friends. I have no doubt that modern hours are very wisely chosen ; for of course every thing we do in the present is incontestably right, and every thing that was done in the past was supremely wrong ; but I don't think the Hôtel de Rambouillet would have been quite so celebrated as it was, if people in those days had dined at half-past eight."

The Belinda tea-service was brought : a clumsy guest had once contrived to break one of the Belinda saucers, but not by the faintest contraction of Mrs. Champernowne's brow could the delinquent have divined the value of the fragile soft paste which he had shattered. The widow was never more charming than when presiding over her tiny tea-table. There was no hissing urn, no glittering kettle simmering noisily above a spirit-lamp ; for urns and kettles are by nature fussy, and fuss and bustle were unspeakably obnoxious to Mrs. Champernowne. The gentlemanly man-servant brought a fresh teapot every ten minutes when his mistress had many visitors, and Helen, seated by her aunt, dispensed the cups to the tea-drinkers. Every one of the teapots was a gem in its way, and had an individuality of its own. Mrs. Champernowne had a mania for teapots, and had christened her favourites by the names of illustrious tea-drinkers. There were Pope and Addison, Elizabeth Steele and Lady Mary Montague, Molly Lepel and Horace Walpole. No muscle of the gentlemanly servant's countenance relaxed when he was told that there was to be gunpowder in Lady Mary, and orange-pekoë in Mr. Pope.

The gentlemanly creature lighted a cluster of wax-candles and a moderator-lamp, and stirred the fire as softly as if the poker had been sheathed in velvet. No vulgar glare of gas ever illuminated the Hermitage. Moderator-lamps, burning beneath Parian shades, cast their chastened light upon the sombre green of the velvet pile, and waxen tapers twinkled dimly as in a chapel.

Mrs. Champernowne glanced at the clock on the chimney-piece.

"What time do you dine, Mr. Crawford?" she asked. "I mustn't detain you here while Florence is waiting for you at the Fountains."

"Florence dines in Bloomsbury this evening, and I—I dined between three and four," said the painter, who had eaten three biscuits and drunk a glass of pale sherry at that hour. Was there any such thing as dinner for privileged creatures who were permitted to enter the sacred chambers of the Hermitage?

"I wonder whether she thinks I would leave her for the sake of the best dinner the united *chefs* of all the London clubs could devise?" he thought.

He stayed at the Hermitage, and drank innumerable cups of tea, and forgot that he had ever sworn to abjure the society of Georgina Champernowne. After tea there were new photographs to be looked at, and pleasant talk about the celebrities of the Parisian *salons*, and then the widow played the softest little bits of Mozart for the painter's edification. Peculiar in every thing, she had her peculiarity with regard to music, and played Mozart, and Mozart only.

"Other composers are very grand," she said, "but Mozart is grand enough and good enough for me. I find every thing that I care for in his music, and don't care to go further. You know I am wicked enough to hate strangers."

Rossini and Auber, Beethoven and Mendelssohn, were amongst Mrs. Champernowne's strangers. The room filled in the course of the evening, and the painter stayed till eleven o'clock. He went very little into society, and Mrs. Champernowne was pleased to exhibit him to her friends. He knew that he was a slave amongst other slaves, who smiled as they contemplated one another's fetters. But in the siren's presence he gave himself up to the sweet intoxication of her influence. To-night she was especially gracious to him, though even when most gracious she contrived to avoid any thing like exclusiveness.

"You are my prodigal son," she said. "I began to think that I was never to see you again."

Throughout all the evening she said nothing worth recording. She sat in the midst of handsomer women than herself, and gave place while cleverer women talked their best; but those who left her presence remembered her and her only; and there were many who would have sympathised with William Crawford as he walked slowly homeward through the high-ways and byways of Kensington, pondering upon his enchantress.

"Why should I avoid her if it is such happiness to me to be near her?" he thought. "I have no foolish hope that she will ever be more to me than she is now. It ought to be enough for me to see her now and then, to spend such an evening as I have spent to-night, and to go back to my work

all the better for so bright an interval of happiness. What can I want more than that, or what could be more delightful—while it lasts? But when I am old and grey and purblind, and have painted half-a-dozen bad pictures, and the public are tired of me, and the critics call my colour flimsy, and insolent young painters begin to talk of poor old William Crawford, who was once such a great card, will Mrs. Champernowne let me spend my evenings at the Hermitage *then*?

CHAPTER XVI.

AT HOME IN BLOOMSBURY.

THE slow days, the long weeks, the interminable months dragged themselves out, and Cecil lived alone with her husband in the stately solitude of the northern side of Brunswick Square.

The celebrated pea-green Hayne was wont to declare that his horses grew restive when he attempted to take them eastward of Temple Bar; and there are many people nowadays inferior in status to the elegant West-Indian millionaire, who shudder at the mention of Bloomsbury, and affect a serio-comic horror of the unknown latitudes on the northern side of Holborn.

Mr. O'Boyneville had no fashionable aversion to an unfashionable locality. He liked his house in Brunswick Square, because it was big and stoutly built, like himself; and, as the belief that any thing appertaining to himself must necessarily be the very best thing of its kind in existence was deeply implanted in his tranquil breast, he was serenely unconscious of any brighter region than the comfortable square in which he had taken up his abode when he first found himself able to support a household of his own.

If he had known that there were fairer places than Bloomsbury within reach of the courts of law; if he had fancied that there was any spot in or near London which would have been more pleasant for Cecil, he would have been quick to move his goods and chattels. He loved his wife honestly and truly, and would have made a heavier sacrifice to give her pleasure; but he knew about as much of a woman's tastes and prejudices as he knew of the habitudes and requirements of a white elephant; and he took Lady Cecil calmly home to the dreary, scantily-furnished Bloomsbury mansion, and left her to be happy after her own fashion in the spacious empty rooms while he went back to his work.

While he went back to his work ! In those few words might have been told the dismal history of two lives. The husband went to his work, and gave his heart and soul to breaches of contract and actions for damages, to libel and divorce cases, to actions in debt, trespass, assumpsit, trover, and ejectment; and the wife saw him go out and come in, heard his tired sigh, as he sank half-exhausted into his easy chair, but remained utterly ignorant and unsympathising.

She had just at first tried to understand her husband's career, and had questioned him upon the subject of his laborious days and studious nights; but when he tried to explain some interesting case—a great will case—in which the issue of a tedious suit depended on the signification of the words “then” and “forthwith,”—whether the former was meant to specify a particular time, or had reference to some other antecedent time; and whether the latter meant “immediately” or within a convenient time after a certain event,—her mind lost itself among the complications of the law, and she was fain to confess herself mystified rather than enlightened by her husband's explanation.

He kissed her, and told her he would never plague her again with such dry details; and from that hour he very rarely talked of business in his wife's presence.

But he thought of it, and that, for Cecil, was a great deal worse. At breakfast, at dinner, when his young wife was talking to him in her brightest and most animated manner, she would stop suddenly, chilled and discouraged by the discovery that the great barrister had not heard a word of her discourse. After telling him about a new book—a fresh view of Mary Queen of Scots, by a French historian; an anti-Carlyleian essay on Frederiek of Prussia; a passionate, classic tragedy, by a new poet—Cecil would look hopefully for some answering ray of interest in her husband's face, and would behold his eyes fixed and staring, and hear his lips murmuring faintly to himself, “The defendant seems to me to have no case, and the plaintiffs will be entitled to recover if Giddles and Giddles can show that the letter was posted on the twenty-first; the defendant must be held in law to be the purchaser, and therefore responsible for every bale of the cotton. The cases *Slattery v. Spindleshanks*, 30th Law Digest, Q.B., page 102, and *Capers v. Pepper*, in the Weekly Reports, are almost in point—humph!—yes, yes; but old Giddles must be kept out of the witness-box, and Giddles junior pinned to the date and postmark of that letter; and—yes, yes—”

After breakfast Mr. O'Boyneville kissed his wife, and hurried out of the house. At half-past six he came home,

washed his hands in a little dressing-room at the back of his study, and sat down to dinner in the dress he had worn all day, with the dust of the law-courts in his hair, and all the dreariness of the law in his brain. Sometimes he talked a little to his wife during dinner, telling her some scrap of public news in which she did not feel the faintest interest, or reciting some legal witticism, which to her uninitiated mind appeared unspeakably stupid. After dinner he read his papers for a quarter of an hour, and then laid himself down upon a gigantic crimson-morocco-covered sofa, which looked like the relic of a departed era, a fossilised mammoth in the way of upholsterer's work, and slept peacefully until nine, when a modest and almost furtive double knock announced the advent of his clerk, who brought the evening's batch of letters and papers.

Then the popular barrister arose like a giant refreshed, took a cup of tea from Cecil's attentive hands, and sipped the revivifying beverage in a dreamy manner, staring thoughtfully at his wife without seeing her, and still revolving the case of Giddles and Giddles, Liverpool brokers, and the three thousand bales of cotton. After tea he went to his study, which darksome sanctorum he rarely left until the smallest of the small hours had sounded from the clocks of St. Pancras and the Foundling.

Laurence O'Boyneville had won his position by honest hard work, and by divine right of an intellect not easily matched amongst the ranks of hard-working man. But such a man is apt to make a terrible mistake when he brings a fair young wife to his joyless home. Incessant work had become the normal state of the barrister. He did not know that his home was dreary. His life seemed pleasant enough to him; and he did not know that to a woman such a mode of existence must be simply intolerable. He gave his wife a comfortable house, and the unlimited command of money; and he fancied he had done all that was necessary. He had no time for any thing more. When his day's work was finished he was too tired to change his dress, too tired to talk without effort, too tired to go from one room to another after his dinner; and when he had recovered from the fatigue of his day's work his night's work began.

And such a life as this was the realisation of his brightest dream. For these days of unrest and excitement, for these studious nights had the young man from Shannonville toiled and struggled. He had attained a high position in his profession, and he loved his profession. What more could the heart of man desire? Venus Anadyomene divinely smiling amidst a cloud of silvery spray, radiant with vermilion and

carmine, ultramarine and Naples yellow, could be no more delightful to the mind of William Crawford, the painter, than wore the eases of Giddles and Giddles v. Clithery, Shavington v. The Estremadura Soap-boiling Company (limited), and many others, to Laureneo O'Boyneville, Q.C.

What reason have the painter and the poet, the sculptor and the musician, to be thankful that the arts for which they slave, the labours to which they devote their lives, are beautiful for all the world as well as for the labourers! If Cecil's husband had been a painter she would have been content to stand beside his easel while his bright faneies grew into life upon the canvas. Every new picture would have been an era in her existence as well as in his. No curve of an arm or wrist, no pose of a head, no undulation of a drapery that would not have made subject for pleasant talk and spirited discussion. The painter and his wife may go lovingly hand-in-hand upon the great highway to Fame's starry temple; and if she has been his model now and then, and if she has suggested the subject of a picture, or devised some happy alteration of an attitude, she seems to have had a part in her husband's work. To all time the wives of Rubens will be associated with his genius; so long as the work of Raffaele endures, the world will remember the woman he loved and painted.

But what part can the barrister's wife have in his triumphs? Except amongst certain sets the world does not talk much of popular barristers; and the wife of a legal luminary hears little praise of her husband from the lips of strangers. A woman must be strong-minded indeed who can interest herself in the technicalities of a dispute arising out of the purchase of sundry bales of cotton, or the winding-up of the affairs of a bubble company. There is something in the very paraphernalia of the legal profession which, on the threshold, repels all feminine sympathy. The crimson bag, the red tape, the green ferret; the slippery blue paper, which to the unprofessional pen is utterly impracticable for all literary use,—every thing seems aliko symbolical of a hopeless dryness and arid barrenness, amidst which no solitary blossoms, no lonely, accidental prison-flower can put forth its tender shoots.

As the dull days erept on, so miserably alike one another, Cecil felt it was her duty to be interested in her husband's career. She read the law-reports in the *Times*, the pale shadows of bad puns, whereat there had been laughter, but which could bring no smile to her pensive face. She could not be interested in those dreary lawsuits, those endless disputations about sordid things. So at last she abandoned the effort, and fell back upon her own thoughts, which were sad enough sometimes.

As Lord Aspendell's daughter and as Laurence O'Boynville's wife, Lady Cecil might have had enough of dinner-parties and evening-parties, kettledrums and *déjeûners*; but she had grown weary of all parties long before her marriage, and was glad to escape from the set in which she had lived, and to hide herself in the remote fastnesses of Bloomsbury.

"My husband has no time for going out," she said, when her old friends asked her to their houses.

"But you can come, Cecil, and Mr. O'Boynville can look in during the evening."

Cecil shook her head.

"He is so tired after his day's work that it would be a cruelty to ask him to go out," she said.

"And you are going to lead this dull life always, Cecil?"

"I don't care for society. I was accustomed to a solitary life with poor papa, and it suits me better than any thing else."

But Cecil, looking back upon that old life, remembered with a sigh how dear a companion her father had been. There was nothing in heaven and earth that they had not talked of; no book read by one, and not by the other; no subject so barren that it had not served for pleasant discourse, when the shabby old curtains were drawn, and the lamp lighted in the drawing-room of that dear old tumble-down cottage on the Dyke Road. Cecil did not consider what it was that constituted the grand difference between her father and her husband. She had lived amongst poor people before her marriage, but she had never lived amongst hard-working people. It was very strange to her to have to do with a person who had no leisure for the refinements and amenities of life; who gave short answers, for lack of time to be deliberate and polite; who told her "not to bother," when she asked some womanly question about his health, or his fatigues, in the midst of professional meditations. A woman has acquired sublime patience when she can meekly endure to be bidden not to "bother" her husband, and still love on.

Never until her marriage had Cecil been familiar with the people who do the work of this world; and it was scarcely strange if her husband, in workday clothes and with his workday manners, seemed to her a being of a different race from that to which belonged the high-bred idlers she had been accustomed to encounter. She knew that he loved her; she knew that he was generous, and good, and true: but this knowledge was not enough. She knew that he was clever; but her lonely days were never brightened by any ray of his intellect, her desolate evenings were never enlivened by his wit. Was he *her* husband? Was he not rather wedded to that inexorable

tyrant which he called his profession? He loved his wife, and was anxious to please her, but not if her pleasure involved the neglect of his professional duties. If Cecil knew that she was beloved, she knew also that Giddles and Giddles and the subtle niceties of the law were nearer and dearer to her husband than she could ever be. It was the name of Giddles, mingled with scraps of an address to the court and jury, that he muttered in his fitful sleep,—it was how to avail himself of the weak points in Clithery's defence, or Shavington's, or Jones and Smith's cases, that he pondered as he brooded by the domestic hearth.

"Why did he marry me?" she thought sometimes sadly; "I am of no use to him. I am no companion for him. A home for him is only a place in which he can eat and drink and sleep, and keep some of his law-books. If I speak to him at breakfast or dinner-time, I may disturb a train of thought by some idle word; and when he is asleep on the sofa, how is he the better off for my sitting on the opposite side of the fire yawning behind my book? The man who comes to him every evening with the red bag is more to him than I am, for the man and the bag belong to his profession.

It is not to be supposed that even so busy a man as Mr. O'Boyneville lived in entire exclusion from all social intercourse with his fellow-men. There were stately dinner-parties to which he conducted his elegant young wife, and on rare occasions he gave a stately dinner at home. And then, once more, Lady Cecil was called upon to give her mind to the *menu* of the feast; only in these latter days there were no harassing calculations of ways and means, no balancing of *fricandeau* against calves' head *en tortue*, no weighing of lobster-cutlets against eels *à la tartare*. All Mr. O'Boyneville's ideas were large and liberal. His household was well organised, his servants few and efficient, his cellar richly furnished; and if the comfortable kitchen-wenches of Bloomsbury are behind the *chefs* and *cordons bleus* of Belgravia, the Bloomsbury confectioner is like "Todgers's," and can do the thing handsomely when he pleases.

But when all was done those rare and solemn entertainments were very dreary to Cecil. She tried to be interested in her husband's friends; but the legal magnates with whom the great O'Boyneville chiefly associated were not interesting to his young wife; and the wives of the legal magnates seemed to have lost all the freshness and brightness of their youth under the all-pervading influence of such cases as Giddles and Giddles *v.* Clithery, and Shavington *v.* The Estremadura Soap-boiling Company (limited).

If Mr. O'Boyneville could have purchased his wife pleasure at any cost save that of his legal position, he would gladly

have done so. He saw a pile of Cecil's music-books, heaped on a side-table in the bare, bleak drawing-rooms, and half an hour afterwards bade his clerk convey to Messrs. Broadwood his desire that one of the finest grand pianos that firm could supply, should be delivered without delay in Brunswick Square. Cecil felt a kind of rapture as she ran her fingers over the new keys, and heard the silvery tones of that perfect instrument; for the dowager's cottage, on which she had been wont to perform in Dorset Square, gave forth only feeble tinklings for its treble, and woolly confusion for its bass. After the pleasant surprise occasioned by the arrival of the splendid grand, after a happy day spent in desultory ramblings amongst old music-books, Cecil tripped lightly down to the hall when the banging of doors announced the arrival of her husband's hansom-cab, eager to bid him welcome.

She met him, and went with him into the dressing-room, where he was wont to make his brief toilet.

"I want to thank you a thousand, thousand times!" she said.

"Thank me, my dear! What for?" asked the barrister, washing his hands.

"The piano—the beautiful Broadwood!"

"What piano?"

The great O'Boyneville's mind was either with Giddles v. Clithery or the Spanish Soap-boiling Company. Cecil sighed. It seemed as if half the value of the gift was taken away by the indifference of the giver.

"I thank you very, very much," she said presently, but all the girlish animation had gone from her manner. "There is nothing in the world you could have given me so welcome as that delightful piano."

"I'm very glad you like it, dear; I told them to send you a good one. I caught sight of your music-books on the table in the drawing-room through the open door as I came down to breakfast yesterday morning, and I remembered that music-books couldn't be of any use to you without a piano."

After this Cecil tried to make herself happy in her husband's house. She tried to reconcile herself to his long absences, his gloomy preoccupation, his profound slumbers on the mammoth sofa. She tried to be in all things a good and dutiful wife, and to lead her own life peacefully and happily, thanking Providence for having given her so kind a protector, so honest a friend, in the person of the husband who could never be her companion. She arranged her favourite books in a little old-fashioned bookcase in the back drawing-room; she decorated the two gaunt rooms with birds and flowers, and scattered pretty inexpensive nicknacks on the ponderous rose-

wood tables. Whatever elegance can be imparted to two great dreary apartments, furnished by general order on an upholsterer with all that is most solid in carved rosewood, and all that is most darksome in green damask, Lady Cecil imparted to the Bloomsbury drawing-rooms. But when all was done they were too large for her loneliness, and the days and nights seemed very long in them. She had piles of new books from a mighty emporium in the neighbourhood, and she read herself almost blind sometimes before the day was done. She had a neat little brougham in which to pay visits or drive in the park, but she did not care to retain fashionable acquaintances whose ways were no longer her ways. The delights for which she pined were not the frivolous joys of Belgravian drawing-rooms, nor the glare and glitter of Tyburnian festivals. When her fancies wandered away from the Bloomsbury realities into the world of visions, they carried her to fair cities in distant lands, to sombre German forests and snow-clad Swiss mountains, towering upward in an atmosphere whose breath is like the breath of a new life revivifying a worn-out body. She thought how peaceful, how very nearly happy, the quiet autumn days spent in Devonshire with her husband had seemed to her.

Mr. O'Boyneville was not a man to do things by halves, and when he divorced himself from business the separation was always a complete one. During the brief honeymoon he had been the most devoted and submissive of husbands, the tenderest of friends, the most sympathetic of companions; but once within a shilling cab-fare of the law-courts, the husband and the lover froze into the man of business, and Giddes *v.* Clithery, or Jones *v.* Robinson, or Smith against Brown and others, reigned paramount.

Mrs. MacClaverhouse honoured her niece by dining with her now and then, and was received with stately ceremony, and treated with all courteous attention by her nephew-in-law, for whom she seemed to entertain a profound esteem. The dowager was pleased to express her approval of Mr. O'Boyneville's wincs, and her commendation of her niece's cook, "though she robs you, my dear, I have no doubt, up hill and down dale," said the experienced housekeeper; "those good cooks always do. And that husband of yours is such a generous creature, that I think he must have been created to be robbed. I do hope you keep some check upon the house-keeping, and go down to the kitchen at least *once* a-day. I know it requires moral courage to do it, just at first; but a woman who has no moral courage is not fit to have a house of her own, or to live in lodgings either; for, long as my experience has been, I'm not able to say whether a cook's or a

landlady's audacity goes furthest in such matters as lard and gravy-beef, while the amount of port and sherry such women will make away with, under pretence of hare-soup and cabinet-puddings, is something awful."

But though the dowager had every reason to be satisfied with her reception whenever she visited Brunswick Square, she did not care to go there often, for her lively spirit revolted against the dulness of Mr. O'Boyneville's mansion.

"I don't know how it is, Cecil," she exclaimed one day, "but from the first moment I entered your dining-room its effect upon me has been equally depressing. There's a something. I don't know whether it's the dark-brown curtains or that dreadful mahogany cellaret—and, oh, why do they make cellarets like sarcophaguses?—under that gigantic sideboard; but there is a something in your house that preys upon my spirits. Of course it needn't have that effect upon you, my dear, for you're accustomed to it, and habit always attaches one to things; but I'm a whimsical old woman, and this end of the town always did depress me; while if you take me up towards Islington, past all those cheap photographers and dusty little gardens, you take me to despair."

Miss Crawford was a frequent visitor at her old friend's house, though Cecil did not encourage her visits, as her coming very often involved the escort of Mr. Lobyer, who worried the birds stealthily while the two ladies were engaged in conversation, and who was generally accompanied by a diminutive terrier, or a fawn-coloured pug of unamiable disposition. Even when Florence Crawford came alone, her presence was not altogether welcome to Cecil. She was oppressively lively, and seemed to grow more and more volatile as the time appointed for her marriage with the young millionaire grew nearer. She talked of nothing but carriages and horses, Tyburnian mansions, and county splendours; and she was never weary of upbraiding Cecil upon the folly of her residence in Brunswick Square.

"If I were you I wouldn't allow my husband an 'hour's peace till he removed to the West-end," she said; "I hear he earns heaps of money, and it's really shameful of him to keep you here."

"My dear Florence, if I were to ask Mr. O'Boyneville to take a house at the West-end, I'm sure he would do so immediately."

"Then why in goodness' name don't you ask him?"

"Because he would be so ready to grant my request, and I don't wish to impose upon his kindness."

"Impose upon his fiddlesticks! Really, Cecil, you provoke me into being vulgar: and I wonder how it is, by-the-bye, that

all great emotions have a tendency to make one vulgar. I shall lose all common patience if you insist upon talking like the good young woman in a novel. What did you marry Mr. O'Boyneville for unless it was for a handsome house and a fashionable carriage?"

"I married him because I loved him," Cecil answered gravely, "and because I hoped to make him a good wife."

Flo's piquant eyebrows elevated themselves to their utmost extent as her friend said this.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "of course that alters the case: but you really *are* like the young woman in a novel, Cecil; and I could never quite bring myself to believe in that young woman."

And then the impulsive Florence pounced upon her friend, and embraced her with effusion, declaring that she loved her dearest Cecil to distraction, and that she would not for worlds say any thing to wound or distress her. "I'm such a mercenary wretch myself, dear," she said, "that I fancy every body must be made of the same contemptible stuff. The girls I meet are so like me, and all our ideas seem to run in the same groove. Do you know, Cecil, I sometimes think that if we are unbelieving and mercenary—if we worship nothing but the pomps and vanities of society—our wickedness is only the natural effect of the precepts instilled into the youthful mind by those dreadful grandmothers and maiden aunts of the old school, who were always preaching against all that is romantic and poetical, and whose dearest delight was to bray their children's brains in the stony mortar of common-sense."

Once, and once only, did Cecil venture to speak earnestly to Florence Crawford on the subject of her approaching marriage. All those vague allusions to the mercenary sentiments of modern damsels, which Miss Crawford was so fond of uttering, seemed to Cecil like so many excuses for her union with the rich young Manchester man. She had not the heart to ask direct questions, but she spoke very seriously—as she would have spoken to a sister.

"Remember the long, long life, dear," she said earnestly,— "the long years that are to come after the wedding-day. Women never could talk so lightly of marriage if they had any thought of the future. Think, Florence dear, it is a union that can only be broken by death—or shame and misery ten times worse than death. I can only repeat the stalest truisms; these things have been said a hundred times before to-day far better than I can say them; and yet day after day, year after year, there are wedding-favours worn, and wedding-bells rung, in

honour of marriages that are only the beginning of life-long misery."

"Cecil," cried Flo impatiently, "if you talk like that I shall begin to think you repent having married Mr. O'Boyneville."

"No, no, dear, I don't repent; but I know now that I did not think seriously enough of the step I was taking."

Miss Crawford had been beating the point of her pretty little boot upon the floor, and twisting the fringe of her elegant parasol into all manner of knots and entanglements during Cecil's lecture. The piquant eyebrows were contracted into a frown, and the pretty grey eyes were filled with tears, and it was not easy to discover whether anger or sorrow were the stronger in the breast of Florence Crawford.

"I don't think I should have accepted Thomas," she said presently—and she had not yet brought herself to pronounce her lover's Christian name without making a wry face—"in fact, I'm sure I shouldn't have accepted him if I had known what being engaged would bring upon me. Every creature upon earth seems to make it his or her business to lecture me. People talk about hasty marriages and life-long misery just as if they had some occult power of knowing that Mr. Lobyer was doomed to half murder me with a poker, like the men one reads of at the police-courts, within a week of our marriage. And yet what did I see before I was engaged? Every girl I knew eager to please the man I am going to marry, and every mother trying to beguile him into marrying her daughter. But now every thing is changed. People shake their heads when they talk of Mr. Lobyer, and my particular friends sigh and groan about my prospects as dismally as if I had set my heart upon marrying a chimney-sweep. If I was going to be sacrificed upon an altar to-morrow, like that young woman in Racine's tragedy, people couldn't go on about me worse than they do. Of course I don't pretend to say that I am romantically attached to Mr. Lobyer—first and foremost because I don't believe there are any romantic attachments in these days; and secondly, because if there are, I'm not at all the sort of person to be the subject of one."

And then, after a little pause, Miss Crawford would continue the discussion.

"I like him very well, I'm sure," she said rather thoughtfully, and somewhat as if she had not quite decided the question in her own mind, "and I don't care a straw for any one else; and I dare say I shall behave pretty well to him, though I fear it's not in my nature to behave too well to any one. So, on the whole, I really can't see that people have any right to lecture me about the unfortunate young man I'm going to marry."

After this tirade the impetuous Florence again embraced her friend, and declared herself for the twentieth time to be a frivolous mercenary creature, unworthy alike of love and friendship. But henceforward Cecil felt that it was useless to interfere with Miss Crawford's arrangements. If sorrow lay before the painter's daughter on the road that she was treading, she was too obstinately bent on going her own way to be drawn back by any friendly hand, let it hold her never so gently.

Mr. Lobyer dined in Brunswick Square one evening to meet his betrothed ; on which occasion the barrister subjected him to rather a severe cross-examination. Cecil ventured next morning to ask her husband what he thought of her friend's suitor.

"It's rather fortunate for your friend and for the gentleman himself that he was born rich," answered Mr. O'Boyneville ; "there are some men who seem created to distinguish themselves at the Old Bailey, and I'm afraid Mr. Lobyer is one of them. But as he is the owner of a million or two, it doesn't much matter. If he had been a poor man, he would have run through all the crimes in the statute-book ; but as he has unlimited wealth, he can indulge himself by breaking four-fifths of the ten commandments without putting himself in the power of the law."

CHAPTER XVII.

POOR PHILIP.

THERE were other men besides Laurence O'Boyneville who found it pleasant to pitch their tents and kindle their household fires within the limits of Bloomsbury. Sigismund Smythe, the novelist, believed in the neighbourhood of Russell Square as the most delightful spot on earth.

"I had an over-dose of the country when I was young, and I'm not given to babble of green fields and pastures new," said Mr. Smythe, whose quotations were apt to be more appropriate than correct. "People may talk as they like about the dulness of Rachel Street, and Sidney Crescent. I only wish they'd had a taste of the High Street of my native town on a hot summer's evening between eight and nine o'clock. That would cure them. Dull, quotha ! haven't we the cabs and the tradesmen's carts, and the great vans from King's Cross Station, and coals always being delivered at one's next-door neighbour's. In my native town there was'n't a tradesman kept any conveyance above

a wheelbarrow ; and as to cabs, there was only one dilapidated old fly in the place. Oh, I should like the people who turn up their noses at Bloomsbury to try Wareham, when the townspeople have gone to a cricket-match in the Castle-Meads, and when the only thing alive in the High Street is one solitary cat stalking upon the tops of the houses. Dull, indeed ! why, on such a summer evening as I'm thinking of, I've heard a man yawn three doors off, and I'm sure a hearty sneeze would have startled the whole town."

Mr. Smythe had taken to himself a pretty country-bred young wife, the orphan niece of his old friend Charles Raymond, with whom he lived in perfect harmony, and who never read a line of his novels. This was a point upon which the novelist insisted.

"If you read my books you'll make suggestions, and if you make suggestions I shall hate you, and the better your suggestions are the more I shall hate you," said Sigismund. "Nor do I care about your knowing the depths of infamy which the human mind, for an adequate consideration, can fathom. The critics inform me that my fictions are demoralising. As a writer and a ratepayer I believe in my fictions ; but as a husband I defer to the critics, and forbid my wife to read my novels."

Sigismund's house was comfortably furnished ; and in no habitation within sound of the bells of St. Pancras were to be seen so many nicknacks, such quaint old black oak book-cases and cabinets, such wonderful morsels of majolica and Palissy, such Lilliputian silver tea-services and watering-pots and coal-scuttles, such marvels in the art of photography, such delicious book-binding in white vellum and many-coloured calf, as in the dwelling of the romancer. Mr. Smythe possessed that love of colour and brightness, that childlike yearning for prettiness, which seems the attribute of most men who live by the cultivation of their fancy. To keep these household gods in order was Mrs. Smythe's chief occupation and delight ; and to her mind the little inner room lined with books and furnished with a wonderful office-table on which there were inexhaustible bundles of quill-pens and innumerable reams of smooth shining foreign note-paper, was the most sacred chamber ever tenanted by mortal man. For in this apartment did the industrious Sigismund compose his romances, beguiled by the yelping and howling of his favourite dog, who inhabited an open stone-vault below the novelist's windows,—a vault which the boldest of house-agents faltered in designating a back-garden.

Perhaps there was no pleasanter house with a mile radius of Russell Square than the modest dwelling inhabited by Mr. and Mrs. Smythe. Here, when the moderator lamp was lighted

and the curtains drawn, some of the brightest luminaries of modern literature assembled round the hospitable hearth. Here were always to be found dry sherry and unlimited soda-water, the palest brandy and the most genuine Seltzer and Vichy. Here little wicker covered bottles of liqueur, and cherry cordials that had come straight from Copenhagen by convoy of friendly hands, were found lurking in corners of sideboards. Here better things were said than ever found their way to the compositor. Here the mighty chief of the "Bond-Street Blagueur" laid aside the murderous pen of the critic and expanded in genial friendship—that delicious friendship of the *coterie*, which is another name for enmity to all the rest of the world. And here poor Philip Foley came to seek consolation—or at least friendly listeners into whose ears he could pour the unsuccessful man's bitter railing—when the British Institution and the Academy had been unanimous in rejecting his pictures, and when the Sunday evenings at the Fountains had been particularly dispiriting. Of late Mr. Foley had abandoned himself to a sullen despair—the outward and visible tokens whereof were to be observed in the length of his hair and the carelessness of his attire. He had taken to immoderate tobacco, and laughed a strident laugh at the caustic witticisms of the "Bond-Street" chief. He had grown fitful in his habits, and would sometimes drink himself into an intellectual frenzy with innumerable tumblers of brandy and Seltzer, while on other occasions he would sit apart glowering moodily on the company, and refusing to taste any thing stronger than water.

Sigismund was very good to this stricken deer. Sometimes, when Philip had taken a homely dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Smythe, and when the novelist had been working hard all day, the two young men paced the streets and squares of the Bloomsbury district together in gloaming and gaslight, and discoursed with brotherly confidence and freedom.

"I tell you she isn't worth the howling you make about her—*le jeu ne vaut pas*—the what's-its-name," said the practical Sigismund. "What is she but a little fair-haired chit, with dark eyebrows and big grey eyes, and the insolent turned-up nose of a Palais-Royal *soubrette*? What is she but a mercenary little adventuress? Yes, though she lives under her father's roof, and shelters her innocence under the wing of a chaperone when she ventures abroad, the woman who angles for a rich husband is no better than an adventuress, whatever and whoever she may be. And you let yourself run to seed, and neglect your work, and take to cynical declamation against things in general, when you have good reason to be thankful for a blessed escape from misery. Do you think such a wife as

William Crawford's daughter could fail to make you wretched ; Why, she would spend your annual earnings on her gloves ; and the day that brought you back your unhung pictures from the Academy would in all probability bring you a county-court summons from your wife's milliner. No, no, Phil ; the lovely Florence would have been no wife for you, and she has shown herself wise in her generation. You want a dear homely little creature—say an orphan,—there's an extraordinary advantage in marrying an orphan,—a poor desolate young thing who has spent her girlhood as half-boarder, or governess-pupil in a cheap boarding-school, and who will think Islington a paradise, and esteem herself fortunate if she gets a new gown once a year, and a clean bonnet-cap at Christmas and Easter. That's the only kind of wife for a rising man—the dear good uncomplaining helpmate, who will devote all the strength of her intellect to make both ends meet, and will, while sitting by your side in the parlour, have an instinctive consciousness that the maid-of-all-work is burning a tallow-candle to waste in the back-kitchen,—the model housewife of the Dutch painters, who goes down to her kitchen with a candle in the dead of night, to prevent waste and riot. You want a dear little girl with a genius for mending and contriving, who will sit by your fire-side darned your socks, and singing ' Wapping old stairs ' or ' The last rose of summer ' while you work at your easel, and who will believe in you, in spite of the world, as the greatest genius that ever handled a brush. In point of fact, you want such a wife as my wife ! " exclaimed Sigismund triumphantly. " And as for Florence Crawford, let her make merry or go hang herself, as the bard observes. Good gracious me ! " cried the romancer, suddenly bursting into song :

“ Should I, wasting in despair,
Die-ie becau-ause a woman's fai-air ? ”

By which, of course, I mean shall *you*," he added, in explanation. " Besides, haven't you your art to fall back upon ? If life goes wrong with you, can't you take it out in violent reds and yellows, as I take it out in murder and villany ? When the critics fall foul of me, I buy an extra ream of paper and a gallon of ink, and go at my work with a will. All the world lies before you, dear old Phil ; and the day may come when Mrs. Lobyer will be obliged to expend her shilling for a peep at your great picture reigning in solitary glory in some West-end gallery ; which isn't by any means a new dodge by-the-bye, for didn't the Athenians pay an entrance-fee for seeing the ' Helen ' which Zeuxis painted for their city ? "

Thus consoled by the voice of friendship, Mr. Foley only-

grew more bitter. But he took his friend's advice nevertheless. Expended his last ten-pound note in the purchase of a new easel, and set up a monster canvas. He was almost like poor Haydon, who, in the piteous record of his wasted life, declares that without "a new large picture to lean upon," he felt "as if deserted by the world."

In all the course of his acquaintance with William Crawford's fascinating daughter, the young painter had made no direct avowal of his passion. He loved her—he had told her so, indirectly, a thousand times—and he knew that she was conscious of his devotion.

For some time after hearing Florence Crawford's engagement discussed as an established fact, Mr. Foley kept aloof from the Sunday-evening gatherings at the Fountains. Ah, how he hated the dreary Sabbath twilights after he had forsworn the delight of Flo's society; the wind and dust upon the Islington highways; the smartly-dressed church-goers decorously moving homewards; the smarter servant-maids hurrying away from hot little chapels, where they had been enduring semi-suffocation in the glare of the gas! Those bright, windy, spring evenings were terrible to the struggling painter. The decorous Islingtonians stared at him wonderingly as he passed them by, with his haggard face and streaming hair, his meerschau-mpipe and paint-stained coat. He lit his pipe when he was clear of the crowd, and with that faithful companion walked the suburban highways till midnight. On such evenings the atmosphere of his painting-room stifled him; the prim little sitting-room, in which his landlord's family kept their Sabbath state, was odious to him.

"I feel as if I couldn't breathe on those wretched Sunday nights," said Philip to his faithful Sigismund. "It is all very well while I can see to paint—for I have grown a heathen since—since—*she* threw me over—and I stick to my easel on Sundays as well as week days; but when the light goes my pluck goes with it. I light my pipe, but the tobacco chokes me. I fold my arms upon the window-sill; and try to think out some difficulty in the composition of my picture; but it's no use. I find myself thinking of *her*, and wondering whether she is arraying herself in one of those gauzy white muslins, with floating turquoise-coloured ribbons, in which she looks the incarnation of freshness and innocence. And then I light my lamp and open my box of water-colours, and make a little sketch of her in the cloudy muslin, and the sky-blue ribbons, with sunshine upon her hair, and sunshine upon her dress, and the tenderest shadows hovering about and around her. Ah, Sigismund, if you are ever desperately in love, thank Providence that you can't paint. That's a fatal power. To

conjure out of a few paltry pigments the beloved face in all its dangerous beauty, instinct with looks of love that never will illumine it for you ; to be for ever calling into life and brightness the same lovely shadow, and to know that it is only a beautiful phantasm ; to kiss the lips that are nothing but a patch of colour wet from your own brush ; to pore upon eyes that owe their sole light to artful touches of the pencil,—ah, dear friend, *that way madness lies!* If St. Anthony had been as good a draughtsman as William Crawford, he wouldn't have been *Saint Anthony* ; for he could never have rid himself of the sirens. When I have finished my sketch, and have admired it, and have got into a passion with it, and have torn it into a hundred fragments, I put on my hat and go out. But even out of doors the atmosphere seems close and stifling, and I can scarcely breathe till I get beyond Holloway, to the crown of Highgate Hill ; and then I stand on the bridge and look down upon London, and think what a vast Babylon it is, and how many girls there are within its boundaries ready, like Florence Crawford, to sell themselves to the highest bidder—slaves who only lack the badge of slavery. I shall go to Switzerland in the autumn, Sigismund, and paint from nature, and try if I can't walk down my disappointments amongst the mountains."

As the time when Miss Crawford was likely to become Mrs. Lobyer drew nearer, poor Philip found his Sabbath evenings more difficult of endurance.

That passionate yearning to see the adored object once more—for the last, last time—to which all despairing lovers are liable, took complete possession of the young painter. For three consecutive Sundays he fought against the temptation, calling up his pride to assist him in the struggle. But pride is very weak when bidden to do battle with love. On the third occasion Mr. Foley snatched up his hat, hurried to a barber in a poor neighbourhood, in which a barber's business was at its best on a Sunday, and sacrificed the luxuriance of his hair and beard to the man's inartistic scissors. Then, after a walk, in which he fought the tempter for the last time, changing his mind every five minutes, the painter went back to his lodgings and made a careful toilet. There was a feverish kind of pleasure in what he was doing—the desperate sense of delight which a despairing wretch is apt to feel when his woes have come to a climax, and he is about to snatch the one chance of a fleeting joy that remains to him amidst his misery.

It was a balmy evening in May, and the stars were shining in a tender blue sky, when Philip descended from the heights of Islington. He had sold no picture for the last six months, and had exhausted the quarterly instalments of his modest

income, so he was fain to make his way on foot along the interminable New Road and across the park to Kensington. He brushed the dust from his boots with his cambrie handkerchief as he stood before Mr. Crawford's gates, and while doing so, he had the pleasure of beholding the arrival of a pair of high stepping cobs, and the smallest of miniature broughams, furnished with the biggest and most ferociously flaming of lamps, whose demoniac glare might have been easily dispensed with under the silvery spring starlight. A contemptuous groom with a tight waist descended from the box of this vehicle and opened the door with a bang, thereby releasing Mr. Lobyer, who emerged something after the fashion of a badly-fitting jaek-in-the-box, and who looked a great deal too big and elumy for his brougham. The two men looked at each other as they passed through the gateway together, pretending not to know each other, and with an unquenchable hatred visible in the faces which they fondly imagined expressed nothing but a contemptuous indifference.

The rich man was free of the place, and contrived to push his way to the drawing-room before Philip; and the young painter, following close upon his heels, had the opportunity of beholding Miss Crawford's coquettishly disdainful welcome of her affianced suitor.

Poor Philip saw her face grow pale as she looked across her lover's shoulder and recognised her old admirer; but the colour came back to the delicate cheeks very quickly, and she gave Philip her hand with her airiest manner.

"Where have you been hiding yourself all the season, Mr. Foley?" she exclaimed. "We never see you now. I hope you are devoting yourself to some great picture that is to astonish us all. Do tell me what you have been doing in all these ages."

Miss Crawford drew her airy dress away from one side of the capacious triangular ottoman, which had been almost hidden under her voluminous draperies, and Philip seated himself in the vacant place. Yes, there are decidedly some joys left even for the desperate man, and Philip experienced a keen sense of delight in defying Mr. Lobyer.

That gentleman stood beside his betrothed, looking down upon her with an expression which might have in some degree justified the dismal forebodings of the people who foresaw only melancholy results from Miss Crawford's brilliant match. But Flo was not a person to be alarmed by the scowls of a jealous swain, so he never so savagely. She looked up at Mr. Lobyer with her sweetest smile, and murmured gently:

"Surely, Thomas, you know Mr. Foley? you must have met him here again and again."

The two men uttered unintelligible growls without looking at each other, and Florence continued her conversation with her unhappy admirer.

"I hope you have been working very hard," she said, "and painting from nature. Papa is always talking about the necessity of painting from nature. Have you been abroad, or in Scotland, or Wales? Pray let us hear what you have been doing."

"Very little so far, Miss Crawford," answered the landscape-painter gravely, "but I am beginning to work in savage earnest. 'Men must work, and women must weep.' I think that's what Mr. Kingsley says. Heaven knows the men work hard enough nowadays, but I fancy the race of women who weep has passed away."

Miss Crawford looked at her victim with the most charming expression of bewilderment; and then after a brief pause she said sweetly:

"I looked for something of yours at the British Institution and the Academy, and was so disappointed to find nothing. How did it happen?"

"My pictures were rejected. It is my destiny to be rejected," said Philip, with tragical intensity.

Mr. Lobyer at this moment gave utterance to a suppressed growl, and might possibly have testified his indignation by some overt act of discourtesy towards Philip, if a little deputation had not approached the ottoman to entreat a song from Miss Crawford. That young lady, rising promptly to comply with the desire of her friends, left her two lovers seowling at each other.

A young German, of a musical turn of mind, conducted Flo to the piano, and made himself busy in arranging the music and placing the candles. Mr. Lobyer, glaring at this gentleman, and addressing Philip Foley under cover of this gentleman, gave utterance to his sentiments.

"I should have thought when a fellow was engaged to be married to a girl, other fellows would have sense enough to know that the girl doesn't want their attentions," said the amiable Thomas; and then he stalked to the piano, and stood behind his liege lady, staring moodily at the parting of her hair as she played and sang. Mr. Lobyer was not an enthusiast in the musical art, nor indeed in the pictorial, nor in any art which demands the possession of refined tastes in the man who loves it.

Philip held himself aloof from the group around the piano. He heard Flo's clear soprano voice ring out the airiest of ballads, all about Switzerland and "chamois bounding free," and mountain maids, who sing tra-la-la-la from morn till

dewy eye. He heard her, and fancied that such silvery notes could only belong to a singer unencumbered with any thing in the way of a heart.

"She could never sing like that if she had a spark of real feeling," he thought. "How charming she was just now! how sweetly she smiled at me! how graciously she invited me to sit by her side! And yet she has no more consciousness of my suffering than if she were a mermaid. She is going to marry a rich man, and she is so pleased with her good fortune that she is ready to be amiable to all the world. But for pity, or compunction, or womanly tenderness — bah! she does not know what such things mean."

The young painter turned his back upon the crowd — the fashionable people who came to the Fountains because they wanted to see what William Crawford was like, and the artists and professional people, who came because they liked him — poor Philip turned his back upon society, and went into a little inner room where there were stands of engravings and photographs, and where flirtations were often carried on pleasantly under cover of art. The little room happened to be empty just now, and Philip threw himself into a chair by the open window, and abandoned himself to melancholy meditation. Mr. Crawford's garden looked very pretty in the starlight. There were trees that had been growing there for centuries — a noble old cedar, which had sheltered the powdered beaux and belles of the Hanoverian dynasty, under which Harley or Bolingbroke may have paced with meditative steps; a tree that had flourished in the days of the court suburb's grandest glory, and which flourished still for the delight of William Crawford the painter, who had given something like a guinea an inch for his old-fashioned garden.

Philip had been sitting alone for some time; he had been so long undisturbed that he had forgotten the nature of the place he was in, and the meaning of that gentle buzzing and humming of voices in the adjoining apartment. So profound were the young man's meditations that the sound of footsteps close behind him did not break the spell of his reverie. It was only when a friendly hand was laid upon his shoulder that he looked up and saw his host standing by his side.

"Florence told me you were here, but I couldn't find you till this moment," said the great painter, giving his cordial hand to the moody struggler. "What have you been doing with yourself all these months? I wanted your help for the background of my Jupiter; but perhaps you are growing too big a man to paint backgrounds."

"Not too big a man, Mr. Crawford, but too proud a man. I think the unsuccessful men are always the proudest. Failure

is like poverty, it sets a man against his fortunate fellow-creatures. I've been painting seven years; and though I've worked fitfully, I've not been idle. If I don't do anything to make my name known amongst painters in the next three years, I'll make a bonfire of my easel and all the rubbish of my studio, and take to my father's trade."

"What was that?"

"He was a lieutenant in the 82nd foot, and died of cholera on a forced march in the hottest month of the East-Indian summer. There was a fuss made at the Home Office about that march, and it turned out to have been one of those official blunders by which lives are so often wasted. I dare say my father had rather a hard time of it altogether in his brief military career, but his life wasn't *all* disappointment and failure. He didn't know what it was to give his heart and soul to the work he loved—to think of it by day and to dream of it by night, until he woke from his bright dreams to find it all so much wasted labour. He never knew that."

"No, Philip," answered William Crawford gravely, "but I have known that; and you know as well as I do that I have gone through the struggles, and endured the disappointments, that seem so hard to you now. Do you remember that mystical story of Bulwer Lytton's, in which the student, who would fain have made himself master of a mighty science, was arrested at the outset by a hideous spectre that haunted the threshold of the shadowy temple? At the portal of every temple you will meet the same forbidding spirit. I have faced the Dweller on the Threshold, Philip, and have wrestled with and vanquished him. For me he has borne the shape of toil and poverty, failure and humiliation. He has dressed himself in the clothes of the hanging-committee, and has rejected my pictures; he has made himself an art-critic, and has demolished me in a malevolent criticism. In every form I have encountered him, and have mastered him—only because I loved my art better than I loved myself, and worshipped my art as something apart from myself. There was some method in poor Haydon's madness when he said, 'In me the solitary sublimity of high art is not gone.' With an execution in his house, and a cook dunning him for her wages, the poor enthusiast was able to rejoice that there was one person left in the world to paint big classic unsaleable pictures. I believe that poor fellow was a real artist. There are men who paint great pictures who are not true artists; and there are true artists who never paint great pictures. Your ideal artist is above envy and above despair. Haydon committed suicide because he couldn't pay his butcher and baker, not because his big canvases were unsuccessful. He would have gone on painting,

and hoping against hope, if he could have afforded to live ; it was the sordid every-day necessity that vanquished him. You will never be a great painter, Foley, while you think of your own disappointments, your own failures : you must learn to merge your identity into the mighty abstraction. If they refuse your picture at the Academy to-day, go home and begin a better to-morrow ; and before the month is out you will rejoice that your rejected canvas was unhung. The story of Lot's wife has a moral for painters. Never look back. What are the failures of the past and the present ? A little wasted canvas, a few tubes of colour more or less ; and it is across the failures of the present that brave men march to the triumphs of the future. What hot-headed fellows the young men of the present day are ! I was five and thirty before I got a decent price for a picture ; and here is a lad of twenty-seven talking of going out to India to die, because he is not acknowledged as the new Turner."

William Crawford had been the kindly friend and adviser of many young painters ; but it was not often that he spoke as earnestly as he had spoken to Philip Foley to-night. The young man grasped his counsellor's hand with feverish ardour.

"You are right," he said. "I am a weak, egotistical fool ; and it is of myself I am always thinking, and not of my art. A painter ought to divorce himself from the common weaknesses and to wean himself from the common pleasures of mankind ; and yet Rubens was happy with his beautiful young wives, and had his home as well as his painting-room. I gathered some ivy-leaves in his garden last autumn, and, standing in the little pavilion where he used to sit sketching on summer mornings, I thought what a blessed existence it must have been, the sweet home-life in that quaint old city of Antwerp. But it is not in every man to be Rubens, nor is it in every man to win the woman he loves ; and — you are right, Mr. Crawford. The painter who wants to be great must forget himself and his own troubles. I dare say there were family jars even in the Antwerp household, and that glorious Peter Paul has gone to his work with a sore heart on some of those bright summer mornings."

There was a pause, during which both men stood looking out at the starlit garden, thinking of the women they loved. Mrs. Champernowne had promised to "look in" at the Fountains on that special Sunday evening, and had not done so.

"It was like her to delude me by a promise, on purpose to disappoint me by breaking it," thought Mr. Crawford bitterly.

"Come, Folcy," he said at last, "let's hear what you have been doing. I hope you are working honestly."

"I am working honestly just now; but I have wasted more of my life lately than I can afford to waste, and I have only just awakened to the sense of my folly."

"Then you are lucky," answered William Crawford. "The man who awakes to a sense of his folly at twenty-seven is a happy fellow. There are some of us who are fools for the best part of our lives. But answer my question plainly: What are you doing now?"

"Mountain-scenery—an evening-storm."

"And you paint your mountain-storm at Islington, with no better light than you get across London chimney-pots! That is not the way Collins painted. You must go straight to nature, my dear boy, and paint your storm amongst the mountains."

"A man whose pictures won't sell, and who has only a hundred a-year to fall back upon, can't afford to go to nature. I did think of spending the summer on the Yorkshire coast, roughing it among fishermen and coast-guardsmen; but I have outrun the constable, and must stop in my Islington lodging and paint 'pot-boilers.' I can't afford to travel this year."

"Yes, you can, Philip, if I lend you a couple of hundred pounds."

"You, Mr. Crawford?"

"Who can better afford to do so than I, who know your power to do great things in the future? However, on reflection, I won't lend you the money. Borrowed money is supposed to exercise a demoralising influence on the artistic mind. I'll give you a commission, and pay you in advance. There's a little bit of scenery on the Danube that I fell in love with a few years ago. I'll find you the description of the spot in Murray, and I'll write you a cheque for the two hundred before you leave the house to-night. Spend your summer and autumn on the Rhine and Danube, and bring me back my pet spot on a small canvas."

"But—but this is too generous," stammered the landscape painter.

"There's not a spark of generosity involved in the transaction. If I were a Manchester man you would take my commission without thanks or parley. But since you insist upon treating the matter as a favour, I will attach a condition to my offer."

"And that is——"

"That you leave England at once. These long May-days are too good to waste in lodgings at Islington."

"I think I know why you do me this great kindness," said Philip.

"First and foremost, because I believe in your genius."

"Secondly, because you don't wish me to come to this house just now. I understand the delicacy of your kindness. I appreciate your goodness, and——"

"And you accept my commission——"

"As heartily as it is given. I shall start for Rotterdam by the next steamer; and when I come back——"

"You will bring home a picture which the Academy will not reject. I may be on the hanging-committee myself next year, in which case I promise you your landscape shall not be skied. Be sure there's human interest in your picture, by-the-bye. You paint the figure better than any landscape-painter I know; and mind you make good use of your power. That barefooted girl with the pitcher would not have crossed the brook so often if your crack landscape-painters didn't know the value of human interest. Let us have something fresher and stronger than the barefooted girl for Trafalgar Square next May."

There was a walnut-wood davenport in the room, before which the painter seated himself. He took a cheque-book from one of the drawers, and wrote his cheque while he talked to Philip.

"If you take that to my bankers they'll give you circular notes," he said; "and now good-night and good-bye. Start by the next boat, work your hardest, and look forward to next May. I mean you to be a great man."

For the second time Philip grasped the great painter's hand, and that hearty pressure of palm to palm was the only expression which he gave to his gratitude. Nor did William Crawford give him any opportunity for grateful protestations. Before the young man had put the cheque into his pocket, his benefactor had returned to the drawing-room, where his guests were perpetually being surprised, and delighted, and unspcakably obliged by instrumental and vocal performances, during the progress of which they had appeared agreeably occupied by animated conversation.

After putting the painter's cheque into his pocket, Philip went out into the garden, and paced slowly up and down a broad gravel-walk that led away from the house, and was over-shadowed by trellis-work and creeping plants. He wanted to linger just for a few minutes within the precincts of his paradise before he turned his back upon it for ever.

"When I come back here *she* will be married to that cub,

and the mistress of some fine bran-new house in South Kensington or Tyburnia. And I can remember her walking by my side in this shaded alley, looking up in my face with grave earnest eyes, and pretending to be interested in my art. As if *she* cared for art, or for any thing upon this earth except fine dresses and diamonds, and a three-hundred-guinea brouche in which to display herself when she drives in the park. If I painted a good picture, and made a success, would she be sorry then, I wonder?"

After two or three rapid turns up and down this dark alley, where the sound of voices and music came to him through the open windows of Mr. Crawford's drawing-room, Philip went back to the house, and made his way through the crowded apartment. He would have left the Fountains without seeing Florence, but that young lady happened to be standing in his way to the door. She looked at him with a bright surprised face.

"Why, Mr. Foley, where have you been hiding yourself for this last half-hour? You only appear to make yourself invisible. Baron Meiffenheim has been singing the most enchanting little German ballad, and I so much wished you to hear it. I know you like that kind of music."

"I like it so well that I am going up the Danube on purpose to hear it," answered Philip bravely. "Good-night, Miss Crawford; good-night and—good-bye."

He laid a solemn emphasis on the last two syllables, and suffered the little hand he had taken to fall suddenly from his loose grasp. Flo had been an accomplished coquette from the date of her thirteenth birthday, and was accustomed to heart-rending farewells; and yet she felt just one little pang as those solemn syllables fell upon her ear. It would have been so much more pleasant if the landscape-painter had waited to witness her triumphs, and to be exasperated by her fascinations, when she had entered the lists of bewitching matrons as Mrs. Thomas Lobyer.

The steamer left St. Katharine's Dock for Rotterdam at noon on the following day, and on Monday night Philip Foley sat on the raised deck of the vessel smoking a cigar, and looking dreamily down at the phosphoric light upon the waves dashing past him with an eager palpitating motion, as if—or so it seemed to Philip—each silvery wavelet had been hurrying madly towards the English shore to kiss the feet of Florence Crawford.

"There's not a boat goes by us but seems to my mind to be sailing towards her, while I am going away," thought the dependent lover.

He was sorry that he had accepted the painter's kindness

He was sorry that he had pledged himself to become an exile from the land in which he had enjoyed the privilege of making himself supremely miserable for love of Florence Crawford.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TOO LATE FOR REPENTANCE.

AFTER considerable parley, and much supplication on the part of the devotee Mr. Lobyer, it had been arranged that Miss Crawford's marriage should take place on the last day of June; and for a period of six weeks prior to that date the painter found his home a place of confusion and his life a conflict.

Of course it was quite impossible that Florence should herself arrange and superintend the preparations necessary for her bridal. Matronly aid was here indispensable; and in order to give that aid efficiently, Mrs. Frederick Bushby, otherwise Aunt Jane, abandoned the care of her household to a useful maiden sister, and established herself *en permanence* at the Fountains. At her bidding came two estimable young persons in the dress-making line, and an estimable elderly person renowned for plain needlework; and the scrooping and snipping of these worthy people's scissors set William Crawford's teeth on edge whenever he passed the open door of the apartment in which their labours were carried on. At Mrs. Bushby's bidding came also, at all seasonable and unseasonable hours, gentlemanly-looking individuals carrying paste-board-boxes, who were generally announced as "the young man from Regent Street," or "the young man from Wigmore Street," or a "young person with some lace from South-Audley Street, if you please," or "the white-satin boots from Oxford Street, Ma'am."

Poor William Crawford lifted his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders in utter despair when such announcements broke, time after time, upon the quiet of his meditative evening hours.

"Is there any social law which forbids a woman buying clothes after she is married?" asked the painter; "or how is it that a bride finds it necessary to stock her trunks with garments that might serve for a lifetime? Don't imagine I wince at the amount of the cheques, my dear. You may have as much money as you like, Flo; but all this business about white-satin boots and old point-lace seems such unnecessary frivolity."

Of course, on this Mrs. Bushby swooped down upon her brother-in-law, and annihilated him with feminine argumentation.

"When *I* was married, Madame Devy had *carte blanche*," said the matron, "though I was not an only daughter, and though I was going to marry a hard-working solicitor. Such a marriage as Florence is about to make is an event in society, and her *trousseau* will be a subject of conversation. The Wigmore-Street people have already asked permission to exhibit the cambric and Valenciennes *peignoirs* they are making for her; and the Oxford-Street people are going to introduce quite a new style for the Wellington boots we have ordered for riding."

William Crawford groaned aloud.

"And my daughter rides in Wellington boots!" he exclaimed. "Don't tell me any thing more about the *trousseau* if you please, Aunt Jane. Ask me to sign as many cheques as you like, but don't let me know the particulars. Isn't it Owen Meredith who says, 'There are some things hard to understand?' surely a young lady's *corbeille de mariage* is one of them."

Mrs. Bushby did not trouble herself to notice these ribald remarks. She regarded her distinguished brother-in-law with placid contempt. It is not alone my Lord Dundreary who sets down every man who differs from him as a lunatic. In Aunt Jane's opinion the royal academician was an eccentric creature, who made more money than one could suppose by painting scantily-draped young women, and who in the affairs of every-day life was little better than a fool. She suffered him to rail as he pleased against the frivolity of modern young ladies; and she revenged herself upon his cheque-book. The little people in Russell Square profited considerably by Miss Crawford's wedding; for Mrs. Bushby's calculations as to material for dresses that were to be made by the two estimable young persons were apt to err on the side of liberality; and if a few yards of silk or velvet were left, dear extravagant Flo was always the first to propose that the fabric should be converted into a frock for Fanny, or a pelisse for Lilly, or a tunic for Johnny, as the case might be.

And was the painter's daughter of so shallow and frivolous a nature as to find perfect happiness in days spent in milliners' show-rooms and before the counters of haberdashers? Was the society of Thomas Lobyer, who hung about the Fountains after his own loutish fashion at all hours of the day and evening, all-sufficient to satisfy the desires of her heart and mind? She seemed happy, for a young lady who laughs a great deal, and talks almost unceasingly, and pirouettes round

the room on the points of her pretty little feet, with the smallest possible provocation, is generally supposed to enjoy a plethora of happiness. But that very close observer—who, like the typical policeman, is never in the way when he is wanted—might have perceived a shade of fever and hurry in Miss Crawford's gaiety which rarely goes along with unalloyed content. Perfect happiness is apt to be very quiet. There is a solemn hush, a delicious repose in real joy, a delight too deep for words: and such delight had no place in the heart of Florence Crawford. She was pleased with her fine clothes; she was pleased with her jewels. She had more diamond hearts and crosses and crescents than she could count. She had an eagle newly alighted on a monster carbuncle, that looked like a block of translucent red-currant jelly. She had been satiated with suites of turquoise and opal, and had learned to discover a "feather" in a fifty-guinea emerald ring. She was pleased with the carriages which Mr. Lobyer showed her at the makers' in Long Aere, and the horses that had been selected at one of Tattersall's crack sales, for her especial benefit. She was pleased with her visits to the upholsterer who was making new furniture for her rooms at Pevenshall, and who submitted his designs for her approval with as deferential an air as if she had been affianced to a prince of the blood-royal. There are some follies to which womanhood on the sunny side of twenty is prone to stoop, and Miss Crawford was weak enough to be just a little intoxicated by the homage she received in the character of Thomas Lobyer's plighted wife, and a little inclined to forget that the enjoyment of all the glories and grandeurs derived from Mr. Lobyer's wealth involved a life-long alliance with Mr. Lobyer himself. And if the modern Iphigenia is so base a creature as to immolate herself of her own free will before the hymeneal altar, she is rarely without some kind female relation to urge her to the fatal step, and to push her forward with relentless hand, should she shrink from the consummation of the sacrifice. Aunt Jane lost no opportunity of vaunting her niece's good fortune, or of praising Mr. Lobyer—who, for his part, was barely civil to the obliging matron, and was apt to lapse into a state of despondent sulkiness when he found her in constant attendance upon her niece.

No, for the modern Iphigenia there is no such thing as turning back. The days hurried by the plighted bride with relentless haste. The obsequious upholsterer bade his men work night and day, in order that the Pevenshall splendour should be completed in due time. The coachmaker of Hatton Garden would have immolated himself on the floor of his workshop rather than have disappointed such a customer as

Mr. Lobyer. The inestimable young women worked as if for a wager. The French milliner who made Miss Crawford's gala-dresses declared that she had broken faith with duchesses in order to keep her promises to the future Mrs. Lobyer. Flo tried to count the days that yet remained of her unfettered girlhood, but they seemed to slip away from her with a rapidity that defied all powers of calculation. Aunt Jane grew busier and busier as the days grew fewer; and the servants' bell at the Fountains had little rest from the hands of tradesmen's boys. Flo's pretty bed-chamber was transformed into a chaos of parcels and bonnet-boxes, trunks and packing-cases. Glittering caskets of perfumery, mother-of-pearl glove-boxes, and enamelled handkerchief-boxes, wonderful boudoir inkstands in lapis-lazuli and ormolu, embroidered sachets, and perfumed pincushions,—all the feminine delights of M. Rimmel's emporium,—were scattered upon dressing-tables and writing-tables, waiting to be packed. Every day the industrious females at work in the spare bed-room brought some newly-finished garment to swell the heap of silk and moire, muslin and cashmere, that was piled upon the sofa. Flo contemplated all these treasures with a bewildered face sometimes when she was quite alone; and there was some shadow of sadness in the bewilderment of her countenance.

"I wonder whether I am much better or wiser than the savages who are so fond of beads and feathers," she thought.

The modern Iphigenia has very little time for reflection. Poor Flo's life was a perpetual fever during those last days which were so difficult to count. Aunt Jane was never weary of discussing the bridal grandeurs, the bridesmaids' toilettes, the breakfast, the continental tour, the arrangements at Pevenshall. The only person whose equable spirits seemed entirely undisturbed by the excitement of this period was the bridegroom himself, who took matters as coolly as if he had gone through the same important crisis twenty times before, and had become thoroughly *blasé* as to the emotions involved therein. He paid daily visits to the Fountains with laudable devotion, and he conversed with his future wife as much as it was in him to converse with any one, which was not very much; but he still clung fondly to the companionship of miniature bull-terriers and fawn-coloured pugs, and might be seen seated in the brougham that was too small for him, taking his airing in the park with a fawn-coloured pug on his knee.

The time came very speedily when Flo found it easier to count the remaining hours of her unfettered girlhood than it had been to count the days. On the last day Mrs. Bushby went back to Russell Square to see to the finishing touches of

her two elder girls' toilette, and to secure the Bloomsbury hair-dresser for the arrangement of their tresses on the all-important morning. These juvenile cousins were to swell the train of Miss Crawford's bridesmaids, and were to exhibit themselves in marvellous costumes of pale-blue glacé silk and tulle.

But if Aunt Jane had deserted her post upon this last day, she was not the person to leave disorder or confusion behind her. Every arrangement had been completed before the matron's departure. The formidable deed of settlement, which secured Miss Crawford a yearly income that might have satisfied a countess's requirements as to pin-money, had been executed with all due ceremony. The handsome trunks for the continental tour, the gigantic packing-cases that were to be sent straight to Pevenshall, were labelled, and Florence looked with a vague sense of confusion at the addresses in which she was entitled "Mrs. Lobyer." The smallest details had been carefully supervised by the indefatigable matron before she departed to spend a busy day in the bosom of her own household.

"I am going away quite easy in my mind, dear," said Aunt Jane, when Florence escorted her to the porch; "for I don't think there has been an iota forgotten. You will see me again at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, with the children. And now, my love, be sure you take plenty of rest, for I want you to look your best and brightest to-morrow."

There was nothing left to be done,—no more shopping, no more solemn interviews with the French milliner, no more excitement of any kind whatever, but a dead, sullen calm. No sooner had Aunt Jane's hired brougham driven away from the gates of the Fountains, than Florence Crawford's spirits sank as suddenly as the wind drops sometimes on a sultry summer's day. She went up stairs to her room, and on her way thither had occasion to pass those boxes whose primly-written labels had become obnoxious to her.

"It is such an ugly name," she thought; "*nobody* could like to be called Mrs. Lobyer."

In the bed-room Miss Crawford found the new maid who had been engaged to attend her in her altered estate; and if, in such moments of unreasonably depression, one individual can be more antipathetic than another, that individual is a new maid. The young person was busying herself with the arrangements of the dressing-table, and Florence fled from her as from a pestilence; but not before she had caught a glimpse of the wedding-dress laid out on the sofa like a shroud, and looking almost as ghastly in its spotless whiteness.

"She'd want to talk to me if I stayed," thought Flo, as

she hurried from her abigail's presence ; " and I should have to hear all about her last place, and her anxiety to please me and understand my ways, and so on : as if I had any particular ways, except always losing my things and leaving my keys about."

Miss Crawford wandered into the drawing-room, and thence into an apartment which served as a library. The windows were all open, the birds were singing in the conservatory-passage that led to the painter's sacred chamber, the warm June sunlight shone upon dazzling flower-beds, and sparkled amid the waters of those marble basins which gave a name to William Crawford's abode. All things were looking their gayest and brightest ; but poor Flo's heart sank amid this summer radiance. She closed the venetian-shutters, and seated herself in the darkest corner of the shadowy room.

She was quite alone. Mr. Lobyer had pleaded some especially important engagement of a business character as an excuse for his absence on this day, and Flo had told her father's servant that she would be at home to no one. She had the long summer hours to herself, and her aunt had entreated her to rest. If repose consists in sitting motionless in an easy-chair, with fixed eyes and idle hands, Flo certainly obeyed Mrs. Bushby's injunction ; for the little clock on the chimneypiece recorded the passage of more than one hour while the bride-elect sat in the same attitude, with sad eyes fixed on one spot in the carpet, and listless hands loosely intertwined in her lap.

She aroused herself at length from this melancholy meditation ; but she sighed more heavily than a millionaire's bride-elect has any right to sigh as she lifted her head and looked dreamily round the room.

" I don't know what is the matter with me to-day," she thought. " I seem to have grown sick of my life all at once ; and if I am ever so tired, I must go on living just the same. It is not every body who can die at a moment's notice, like Shelley's Ginevra."

Miss Crawford sighed heavily for the second time, and turned to the book-shelves near her with an impatient gesture.

" I don't suppose there is a creature in this world whose life will bear thinking about," she said. " What is it that dreadful person in the play says ? ' These deeds must not be thought after these ways ; so, it will make us mad ! ' I'm sure *my* life has been all hurry and excitement ever since I left school—one perpetual contest with other girls, as to which of us should wear the best dresses, and know the nicest people, and go to most parties. I sometimes think things

might have happened differently if I had had time to think and had been less influenced by other girls."

She took a book from one of the shelves hap-hazard; but there is a Nemesis who governs and pervades the trifles of every-day life. The book on which Miss Crawford's careless hand happened to fall was a volume of the Waverley novels, containing *The Bride of Lammermoor*; and in the mind of a young lady who is about to make a mercenary marriage that sad story is likely to awaken painful ideas. Poor old George III. had a fancy to read Shakespeare's *Lear* at that time when he, like the legendary monarch, was old and distraught; and his physicians ordered that the pitiful tragedy should be kept from his hands; but the king was wiser than his medical attendants, and knew where to find the play in spite of them. He asked for Colman's Dramatic Works, which his unsuspecting servants willingly gave him, and amongst which he knew there was the modern playwright's adaptation of the grand old play. He read the tragedy, and was found by his daughters weeping. "I am like poor Lear," he said piteously; "but I have no Goneril and Regan—only two Cordelias." One can fancy the scene a touching one, and the king's daughters melted into tears that were not entirely bitter as they bent over the sorrowful old man, amidst whose madness there was so much wisdom.

Flo turned the leaves of Sir Walter's masterpiece listlessly at first; but who can read half-a-dozen pages of that wondrous story and not be interested? The sweet romance was very familiar to her; but she read on, charmed anew by the sad tender record of an "o'er true tale." She read on till her tears fell fast, and a vague sense of her own disquietudes seemed strangely blended with the sorrows of Lucy Ashton. She sat reading till her father's step on the tiled floor of the conservatory startled her from her abstraction.

"Are you all alone, my darling?" asked the painter tenderly, as his daughter laid aside her book, and rose to greet him.

"Yes, papa; I have been alone all day."

"But where is Aunt Jane?"

"She has gone to the Square to see to the children's dresses for to-morrow," answered Flo with a sigh.

The thought of that bridal finery carried her back from Lucy Ashton's omen-haunted courtship to all the frivolous splendours of her own wedding.

"Why didn't you come to me, dear?" asked the painter: "I should have liked to have had you with me on this last day."

"I thought you were working hard, papa, and I didn't like

to interrupt you. And—and—I felt rather melancholy to-day. This house seems such a dear old place now I'm going to leave it : and I love you so dearly, papa, though I have never given you any proof of my love."

She clung to him as she spoke, and hid her face upon his breast. There were a few tears upon the collar of Mr. Crawford's coat when Flo lifted her head and slipped her hand through his arm, to lead him towards the dining-room.

"Tell me that I have not been a *very* wicked daughter, papa," said Flo pleadingly. "I'm sure I feel as if I were Goneril and Regan and those two dreadful sisters in Balzac's *Père Goriot* all in one."

"My pet, you have been a charming daughter," answered the painter, smiling.

"Yes, papa, but not a good one."

"As good as you have been charming, my darling, though just a little bewildering sometimes in the way of slang phrases and Wellington boots. There, there, let me see my own bright Flo again. I suppose it's only natural that this last day should make you a little melancholy ; but a lady of fashion ought not to be melancholy, even on the last day of her girlhood. I have always had a vague idea that nobody ever cried on the Piccadilly side of Oxford-Street. Of course people must die everywhere, and there are grand funerals, and hatchments on house-fronts, and court-mourning at the West-end ; but I did not think fashionable people were ever sorry. They seem to me like actors and pantomimists, obliged to put private griefs aside in order to comply with the exigencies of public life. Come, darling, we are to dine *tête-à-tête* to-day. You must imagine yourself a woman of fashion, who has taken a fancy for entertaining a popular painter."

"I had rather be your loving daughter, papa, and forget all about fashion," Flo answered sadly.

All the feverish gaiety of the last few weeks had departed, leaving a very real sadness in its place. But Miss Crawford was not the sort of person to abandon herself weakly to any morbid feelings. She saw her father's eyes fixed upon her in earnest watchfulness, and shook off her despondency with one of those heroic efforts of which even frivolous women are capable. She talked gaily all through the cosy little *tête-à-tête* dinner, which the painter found very agreeable after that surfeit of Aunt Jane's society, from which he had suffered of late. Throughout that pleasant dinner there was a tacit avoidance of all allusion to the grand event so near at hand. Flo talked of any thing and every thing except Mr. Lobyer and the future.

"Papa," she cried suddenly, as they sat listlessly trifling

with some strawberries after the table had been cleared, "let us spend the evening in your painting-room. I know it is your pet retreat, and I want to be a dutiful daughter for once in my life."

She crept behind the painter's chair, encircled his head with her arms, and kissed him on the forehead. So had his young wife stolen behind him sometimes, to administer consolation, during those dreary days in Buckingham Street, when he had seated himself before his easel to stare blankly at his hopeless work, prostrate in body and mind. His daughter's touch recalled those departed days with all their mournful associations. He took one of the little caressing hands, and pressed it gently to his lips.

"My darling," he said very softly, "you remind me of your mother."

It was the first time he had ever said this in all his intercourse with his daughter.

They went together to the painting-room, and sat in the great bay-window, through which the soft evening air crept towards them, like a soothing influence. The painter sat in his favourite easy-chair, looking dreamily towards the western sunlight, warm and golden behind a foreground of sombre green. Flo brought a low ottoman to her father's feet and seated herself upon it, with her folded arms resting on his knee, and her head drooping a little upon those round white arms. Not very far away from them, rapid broughams were hurrying to and fro in the shadowy park, bearing airily-attired beauty to the elegant solemnity of patrician dinner-tables, but in the painter's garden the faint sighing of summer winds among the leaves and the twitter of one belated bird alone broke the stillness.

Within the twilit painting-room neither William Crawford nor his daughter seemed inclined to break the spell of that summer silence. Amid the brightest and happiest surroundings there is always some touch of melancholy in the atmosphere of a summer evening, and to-night Florence Crawford was not especially happy.

"Papa," she said at last, after they had both abandoned themselves for some time to a thoughtful silence, "if I were going to live with you two more years, I think I should be a very different kind of daughter from the creature I have been."

She laid a contemptuous emphasis on the word creature, as in the extremity of self-humiliation.

"But why, why, darling?"

She did not reply to his question, but went on with her self-upbraiding.

"I would never call a picture of yours 'jolly' again. Had Rubens any daughters, I wonder?—surely with two or three wives he could scarcely escape daughters; and were they hateful, pert creatures like me, and did they call that wonderful picture he painted for the Arquebusiers 'jolly,' if there was any Flemish equivalent for that horrid word? I know how horrible it is now, since"—"since I've heard Mr. Lobyer use it," Miss Crawford had been about to say; but she pulled herself up suddenly, and continued, "since I've heard it worn threadbare by all kinds of people. Oh, papa," she cried with sudden enthusiasm, "I know what a great man you are, and how proud I ought to be of being able to call myself your daughter! I do know that, though I seem so vain and frivolous: and I know that your 'Aspasia' is the greatest picture that ever was painted—'bar none,' as Mr. Lobyer would say."

The little bit of slang escaped poor Flo's lips in the midst of her sentiment; but the painter was too deeply moved to be cognizant of the vile phrase which concluded his daughter's exordium. He took her up in his arms and kissed her tenderly.

"My dearest girl," he said, with an assumed gaiety, "we do not expect to find the wisdom of all the sages under these crinkled golden locks; and if you have called my pictures 'jolly,' I am sure the epithet is infinitely more civil than many my critics have applied to them. Besides, you are to be as much my daughter in the future as you have been in the past, and I shall expect Mrs. Lobyer to be as deeply interested in my work as Miss Crawford has been. And now, dear, come into the drawing-room and sing to me. We must not prove ourselves unworthy of the blessing of Aunt Jane's absence by lapsing into melancholy."

Upon this Florence embraced her father, and protested vehemently that he was the best and dearest of created beings. And then before he had time to recover himself, she buried her face in his breast, and sobbed aloud.

"Papa, tell me that you don't think me a wicked mercenary creature," she cried; "pray, pray tell me that you don't think I'm that."

Who shall find words wherewith to set down the glory of that ceremonial which was performed on the following day at a fashionable temple? a temple the priests of which were broadly accused of Puseyite tendencies, and on whose communion-table there glittered brazen candlesticks. All the nursemaids of the neighbourhood dragged their charges to behold the splendour of Miss Crawford's bridal train; and the fashionable reporters were more than usually grandiloquent in their descriptions of the wedding.

Nevertheless it was very much like other weddings, except in the one grand fact that the bride shed no tears.

"I didn't cry, you see, papa," she said, when she found herself for a few moments alone with her father after the ceremony. "I feel myself quite a woman of fashion."

The brilliant Florence did not inform her father that she had been crying all through the previous night, and that copious applications of cold water and *eau-de-Cologne* had alone prevented her appearing at the fashionable altar with swollen red circles surrounding her pretty grey eyes.

The express-train that bore Mr. Lobyer and his bride to Dover on the first stage of their continental tour rushed past many a pleasant rustic dwelling, nestling deep amid summer verdure: and, looking down at humble homesteads and cottage-gardens, warmly tinted by the westerling sun, the millionaire's wife thought sadly:

"I wonder whether the people who live in cottages marry for love?"

CHAPTER XIX.

TIDINGS FROM INDIA.

FOR Lady Cecil the summer months in Bloomsbury were very dreary. And it may be here confessed that Bloomsbury is rather dreary in the summer evenings, when the rifleman's "little drum has beat to bed" in the quadrangle before the Foundling Hospital, and vagrant children hawk pitiful bunches of flowers in the squares and streets. But are not the endless terraces and oblong squares of Tyburnia, and even the broad highways of Belgravia, apt to seem not a little dismal in the fading light, when the sickly gas-lamps struggle faintly with the last glimmer of day; and shabby wanderers prowl the pavements and look enviously at the rolling chariots of wealth?

Cecil O'Boyneville abandoned herself entirely to the unbroken monotony of her life. She had yet to learn to find her own society and her own occupations, in common with the wives of other busy men. She accepted the lot that fell into her lap, and did not attempt to change or modify it. Her husband was kind to her, generous, affectionate, confiding, and she wished to do her duty. If Laurence O'Boyneville made no change in his bachelor-habits, if he devoted his nights to study and his evenings to sleep, he had perhaps some excuse for his devotion to the profession he loved, in the fact that his

wife made no attempt to alter the scheme of his existence. No salaried housekeeper could have been more submissive than the Earl of Aspendell's daughter showed herself to the sovereign will of her lord : so Mr. O'Boyneville told his old friends and familiars that he was the happiest fellow in existence, and that his wife was an angel.

He was happy, for the woman he loved received him with a tranquil smile when he went homo to his dinner, and was content to sit opposite to him while he ate his hasty breakfast behind the *Times* newspaper. Even in his post-prandial slumbers he had a dim consciousness of that beloved presence. But he did not very frequently take the trouble to tell his young wife how dear she was to him. Having once won her to be the pride and delight of his quiet home, he took things for granted, and forgot that a man's real courtship only begins upon his wedding-day. If Cecil had complained of her life, Laurence O'Boyneville would have speedily set about adapting his existence to her pleasure ; but she did not complain. She had married him because he loved her, and not because she loved him ; and she shrank from indulging in the caprices which a wife who truly loved her husband would have exhibited without scruple.

A profound weariness of spirit took possession of the barrister's wife in the bright June weather, when the days were too brief for the glory of western London, and the midsummer evenings too long for tranquil Bloomsbury. For some time before her marriage it had seemed to Cecil Chudleigh as if the serious business of her life had been done with. She was not unhappy. She was not discontented. But she had finished with all the eager hopes and desires of existence. She wished for nothing, she expected nothing. One only yearning—and that no ardent or passionate desire—had remained to her after the one great sorrow of her life,—she had wished for a home ; she had wished to be something more than a waif and stray in other people's houses. This wish had been realised, and henceforward there was nothing left for her to hope or fear.

She had married without love ; and yet no base or mercenary motive had influenced her conduct. Truly and unreservedly had she given her faith to Laurence O'Boyneville. It is for the man who marries such a woman to win or lose the heart which is not—and yet is so nearly—his. Unhappily, Mr. O'Boyneville, with all honesty of purpose and generosity of heart, took the very way to lose the prize which, of all earthly treasures, he most desired to obtain. If the barrister's wife had dissolved into tears at the breakfast-table or disturbed his digestive organs by a storm of hysterics after dinner, Mr. O'Boyneville would have perceived that there was something

out of gear amidst the machinery of his home, and would have done his uttermost to remedy the defect. But the disease which was undermining Lady Cecil's moral constitution was not sorrow; it was only the absence of joy. Of what could she complain, who desired nothing upon earth except a little rest after the weariness of her youth? She rested to her heart's content in the tranquil solitude of Brunswick Square, withdrawing herself day by day more completely from all old associations. If the days were joyless, they were at least without cares or troubles; the sordid perplexities of the past were done with—that slow torture called genteel poverty was hers no longer. An atmosphere of commonplace comfort pervaded the great O'Boyneville's household; and even in Dorset Square his presence seemed to carry with it an odour of prosperity—for Cecil was surprised to find that her aunt no longer bewailed the hardness of a dowager's lot, and the thievish propensities of landladies. Poor Cecil, who was so painfully familiar with every note in the gamut of Mrs. MacClaverhouse's domestic economy, was astonished to behold those expensive and unprofitable dishes, which of old had been excluded from the Dorset Square *menus*, now figuring frequently in the little banquets which the dowager provided for Mr. O'Boyneville and his wife.

"I ought to be happy," Cecil said to herself sometimes; and sometimes even in saying those words the faint odour of the sea came back to her like a breath of the past, and she saw the low grey shore below Fortinbras Castle, and Hector Gordon's face bent over her in passionate sadness.

"My fate was in my hand that day," she thought. "What would my life have been now if I had chosen otherwise than I did?"

It was not often that such thoughts as these disturbed the dull tranquillity of Cecil O'Boyneville's mind. She had learned to think very calmly of Hector Gordon, and the unknown future that might have been hers, long before she had plighted her faith to the barrister; and it was only now and then that the picture of the past flashed for a moment upon her mental vision, evoked into life and brightness by some mystic power of association. She had learned long ago to think of the Scottish captain almost as we think of the dead; and in counting the years that had passed since that delicious autumn holiday, she marvelled to find how few they were. It seemed so long since she had seen that quiet Hampshire coast—so long since she had sat in the shadowy drawing-room listening to the low music of her lover's voice.

The season came to a close, Trinity Term ended, and the long vacation began. Laurence O'Boyneville implored his wife

to take up her abode at some pleasant watering-place while he went on circuit.

"You can ask your aunt to go with you, Cecil," he said; "and in that case you'll have the use of her maid, if you don't care about taking one of your own. Suppose we say Ryde; that's as nice a place as you can go to. I'll run across and take lodgings for you, and I'll get you a basket-chaise and a stout pony, that you can drive about the island to your heart's content. I want to see the sweet wild-rose tint come back to your cheeks, darling. You've been looking very pale lately."

It was not often that the speech of Laurence O'Boyneville the husband assimilated so nearly to that of Laurence O'Boyneville the lover, and Cecil rewarded him with a grateful smile.

"You are very kind, Laurence," she said; "but I know my aunt has made all manner of arrangements for the autumn and winter. She told me a few days ago that she has not a week disengaged. And I really don't care at all about going to the sea-side. I would just as soon remain in town while you are away."

"My darling girl," exclaimed the barrister, "if you stay in London all the summer you'll be ill."

But again and again Lady Cecil protested that she would be contented to spend her summer in Bloomsbury. If she could have gone to some quiet sea-coast village alone, with no companions except her books and music, she would have been very well pleased to escape from the wilderness of streets and squares. But a two-months' sojourn at a fashionable watering-place with a vivacious matron was something more than Cecil felt herself able to endure; and Mr. O'Boyneville seemed to take it for granted that his young wife must be protected by a chaperon when she left his sheltering wing.

"If you *won't* go to the sea-side," he said, "you might at least spend a few weeks with the Mountjoys. I know they'd be delighted to have you."

"But indeed, Laurence, I shall be happier at home," Cecil pleaded; "I had so much visiting in country-houses, you know, before our marriage."

The barrister shrugged his shoulders. He had no leisure for further argument. His circuit work was very heavy, and his brain was already occupied by the claims and the counter-claims of Snooks *versus* Jones; of Simpkins against the Mayor and Corporation of Guzzleton (involving knotty questions under the Lands Clauses Consolidation Act); an action for nuisance by Tittlebat against The Cesspool-Utilising Association, for allowing their reservoirs to drain into his fishponds; and by a variety of other cases in which sundry crooked and

troublesome bits of evidence were, with the aid of his juniors, to be made smooth and straight for the benefit of those provincial litigants and delinquents whose rights, wrongs, interests, and defenses had been intrusted to the popular O'Boyneville. Thus, in this, as in all other cases, the claims of business were stronger than the call of marital duty. Cecil had her own way, and spent the long July afternoons alone in the Brunswick-Square drawing-room, while her husband won fame and money abroad, and courted the laughter of hawbucks and clodhoppers in stifling provincial town-halls and court-houses.

But before Laurence O'Boyneville departed for his circuit-duties an event occurred which was to exercise an evil influence on Cecil's lonely reveries during those long summer days, those solitary evenings spent in the dim twilight of a dreary chamber.

Before winging her way to a Sussex manor-house, in which she was to begin her autumn round of visits, Mrs. MacClaverhouse came to take a farewell dinner in Brunswick Square. Some unwonted trepidation, some touch of unusual tenderness in the dowager's manner, impressed Cecil in the first few moments of that lady's arrival; but on asking her aunt if any thing was amiss, any direct reply to her question was artfully evaded by the dowager, who became suddenly interested in the state of Mr. O'Boyneville's health.

Before Cecil could repeat her inquiry, the barrister made his appearance, accompanied by another legal celebrity, whose cheering presence often illumined the dulness of Brunswick Square. Mr. O'Boyneville welcomed the dowager with his accustomed cordiality, and made an especial descent to the cellar to procure a particular brand of sparkling Moselle for that lady's consumption. The two legal celebrities made some faint pretence of general conversation while the soup was on the table; but with the appearance of the fish plunged at once into a discussion of the numerous points, which bristled over the celebrated case of Blunderbuss against Saddlebags, lately decided in the Court of Exchequer; and then, by an easy transition, they floated into a debate upon the arguments of the respondent's counsel in that interesting appeal before the Lords-Justices. On ordinary occasions the dowager—who was always well posted in her *Times*—was apt to join in these legal disquisitions, and would give her opinion with sprightly intelligence and feminine decisiveness. But to-day Mrs. MacClaverhouse was evidently preoccupied. She allowed the gentlemen to express their sentiments without interruption or contradiction from her, and forgot to compliment Mr. O'Boyneville on the delicate aroma of his Moselle, or to whisper any

little reproving speech to Cecil regarding the wasteful character of the banquet.

The dusk was deepening when the ladies went up stairs to the drawing-room ; but when the barrister's inestimable man-of-all-work would have lighted the candles, Mrs. MacClaverhouse entreated that the operation might be postponed.

"I know you like mooning in the dark, Cecil," exclaimed the dowager, with some of her native sharpness, "and for once in a way I feel inclined for this half-light.—Come in half an hour, Pupkin ; that will be plenty of time for the candles.—There's light enough for you to play to me, I suppose, Cecil ?"

"Quite enough, dear aunt. Would you like me to play ?"

"Yes, most decidedly. It's a treat to hear a decent piano after that old rattle-trap of mine. And your Broadwood is a magnificent instrument—something like a present from a husband. Ah, what a husband yours is, Cecil!" exclaimed the dowager, with sudden enthusiasm ; "and I dare say you think no more of him than if he was one of those men with red-hot pokers and hob-nailed boots that one reads of in the police-reports."

"But, auntie, I am very grateful——"

"Grateful!" cried Mrs. MacClaverhouse, impatiently ; "gratitude has nothing to do with it. I tell you, child, you are utterly incapable of appreciating Laurence O'Boynville."

Cecil had seated herself at the piano by this time. Her fingers wandered absently over the keys, and her head was bent in a pensive attitude. Mrs. MacClaverhouse watched her niece sharply as she bent over the instrument. The slender figure draped in white looked very fragile and phantom-like in the dusk.

"What would you like me to play, auntie ?" Cecil asked presently.

"Oh, let me have one of your favourite reveries : your 'Gondola,' or your 'Femme du Marin,' or your 'Source,' or some of that dreamy nonsense you are so fond of. Play something of Mendelssohn's, if you like—those doleful 'Songs without Words'—funeral dirges without the funeral, I should call them—which you were so fond of playing to Hector at Fortinbras."

Watching the frail white figure relentlessly athwart the dusk, Mrs. MacClaverhouse perceived a faint shiver disturb its repose as she said this. But in the next moment Cecil struck a few chords and began to play. Her aunt rose from the chair in which she had seated herself, and came nearer the piano.

Cecil's music to-night was of the softest and tenderest character. Her fingers glided over the keys in a dreamy *legato* movement, and as the dowager watched and listened, two actual tears arose in those sharp worldly eyes, and blotted the picture of the slender white-robed figure, and graceful drooping head.

While Cecil was lingering fondly over a *piano* passage, the dowager startled her by a profound sigh. Any thing in the way of sentiment was so foreign to the habits of Mrs. MacClaverhouse's mind that Cecil looked up from her piano in unmitigated surprise.

"Ah, by-the-bye," said the dowager, "talking of Hector Gordon, I had some news from India to-day."

"Indeed, auntie!"

The same faint shiver that had stirred the white-robed figure before stirred it again. There are some things that can never be forgotten.

"Yes, I had a letter *via* Marseilles. Of course, when people are wallowing in gold they have no occasion to think of sixpence more or less for postage. *My* letters have to go by Southampton. Bad news, of course, Cecil; who ever receives good news nowadays? I shall have to go into mourning; poor people's relations are always dying. I am really almost inclined to think they do it on purpose to involve one in the expense of mourning."

Cecil's heart gave a great leap, and then seemed to stand still. The human heart has a faculty of transforming itself into a lump of ice at such moments.

"What do you mean?" she cried, with a vehemence that startled the dowager; "is Hector Gordon dead?"

She rose from before the piano, trembling from head to foot. Mrs. MacClaverhouse caught her niece in her arms.

"My darling!" she exclaimed,—and perhaps it was the first time in her life that the strong-minded matron had ever employed so tender an epithet,—“do you think I should talk so coolly about going into mourning for my boy?—who has been more than a son to me, bless his generous heart. Don't tremble so, Cecil; it is Hector's wife, poor young thing, who is dead.”

"You—you frightened me, auntie," murmured Cecil, as she sank helplessly into the chair from which she had risen in her sudden terror. "You know how little Hector Gordon and I have ever been to each other—what utter strangers we are and must always be to one another now. But to be told all at once, that a person you have known and been familiar with is dead, the shock—the——"

The words died on her lips. The sudden terror that had

taken possession of her had given place to a new fear. She was alarmed by the intensity of her own feelings.

"If he were really dead," she thought, "what right should I have to feel like that?"

She recovered herself with an effort, and after a brief pause addressed the agitated dowager very calmly.

"Tell me all about it, auntie," she said; "it is very shocking—so young—so happy."

In the moment after having said these words, a pang of envy shot through Cecil's heart. Ah, what an enviable fate it seemed, this destiny which commonplace people are so apt to bemoan! To have one brief year of perfect bliss, and then to die; to live the life of the roses and butterflies; to be indeed the favoured of the gods.

"It seems there was a baby," said Mrs. MacClaverhouse, "though *I* had not been told there was any thing of that sort expected; and of course, if the poor child had lived, they would have looked for their godmothers elsewhere. The infant was a son, and Hector was delighted, and every body else was delighted. But things took a bad turn; the baby died, and the poor young mother fretted, and then there came a fever, and in three weeks' time my poor boy was a widower. I have had no letter from him yet, but they tell me he is dreadfully broken-hearted."

"It is very dreadful for him," murmured Cecil.

"And worse for her, I should think, poor thing," said the matter-of-fact dowager.

"I tell you, my dear Sir, if Bamper goes in for specific performance of contract, the defendant hasn't a leg to stand on," said the sonorous voice of Mr. O'Boyneville, who entered the room at this moment in hot argument with his friend. "Good gracious me, Mrs. Mac.!" he exclaimed, on entering the dusky chamber, "how is it they have left you in the dark all this time?—Cecil, what have you been thinking of? Where's that fellow Pupkin?"

The valuable Pupkin appeared with lights at this moment. The barrister's powerful will vanquished his household as it conquered all other opponents. The man-of-all-work had entered his service ten years before, a rough and unkempt lad, with no ideas beyond blacking-brushes and a knifeboard, to become in due time the very pink and model of indoor domesticities.

Pupkin placed a moderator-lamp on the centre table, and lighted candles on the cheffonier and mantelpiece. He brought the tea-equipage, and attended on his mistress while she poured out the tea. Mr. O'Boyneville relapsed into profound meditation, as it was his habit to do while taking tea. He was

thinking fondly of the red bag which was waiting for him on the study-table below, and wishing that his brother luminary might be inspired to take his departure. But that gentleman was pleased to snatch an opportunity of making himself agreeable to his learned friend's aristocratic and elegant young wife, and was relating a facetious but strictly correct trial, which had convulsed one of the law-courts during the late term. Poor Cecil smiled faintly at the feeble witticisms, and tried her uttermost to be civil to her husband's guest. But she was very glad when Mr. O'Boyneville, after a protracted fit of staring, which was the next thing to epilepsy, started suddenly from his seat, and exclaimed :

"And now, my dear Sleghammer, I'll wish you good-night. I've got some very important papers to look through before I go to bed, and——"

"My dear Boyneville, don't use the least ceremony. I know how you work ! and, bless my soul ! it's past ten o'clock. But really I had spent such a delightful evening, that, upon my word, I——" murmured Mr. Sleghammer, looking at Lady Cecil, whose society he had enjoyed for about twenty minutes since dinner.

When Mr. O'Boyneville's guest had walked away in the summer night, and when Mr. O'Boyneville had gone to his nightly labours, the dowager embraced her niece very affectionately before taking her departure in the phantom chariot, which had been prowling slowly to and fro in the square for the last half hour, to the admiration of the boys of the district who associated the equipage vaguely with the Lord Mayor.

"What a dear creature your husband is !" cried the dowager ; "and how entertaining it is to hear all the little secrets of the law-courts ! You ought to be happy, Cecil ; you ought indeed. But you girls don't know what real happiness is. And yet *you* ought to know the value of a good home, and a generous husband ; for you have known what it is to be poor."

"Do you think that I do not appreciate my husband's goodness ?" said Cecil earnestly. "Indeed—indeed, auntie——"

"Oh yes," answered the dowager promptly, "you appreciate his goodness perhaps ; but you don't appreciate *him*. You just tolerate him because he is good and kind to you, and works like a galley-slave to insure your welfare in the future ; but if he could read 'Victor Hugo' like a play-actor, and make an idiot of himself about Mendelssohn, you'd adore him."

This was the last Cecil saw of her aunt for some time, for on the morrow the dowager departed to the Sussex manor-house. Before the week was out Mr. O'Boyneville had also taken wing, and Cecil was quite alone in the big empty Brun-

wick Square mansion. She had been allowed to have her own way. She had escaped the weariness of a sea-side excursion—the familiar gaieties of country-house visiting. She was alone with her books and her music, as she had wished to be. She was alone, and she found the autumn days too long for her, the Bloomsbury mansion too big and empty.

Mr. O'Boyneville had no idea of being an inattentive husband. He sent his wife hasty lines scrawled on the flaps of envelopes in the intervals of his professional labours, and the hasty lines were full of kindness and anxiety for her welfare. But a couple of sentences written on the flap of an envelope are not calculated to "speak the soft intercourse from soul to soul;" and the barrister's brief scrawls afforded his wife very little food for reflection during her lonely hours. She wrote her husband long dutiful letters, two and three times a week; but she found this letter-writing rather a weary labour sometimes. What subjects were there on which she could be expansive? She took so little interest in his professional triumphs. He cared so little for her books and music. She shrank from putting her thoughts into words: but one conviction was slowly and surely taking root in her mind, and that conviction was that her marriage had been a mistake.

"He ought to have married some good comfortable creature, who would have found occupation enough in household duties, she thought sometimes. "I read too much, and think too much, until I begin to feel that there is something wanting in my life."

She had never dared to acknowledge to herself that the something wanting was a more genial companion than Laurence O'Boyneville.

"He is so good to me, and I ought to love him so dearly," she thought in those moments of self-reproach which came very often in her lonely days. "I know that he is good, and honourable, and clever; what more can I wish him to be? Surely I ought to be proud of such a husband when I remember the fate of other women. What would become of me if I had married such a man as Mr. Lobyer?"

There is a little story by Alfred de Musset, in which the heroine is married to a man whom she has passionately loved. She finds, too late, that there is little sympathy between them, and her life is very lonely. One night she is at the opera—alone, as she almost always is; and when the music, which she adores, fills her with uncontrollable emotion, she stretches out her hand involuntarily to clasp the sympathetic hand of a friend. The poor little hand falls upon the arm of an empty chair. The husband is no amateur of Mozart, and falls asleep

on those rare occasions when he accompanies his wife to the opera.

There were times when Cecil felt a vague yearning for the touch of that sympathetic hand ; there were times when a chilling sense of intellectual loneliness oppressed her spirits, and when she felt that it would have been better for her if the daily cares about plate and china, and all the little sordid duties of her Dorset-Square life, had still demanded her thought and attention.

Did she ever think of the young widower far away in his time of mourning ? Did the picture of that which might have been arise more vividly before her vision now that the cold hand of death had loosened Hector Gordon's bondage ? Alas ! yes ; struggle as she might against the tempter, there were times when she felt herself weak, and wicked ; there were times when the face that had looked down upon her under the sunless autumn sky looked at her again out of the shadows of her lonely room, instinct with the same melancholy tenderness—the same passionate devotion.

"I ought to be content to remember that for one moment in my life I was loved like that," she thought. "I am as foolish as I am wicked when I let his image come back to me. What could I be to him if we met now, and I were as free as he is ? Can I suppose that he remembers me, after all the domestic sweetness of his brief married life—after the terrible sorrow in which it has come to an end ? Ah, no, thank God for that ; the past has made a gulf between us which nothing in the present can bridge over. If we met to-morrow, we should meet as strangers. I can almost fancy the look of indifference I should see in his face."

If Cecil was a lonely wife, she was at least not a neglected or forgotten one. All things that can contribute to a woman's happiness—when considered from a prosaic and common-sense point of view—were freely furnished by Laurence O'Boyneville for the woman he had wooed so boldly and won so easily. A dainty little brougham, and a stout strong-built steed, had been provided for the barrister's wife. She had a coachman renowned for his sobriety, and she had no occasion to suffer the ignominy of opening her carriage-door, or the martyrdom involved in the dangerous attentions of street-boys ; for the inestimable Pupkin accompanied her in her drives, and marshalled her solemnly to her chariot after her calls or shopping. She had unlimited supplies of new music, and first-class subscriptions at more than one library. She had *carte blanche* at Howell and James's, and had she chosen to be extravagant, might have indulged her folly to the uttermost. She had a well-appointed although somewhat dingily-furnished house,

and servants who gave her very little trouble ; and if amidst all this substantial commonplace comfort the sympathetic hand and the congenial companionship which make the lives of some few women happy were wanting, she had surcly little right to complain. That perfect circle which is the emblem of eternity is not to be found embodied upon earth, and there is always some missing link in the golden chain of sublunary bliss.

When all the brightness of summer had vanished before the pelting rains and dull leaden skies of a stormy October, the barrister returned to his wife and his London engagements. She was really glad to welcome him back ; even though he did seem a little bigger and louder, and more overpowering altogether, now that she had been separated from him for some months. Business of a special nature had kept him away from home after his circuit-work had been finished, and it was not till the middle of October that he was free to return. He came back to the old round of perpetual labour, and his work in the ensuing term threatened to be even heavier than usual ; but he had time to see that his wife was looking pale and ill, and the discovery grieved and distressed him.

“ I did wrong in letting you have your own way, Cecil,” he said ; “ this autumn in London has done you harm. You are looking pale and ill. If you’ll tell Pupkin to put a couple of shirts in my portmanteau, I’ll take you down to Brighton to-morrow afternoon by the five o’clock express.”

It was in vain that Cecil protested that there was no occasion for Mr. O’Boyneville to put himself out of the way on her account. The barrister insisted on the visit to Brighton ; and on the following day, which was the last of the week, and the only one on which Mr. O’Boyneville could have turned his back upon the neighbourhood of the law-courts, Cecil found herself whirled seawards through the evening fog by the most delightful express-train in Christendom. The cool sea-breezes blew into her chamber at the Albion, and she saw the lights of the chain-pier burning brightly below her window as she arranged her hair before the glass. She found her husband comfortably established before a blazing fire in the sitting-room when she went down stairs ; and in less than half an hour a little *chef-d’œuvre* in the way of dinners was served by the gravest and most attentive of waiters. After dinner Mr. O’Boyneville enjoyed his accustomed nap ; while Cecil stood at the window, looking out at the moonlit sky and sea. Ah, who shall say what a treat the sea is after Brunswick Square—what refreshment to the eye in those big rolling waves—what music in the sonorous roar of the sea, after the fifes and drums of the Foundling !

After tea Mr. O'Boyneville looked at his watch, and then rang for the waiter.

"I expect a parcel by the 9.45 train," he said. "Will you be good enough to inquire about it; and let me have a pair of candles on that table?"

The waiter bowed and departed. He returned in ten minutes, carrying a bundle, at which Cecil gazed wonderingly.

It was the barrister's crimson bag.

"My work follows me, you see, Cecil," said Mr. O'Boyneville. "I was anxious about to-night's letters and papers; so I told Jarvis to send the bag after me."

The attentive waiter placed candles on the side-table; and the great O'Boyneville seated himself before his papers. He worked indefatigably for the remainder of the evening. Cecil heard the stiff law-stationer's paper crackle as the barrister read his briefs, only pausing now and then to scrawl some note upon the margin, or to meditate profoundly, with a thoughtful scowl upon his face. She had no books with her; so she drew back the curtain from before the window that commanded the sea, and sat by it, looking out at the moonlit waves and the lamps of the cliff and pier; and but for the roaring of the sea and the moonlight on the waters, Brighton would have been as dull as Bloomsbury.

On Sunday afternoon Mr. O'Boyneville drove his wife up and down the cliff in the clear cold October weather. He recognised several of his brother luminaries, who were taking the air on the King's Road, all more or less thoughtful and preoccupied of aspect, and all meditating Smith *versus* Brown, or Jones *versus* Robinson, or some other cases in which their rhetorical abilities were to be displayed. The barrister entertained his wife by pointing out these distinguished individuals.

"Do you see that tall stout man, Cecil? No, not that one; the man nearest the lamp-post—the man who is blowing his nose? That's Bobbin, the great chancery-barrister—the man who——"

And then, when Cecil had confronted the east wind, and strained her eyes to the uttermost, and ultimately had gazed reverentially on the wrong person, Mr. O'Boyneville went on to sing the praises of Bobbin; and a quarter of an hour afterwards poor Cecil had to twist her head in all manner of unpleasant positions, in order to behold a man in grey trousers and a brown overcoat, who turned out to be no other than the mighty Valentine, but who in outward aspect differed in no essential way from other men.

Lady Cecil was not interested in Bobbin or Valentine. Laurence O'Boyneville could have shown her Victor Hugo

or Alfred Tennyson taking their constitutional on that pleasant sea-shore, she would have thought it no trouble to twist her head or strain her eyes in order to look upon them ; though even then there is some probability that she would have been disappointed in the mortal habitations of those mighty souls. Was not Lavater disappointed in Goethe, and almost inclined to disbelieve that the handsome young stranger presented to him was indeed the author of *Werter* ?

After the conventional drive up and down the King's Road, Mr. O'Boyneville took his wife into bleak solitudes beyond Rottendeau. They drove between bare hills, through a bit of lonely country, where there were little homesteads scattered far apart, with lights twinkling feebly in the twilight—a lonely barren bit of country, whose atmosphere on an October afternoon has a soothing influence on the mind. The dim grey downs, and the sheep feeding high up in the clear air, seem so very far away from all London care and turmoil.

Both the barrister and his wife abandoned themselves to a contemplative mood during the long country drive ; but after dinner they talked very pleasantly by the cheery fire, and Laurence forgot his red bag for once in a way, and became the man he had been during the brief holiday-time before his marriage—not very sentimental or metaphysical, but an agreeable companion nevertheless.

“ I think the holiday has done us both good,” he said to his wife, as an early express bore them away from Brighton on Monday morning. Mr. O'Boyneville had persuaded Cecil to stay a few days longer at the Albion, promising to return and fetch her ; but she did not care to stay at Brighton alone, with neither books nor music.

“ I wish we could oftener be away from Brunswick Square and your professional work, Laurence,” she said, with her hand in her husband's big palm. She felt drawn nearer to him by that one day's holiday than by all the domestic routine of their Bloomsbury life.

“ Ah, my dear, that isn't possible,” said the barrister, with a sigh of resignation.

Had the great O'Boyneville's fate been in his own hands, would he have had his professional labour less, his leisure for home-duties and home-pleasures greater? Alas ! it is very much to be feared that he would not have so chosen. He was but mortal man ; and the triumphs of the law-courts, the compliments from the bench, and the “ roars of laughter ” reported in the newspapers, are very sweet to the forensic mind.

A fortnight after the Brighton excursion there came a letter from Flo—a letter the contents of which Mr. O'Boyneville, who was sufficiently inquisitive upon occasions, begged

to hear. As Mrs. Lobyer's epistle, though intensely affectionate, was by no means confidential, Cecil complied with her husband's request. The letter announced Mr. and Mrs. Lobyer's return from the Continent, and establishment at Pevenshall; and the writer entreated her dearest Cecil, and her dearest Cecil's husband, if possible, to spend Christmas at that country mansion.

"You like Mrs. Lobyer, don't you, Cecil?" the barrister asked, when the perusal of the letter was finished.

"Oh yes, I like her very much indeed."

"Then why shouldn't you accept her invitation?"

"But can you go, Laurence?"

"Well, I rather fear not. I might run down for Christmas-day perhaps, and a few days after, while the courts are up; but that would all depend upon circumstances. In any case you ought to go, Cecil; the change of air and scene will do you good: you've not been looking well since my return from circuit."

There was some discussion. Cecil did not care for gaiety; Cecil did not wish to leave her husband at Christmas time; but the barrister's strong will triumphed.

"I let you have your own way in the summer, and I found you looking as pale as a ghost when I came home. You must let me have my way this time, Cecil," he said decisively.

So it was decided that Lady Cecil should accept Mrs. Lobyer's invitation, and should go to Pevenshall on the fifteenth of December, where Mr. O'Boyneville would join her, if possible, during the Christmas week.

A few days before she left Brunswick Square Cecil received a voluminous epistle from the dowager, who retailed all the gossip of the house in which she was staying for her niece's amusement, and furnished the barrister's wife with a brief chronicle of births, deaths, and marriages, pending or otherwise.

The letter was written closely on two sheets of paper, both crossed, and in an obscure corner Cecil found a postscript.

"I have heard from Hector Gordon. His regiment is ordered home, and he comes with it. Indeed, for all I know, he is in England at this moment."

"He is as far away from me in England as he was in India," Cecil thought, as she folded the missive. "My aunt must know that he and I would never wish to meet, and hers is the only house in which I should be likely to see him."

She showed Mr. O'Boyneville her aunt's letter; and even the obscure little postscript did not escape the searching eye of the barrister. He asked who the Hector Gordon was who was expected home; and Cecil had to explain her aunt's rela-

tionship to the Plunger captain, and to tell the story of the young man's marriage and widowhood, for her husband's edification.

CHAPTER XX.

AT PEVENSHALL PLACE.

PEVENSHALL PLACE was a noble modern mansion, which Thomas Lobyer the elder had built for himself in the days when he still hoped to find a worthy successor to his commercial glory in the person of the lad who was spending his juvenile leisure among lords and commoners on the grassy meads of Eton. The great millowner's wealth had been lavished freely on the solid grandeur and decorative splendours of Pevenshall. The house was in the Italian style,—a noble square white mansion, with a balustraded roof, surmounted by airy turrets, and a broad terrace-walk, that commanded one of the loveliest prospects in Yorkshire. No vulgar architect had designed the Manchester trader's dwelling. The millionaire of to-day begins life with gigantic advantages. He has the benefit of two thousand years of civilisation, and may profit by the experience of emperors. Before the plans for Pevenshall were completed and approved, Mr. Lobyer had been made familiar with all the masterpieces of domestic architecture still existing in the present, or known to have existed in the past. He had disdained Stowe, and had rejected Fonthill; he had pooh-poohed Adrian's Villa, and turned up his nose at the abode of Lucullus. He had remarked that the apartments of Sallust, at Pompeii, might be eminently adapted for a gentleman's wine-cellar, but were utterly unfit for a gentleman's residence. After going through innumerable folios of drawings and engravings which his architect—happy in the expectation of five per cent. on some fifty thousand pounds—had brought to him, Mr. Lobyer made his choice with that promptitude and decision which had regulated his conduct in all the most important affairs of life.

“If I can't have that,” he said, laying the end of his square forefinger on an engraving of Warwick Castle,—“and of course I can't, for I never saw any thing in the way of a castle built nowadays that didn't look like a workhouse or a gaol—I'll have that;” and he transferred his finger to a water-colour sketch of a modern Italian villa in the suburbs of Florence; “or at any rate I'll have that kind of place—light, and bright, and cheerful-looking outside; but as warm and comfortable inside

as an old-fashioned farmhouse, and from garret to cellar as solid as the Tower of London. Give me a drawing-room forty feet by twenty five, an entrance-hall thirty feet square; and take care there's no such thing as a dark corner or a narrow passage in the house, and I shall be satisfied."

After having said this, Thomas Lobyer the elder declined all further discussion upon the subject of the house that was to be built for him. In the space of a few months the lordly mansion arose on the slope of a wooded hill-side, and all the district wondered at its grandeur. The architect had *carte blanche*. There were chambers panelled with oak and cedar, sandal and maple-wood. There was a staircase of Carrara marble, with balustrades of carved bronze, and lamps copied from antique Roman models. Julius Caesar might have ascended such a staircase, and would have found nothing to criticise in the perfection of its appointments. Thomas Lobyer the elder approved of the mansion because it was large and handsome, and was very slightly affected by the odour of classicity that pervaded it. He freely paid the amounts which the great builder demanded of him, and it was only when he looked over his banker's-book at the close of the transaction, that he knew how dearly his fancy had cost. He sent the architect to London to give the necessary orders to upholsterers; and Pevenshall Place was furnished in perfect harmony with its architecture, but with very little reference to the peculiar taste of its proprietor.

The architect had an especial tenderness for the classical; and the great millowner, eating his frugal meal alone in his vast dining-room, illumined by candles in oxidised silver branches that might have appropriately adorned the banquet-table in the Apollo chamber, was inclined to think his new mansion somewhat cold and cheerless of aspect. It may have been that the millionaire was prone to be dispirited on that first day of his occupation, for the morning's post had brought him a letter from the dame in whose house his son and heir was lodged, and the terms of the epistle were very uncomplimentary to Thomas the younger; and this feminine complaint about Master Lobyer's delinquencies—his cruelty to smaller and weaker boys—his falsehood and cunning—his obstinate resistance of authority—was only the beginning of the evil to come. From the day in which the millowner took possession of his splendid dwelling, until the hour in which he exchanged it for a very mean and narrow habitation, his life was poisoned by corroding cares—embittered by perpetual disappointments; and all his cares and all his disappointments had one common cause in the person of his son.

He took a disgust for the gorgeous mansion whose erection

had cost him so much money. His troubles weighed very heavily upon him in those spacious rooms, amidst whose chilly splendour there was no occupation for him. At Pevenshall the rich man found too much leisure in which to brood upon his cares and disappointments, and he was always glad to return to Manchester, where he had a comfortable dwelling attached to his great warehouses, and where he could steep his brain in the small vexations and perplexities of commerce, to the oblivion of the prodigal who was so slow to return.

Pevenshall Place, with innumerable lighted windows flashing on the darkness of the night, looked a very noble mansion as Cecil approached it in the luxurious brougham that had been sent to meet her at the Farnleigh-Heath station. No enchanted palace of fairy story could have shone more brilliantly upon the belated wanderer than did this substantial modern dwelling. Within, splendour and comfort fought for the mastery. A gigantic fire of sea-coal, surmounted by a monster log, warmed and brightened the great Italian hall, a desecration which would have excruciated the classic architect—who had devised an appropriate bronze stove, of antique design, for the heating of the vast chamber. Curtains of crimson cloth hung before all the doors, and the skins of wild animals lay side by side with Persian carpets and the snow-white fleece of peaceful sheep. The pair of matched footmen who were the chief glory of Mrs. Lobyer's establishment advanced to receive Lady Cecil's morocco travelling-bag, and to relieve her of her shawl. The splendid creatures knew that she was an earl's daughter; but they could not entirely conceal some faint tokens of that gentlemanly contempt which a high-bred footman must always entertain for a lady who travels without her maid.

"Which her connection with the peerage makes it wuss," said one of the gentlemen, when he discussed the matter at the social supper-table; "it's bringing the very horder she belongs to into contempt."

The gorgeous creatures relinquished Lady Cecil's burden to meaner hands immediately after taking them. They were attended by *aides-de-camp* in the shape of an under-footman and a boy page; and their reception of the traveller's parcel had been a purely ceremonial act. One of these Corsican brothers of the servants'-hall drew aside a crimson curtain, and revealed a broad lighted corridor, with many doors, some of which were open, and along which echoed the sound of voices and the resonant music of laughter.

Before Cecil could follow the majestic footman, that individual drew suddenly aside, and a light fluttering figure, brightly attired in trailing garments of pink silk, half hidden

under airy puffings of blonde, came hurrying towards the visitor.

It was Flo, brighter and more bewitching even than of old, with her golden hair tortured into an edifice of puffs, *à la Pompadour*, and sprinkled with glittering particles that sparkled in the lights.

"You darling, how good of you to come!" she cried eagerly. "I should have driven over to the station myself to meet you, but the house is so full of people, and I couldn't leave them. They are drinking tea in the blue room; will you come and plunge into the midst of us at once, or shall I take you to your rooms? We have nearly an hour between this and dinner, and you see I am dressed, so for that time I am quite your own. Do come and see all my new friends, Cecil. You look charming after your journey—not a hair turned, as our sporting-visitors say; your little blue-velvet bonnet is delicious, and that grey-cloth travelling-dress becomes you admirably. Come, dear, let me show these provincial grandees that there is at least one woman in the world who does not talk slang, and is not the living, breathing image of every other woman.

Cecil pleaded for a retreat to her own apartments; but the vivacious Florence half led, half dragged her to the room whence had issued the sounds of revelry. It was an apartment which was small in comparison with most of the Pevenshall chambers, and which had that air of extreme cosiness and comfort with which very spacious rooms are not easily invested. Here the classic architect had been superseded by Florence and the bric-à-brac shops of the West-end. Bright-blue hangings contrasted vividly with the cedar-panelling; tiny gems by modern masters, set in deep frames of ebony and gold, adorned the walls; and these gems were of the first water, having been chosen by William Crawford as bridal gifts for his only child. All that is most comfortable in the way of easy-chairs and most eccentric in the shape of tiny tables had been provided for this chamber; and here a party of vivacious ladies and agreeable gentlemen were grouped about the fire drinking tea, and talking with that pleasant abandonment which pervades unceremonious meetings between luncheon and dinner in an hospitable country-house. Cecil found the usual elements of such gatherings—two or three country squires, or heirs-presumptive, or younger sons of country squires; some military men from the barracks at Chiverley, the principal town within twenty miles of Pevenshall; a sprinkling of the London element, as represented by some elegant young members of the clubs; a German diplomatist; and a bevy of pretty girls, whose maiden insipidity was relieved by a handsome widow and a

coquettish matron renowned for an especial genius for the cultivation of Platonic attachments. Of course, every body was delighted to see Lady Cecil O'Boyneville. The one or two people who knew her were enchanted to meet her again, and the people who didn't know her were inexpressibly anxious to make her acquaintance. The new-comer was ensconced in the warmest corner of the pretty chamber, and country squires disputed for the honour of bringing her strong tea. The novelty of the scene was refreshing to her after the dull solitude of Brunswick Square; for let the jaded traveller be never so weary and heartsick, there is some faint sense of pleasure involved in the mere fact of being in an utterly strange place. In this cosy morning-room at Pevenshall all was brightness and colour. Every body was prettily dressed and smiling, animated and happy—as it seemed; and amongst them all there was no one gayer or brighter than Florence—that mercenary Florence for whom Cecil had felt such profound compassion.

“And she really is happy,” thought the barrister's wife, as Mrs. Lobyer stood in the centre of the little throng beaming upon her guests.

Florence insisted upon accompanying her friend to the rooms that had been prepared for her. They were very luxurious apartments, pervaded by that atmosphere of wealth which reigned in almost every chamber of Pevenshall Place. The marble mantelpieces were enriched with garlands of flowers; the grates were marvels of glittering elegance, the china was luminous gold and colour, the chintz draperies were as delicate and lustrous as satin, the boudoir was a nest for a lotus-eating visitor; the low Arabian bed looked like a throne, the pure white rugs were soft and stainless as new-fallen snow; and, seen through the bed-chamber, the lighted dressing-room looked as fresh and bright as a chromo-lithograph. Fires burned cheerily in the three apartments. Wax candles in blue Sevres candlesticks lighted tables and mantelpieces; and that traveller must have been indeed dead to the influence of externals who had failed to rejoice in such a luxurious shelter.

“What charming rooms!” cried Cecil.

“I am so glad you like them,” Flo answered, cordially. “These rooms are close to my own, and I thought of you, dear, when I had them furnished; for though you have always lectured me, I think I like you better than any one else in the world, except papa.” This was not a very promising speech from a wife of six months. Cecil was sincerely anxious about her friend's happiness, and was on the watch for faint indications to reveal the real state of things. Mrs. Lobyer had as yet made no allusion to her husband, and Cecil found

it incumbent on herself to inquire after the wellbeing of the master of Pevenshall.

"I hope Mr. Lobyer is well," she said.

"Oh dear me, yes; he is very well," Flo answered, with supreme indifference. "I have not seen him for the last day or two. I suppose he is at Manchester. He is subject to periodical disappearances, and when he disappears people tell me he is at Manchester. It's very likely he will reappear at dinner-time; he generally does reappear at dinner-time; and whether he has been out on the terrace to smoke a cigar, or a week away at Manchester, his manner is pretty much the same. I have heard people say that Mr. Lobyer is not gentlemanly; but I am sure that if it is correct not to admire any thing, and not to be surprised at any thing, and not to care about any thing,—except the rise and fall of that horrible, unsteady money-market, which fluctuates to such a degree that it makes me dizzy to think of it,—Mr. Lobyer is the prince of gentlemen."

"You talk of things as lightly as ever, Flo," Cecil said, wonderingly.

"Heaven help me when I begin to talk of things seriously!" answered Mrs. Lobyer, more earnestly than she was wont to speak. "And now, darling, I must run away. You have only half an hour between this and eight o'clock, and I want you to look your best, in order to astonish my Yorkshire grandees, who go to London once in ten years, and who, in the interim, fondly believe that the civilised world comes to an end somewhere beyond the city of York."

The Pevenshall dining-room, enriched by that splendid tribute which modern painters and modern sculptors offer to the golden calf of Manchester, was a very superb apartment. The Pevenshall drawing-room would not have shown meanly when contrasted with one of the saloons of Windsor; and in the drawing-room, leaning in a meditative attitude against one of the low mantelpieces, and worrying a Skye terrier with the toe of his boot, Cecil found Mr. Lobyer, who gave her a gentlemanly, but by no means rapturous, welcome to Pevenshall. "I hope my wife will make you comfortable, Lady Cecil," he said. "I'm sure she ought to do so, for she's been talking enough about you for the last fortnight, whether you would come, or whether you wouldn't come, and so on."

Mr. Lobyer's conversational powers were not taxed further just at present, for a ponderous butler announced dinner, and the host offered his arm to Lady Cecil, to the aggravation of a county matron who considered herself the leading personage at Pevenshall. He said very little during dinner, and that little related chiefly to the aspect of commercial affairs in

America, the tightness of the money-market, the drain of gold from the Bank of England, and other equally entertaining topics for general conversation. Two or three men at Mr. Lobyer's end of the table listened reverentially to any words that fell from his lips, and discoursed with much gusto upon his favourite subjects; but the rest of the party divided themselves into little clusters, and a buzz of animated chatter filled the room. In the course of a commercial discussion it transpired, incidentally, that Mr. Lobyer had spent the last few days in Manchester, and that things were looking dull there, and this was all that he said about his absence from home.

The evening glided by very rapidly in the great drawing-room, where there was room for a carpet-dance without disarrangement of furniture, and where there were all manner of delightful nooks and corners for confidential conversation. A social tragedy might have been enacted in one corner of that spacious apartment, while the general occupants of the chamber were laughing and talking in supreme unconsciousness of domestic storm or trouble. The evening passed very pleasantly. When a large party is assembled in a country-house there are generally to be found some nice people, and at Pevenshall the nice people were in the majority. There were musical people, and people who were madly devoted to amateur theatricals; and there was one gentleman who was great in the performance of spirit-rapping and table-turning; and another gentleman who shone as an *improvisatore*, and who sang extempore buffo-songs, which every body thought delightfully clever, but which would have seemed atrociously stupid if people had had sufficient time or presence of mind to grasp the full meaning of the words, or if the singer had not been artful enough to cover his worst puns and his most excruciating rhymes by a volley of common chords.

Altogether the evenings at Pevenshall were successful; the more so perhaps because the master of the house was apt to withdraw himself to the smoking-room or the billiard-room, with a few chosen companions. When bidding Flo good-night on this first evening of her visit, Cecil declared that she had enjoyed herself very much.

"I have been leading such a quiet life lately, that I did not think it was in me to enjoy society so much as I have done to-night. What nice people some of your new friends are, Flo!"

"Do you think so?" Mrs. Lobyer said, elevating her shoulders with a little gesture, which was the last thing in fashion in the best Parisian circles. "Perhaps you have not seen the nicest of them yet."

CHAPTER XXI.

SIR NUGENT EVERSIED.

IF Cecil had sighed for a life which should be a complete change from the dull round of existence in Brunswick Square, she could not have found any where a more perfect realisation of her desire than was to be found at Pevenshall Place. Here, from the ten-o'clock breakfast to the abnormally late hour at which the last lingerers in the big drawing-room took their reluctant departure, the order of the day was gaiety. Florence devoted herself to one incessant round of amusement, and her visitors seemed nothing loth to follow her example. Amidst the pleasant frivolities of Pevenshall, it was almost difficult to remember that there was any portion of this universe in which "men must work and women must weep," and that reasonable beings were created for any graver purpose than the playing of billiards, the acting of charades, and the composition of *bouts rimés*.

Cecil would fain have seen a little more of her old friend, and in some manner renewed the confidential intimacy that had existed between them before Flo's marriage, but Mrs. Lobyer gave her visitor no opportunity for confidential conversation. She was very affectionate; she was full of anxiety for her friend's comfort and enjoyment, but she avoided all chances of a *tête-à-tête*, and seemed to have a nervous terror of being questioned about herself. Perceiving this, Cecil began to fear that Florence Lobyer's life was not entirely happy, in spite of its incessant gaiety.

"You had a pleasant tour, I hope, Flory," she said one day when they were alone for a few minutes.

"Oh yes, we tore about Europe as fast as express-trains and post-horses could take us, and we spent a few weeks in Paris on our way home. Paris is a nice place for shopping. I believe I wasted a small fortune on the boulevards and in the Rue de la Paix; for Mr. Lobyer made quite a wry face when he saw my bills. We drove in the Bois a great deal, and went to a few nice parties, and ate a good many expensive dinners, and went several times to the opera; where Mr. Lobyer slept very comfortably, and where I amused myself by looking at the diamonds, and mentally comparing them with my own. I only saw two people whose jewelry was worth mentioning, and they were a Russian princess and a French actress. Yes, on the whole, I think we had a very pleasant tour. And now tell me about Mr. O'Boyneville. Are you happy with him?"

"Yes, dear, I have every reason to be happy, for he is very kind to me."

"And you really like him?"

"I really like him very much indeed."

This was the nearest approach to a confidential conversation that occurred between Florence and her friend during the first week of Cecil's visit.

The days passed very quickly, the evenings were delightful, and it was not often that even the most transient cloud obscured the brightness of Mrs. Lobyer's countenance. The master of Pevenshall inflicted very little of his society upon the guests who enjoyed themselves in his mansion. There were two or three horsey-looking men and two or three commercial magnates with whom he chiefly consorted. His mornings were spent in hunting when the weather was favourable, or in lounging about the great quadrangle, surrounded by outbuildings and stables, examining his horses, presiding over a rat-hunt, or worrying his dogs, when the hounds and huntsmen were fain to be idle. His evenings were devoted to the society of his own particular friends in the billiard or smoking-rooms; and except at dinner-time, he rarely intruded on his wife's circle.

After observing her friend for some time with affectionate anxiety, Cecil began to think that perhaps the life which the painter's daughter had chosen for herself was very well suited to her.

"Why do I wonder about her?" Cecil thought, as she saw Mrs. Lobyer the gayest and most animated of all the Pevenshall party; "she possesses every thing which most women sigh for from the hour in which they leave the nursery, and it would be strange indeed if she were not happy."

But then came the thought of the future. Must not the time come when the pleasures of a fine house and agreeable society must pall upon the mistress of Pevenshall? Four or five years hence, when custom had robbed these joys of their bloom and freshness, was it not terribly probable that Mr. Lobyer's wife would awaken to nobler aspirations, only to find that she had awakened too late? Then how commonplace and monotonous the unvarying round of country-house gaieties, the turmoil of London dissipations, must seem to the woman who had made it the business of her life to win them!

"She is younger than I am, and she does not know how soon one grows tired of these things," thought Cecil. "I have sometimes thought, when driving up and down by the Serpentine with my aunt, that the treadmill could scarcely be worse than the Lady's Mile must be to women who have lived

ten or fifteen years in society, and have gone through the same routine year after year."

On the twenty-fourth of December a letter came from Mr. O'Boyneville, announcing his inability to spend Christmas at Pevenshall.

"I have made a great effort to come to you, but I find my work for Hilary Term so heavy that I dare not turn my back upon my study. You would scarcely like to see my crimson bag in the Pevenshall library, and if I came I should be obliged to bring my bag with me. So enjoy yourself without me, my dear, and forget that there is such a person as Laurence O'Boyneville in existence."

"He is not jealous, at any rate," said Flo, after hearing this part of the letter: "what a blessing it is to have a husband who is not afflicted with a jealous disposition! If Mr. Lobyer were to see me flirting with half-a-dozen people at once, I don't think the spectacle would disturb the serenity of his mind."

"You speak as if you wished to make him jealous, Flo."

"Well, I don't know about that. Sometimes, perhaps, I really do wish to make him—something. You don't know how provoking those husbands who are not jealous can be. If Mr. Lobyer only watched me as closely as he watches the money-market, he would be a perfect Othello."

"But you cannot be displeased with him for devoting himself very much to business, Flo," argued Cecil; "for all the luxury and splendour of this house are the fruits of his commercial successes."

"Now you're going to lecture me," exclaimed Florence impatiently. "While I was engaged to Mr. Lobyer, every body seemed to take a delight in abusing him; but now I'm married to him, people preach about him as if he were a saint. Even papa, who was so much against my marriage, never writes to me without some little bit of preaching about my duties as a wife. I don't set up for being a model wife; and if Mr. Lobyer is satisfied with me, I really can't see what right other people have to interfere."

After this Florence apologised for her impatience, and embraced her dearest Cecil after her wont.

"And now, darling, I want you to come and walk on the terrace with me. It's a delightful morning, more like October than December; and we'll leave all those worsted-working and piano-strumming people in the drawing-room to amuse themselves. Run and put on your warmest shawl. I'll wait for you here."

This conversation had taken place in the morning-room, where Cecil had found Mrs. Lobyer alone for once in a way

an hour after breakfast. Flo was already dressed for walking in a coquettish black-velvet jacket, trimmed with chinchilla, and a bewitching little hat, adorned with a peacock's breast.

Mrs. Lobyer was dressed more carefully than she was wont to attire herself for a walk on the terrace. Her dark-grey poplin dress was looped up on each side, revealing a glimpse of a scarlet-cloth petticoat, a pair of miraculous boots, and the faintest scintillation of grey-silk stockings. Her little gauntlet-shaped gloves were the prettiest that ever came from the hands of a glovemaker, and fitted to perfection. Her hair was tied in a clustering knot, which was the perfection of artistic carelessness, and one little bit of turquoise blue ribbon peeped from amidst the gold-coloured tresses.

"I think even papa would confess I had some idea of colour if he saw me to-day," said Mrs. Lobyer, as she mounted a little ottoman and surveyed herself in a Venetian mirror framed in the cedar-panelling. "I discovered the value of greys and scarlets from one of his pictures. I'm sure I don't know why I should have taken pains with my dress this morning: but one must amuse oneself somehow or other."

Mrs. Lobyer smothered a little yawn with the fingers of her pearl-grey gloves, and went to one of the windows whence there was to be seen a sunlit winter landscape, with all the varying beauties of light and shadow playing upon hill and dale, and wood and water, which made the prospect from the south front of Pevcnshall Place one of the finest views in the North Riding.

Cecil joined her friend a few minutes afterwards, and the two ladies went out upon the terrace, where they met Mr. Lobyer, who was hurrying towards the steps leading to the carriage-drive with a railway rug on his arm.

"You are going away?" asked Flo, politely.

"Yes. I find I must run to Manchester this morning. I shall be back in time for dinner to-morrow."

"You will travel on Christmas-day?" exclaimed Flo, with a slight elevation of her eyebrows.

"Why not on that day as well as any other?" said Mr. Lobyer coolly. "Do you think I am to stop my business because people choose to over-eat themselves with beef and pudding on the twenty-fifth of December? Good-bye, Flo: I've only half an hour for the drive."

The millionaire brushed his wife's forehead with his bushy moustache, and then ran down the steps, where an American gig with a high-stepping horse and a miniature tiger were in attendance upon him. In this airy equipage Mr. Lobyer was borne along the avenue as on the wings of the winter

wind ; and, seen from a distance, presented an appearance of high-stepping horse, man, and high wheels, without any superfluous encumbrance in the way of vehicle.

"And now let us enjoy ourselves and have some nice talk," said Flo, when she had stood for a few moments watching her vanishing lord and master with eyes which did not even express that spurious kind of interest called curiosity. "Your bonnet is very pretty. How do you like my hat?"

After this lively commencement the conversation flagged a little. When people deliberately set themselves to talk, they are apt to be seized with a kind of mental paralysis, which deprives them, for the time being, of the faculty of intelligent speech. The two ladies walked briskly up and down the long stone-terrace, and a delicate flush deepened in Mrs. Lobyer's cheeks, and heightened the brilliancy of her eyes. The great clock in the quadrangle had struck twelve as Mr. Lobyer departed ; but that gentleman had scarcely been absent ten minutes when Florence produced her watch, and consulted it as carefully as if she had been one of the Manchester men in whose society Mr. Lobyer delighted.

The two ladies walked several times up and down the terrace ; but in spite of Cecil's efforts the conversation still flagged. When Cecil admired the view, Mrs. Lobyer owned that it was charming—while the magic of novelty lasted.

"One gets used to it," Flo said indifferently. "I dare say if people could live on the summit of the Matterhorn, they would get used to that, and think very little of it. When first I came here I used to look out of my dressing-room window and admire the prospect while Carstairs was dressing my hair ; and now I take no more notice of the view than if I were living in Russell Square."

After this Mrs. Lobyer relapsed into silence ; and perceiving that she was preoccupied, Cecil abandoned herself to her own meditations, though not without some wonderment as to why Flo had made such a point of bringing her out on the terrace when she had nothing particular to say to her.

They had walked for some time in silence, when the sound of horses' hoofs upon the hard carriage-drive made them both look up. The pretty pink flush deepened ever so little on Mrs. Lobyer's cheeks as a horseman, followed by his groom, rode rapidly towards the terrace steps.

"It is Sir Nugent Evershed," said Flo ; "now, Cecil, you are going to see one of the best men of the country—enormous wealth, without the faintest association with the money-market,—and oh, how delightful money without the market must be!—and an interminable line of ancestors ; though, if ancestors didn't generally reveal themselves in high insteps,

aquiline noses, and taper fingers, I shouldn't set any particular value upon *them*."

All this was said very rapidly, very gaily, very lightly; but lightly as it was said, Lady Cecil wondered a little at the warmth of Mrs. Lobyer's complexion and the new brightness in Mrs. Lobyer's eyes.

Sir Nugent Evershed surrendered his horse to the groom at the bottom of the terrace-steps, and came on foot to greet the ladies. He was one of those rare exotics—those hothouse flowers in the garden of youth—which, so long as grace and beauty are worshipped upon the earth, will always find tender cherishers, even though some drops of subtle poison mingle with the perfume,—even though a base of clay sustain the torso of the god.

He was the very pink and pattern of the *jeunesse dorée*, the type of man that has appeared with but little variation of form in every century; the Aleibiades, the Essex, the Cinq Mars, the George Villiers, the handsome Lord Hervey, the butterfly whose gilded wings excite the indignation of wiser men, but who laughs at their wisdom and defies their scorn, serene in the enjoyment of his butterfly triumphs.

Sir Nugent was fair, with blue eyes and pale-amber moustache and whiskers. The Aleibiades of the present day is generally of a fair complexion, and our friends on the other side of the Channel may talk now of the *blonde meesters* as well as the *blonde meess* of the *brumeuse Angleterre*.

Florence introduced Cecil to the elegant young Baronet, who seemed on very familiar terms with Mrs. Lobyer. He entreated the ladies to continue their walk, and strolled up and down the terrace with them.

"I will go and look for Lobyer presently," he said. "I suppose I shall find him somewhere about the house or stable, as it is scarcely a hunting morning."

"You will not find Mr. Lobyer till to-morrow," answered Flo; "he has gone to Manchester."

"Again! What an extraordinary attachment he has for Manchester! I never cared much myself for the Cottonopolis; it seems to me London without the West-end."

After this Sir Nugent made himself eminently agreeable. The butterfly of the nineteenth century must not be altogether a foolish butterfly; for the gentler sex, whose suffrages he courts, are very far in advance of the Belindas and Saecharissas of the past. Sir Nugent had been to every place that was worth a gentleman's visiting, and seen every thing worth seeing, and read almost every book worth reading. He was a proficient in all gentlemanly sports; at nine years of age he had "passed" as a swimmer at Eton, and at nineteen had been

stroke-oar in one of the Oxford boats. He was as much at home deer-stalking and eagle-shooting in the Highlands as he was in the West-end clubs, and his only effeminacy consisted in the whiteness of his hands and the careful tastes of his costume.

The two ladies and the baronet went into the house presently, and made their way to the drawing-room, where Sir Nugent was welcomed with universal cordiality. He had a cousin staying in the house, a fast young lady with out-of-door propensities,—a young lady who wore clump-soles to her boots, defied wet weather, and unblushingly consumed a whole grouse at the breakfast-table before the face of mankind. A young lady whose mother is a county heiress, and whose paternal ancestors have been drawn and quartered in the dark ages, may venture to take life after her own fashion.

Sir Nugent stayed to luncheon, and Sir Nugent lingered in the great drawing-room all through the winter afternoon. In the twilight Florence asked her friend for a little Mendelssohn; and while Cecil played the tender music the baronet and Mrs. Lobyer stood in a bay-window near the piano, talking in hushed voices attuned to the pensive melody. There were a good many people in the room; but it was a dangerously spacious apartment, in which conversation was apt to degenerate into *tête-à-tête*. When lamps were brought, the party of ladies, with Sir Nugent and two or three other gentlemen amongst them, adjourned to the morning-room to take tea; and still the Baronet lingered, assisting in the dispensing of the cups and making himself eminently useful to Mrs. Lobyer.

"Thank Heaven, we are drifting back into the cosy ways of our ancestors," he said, as he leant against the corner of the mantelpiece nearest Flo's chair. "This ante-prandial tea is the most delightful invention, and if we could only bring ourselves to dispense with the dinner, how very agreeable our lives would be! Do you expect to see Mr. Lobyer this evening?" he asked Florence.

"I think not. He talked about coming back to-morrow."

"On Christmas-day! Ah, well, I suppose there is no Christmas for millionaires. Imagine the Marquis of Westminster eating turkey, and calling it Christmas! He could have turkeys all the year round. He might have a dish made of the tongues of a thousand turkeys on his breakfast-table every morning if he liked. There can be no such thing as change of season for the millionaire. His house is warmed from roof to basement with hot-air pipes, and he has peaches all the year round. I should like to have seen Lobyer to-day, and I have inflicted myself upon you most shamefully in the hope of seeing him."

"I don't believe Nugent ever thought himself an infliction

in the whole course of his life," cried the fast young lady cousin. "He is the vainest of men, and thinks that we ought all to be intensely grateful for having enjoyed the privilege of his society. All the girls in the North Riding spoil him, because he happens to be the most eligible bachelor on hand now that Lord Loncesvalle has married. I remember Lord Loncesvalle—such an elegant young fellow, when he was canvassing the Conservative interest for Chiverley. And I really think I wrote poetical squibs against his opponents. Pray run away, Nugent. It's no use your staying, for Mrs. Lobyer can't ask you to dinner in that coat; and it is time for us all to dress. Don't forget to write to Jeffs for the comedy we want to play on the 16th of January. Remember, you are to be the Marquis, and we must form a committee for the discussion of the costumes early next week."

"I will ride over the day after to-morrow," answered Sir Nugent; "and I will bring the piece with me."

He bent over Florence to shake hands and say good-bye, and there was in that adieu just the faintest suspicion of a something beyond the routine of ordinary acquaintance. He shook hands with his cousin, and went through a little fernery that opened from the morning-room and led out upon the terrace, below which his groom had been pacing up and down for the last half-hour leading the two horses.

It was a clear moonlight night, and Miss Grace Evershed went to one of the windows to watch her cousin's departure.

"Nugent must find our society amazingly delightful, or he would never have allowed Pyramus to wait half-an-hour in the cold," cried the young lady. "He is generally so absurdly particular about his horses—and Pyramus is a recent acquisition. I think Nugent gave something between four and five hundred for him."

Cecil and Florence went up to their rooms together that night, and Flo followed her friend into the pretty little boudoir, where a red fire was burning with a frosty brightness.

"You are not sleepy, are you, Cecil!"

"No, dear, not in the least."

"Then if you've no objection I'll stop for a few minutes," said Flo, seating herself in one of the pretty chintz-cushioned easy-chairs, and playing with a Chinese hand-screen. "For my own part I never feel so thoroughly awake as at this time of night. I think if people sat up for eight-and-forty hours at a stretch, they would go on getting brighter and brighter. As it is, we chop our lives up into such little bits, and are seldom either quite awake or quite asleep. How do you like Sir Nugent Evershed?"

The question was asked very carelessly, and the questioner's eyes were fixed upon the fire.

"I really don't know him well enough either to like or dislike him," Cecil answered.

"Nonsense, Cecil! that's a lawyer's answer. Women always jump at conclusions, and I have no doubt you have jumped at yours in this case. You couldn't be half-a-dozen hours in Sir Nugent's society without forming some opinion about him."

"Well, dear, I think he is very handsome."

"Do you?" said Flo, lifting her eyebrows, and shrugging her shoulders. "Well, yes, I suppose he is what most people would call handsome."

"But you don't call him so?"

"Well, no; I have seen handsomer men. But what do you think of *him*—his manners—himself, in short?" Flo asked rather impatiently.

"I think he is exactly like a great many other young men I have seen——"

"Good gracious me!" cried Flo, this time very impatiently, "do you mean to tell me that the generality of young men are as elegant and accomplished as Sir Nugent Evershed?"

"No, I don't mean to say that exactly. But I think the generality of young men in the present day are very accomplished. They all travel a great deal; they all read, they——"

"Cecil, if you're going to talk like a blue-book, or a statistical paper, I shall go away. I see you don't like Sir Nugent."

"My dear girl, I never said any thing of the kind. I only say that he seems to me like a great many young men I have seen. Rather more handsome, and rather more accomplished, and rather more elegant than the generality of them perhaps, but only differing from them in degree. Is he a great friend of Mr. Lobyer's?"

"Yes," Flo answered, still looking at the fire; "they are very intimate. Are not those pretty tiles, Cecil?" she asked, suddenly turning her eyes on the encaustic tiles that surrounded the grate. "I chose the design myself. The architect had put a bronze stove into this room, and it was to be heated with hot-air pipes! Imagine a boudoir heated with hot-air pipes! I think when one feels particularly miserable there is nothing so consoling as a cosy fire. A soothing influence seems to creep over one as one sits in the twilight, looking into red coals. And how, in goodness' name, could one sit and stare at pipes? I suppose architects never are unhappy."

This speech seemed to imply that unhappiness was not altogether a stranger to Mrs. Lobyer. But Cecil did not take

any notice of the remark. When a young lady chooses to marry as Florence Crawford had married, the wisest course for her friends is to ignore the peculiarities of her lot, and to take it for granted that she is happy.

"Yes," Flo said, after a pause, "Sir Nugent and Mr. Lobyer are very intimate; and there is something almost romantic in the circumstances of their friendship. They were at Eton together; they were of the same age, in the same class, and they lived in the same house; but they were the most bitter foes. There was quite a Corsican vendetta between them. Sir Nugent represented the aristocratic party, Mr. Lobyer the commercial faction. They were the Guelphs and Ghibellines of the form. Of course, under these circumstances, they were perpetually fighting, for it really seems that the chief business of Eton boys is to fight and play cricket. One day, however, they had a desperate battle in a place called Sixpenny, though why Sixpenny is more than I can tell you. The fight was going against Mr. Lobyer—for I believe Sir Nugent is enormously strong, though he looks so slender—and the backers were persuading him to take a licking—that's the Eton term, I believe, for giving in; but he wouldn't give in: and while they were wrestling, he took a knife from his trousers-pocket, and stabbed Sir Nugent in the arm. It wasn't much of a stab, I believe, but the backers informed the masters of the business, and there was a tremendous outcry about it, and Mr. Lobyer was expelled the school. Of course he was very young at the time," added Flo, rather nervously; "and I suppose boys of that age scarcely know that it is wrong to use a knife when the fight is going against them."

Cecil did not answer immediately. She had never liked the gentleman whose hospitality she was enjoying, and this little episode from the history of his school-days was not calculated to improve her estimate of him.

"And yet Sir Nugent and Mr. Lobyer are now quite intimate," she said presently, feeling that she was called upon to say something.

"Yes, that is the most singular part of the story. After that Eton *fracas* they saw nothing of each other for years and years. They went to different universities, and Mr. Lobyer, as you know, finished his education on the Continent. When the Pevenshall estate was bought, Mr. Lobyer senior discovered that the country-seat of his son's old enemy was within ten miles of the place. The country people received Mr. Lobyer the elder with open arms; but he didn't care for society, and as he went out very little, he never happened to meet Sir Nugent. And as my husband was very seldom here, *he* never happened to see Sir Nugent, and I suppose the old Guelph and

Ghibelline feeling still existed in a modified degree, and might have gone on existing from generation to generation, if it had not come to an end like a romance. When we were travelling in Switzerland in the autumn, we went on one mountain expedition to see the sun rise from some particularly romantic and unapproachable peak, with rather a large party, almost all of whom were strangers to us. By some accident I and my guide were separated from Mr. Lobyer and his guide; and as the guide could only speak some vile jargon of his own, and couldn't understand any language I tried him with, I found myself wandering farther away from my own party, on the track of a party of deserters who had started off at a tangent to see some other prospect, and to whom the guide imagined I belonged.

"I was very much annoyed at not being able to make myself understood, for I was very tired of the snow, and the slipperiness, and the grand scenery, and was unromantically anxious to get back to the hotel, which I don't think I ever should have done if one of the deserters had not espied me following wearily in their track, and benevolently come to my assistance. He was an Englishman, but he could speak the guide's jargon, and he told the stupid creature what I wanted. Not content with this, he insisted on escorting me himself to meet my own party, and would not leave me till he had placed me in Mr. Lobyer's care. I suppose when poor shipwrecked creatures are picked up by a passing vessel, they are very likely to think that vessel the queen of ships; and I know that I thought my deliverer a most agreeable person. Of course Mr. Lobyer asked to whom he was indebted, and so on, and the two gentlemen exchanged cards, whereupon it appeared that my deliverer was no other than Sir Nugent Evershed. After this we met in the public rooms of the hotel. Sir Nugent was delightful, did not ignore the Eton business, but talked of it as a boyish folly, and said the old fogies who made a fuss about it had no right to have interfered in the matter, and made himself altogether so agreeable that it would have been quite impossible for Mr. Lobyer or any one else to reject the olive-branch so gracefully offered. Beyond this, we found our pre-arranged routes were the same,—it was quite a romantic coincidence, Sir Nugent declared. We were fellow-travellers for some weeks: climbed mountains together, explored cathedrals together, inspected picture-galleries, dined together, stopped in the same hotels, until Mr. Lobyer and Sir Nugent became like brothers. We met again in Paris, where Sir Nugent, who is very musical, was a delightful companion at the opera. Of course, when we came here the intimacy continued, and now we have no more frequent visitor than Sir Nugent."

"And you think that Mr. Lobyer really likes him?"

"Don't I tell you they are like brothers? How solemnly you look at me, Cecil! Have you any objection to offer to the reconciliation effected through accident and *me*? Would you prefer a continuation of the Guelph and Ghibelline feud?"

"No, indeed, Flory. Nothing can be better than this reconciliation if it is really quite sincere on both sides. But I fancy that the law of society sometimes obliges men to appear friendly who never can really be friends. Boyish quarrels are not very serious affairs, perhaps; but I should think it was difficult to forget a schoolboy enmity of the kind you have described. In plain words, Flo, I would strongly advise you not to encourage any intimacy with Sir Nugent Evershed. I may advise you, mayn't I, dear? I am older than you, Flory, you know."

"Every body in the universe is older than me, I think," answered the impetuous Mrs. Lobyer, "for every body seems to think that his or her special business in the world is to give me good advice. I think if ever I do any thing desperately wicked, and am taken prisoner and tried by a jury and written about in the newspapers, and all that sort of thing, I shall get my counsel to plead insanity, on the ground that my brain had been softened by the perpetual pressure of good advice. Now don't be angry with me, Cecil," cried the wilful Florence, melting, after her own particular fashion, into sudden penitence; "I know you are the best and dearest friend I have in the world except papa, and I would do any thing to please you. But as to Sir Nugent Evershed, I have nothing to do with his intimacy with my husband. He comes here to see Mr. Lobyer, and I can't order him not to come."

"But these private theatricals, Flo. I suppose you invited Sir Nugent to take a part in them?"

"Oh yes; that was my doing, of course. When one has an elegant young man hanging about the house, one likes to make use of him."

"But you have so many elegant young men about the house."

"Very likely. But there is not one of them so clever as Sir Nugent. You see, I had set my heart on our doing a comedy of Scribe's. There is such a rage for private theatricals just now, and I knew that the only chance of our distinguishing ourselves was by doing something French. The whole county will be pervaded by *The Lady of Lyons* and *Still Waters Run Deep*; but a comedy by Scribe in the original will be a little out of the common. I know that Sir Nugent's accent is irreproachable, and he is the only man I can trust with the character of the Marquis."

"Is the Marquis a very important character?"

"Yes, he is the leading personage in the piece. Every thing depends upon him."

"Is Mr. Lobyer to take any part in your comedy?"

"Oh no. He calls all that kind of thing nonsense. There are quite enough people in the world ready to make fools of themselves without his assistance, he says. Polite, is it not? But Mr. Lobyer's mind is given up to the money-market. I think he has made a new commandment for himself; 'Thou shalt love the Royal Exchange with all thy mind, and soul, and——'"

"Flo!"

"Oh, of course it's very wicked of me to say that; but sometimes I feel as if the money-market were too much for my brain. It is so dreadful to have a husband whose temper is dependent on the state of trade, and who is sometimes sulky for a whole day because grey shirtings have been dull. However, I suppose, on the other hand, it is a blessing to have a husband who sometimes makes four or five thousand pounds by a single stroke of business. I scarcely wonder that such men as Mr. Lobyer look down upon art, for art is really a paltry business compared to trade, in these days, when every thing is estimated by its money value. Papa is supposed to be at the top of the tree; but he gives a year's labour and thought to a picture for which he gets less than Mr. Lobyer can earn in a day, by some lucky transaction with America. Oh, Cecil, how I detest trade, and all that appertains to it!"

This was not a very promising remark from the wife of a wealthy trader, and it was a remark which Cecil thought it safer to leave unnoticed. Flo's spirits seemed to have left her for the moment under the influence of the money-market. She gave a prolonged yawn, which was half a sigh, and then bade her friend good-night.

Cecil sat by the fire for some time that night, thinking rather sadly of the brilliant Mrs. Lobyer's fate. For the present it seemed bright and fair enough, but what of the years to come? Very gloomy forebodings filled Cecil's mind as she thought of the unknown future which lay before the careless footsteps of that frivolous young matron.

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. LOBYER'S SKELETON.

CHRISTMAS-DAY at Pevenshall was very much like every other day. There was perhaps a little more eating and drinking than usual in the servants' hall, where the male portion of the assembly seemed to consider the inordinate consumption of strong drinks and warm spiced beverages indispensable to the due celebration of the season. A friendly rubber and a tankard of mulled port beguiled the cheerful evening in the house-keeper's room, while the mirth of the occasion was promoted by the witticisms of a linen-draper's assistant who was paying his addresses to Miss Evershed's maid, and had come from the market-town to spend his Christmas evening in the society of his betrothed. In these inferior regions the monster plum-pudding of the traditional Christmas appeared in a blaze of spirituous splendour at the three o'clock dinner, and reappeared in cold substantiality upon the loaded supper-table. Here there were glistening holly-berries, and the frail waxen mistletoe, with all the giggling and scuffling provoked by the magic bough; here, among Mr. Lobyer's well-fed retainers, jolly King Christmas deigned to show his honest rubicund visage in all its legendary geniality. But at Mr. Lobyer's dinner-table jolly King Christmas was a poor creature, represented in one of the later courses by a turkey that was ignominiously carved by an under butler upon the great oak sideboard, and which was handed about in small modicums, to be contemptuously rejected by surfeited diners who had just been regaled with a course of spring ducklings and early green peas at half a guinea a spoonful, and introducing himself furtively at the fag end of the banquet under cover of a small mould of some black compound, which the attendant offering it explained in a low voice as "plum-pudding." In Mr. Lobyer's drawing-room it might have been midsummer; for the fires at each end of the spacious chamber were hidden by great Parian screens, through which the red blaze shed only a rosy glow, like the low sunlight in a summer evening sky; and the atmosphere was odorous with the scent of roses and myrtles, hyacinth and myosotis, blooming in *jardinières* of ormolu and buhl, or fading in tall slender vases of fragile glass. The possessor of a million of money is the earthly incarnation of Zeus. At his bidding the summer fruits ripen at Christmas time; for his pleasure the nipping winter becomes a "time of roses." It is not to be expected, therefore, that the millionaire should put himself out of the way, because the common

herd choose to be joyful ; or that he should embrace dowagers under a vulgar mistletoe bough, and burn his fingers in the extraction of indigestible raisins from a dish of blazing spirits.

Nothing in Mr. Lobyer's manner on this particular twenty-fifth of December betrayed the faintest sympathy with those genial emotions common to the vulgar at this season of the year. He appeared in the drawing-room about five minutes before dinner, faultlessly attired in evening costume, and carrying his familiar — a fawn-coloured pug—in one of his big strong hands. Cecil found her host leaning against one of the mantelpieces, in his accustomed attitude, and caressing this brute, with a moody countenance, when she entered the drawing-room. He did the honours of the dinner-table in his usually graceful manner ; and those amiable people who were never weary of sounding their host's praises in his character of a rough diamond, found him peculiarly delightful this evening ; he was so quaint, so original, they said to each other confidentially, as the millionaire let fall some cynical remark now and then in the course of the banquet.

He seemed very glad to get back to the fawn-coloured familiar, which was snoring peacefully, half-buried in a fleecy rug, when the gentlemen returned to the drawing-room. He lifted the animal by one ear, and retired with it into the depths of an easy-chair, whence might be heard occasional growlings and snappings as the evening proceeded.

"I am afraid that grey shirtings were not lively," Florence whispered to Cecil, as the two ladies were preparing themselves for a duet.

At ten o'clock those splendid creatures, the matched footmen, were summoned to wheel the *jardinières* and *étagères* away from the centre of the room, while Lady Cecil and a young masculine pianist seated themselves at the instrument to play quadrilles and waltzes for a carpet-dance. It was at the same hour that Mr. Lobyer emerged from the depths of his easy-chair, flung the fawn-coloured animal into a corner, and walked towards one of the doors.

"Come and have a smoke in the billiard-room, Chapman," he said to one of his commercial friends, a bald-headed, warm-looking man, of whom the county people never took the faintest notice. Departing with this gentleman in his wake, Mr. Lobyer was seen no more among his guests that evening ; and the carpet-dance went merrily ; and a million stars shone brightly over Pevenshall out of a frosty blue sky, while mid-night melted into morning ; and the belle of the great drawing-room was bright, fair-haired, coquettish little Mrs. Lobyer. But the Christmas night came and went, and the bride of six

months had no loving husband to take her hands in his and say, "God bless you, my darling, on this night above all nights of the year, and in all the days and nights to come!"

Sir Nugent Evershed made his appearance before luncheon on the twenty-sixth of December, with Scribe's comedy in his hand, much to the astonishment of his Cousin Grace.

"Jeffs must have been very rapid," she said. "He generally keeps me longer when I send for any thing."

"I didn't depend upon Jeffs," answered the Baronet; "I rode over to Chiverley after leaving here the night before last, and telegraphed to the Rue Vivienne. It was as easy to telegraph to Levy as to write to Jeffs, and I had set my heart on bringing the comedy to-day." He looked at Mrs. Lobyer rather than his cousin as he said this; but the two ladies were standing side by side, and a man's eyes may take the wrong direction unconsiously.

After luncheon, the party interested in the amateur theatricals adjourned to the morning-room, where Sir Nugent read the comedy, and where the arrangement of the characters was decided. Mrs. Lobyer was to play the heroine, the most bewitching of young widows; and Sir Nugent was to be the Marquis, poor, and reckless, and proud, but passionately attached to the bewitching young widow. Miss Grace Evershed consented to perform a malicious dowager, who made mischief between the spendthrift Marquis and the bewitching widow; and the rest of the cast was made up by a county squire, who had finished his education at Bonn, and spoke the French language as taught by German masters; and two of Mr. Lobyer's London friends, of the fast and flippant school, who appeared to be proficient in every modern language, and skilled in every art except that of keeping out of debt. One of the officers from Chiverley, who was known to be strong in the Thespian art, was requested to take a part in the piece, but he declined with a regretful sigh.

"I shall be in the wilds of Kerry when your performance comes off," he said; "our fellows are ordered off to Tralee on the tenth, and the 11th Plungers come into our quarters. I've often growled about the dreariness of Chiverley, but how I shall envy those fellows,—the queer old English town, and Pevenshall Place within an hour's ride! Do people live in such a place as Tralee? I have a sort of idea that we shall be surrounded by savage natives, and scalped on the night of our arrival. What luck the 11th have had in India! That young Gordon, whose father has such mints of money, has won a step within the last few months. That skirmish at Burradalchoodah made a major of him."

Cecil felt the blood rush to her face for a moment, and then a sick faintness came over her; and the brightly-furnished room spun round before her eyes, until it seemed as if she had been sitting amidst a whirlpool of light and colour. The low-toned voices and the light laughter clashed upon her ears like the noise of cymbals; but it was only for a moment. Womanly dignity came to her rescue after the first brief shock of surprise; and when Grace Evershed appealed to her presently upon some frivolous question, she was able to answer with unfaltering tones.

"What is he to me," she thought, "or what can he ever be to me? And why should I be startled by hearing that he is likely to be within a few miles of the house in which I am staying?"

And then she began to consider whether her visit at Pevenshall could not reasonably come to an end very speedily. Florence had asked her friend to come to her for a long time, and as yet Cecil had been little more than ten days in Yorkshire; but then, as Mr. O'Boyneville was unable to leave London, his wife had a very good reason for returning thither.

While Cecil was thinking of this, the talk was going on round her, and presently she heard Sir Nugent Evershed talking of Hector Gordon.

"He is a splendid fellow," said the Baronet; "I met him in Germany six years ago, and we saw a great deal of each other. He is the kind of man we want in India; the real Napier breed; the man who doesn't know when he is beaten. I was with him in a revolutionary row at Heidelberg. Gad! how he fought! The students wanted to chair him after the squabble; but he wouldn't stand any nonsense of that kind! What a night we made of it afterwards! There was a mad-brained fellow who fancied himself a poet, a brace of transcendentalists, and Gordon and I. I remember our sitting in the balcony of the hotel, drinking Rhine wine and talking metaphysics long after midnight, when the last twinkling light in the queer old city had been extinguished and every roof and steeple stood out clear and sharp in the moonlight. Gordon must be a glorious fellow, if he hasn't degenerated since then. We used to call him the Scottish lion in those days. The girls and old women came to their windows to stare at him as he strode along the miserable pavements, with his long auburn hair flying loose about his neck. I shall be very glad if he comes my way this winter; though I'm sorry they're going to send you fellows to Tralee, Foster."

The Pevenshall party were more interested in the costumes they were to wear for the comedy than in the merits of Major Gordon; so no more was said about that gentleman.

Sir Nugent was intrusted with the duty of writing to a London costumier who would provide the masculine attire, and he further engaged himself to procure a set of coloured lithographs from which the ladies might choose their dresses. Having accepted these commissions, he departed: but not before he had received an invitation to dinner for the following day from Mr. Lobyer, who came into the morning-room before the party broke up, and who seemed, so far as in him lay, to be amiably disposed towards his visitors and the world in general.

Cecil left the drawing-room early that evening, in order to write some letters in her own apartment. She wrote a long gossiping epistle to her husband, telling him of the Pevenshall gaieties, the pending amateur theatricals, any thing and every thing which she thought likely to interest him, just for the few minutes during which he read her letter. It was not because the great barrister was busy and could only write brief serawls to his wife that she should therefore curtail her letters to him. She was so earnestly anxious to do her duty—even if duty was now and then a little tiresome.

“And yet I doubt whether he will be able to take his mind away from all that horrible law-business, even while he reads my letter,” she thought, as she concluded her missive.

In the course of the letter she had expressed her desire to return to London.

“I am amongst very pleasant people here, but do not like to stay so long away from home,” she wrote, and she gave a faint sigh as she wrote the word “home;” “and as you find it impossible to join me here, I think I had better return to Brunswick Square early next week. You wished me to have change of air and scene; and any benefit I am likely to receive from them I have already secured. You know how little I care for gaiety, and how very comfortable I am with my books and piano. Let me have a line please, dear Laurence, by return of post, to say I may come back at the beginning of the week.”

Florence peeped into her friend's room before retiring for the night, and Cecil told her of the letter she had been writing.

“I think if Mr. O'Boyneville cannot come down, I must go back to London next week, dear,” she said.

But Florence declared such an arrangement utterly impossible.

“You have come to me, and I mean to keep you,” she said. “You come here for change of scene, and then you talk of running back to that hideous Bloomsbury after a fortnight, and you even talk of going before our comedy. It is positively

preposterous. Ah, I ought to have insisted on your taking a part in it. But I shall write to Mr. O'Boyneville myself if you are rebellious, and ask him to put his veto against your return."

"But, my dear Florence, you must know that I ought not to be so long away from home."

"I know nothing of the kind. In the last letter you showed me, Mr. O'Boyneville said he was delighted to think you were enjoying yourself here, and that he was up to his eyes in business. What can a man who is up to his eyes in business want with a wife?"

After this there were many discussions upon the same subject, and Cecil found that it was not at all easy to get away from Pevenshall, especially as she received a letter from Mr. O'Boyneville begging her to stay as long as she liked with her friends, and promising to run down for a day or two and escort her back to town if she stayed until the beginning of February. So there was nothing for her to do but to stay; and, after all, what substantial reason was there for her hurried departure? What was it to her if Hector Gordon came to Chiverley with his regiment? Was his coming to be a reason for her running away from the county? It was just possible that the officers of the coming regiment might be visitors at Pevenshall, as the officers of the departing regiment had been; but what did it matter to Lady Cecil O'Boyneville where or when she met her old acquaintance of the little Hampshire watering-place?

Such was the tenor of Cecil's thoughts when she thought at all of Major Gordon; but after once having resolved to remain at Pevenshall until the natural termination of her visit, she tried to banish all thought of Hector and his possible coming from her mind. She abandoned herself to the frivolities of Mrs. Lobyer's circle, and found those frivolities very pleasant in their way. If it was a useless life—and in a manner sinful by reason of its utter uselessness—it was at least very agreeable while the freshness of youth lasted; and Cecil had seen in the person of her aunt, that such frivolities may be tolerably agreeable to age. But in spite of all the brightness and gaiety of Mrs. Lobyer's life, Cecil found herself pitying her friend rather than envying her.

"Surely the day must come when she will be tired of it all," thought the barrister's wife, when Flo had been delighting every body by her vivacity. "She has too many pleasures, and too much splendour and luxury. She seems to me like a feminine Xerxes, and sooner or later she must grow tired of every mortal enjoyment, and cry out wearily for some new pleasure. How tired Cleopatra must have been of every thing

upon earth when she drank that melted pearl!—surely only a little less tired than when she made an end of her life with the asp. And Solomon—what unutterable weariness there is in every line of that wonderful book in which he laments the emptiness and barrenness of his life! I cannot help thinking of these things when I see Flo hurrying from one amusement to another; from a hunting breakfast at home to a morning concert at Chiverley; and then for an hour's shopping in which she spends a small fortune upon things she doesn't want; and then home to meet fresh visitors at dinner; and then charades, or *tableaux vivants*, or a carpet-dance. She must grow tired of all this at last; but before that time this perpetual excitement will have become a habit, and society will be necessary to her, as it is to my aunt. I remember that line of Pope's:

'And round and round the ghosts of beauty glide.'

What a picture it conjures up! Who would not prefer a home and home duties to that perpetual round of pleasures which so soon cease to please?"

And then Lady Cecil thought of the big dingy house in Bloomsbury, and wondered whether the serenity and quiet cheerfulness of the ideal home would ever pervade that dismal mansion. She had hung birds in the southern windows, and had bought rustic baskets of flowers, and perfumed caskets and workboxes, for the adornment of the dingy drawing-rooms; but she had not been able as yet to impart that home-like aspect to Mr. O'Boyneville's dwelling for which her soul yearned.

The Pevenshall visitors were busy with the preparations for the comedy. The billiard-room was given up to rehearsals; the billiard-table was pushed into a dark corner, much to the annoyance of Mr. Lobyer, who fled in despair to Manchester. There was a rehearsal every day during the fortnight preceding the eventful evening; for it is astonishing how much rehearsing one of Scribe's comedies requires when the performers are pretty girls and elegant young men. The business might have been managed in less time, perhaps, had there not been considerable hindrance of one kind and another to the steady progress of the affair. There was one day upon which the arrival of a box of powdered wigs from London interrupted the course of rehearsal, and ultimately put a stop to it, for Mrs. Lobyer having run away to try on her wig, the other ladies followed her example, and then the gentlemen were seized with a like curiosity as to the effect of powder; and there was a general trying on of wigs, all of which were pro-

nounced by the wearers to be hideously ugly and cruelly disappointing ; for the effect of a powdered wig, combined with modern costume, in the chill winter sunlight, is by no means agreeable. Other rehearsals were interrupted by little squabbles about stage arrangements : for Sir Nugent Evershed and the West-end club-men were at variance upon many points ; while one of the latter gentlemen was inclined to give himself airs upon the strength of having assisted at the getting up of the *School for Scandal* at the Countess of Warlinghame's place at Twickenham ; and then there was time lost by reason of feminine gigglings ; and particular people were missing at important moments ; and there was a great deal of trying back, and perpetual disputations as to entrances and exits. But it was altogether very delightful, and every one seemed to enjoy him or herself amazingly. Mr. Lobyer, looking into the billiard-room sometimes in the course of the morning, was wont to make some contemptuous remark upon the occupation of his wife and her guests, before taking his flight to Manchester. And so the days went by, until the last rehearsal took place on the evening prior to the performance, and every body was pronounced perfect in the words of the airiest and most delightful of modern dramatists. The dresses had arrived, after the prospective wearers had endured unspeakable tortures from the fear of their non-arrival. The stage was erected in the billiard-room, and never was temporary theatre more complete in its arrangements. Mrs. Lobyer's spirits rose with the prospect of her triumph ; and Mr. Lobyer grew more disdainfully indifferent to his wife's folly as the important moment drew near.

The sixteenth of January was to be altogether a very grand day at Pevenshall. There was to be a hunt-breakfast in the morning, a dinner-party in the evening ; after the dinner the private theatricals ; and after that display of amateur talent a ball, at which the performers in the comedy were to appear in their stage-dresses. So far as Mr. Lobyer could be interested in any thing but the money-market, he was interested in the hunt-breakfast and the dinner, at both of which entertainments the men of his own set were to muster in full force. The master of Pevenshall had the chance of pleasure at a very early period of his existence, and not being gifted with a very large stock of vivacity, had speedily exhausted the effervescence of his nature. For the last few years of his life all the force of his mind, all the energy of his character, had been directed towards the one end and aim of the successful trader. To make twenty per cent. where other men were making fifteen ; to anticipate the future of the money market ; to foreshadow the influence of coming events, and to enrich him-

self by such foresight,—for this Mr. Lobyer spent his days in meditation, and his sleepless nights in care and anguish. But he was still capable, in his own stolid way, of taking some kind of pleasure out of the splendour of his surroundings, the skill of his cook, the perfection of his wines, and the homage which he received from the minions of the money-market. He felt a grim satisfaction in the knowledge that his wife was beautiful, and that other men admired her and envied him because he was her husband. If he had been an Oriental potentate, he would have taken to himself a hundred wives—not so much for his own happiness as in the hope that other potentates who could boast only fifty wives would envy him the delights of his harem. Not being an Oriental potentate, he had done the best he could in uniting himself to the prettiest woman and the most insolent coquette he had encountered. He had gratified himself, to the annoyance and mortification of other people. From his childhood he had been fully alive to the advantage of being the son of a millionaire, of having been in a manner born in the commercial purple; and the desire of his life had been that all his belongings should be infinitely superior to the belongings of other people. If another millionaire had arisen in the county, and had built for himself a larger place than Pevenshall, Mr. Lobyer would have commissioned Messrs. Foster to dispose of Pevenshall to the highest bidder, and would have erected a nobler and bigger mansion than the palace of the new millionaire. It is just possible that Thomas Lobyer had some vague consciousness that, considered apart from his money, he was a paltry and detestable creature; and that he was therefore eager to make the most of the glamour which splendid surroundings can impart to the meanest object. Aladdin playing in the streets and by-ways of the city is only the idle waif and stray of a defunct tailor; but Aladdin with the command of an orchard whose fruits are rubies and diamonds—Aladdin the tenant of the enchanted palace, and owner of the roc's egg,—is altogether another person. One fancies him arrayed in shining tissues of gold and silver, blazing with jewels, handsome, dashing, elegant, delightful—or, in one word, SUCCESSFUL; and the vulgar antecedents of the tailor's son are utterly forgotten.

Mr. Lobyer was neither an exacting nor a tyrannical husband. He had secured for himself the best thing in wives, as he had the best thing in horses and modern pictures and dogs. If he held her a little lower than his short-legged hunter, a little less dear than his fawn-coloured pug, he at least gave her as much as she had any right to expect from him. She had married him for his money, and he gave her his money. She spent as much as she pleased; she amused herself after her

own fashion. If now and then, moved by some short-lived conscientious scruple, she made an attempt to consult him or to defer to his pleasure, Mr. Lobyer took good care to show his wife that his pleasure was in no way concerned in hers, and that to be consulted by her was to be inexpressibly bored. He let her see very plainly that she was only a part of his pomp and splendour, and that she had nothing to do but to dress herself to perfection, and excite the envy of his toadies and familiars. If he gave her costly jewels, it was in order that she might be an advertisement of his own wealth and importance; and he scowled at her if she came down to dinner in some simple girlish dress when he wanted her to swell his magnificence.

"What the doose made you stiek those dam' rosebuds in your hair when Brownjohn the drysalter was over here?" he asked savagely. "What's the good of a fellow givin' you five or six thousand pounds worth of diamonds, if you lock 'em up in your jewel-case, and dress yourself up in white muslin and blue ribbon, like a boardin' school miss tricked out for a dancin' lesson. Brownjohn's fat old wife had a breastplate of diamonds that would have looked as yellow as barleysugar beside your tiara; and Brownjohn is just the sort of man to notice those things."

"But what does 'it matter how I am dressed?" Flo would inquire; "Mr. Brownjohn knows how rich you are."

"Perhaps he does, and perhaps he does not. You don't know those Manchester fellows; they believe in nothing except what they see; and Brownjohn knows that I have been struck rather heavily within the last six months."

Mrs. Lobyer in her own secret soul rejoiced that she was not more intimately acquainted with the idiosyncrasies of Mr. Brownjohn and other men of his class. She had a faint idea that to be "struck rather heavily" meant something unpleasant; but as her husband did not invite her sympathy, she did not consider herself in any way bound to be uneasy because of such unpleasantness. If ever she thought about Mr. Lobyer's financial position, she thought of him as the owner of wealth so enormous that no mistaken adventure could exhaust or even diminish it in any palpable manner.

"I don't know why he worries himself about the money-market," she said to Cecil. "He couldn't spend any more money than he does if his income were trebled; but I suppose, after reaching a certain point, a man takes pleasure in the magnitude of his wealth without any reference to the use he can make of it. I dare say Mr. Lobyer is tired of being a millionaire—there are so many millionaires nowadays—and a man must be a millionaire if he wants to be any thing out of the common."

The sixteenth of January began very pleasantly. The breakfast went off delightfully. The gentlemen mounted their covert haeks at eleven o'clock, and rode off to the meet, accompanied by a party of blooming equestrians, with Miss Evershed for their leader, and followed by a landau filled with older and less adventurous ladies. These ladies were only to witness the meet, for there were no Diana Vernons at Pevenshall. Miss Evershed rode superbly, but professed a supreme contempt for hunting.

"I believe there was a time when a lady could hunt," she said, when the subject was discussed at the breakfast-table, "and when she knew whom she was likely to meet at covert. But that is all changed now, and we leave the sport to people who seem to enjoy it amazingly, and who can better afford to shake a valuable hunter once or twice in the season than we could."

Miss Evershed happened to be looking at her host as she gave utterance to these remarks, and over that gentleman's swarthy complexion there came a dusky tinge of crimson as he evaded the young lady's fearless gaze.

"It would be rather hard if the hunting-field wasn't free to good riders," he muttered. "I'm sure one meets plenty of bad ones there every day!"

Neither Mrs. Lobyer nor Lady Cecil were among the ladies who rode to covert; for Florence wanted to read one particular scene in the comedy for the last time, and she begged her dear Cecil to stay at home until the afternoon, when they could drive out together.

"They've made me a new set of harness for the grey ponies," Flo said; "harness with bells. In frosty weather it quite gives one the idea of a sledge. If it were not for the hunting people, I should wish it were frosty. We can go out directly after luncheon, Cecil; and I dare say we shall meet those hunting people somewhere or other in the course of our drive. In the mean time I shall go and inflict solitary confinement upon myself while I read over that long scene with the Marquis. I wonder whether Sir Nugent will be nervous. I'm sure I shall; and if we are both nervous, the scene will be a failure."

Mrs. Lobyer retired to her own apartments, and Cecil spent her morning in writing letters. She had heard no mention of Hector Gordon's name since the afternoon on which the comedy had been read by Sir Nugent Evershed; and she had done her uttermost to exclude all thought of him from her mind. But she knew that on the 10th the Fusiliers had left for Tralee, and that on the same day the Plungers had taken possession of Chiverley Barracks. There had been some talk about these Indian heroes amongst callers at Pevenshall, but

no special mention of Major Gordon. She knew that he was near her; that although it was quite possible that she might leave Yorkshire without having seen him, it was equally possible that at any moment he might appear before her—a guest in the house which sheltered her. She had been so accustomed to think of him as utterly divided from her—the inhabitant of another world—that the knowledge of his near neighbourhood affected her with a feeling that was nearly akin to terror.

“What reason have I to be afraid of him?” she asked herself again and again; but in spite of all reason she was oppressed by some kind of fear when she thought of the many chances that might bring Hector Gordon across her path.

Mrs. Lobyer was in her highest spirits at luncheon. The gentlemen were all away in the hunting-field except Sir Nugent, who had arrived at Pevenshall an hour or two after breakfast, and had been supervising the upholsterer's men as they put the finishing touches to the theatre and dressing rooms. He was to dine and spend the night in Mr. Lobyer's mansion. After luncheon he escorted the two ladies to their carriage, patted and admired the pretty grey ponies, and placed the reins in Mrs. Lobyer's hands.

“You'll not drive far,” he said; “remember that as stage-manager I have some kind of authority; and I must beg that you don't fatigue yourself. You have your dinner to go through, you know. It will be nine o'clock before you leave the dining-room; and our performance must commence at ten. An hour is a very short time for a Pompadour toilette.”

“The dinner is a horrible bore,” answered Flo; “those Manchester friends of Mr. Lobyer's care for nothing but dinners; and Manchester is paramount in this house. Why can't one put one's housekeeper at the head of the table on such occasions? I'm sure Mrs. Prowen is a very ladylike person, and I could lend her some of my diamonds. You don't know how I hate those wearisome banquets, Sir Nugent, with the eternal Palestine soup, and turbot, and haunches of mutton, and sparkling moselle, and crystallised fruit, and forced pine-apples, and wax-candles, and that stifling odour peculiar to all dining-rooms, which seems like a combination of roast meat and rose-water. But give the ponies their heads, if you please. How long am I to drive?”

She asked the question in her most charming manner, with that half-coquettish air of submission which is so delightful when evinced by a very pretty woman towards a man to whom she has no right to defer.

“An hour and a half at the uttermost,” answered the Baro-

net, looking at his watch. "I shall be on the look-out for your return; and if you outstay your leave of absence, I shall exercise my authority as stage-manager, and condemn you to the most awful penance I can imagine. You shall play Léonie de Presles without your wig."

"That would be a very small penance; I am sure the wig is hideously ugly, and that I shall look a perfect object in it."

"And I am sure you think no such thing, Mrs. Lobyer. I know you tried the effect of the wig last night by candle-light, and were charmed with it; yes, your blushes convict you; and Lady Cecil knows I am right."

Flo shook her head in coquettish protestation, and drove away; the bells jingling gaily in the frosty air as she went.

"Isn't he nice, Cecil?" she asked presently.

"Who, dear?"

"Sir Nugent, of course."

"Yes, he is very agreeable. But I think——"

"You think what, Cecil? Pray speak out. I can't bear people to begin sentences they can't finish."

"Perhaps you'll be offended if I speak frankly."

"Oh dear, no, say just what you like. It is my normal state to be lectured. People never hesitate to say what they please about me and my goings on."

"I think, dear, you are a little too much inclined to talk to him in a manner, or to let him talk to you in a manner that is almost like flirting. I know how difficult it is to draw the line between what is and what is not flirting; and I dare say you will think me very absurd, dear——"

"I don't think you at all absurd. I know that I flirt with Sir Nugent Evershed."

"Flo!"

"Do you think that I am going to pretend about it, or to dispute as to the exact shade of my iniquity? I talk to Sir Nugent, and I let him pay me compliments—of course they are the airiest and most elegant compliments, like the little epigrammatic speeches in a comedy—and I sing the songs he recommends me to sing, and I read the books he begs me to read, and I have allowed him to bring me ferns from the fernery at Howden Park; and I suppose all that constitutes a flirtation of a very abominable character. But after all, Cecil, why shouldn't I flirt, if it amuses me to do so?"

"But, Florence——"

"But, Cecil, who cares about my flirtations? Mr. Lobyer does not; and I suppose if he is satisfied, other people may let me go my own way. Mr. Lobyer likes to see Sir Nugent dancing attendance upon me, because Sir Nugent is one of

the best men in the county, and his hanging about Pevenshall improves Mr. Lobyer's position *auprès de* Manchester. I know I am a very worthless creature, Cecil; but I am not utterly iniquitous; and I try to do my duty to my husband after a fashion. If I saw that my flirting annoyed him, I would turn district-visitor, and never open my lips except to talk of charity-schools and new iron churches."

"But how do you know that Mr. Lobyer is not annoyed? Some men are so reserved upon such points."

"I know that he is almost always at Manchester; and that when he is at home he is generally in the billiard or smoking-room. Please, Cecil, don't say any more about it. There are some things that won't bear talking of. Tell me how you like the bells; they do give you the idea of a sledge, don't they?"

Nothing could be more charming than the vivacity of Mrs. Lobyer's manner as she turned to her friend with this frivolous question; and yet only a moment before she had been very much in earnest, and the face half averted from Cecil had been a very sad one.

They drove for some miles along a pleasant country road, and then turned into a lane.

"I think we had better go home by Gorsemoor," said Flo; "I know you like that wild bleak open country."

They had emerged from the lane on to the wide hard road which skirted the broad stretch of common land called Gorsemoor, where Flo espied a little group of country people clustered at a spot where two roads crossed, and where there was a little wayside inn.

"You may depend they are waiting for some of the hunting-party," exclaimed Mrs. Lobyer. "Look out, Cecil; do you see any signs of pink in the distance?"

"Yes, I see two or three red coats coming across the common, and a lady."

"A lady? Yes, it *is* a lady! Who can it be? I know no lady about here who hunts. It must be a stranger; shall we stop and indulge our curiosity, Cecil?"

"If you like."

They had reached the cross roads and the little cluster of country people by this time; and Flo's ponies, which had been driven at a good pace by that young lady, were by no means disinclined to draw breath. The country people within a few paces of the carriage looked at the two ladies. One old gaffer touched his hat, and a woman dropped a curtsey; but this was only the ordinary deferential greeting given to unknown "quality." The lady in the pony carriage was not recognised as the mistress of Pevenshall Place. Gorse Common

was just a little outside the radius within which the influence of Pevenshall reigned supreme.

The red-coats were riding at a leisurely pace, and their horses gave evidence of having done a good day's work. Flo had not drawn up her ponies three minutes when the huntsmen and the lady reached the cross-roads. There were four huntsmen—two stout middle-aged men, whose tired horses straggled in the rear, and a young man who rode abreast with the lady by his side. It was upon this lady that the little cluster of villagers and the two friends in the pony carriage, as if by common consent, concentrated their attention. She was a very handsome lady—of the red-and-white school; very red and very white—in spite of a little blowsiness incidental to a hard day's hunting; she had a great deal of hair; and if some of the voluminous tresses, which had escaped from a chenille net and had fallen loose on her shoulders, did not quite correspond in shade, it was the fault of her hairdresser. She had bold black eyebrows, and a bush of frizzled ringlets plastered very low upon her forehead; so low, indeed, that there was scarcely any thing between the eyebrows and the frizzy hair. Her habit fitted her exquisitely—if possible, just a little too exquisitely—and there was more braid about it than is compatible with the strictest pureism in the ethics of costume. She wore a white chimney-pot hat, with a black veil, and a stand-up collar of the most masculine type, and the stand-up collar was fastened with one very large diamond—a diamond which Florence remembered as the fastening of Mr. Lobyer's collar when he had first attended the Sunday evenings at the Fountains.

The lady was talking very loudly to the gentleman who rode by her side as they passed the pony carriage, and neither the gentleman nor the lady appeared to observe the grey ponies or their owner. This was, perhaps, fortunate, inasmuch as the gentleman was Mr. Lobyer. He was laughing quite heartily at something his companion was saying, and had half turned in his saddle to speak to the two men behind.

"Did you hear her?" he cried triumphantly. "Say what you will, she'll put a topper on it."

In all Cecil's acquaintance with the master of Pevenshall, she had never heard him laugh so heartily, or give any such evidence of high spirits. She had just time enough to see what manner of person the lady was when the two riders had passed and were gone. The stout men on the tired horses followed. They were two of the Pevenshall visitors who talked "money-market" with Mr. Lobyer, and one of them espied Florence. He lifted his hat, and saluted her as he passed, with abject confusion visible in every line of his countenance.

Young ladies who put "toppers" upon conversation may be very agreeable, but a man who devotes himself to their society is apt to expose himself to the chances of rather awkward encounters.

"Doant yon lassie make Tom Lobyer's money spin?" said the gaffer. "Dick Stanner tould me as young Lobyer bought yon mare in York after t' last soommer reaces, and gave close upon fower hundred pound for her. And they say as the bay hoonter she staked at the early part of the winter cost nigh upon as mooch. I think t' ould gentleman would turn in his grave if he could know th' dooks and drakes th' yoong'un is making of his brass."

"Is that lady in the white hat Mrs. Lobyer?" asked a country woman.

"Loard bless ye heart, no, missis—no more than you be. But I'll tell you what she is. She's Mr. Lobyer's master. Dick Stanner, one of the grooms at Howden, he tould me all about her. She lives at Manchester, she does, most of her time. Miss de Raymond they call her; but she comes over to Chiverley in the hooning season. She's got a house they call a willer, outside Manchester, and keeps her brougham. Dick Stanner had a friend as lived coachman with her, but he said she was such a wild cat in her tantrums, he wouldn't have stayed in her service for ten pound a-week. She'd been a regular out and outer up in London, Dick says, and had helped to ruin as rich a man as young Lobyer. He picked her up in town, and Dick says he's more afraid of a black look from her than——"

Florence whipped her ponies sharply, and they started off at a pace which startled the little group of country people. She had heard quite enough in those three minutes during which she had listened almost involuntarily to the gaffer's discourse. Cecil had laid her hand upon her friend's arm entreatingly when the old man mentioned Mr. Lobyer's name, but Flo sat quite still with her eyes fixed on the speaker, and was not to be aroused from the kind of stupor that had seized her at sight of the bold red-and-white-faced woman riding by her husband's side.

They drove some distance on their way homeward before either of the ladies spoke. To Cecil the situation was cruelly painful. Her heart bled for the frivolous girl who had sold herself for wealth and splendour, and of whose future she thought with absolute terror. What was to become of her? So young, so reckless, so much admired; surrounded by every species of temptation, and exposed to neglect and outrage from the husband who should have protected her.

"Perhaps they can be separated on account of this horrible

woman," Cecil thought as she pondered the matter during the silent drive. "If Mr. Crawford could only know his son-in-law's conduct, I am sure he would interfere."

And then she determined, whenever a fitting opportunity arose, to implore Flo to intrust her father with the story of her wrongs. In the mean time she looked anxiously at the fair young face half averted from her, and she saw that although Mrs. Lobyer was very pale, her countenance wore a look of quiet resolution scarcely to be expected from so frivolous a person.

"You can understand now, Cecil, how little my flirting with Sir Nugent can matter to Mr. Lobyer," she said, as they passed the gates of Pevenshall, speaking for the first time since she had stopped to listen to the country people's talk.

"Did you know any thing about this before to-day, Flo?"

"I did not know any thing about Miss de Raymond, if that is what you mean; but I have known that my husband does not care about me ever since we came back to England. I dare say Miss de Raymond is a very agreeable person; she seemed to be making them laugh very much. Don't you think her handsome? I do. And I suppose that white hat with the black veil is the sort of thing you call *chic*."

"Flory, for Heaven's sake, don't talk like that."

"How should I talk? I mean to be wise in my generation, and take life lightly. If Mr. Lobyer buys four-hundred-guinea mares for Miss de Raymond, I suppose Sir Nugent Evershed may bring me maiden's hair from the Howden fernery. I'm afraid you don't understand modern philosophy, Cecil. I do; and I mean to be profoundly philosophical. There is Sir Nugent waiting for us on the terrace. Wasn't it fortunate I insisted on going out without a groom? Though, for the matter of that, I dare say they know all about Miss de Raymond in the servants' hall."

The Baronet came down the steps to assist the ladies in dismounting, while a clanging bell rang in the eupola above the stables, and two eager grooms ran out to receive the vehicle.

"You have been away two hours, Mrs. Lobyer," said Sir Nugent. "Am I to blame you or Lady Cecil for this disobedience to managerial orders?"

His airy gaiety jarred upon Cecil; but Flo answered him vivaicously in her clear ringing voice, and looked at him with a bright smile, though her face was still colourless.

"How pale you are looking!" he said, with some alarm.

"The air has been too cold for you."

"It is rather cold—a dull, damp, penetrating cold," said Flo, with a piteous little shiver; "and now I am going to my

own rooms to take a sicsta, and I shall forbid any body to come near me."

She glanced at Cecil as she spoke, and ran away, as if she would fain have avoided the possibility of any further discussion. Cecil and Sir Nugent went into the house together.

"All the theatrical party are possessed by a kind of fever this afternoon," said the Baronet. "My Cousin Grace has been walking up and down the terrace muttering to herself like a sibyl, and George Miniver has been pacing the picture-gallery in a dramatic frenzy. How little this evening's visitors will appreciate the agonies we have undergone for their amusement! As for me, I feel a kind of despairing resignation to the ordeal that awaits me, such as one can fancy a man may feel the night before his execution. I have been playing billiards all the afternoon with some officers from Chiverley, in order to get rid of the time."

"Some officers from Chiverley." The phrase set Cecil's heart beating at an abnormal pace. The only officers now at Chiverley were the Plungers. And yet Lady Cecil O'Boynerville had no right to be affected by any intelligence relating to the Plungers. She thought of poor Flo's miserable circumstances, and remembered how much happier her own life was, even in Bloomsbury. It may be a hard thing to have a husband who gives his best thoughts to the interests of a soap-boiling company; but it is infinitely harder to have a husband who devotes his leisure to the society of a Miss de Raymond.

Cecil went to her own pretty sitting-room, where the candles were lighted and the fire burning brightly. She took a book, and tried to read until it was time to dress for dinner; but the thought of Flo's and her own domestic circumstances came between her and the page. She was glad when the little clock on the chimney-piece struck half-past six, and there was some excuse for beginning her toilette for the eight-o'clock dinner. It was about half-past seven when she went down stairs, dressed for the evening, and looking very elegant and very girlish in a fresh toilette of white tulle, with wreath and bouquets of snowdrops—a costume which had been ordered from a French milliner for this especial evening, in accordance with a suggestion of Mrs. Lobyer's.

The great drawing-room was blazing with light, and bright with assembled guests, when Cecil entered it—so bright that its first effect was ominently bewildering, and the new-comer was glad to gain the sanctuary of a triangular ottoman on which Clara Evershed and the sentimental widow were talking scandal under a pyramid of exotics.

"We have been amusing ourselves by the study of Mr. Lobyer's friends," said Miss Evershed. "What delightful people they are, and what a privilege it is to meet them! They have begun to talk about American finance and the drain of gold already. However, we are not entirely given over to Manchester. The military element is strong among us. There are three or four of the Plungers, and amongst them that Major Gordon who distinguished himself at Burradalehoodah."

The room, bright and confused before, span round before Cecil's eyes for a moment, a chaos of light and splendour.

"Is Major Gordon here?" she asked.

"Yes. Do you know him? He is over there by the fireplace, talking to Nugent and Mr. Lobyer. Don't you think him very handsome? I do; much handsomer than Nugent; grander and more distinguished; not such a dash of *petit-maitre* about him; but then no civilian is ever quite equal to a high-bred military man. I suppose the girls here will allow poor Nugent a *relâche*, and devote their attention to the Major, who is a widower, and enormously rich, I am told."

"Yes," Cecil answered quietly; "he is very rich; he is my aunt's nephew, and a kind of distant connection of my own, I suppose."

Miss Evershed's volubility had given Cecil time to recover her composure, and to read herself one of those little lectures with which she had been accustomed of late to school herself. What reason had she to be agitated? What was it to her that chance had brought Hector Gordon to Pevenshall? Could there be any one in the room more utterly a stranger to her than he must be for evermore? She remembered this, and tried to think of her absent husband brooding over the details of Snooks *versus* Tomkins by his lonely hearth, while she affected to listen to Miss Evershed's vivacious chatter.

Across the crowd she saw the proud head that had bent over her on the misty sands. They were strangers—such utter strangers now and for evermore; but even in that lighted room, amidst the odour of exotics, the buzz and hum of many voices, the breath of the ocean came back to her, and like a rushing wind from that unforgotten sea returned the memory of the past, with all its sorrow and passion, its silent anguish and despair.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"HOW SHOULD I GREET THEE?"

THE German diplomatist took Cecil in to dinner, and she found herself seated a very long way from Major Gordon, who was quite hidden from her by a barrier of hothouse flowers, crystallised fruits, and oxydised silver candelabra. There was a little interval in the drawing-room after the long elaborate banquet, during which Flo and the rest of the amateur performers disappeared from the horizon. There were constant arrivals of people who came from short distances to assist at the private theatricals, and the room filled rapidly in this interregnum. And in all the time Major Gordon and Cecil O'Boyneville happened to be at different ends of the long room, almost as far apart as they had been with the Overland journey between them, Cecil thought, as she caught glimpses of the familiar figure now and then at the end of a long vista.

There was rather a longer interval than had been anticipated, and Mr. Lobyer, lounging in his favourite attitude against one of the mantelpieces, looked at his watch more than once with a disagreeable sneer upon his face.

"Half-past ten," he said, "and these amateurs were to have begun at ten. I suppose Evershed has lost his boots—or his memory—at the last moment; or my wife has set fire to her wig, or the machinery of the curtains is found to be unmanageable, or there is something agreeable of that kind in the wind. I never knew people make fools of themselves in this way that they didn't come to grief in some manner."

But Mr. Lobyer's forebodings were not realised. The door was flung open presently, and a solemn butler announced that the performance was about to commence; whereupon there was considerable rejoicing and some little bustle.

The German diplomatist again presented himself to Cecil, and escorted by that gentleman, she made her way to the billiard-room, where, in the confusion attendant on the placing of some fifty or sixty people, she had little time to notice who occupied the seat next her. It was only when the rustling of silk and fluttering of tulle, the whispering and exclaiming, the questioning and answering, and entreating and refusing, and all the polite squabbling was over, and every one fairly settled, that Cecil glanced towards the person on her right hand. Her heart had been beating at an abnormal pace all the evening; but perhaps it beat a little faster when she perceived that her right-hand neighbour was Major Gordon.

They were to be seated side by side during the performance of a five-act comedy—for two hours at least—so near that when he moved his arm in unfolding his perfumed programme he stirred the airy puffings of her dress. As yet he was—or appeared to be unconscious of her presence, and was listening deferentially to Miss Evershed’s animated discourse; for though that young lady was apt to express herself very strongly in reprobation of the husband-hunting propensities of other girls, she was renowned as one of the most desperate flirts in the county.

Cecil found herself wondering that Hector Gordon should be there, listening to the foolish talk of a lighthearted coquette, when it was only nine or ten months since the current of his life had been overshadowed by sorrow and death. His manner was graver and more subdued than of old, it is true; but still he was there, amidst that scene of foolish gaiety, while his young wife’s grave was not yet a year old.

The band-master waved his baton while Cecil was thinking this, and the band began the overture to the *Bronze Horse*. It was in the midst of this lively music that Hector Gordon turned and met the eyes of the woman he had once asked to be his wife. They saluted each other as ceremoniously as if they faintly remembered having met once before at a ball, or a morning concert, or somewhere. Cecil had been paler than usual from the early part of that evening, and on first seeing the Scotchman she had observed that the old warm glow of colour had vanished from his bearded face. If she fancied for a moment that he grew paler as he looked at her, it was only a foolish fancy, which she dismissed in the next instant.

“How do you do, Lady Cecil O’Boyneville?” he said, with just the faintest emphasis on the surname.

“How do you do, Major Gordon?”

Cecil would have been terribly perplexed had she been called upon to say any thing more; but amidst the brazen prancings of the *Bronze Horse* this was about as much as could be said.

The band-master flourished his baton in a kind of frenzy as he urged his men to the climax; the cornets and trombones blew themselves into convulsions, and with a brilliant volley of chords, short and sharp as file-firing, the crimson velvet curtains swept apart, revealing a bijou chamber which Vestris herself might have envied.

It was a boudoir hung with white satin, and furnished with chairs and sofas and tiny fragile tables of white wood, that were miracles of the upholsterer’s art. On tables and cabinets there were vases of Sèvres biscuit filled with white exotics. Every thing in the gem-like chamber was white. It

was the virginal nest of a Parisian *aristocrate* of the old *régime*; such a nest as one might find nowadays in the *Champs Elysées* or the *Rue Taibout*, occupied by a different tenant. The comedy was called *On accorde à qui persévère*, and was one of those airy fabrics which can only be constructed by the light hand of a Gallic workman.

The Comtesse de Presles is lovely, rich, aristocratic, a widow, and two-and-twenty. For her the universe is the sunniest and most delightful affair. She revels in her beauty, her wealth, her youth, her freedom: but so many charms are accompanied with certain penalties. The Countess is persecuted by the crowd of her adorers; and at last, in order to escape their importunities, in very despair she accepts the addresses of the Duc d'Auberive, a gentleman of forty years, *bien sonnées*, stiff, grand, all that there is of the most patrician—a man whose ancestors have made their own terms with the Kings of France—a man whose great-grandfather's arrogance would have defied the throne, had it not been strangled by the iron hand of a Richelieu.

Affianced to this gentleman, whom she respects but does not love, Léonie de Presles is tranquil. Her lovers can no longer molest her. The name of the Duc d'Auberive will serve as an ægis, before which the most presumptuous of these *soupirants* must retire abashed.

No, not the most presumptuous. There is the Marquis, the most utter scapegrace amongst them all. The man whose case was of all others most hopeless—*le dernier des derniers*; the rejected of the rejected; poor, out-at-elbows—morally, not actually, for he makes his creditors dress him handsomely in spite of themselves—dissipated, reckless; a man who has squandered an enormous fortune at *lansquenet*, and has lampooned the Pompadour; a man who at any moment may be consigned to the darkest underground cell in the Bastille, to finish his worthless life in the society of rats and spiders. And this man dares to pursue the lovely Countess with his insolent importunities. He dares even more. He tells her that she shall marry him. Yes; though he is poor and worthless and a scapegrace—though he has lost all his money at *lansquenet*—though she has affianced herself to that respectable idiot the Duke. He loves her. Is not that enough? As to the fortune he has lost—a bagatelle! For her sake he will win another fortune. As for the fury of the Pompadour—he defies the Pompadour. For Léonie's sake he will do any thing that is desperate—save the King's life when it has not been in peril; discover the details of a great political plot that has never existed; do something to win the favour of the monarch himself, in spite of the Pompadour.

It is in vain that the Countess would banish this insolent. She denies him her door—he comes in at the window. She gives her servants the most severe orders—instant dismissal for the renegade who admits the Marquis. But in spite of her the rejected wretch is perpetually at her feet. She triumphs in the thought of having outwitted him, and the next moment he is there—by her side. She sends for her milliner, and lo, her milliner is the Marquis. She orders a cup of chocolate, and the lackey who brings it is the Marquis. She summonses one of her gardeners to complain of the poverty of her exoties, and the gardener is transformed into the Marquis.

And in all this there are involved those exquisite complications, that delicious *équivoque* of which Scribe was so great a master. Every moment there is some fresh situation, some new and delightful perplexity. Now the Marquis is hiding behind a screen—now dipping his powdered head up and down behind an ottoman. The Duke is always being fooled more or less, and the Countess is forced into deceptions she abhors by the artifices of her impertinent suitor. And with the fabulous good luck of all these fascinating seapegraces of the Parisian drama, the Marquis triumphs over every difficulty. All that he has promised to do in jest, he is able to achieve in earnest: without effort, for the trump-cards of fortune drop into his hands. He *does* save the King’s life, in a hunting party, almost by accident. He *does* discover a real political conspiracy, and again almost by accident. The King is delighted with him, the Pompadour forgives him, the forfeited lands of an ancestor are restored to him. A Jew miser who has begged of him, and whom he has assisted, dies and leaves him millions. And at last, tormented beyond all measure, the Countess yields; the Duke retires, glad to be out of a contest which is altogether unfamiliar to his stateliness, and the Marquis triumphs.

Such a piece as this seems written to be acted in a drawing-room. There is no declamation, there are no heroics. Nothing is wanted but coquettish grace in the women, ease and assurance in the men. And who can imagine any thing more delightful than Florence Lobyer in the *rôle* of the persecuted Countess? Such bewitching insolence of the grand dame; such fascinating hauteur; such delicious grace in refusing; such lovely tenderness in the moment of relenting. And the Pompadour dress—that most perfect of all fashions ever invented to render loveliness irresistible—that costume in which plebeian beauty loses its alloy of vulgar clay, and is sublimated into the ideal—that bewildering and bewitching attire which imparts to the snub-nose of a Dunbarry a grace

unsurpassed by the classic profile of a Phryne—what of Florence Lobyer in blue brocade and old point, powder and diamonds, patches and hoop, high-heeled shoes with glittering buckles and gold-embroidered stockings? If Mr. Lobyer had chosen his wife because she was the best thing to be had in the way of wives, he had good reason to be proud of her to-night, when she flashed her beauty and her diamonds upon the dazzled eyes of his guests.

He was proud of her—after his own sullen fashion—and angry with her too; for another man shared the applause which she won, and made himself the central feature in the night's triumph. It was not of Mr. Lobyer's wealth, or the glories of Pevenshall—the oxydised silver candelabra and epergnes—the looking-glass plateau, with its border of silver bulrushes and silver stags drinking in the placid stream; it was not of the splendour of Mr. Lobyer's dinner-table, or the cost of Mr. Lobyer's modern pictures, that these people would talk when they went home. The event of the evening was the amateur acting, which the master of Pevenshall stigmatised as tomfoolery; and the triumphs of the evening belonged to Florence and Sir Nugent.

Lolling in his luxurious chair, and staring at the brilliant little stage with a moody countenance, Mr. Lobyer reflected upon many things, the thought of which was scarcely adapted to the scene in which he found himself. Ah, if at some delightful assembly where every one is looking so pleased and happy, one could take the roofs off people's brains, as Asmodeus lifted the tiles and timbers of Madrid, what strange subjects we should find our friends pondering! There would be Smith thinking of that iniquitous lawsuit, in which the villany of some pettifogging attorney has involved him; Brown calculating the amounts of renewed accommodation-bills, which must so soon be renewed again; Mrs. Jones thinking what a brute Jones has been for the last week, and how shamefully he is flirting with that brazen-faced Mrs. Smith; Thomson brooding over the gloom of the Stock Exchange, and the amount of capital he has squandered on "contango." And yet "the dalliance and the wit" go on all the while. Mrs. Brown sings one of her pretty sentimental songs—"Robin Adair," or "John Anderson my Jo"—while her feelings towards Brown are almost murderous; Smith warbles his little French *chanson*—all about *laissons rire-er*, and *un beau sourire-er*—and is thinking of what he should like to do to the lawyer even as he warbles. Oh sublime hypocrisies of social intercourse! Is sadde-of-mutton very often cold; salmon, whose attendant cucumber comes too late; ice-pudding, dissolving languidly on the napkin that envelopes it; are the

cates and confections of a modern dinner worth so much deception? Instead of the stereotyped invitation prepared by a fashionable stationer, why do not our friends write to us, saying, “Come, let us weep and howl together; for sorrows are many, and life is bitter?”

Leaning back in his chair, and looking at the stage, where the Marquis in violet velvet and gold was coquetting with the Countess in blue brocade and diamonds, Thomas Lobyer’s thoughts went back to an unforgotten time, and he saw a grassy angle, shut in by ivy-covered walls, and heard the clamorous voices of a crowd of boys. He felt a shower of blows sent home by a practised arm, the hot breath of an antagonist upon his cheek, a handsome face pressing closer and closer to his own. He felt all this; and the vengeful fury of that moment came back to him, intensified by certain feelings that had influenced him of late.

“He makes himself at home in my house,” thought the millionaire. “*He* gives his orders to the upholsterers, I’ll warrant, though they’ll send their bills to me. *He* chooses the piece that is to be played; *he* secures the services of the band. And I know that he hates me, and he knows that I hate him; and yet we smirk and grin at each other, like a couple of clowns at a fair. If that knife had struck nearer home, and had done for him altogether, it couldn’t have been much worse for me than it was. I dare say I should only have had a twelvemonth’s imprisonment or so, and I shouldn’t have had him turning up on my wedding tour, and taking possession of my house.”

The comedy came to an end at last. It had seemed *very* long to Cecil. The German diplomatist had talked to her between the acts, and Major Gordon had talked to Miss Evershed.

After the comedy there was an adjournment to the dining-room, for a stand-up supper,—one of those suppers which admit of such ravages in stealthy middle-aged devourers, who prowl from table to table and from sideboard to buffet, sipping of one sweet and then flying to the rest; consuming unknown quantities of white soup and lobster-salad; taking now a seven-and-sixpenny peach, now a plate of plovers’ eggs embedded in savoury jelly; pausing here to quaff sparkling hock, and lingering there to imbibe dry champagne. Such a supper-room affords a superb platform for flirtation; and the young ladies staying in the house, and the young lady-visitors of the evening, did considerable execution among the Plungers, recently returned from the pale beauties of Hindostan, and ready to fall victims to the rosy brightness of fresh young British belles.

Cecil saw that Hector Gordon was graver and more sub-

duced than his brother officers ; but she saw also that he talked to Miss Evershed very much as he had talked to herself in the first days of their acquaintance at Fortinbras, and that he was undisturbed by any memory of the past. She felt that she had reason to be very glad of this. Any apparent consciousness of that brief romance by the sea-shore on his part must have been unspeakably painful to her now ; and yet—and yet—she felt, at the same time, that Hector Gordon's calm indifference did not give her so much pleasure as it should have done.

The close of the evening was very brilliant. The band of the Plungers adjourned to the great conservatory opening out of the drawing-room, after having supped luxuriously—so luxuriously indeed, that one of the cornet-players bungled considerably in the process of changing his keys, and was severely reprimanded by his chief. But the Pevenshall guests were too deep in flirtation and pleasure to be aware of any transient hitch in the harmony of that delicious Plunger band, which played waltzes and galops to perfection ; and the effect of the red coats and glittering brazen instruments seen athwart the dusky foliage of palm and orange, citron and cactus, was picturesque in the extreme. Foremost among the waltzers were Florence in her Pompadour dress, and Sir Nugent in his violet-velvet coat and diamond-hilted rapier ; and the German diplomatist watching them observed to Cecil that it was evident the baronet had learned to waltz upon the other side of the Alps. Conspicuous on account of her position as mistress of the house, doubly conspicuous because of her beauty and brilliant costume, Mrs. Lobyer could not indulge in the mildest flirtation without incurring a certain degree of observation ; and her flirtation with Sir Nugent to-night was not of the mildest order. It seemed as if he could not quite put off his character of the scapegrace adorer while he still wore the dress. As he had pursued the lovely Countess in the comedy, so he pursued the bewitching Mrs. Lobyer now that the comedy was over. As Flo had coquetted in her *rôle* of the Countess, so she coquetted now.

Fast young squires remarked to their intimates that the pretty little woman was "going the pace." Dowagers regarded Mrs. Lobyer curiously through double eye-glasses. Even Miss Evershed shrugged her shoulders, and told her confidante of the moment that the flirtation was really becoming a little too glaring.

"I shall speak to Nugent about it to-morrow," she said ; "for I think he minds me as much as he does any one ; and as I know she is a good little thing, with no real harm in her, I don't like to see her make a fool of herself."

It was nearly four o'clock when the last carriage rolled

away from beneath the Italian portico. It was quite four o'clock when Florence went up stairs with Cecil.

"Now half to the setting moon are gone,
And half to the rising day:
Low on the sand, and loud on the stone,
The last wheel echoes away,"

exclaimed Mrs. Lobyer, whose gaiety throughout the evening had been of a very feverish order. "Let me come to your room, Cecil. We'll have some strong tea, and talk over our evening. Do you think it has been successful?"

The two ladies were on the threshold of Cecil's room as Florence asked this question. They went into the luxurious little retreat, where the fire and candles were always burning as brightly as if they had been watched by some genius of comfort rather than by an ordinary attendant. Mrs. Lobyer rang for tea; and then, after flinging herself into one of the row chairs, pulled off her powdered wig with its superstructure of plumes and diamonds.

"Oh, how my head aches!" she exclaimed as she loosened her hair and let it fall in a shower upon her shoulders. "I wonder whether real actresses ever feel as I have felt to-night. Do you know that I had a splitting headache before dinner, and that my brain has been throbbing like a steam-engine all the evening. Just put your hand upon my head."

Cecil laid her fingers gently upon the fair young head, which was burning with fever. She brought eau-de-cologne from the adjoining room, and bathed her friend's forehead. Mrs. Lobyer's maid appeared while Cecil was doing this.

"Let us have some strong green-tea, Martin," said Flo; "and bring me a dressing-gown. I want to get rid of this horrible dress."

The maid retired to give her order, and returned almost immediately with a loose garment of white cashmere and quilted satin. She took to pieces the brilliant Pompadour toilette, the diamonds and lace and bouquets and plumes, and removed the useless litter, leaving her mistress wrapped in the dressing-gown, with her fair hair falling about her face and neck.

She lay back in her luxurious chair in a listless attitude, looking dreamily at the fire, and did not speak until some little time after the tea-service had been brought.

"You are sure that you are not sleepy, Cecil, and that I am not making myself a nuisance?" she said at last.

"Quite sure, dear. Shall I pour you out some tea?"

"If you please : only it isn't fair that you should wait upon me."

"You have so much more reason to be tired than I have."

"But I am not in the least tired," exclaimed Flo ; "I am only preternaturally awake. And now tell me, Cceil, do you think my evening has been a success ?"

"I think people enjoyed themselves extremely."

"That is no answer, Cceil."

"And I think you acted charmingly ; indeed every one thought so ; but——"

"Ah, there it is ! I expected the 'but.' What is it, Cecil ?"

"Am I to be candid, Floxy ? You know I love you very sincerely, dear ; and I want our friendship to be something more than the conventional friendliness of women who praise each other's dresses and bonnets. Am I to speak without reserve ?"

"Oh yes, if you please," answered Flo, with a sigh of resignation. "I have been doing something dreadful, I suppose ?"

"I think you know what I am going to say as well as I do, Florence."

"Perhaps I do ; but you shall say it notwithstanding. What is it ?"

"You remember what we talked of this afternoon. I told you that I thought your manner with Sir Nugent Evershed was a little different from your manner with other people, and apt to invite observation on that account. I tell you frankly, Florence, that your manner and his manner to-night *did* attract observation, and that some of your guests spoke of you as they had no right to speak. People are very incautious in a crowded room, and one hears things that are not intended to be heard."

To Cceil's surprise her friend burst into a laugh—a clear silvery peal of laughter, which would have been charming if it had not been in such strange discord with the occasion.

"And so people have begun to talk of me ?" she said. "I dare say they have talked enough of Mr. Lobyer and Miss de Raymond ; and now I suppose they will talk of me and Sir Nugent Evershed."

"Florence, for Heaven's sake don't talk like that !"

"How would you have me talk ? Am I to submit tamely to my wrongs ? If my husband outrages me, I will outrage him. Why, those ignorant country people could give me the clue to Mr. Lobyer's indifference. They know that my husband devotes his life to another woman—and has only married me because he wants some one to sit at the head of his table

who does not smoke or swear or paint herself red and white, like Miss de Raymond. He likes the smoking and the swearing and the red and white paint, you know; and I have no doubt he thinks me a horribly insipid creature; but society is not yet so advanced that he can afford to place a Miss de Raymond at the head of his table. That will come in due course."

"Florence, you must not speak of things in this way. I know, dear, that your position is a most painful one, and I can only think of one thing that you can do to lessen its misery."

"And what is that?"

"Write to your father, telling him every thing, or beg him to come to you. He is the only person you can safely trust with the secret you have so unhappily discovered."

"Secret!" cried Flo, bitterly; "a secret that is known to all the country side. No, Cecil; your advice is very good, I dare say; but it is advice that I can never act upon. I have made a mistake, but I made it with my eyes open; and I will never tell my father how miserably my folly has come home to me. He gave his consent to my marriage with such reluctance; he knew that I was selling myself for fine clothes and a splendid establishment. But I tried to deceive him—I tried to deceive myself. Modern London is a kind of Maelstrom, Cecil, and my poor foolish head was giddy with all that confusion of carriages and horses, and bric-à-brac and jewelry. Every body is so rich nowadays, and one is stifled with the wealth of other people. I had begun to think that life was intolerable without a million of money, some time before I met Mr. Lobyer. He was the first millionaire who crossed my path, and I accepted him blindly. But I thought that he asked me to be his wife because he loved me, Cecil—honestly, after his own unromantic fashion—and I meant to do my duty to him; I did indeed, Cecil."

"I believe it, darling; and you may still do your duty," answered Cecil, bending tenderly over the slight figure. Mrs. Lobyer had slipped from the low chair to the ground, and was half-sitting, half-kneeling, at her friend's feet.

"What, with a Miss de Raymond in the background? Never, Cecil! Besides, I had long given over that idea of doing my duty. Within a week of my marriage I discovered how mistaken I had been in thinking Mr. Lobyer cared for *me*. It was for his own glorification, the gratification of his own vanity that he married me; and I am not so much to him as his horses or his dogs, for he takes some pleasure in their society. He swore at me before our honeymoon was over, because I ventured to remonstrate with him for his brutality

to a waiter who had made some mistake about the arrangements of the dinner. From that time all thought of doing my duty honestly and conscientiously, as I had meant to do it, was over. Our marriage was reduced to the level of a bargain, and I resolved to perform my part of the bargain as fairly as I could. So I dress to the best of my ability, and I receive my husband's friends, and am civil even to those Manchester people; and I fill up invitation-cards, and give the housekeeper her orders, and discuss the arrangements of the house—who is to have the blue-room, and who is to have the chintz-room, and who we may venture to put upon the second-floor, and so on. With regard to Sir Nugent Evershed, I will frankly confess that he is an unutterable relief to me after Manchester; and if I flirt with him a little now and then, I consider myself quite at liberty to do so. To-night my nerves were irritated by the rencontre of the afternoon, and I dare say I behaved very foolishly. I wanted to demonstrate my defiance of my husband. I wished to show these people—who, no doubt, know all about Miss de Raymond—I wished them to see that I was no sentimental wife devoted to an unfaithful husband."

"But, my dearest Florence, was it wise to sacrifice your own self-respect in order to gratify your pride?"

"I have no self-respect. I have never respected myself since I married Mr. Lobyer. Oh Cecil, there is nothing that has ever been written about such marriages too strong or too bitter for their iniquity. We sell ourselves like slaves, and when the bargain is completed, we hate the master who has bought us. Don't kiss me, Cecil. I am not worthy that any good woman's lips should touch mine. I have sold myself to a man whom I despised before I hated him; and now that it is too late I repent of my wickedness."

"But if Mr. Lobyer outrages you by association with such a woman as that person we saw to-day, you may be released from this unhappy union. You have only to appeal to your father, Florence; surely he can help you."

"Yes, he can take me back to the Fountains, to be the laughing-stock of every body who ever knew me before my marriage. Ah, how the manœuvring mothers and husband-hunting daughters would triumph if they could discover that my brilliant match had ended in failure and misery! No, Cecil, I must abide by the bargain I have made for myself; and, after all, I cannot complain that I am cheated. I sold myself for diamonds, and carriages, and horses, and servants; and Mr. Lobyer has given them to me. I told you it would be a bad thing for me when I came to talk seriously of things. I must take life lightly, Cecil, like other women who marry

for money. And now *parlons toilette*; tell me how you like my dress to-night. Is that blue a good candle-light colour? I had awful doubts on the subject. If there were any green tinges in it, I must have looked hidious.

After this Cecil tried in vain to bring her friend back to any thing like serious conversation. Mrs. Lobyer chattered as gaily as if no sorrow had ever shadowed her life, and the dim winter daylight glimmered coldly behind the rose-tinted curtains before Cecil could induce her to retire. They separated at last, however, after kissing each other affectionately: and Florence Lobyer's grand field-night came to a close.

After the amateur theatricals, there was a little lull at Pevenshall. Mrs. Lobyer kept her room for a day or two, attended constantly by Lady Cecil O'Boyneville. Medical wisdom pronounced that she had over fatigued herself, and ordered extreme quiet. But to endure such a regimen as the doctor prescribed for more than eight and forty hours was quite beyond Florence's patience. On the evening of the second day she reappeared in the drawing-room, paler than usual, and all the more fascinating by reason of that delicate pallor.

Pevenshall was besieged by callers during that particular week—people who had been so delighted, and so charmed, and so surprised by the amateur comedy, and who were eager to testify their gratification and their delight to the mistress of the mansion. Amongst these callers were the officers of the Plungers, and amongst the officers came Major Gordon.

He came one bright frosty morning, when a bevy of ladies, headed by Miss Evershed, had sailed off to the billiard-room, and when the group in the drawing-room was a very small one. The sentimental widow sat by the fire reading a new French novel—the philosophy of which she took the trouble to expound now and then for the benefit of her companions; an elderly dowager dozed over the morning paper; Mrs. Lobyer sat at a little table by one of the windows, trifling with her brushes, before a half-finished water-colour sketch of a group of *camellia japonicas* that had been brought from the conservatory for the gratification of a sudden artistic impulse on the part of the mistress of Pevenshall; and Cecil bent over an elaborately embroidered slipper which she was preparing for the great O'Boyneville.

“I think it would be rather nice if I could only get a bird's-nest,” said Flo, after a lengthened contemplation of her sketch; “*Camellia Japonicas* and a Bird's Nest—Mrs. Lobyer.’ That would look very well in a catalogue, wouldn't it? But I suppose bird's-nests are out of season in January. Peo-

ple talk about money being able to buy any thing, and yet I dare say my picture will be a failure for want of a bird's-nest. *Camellia japonicas* by themselves are so uninteresting ; and I did so want to astonish papa by sending something to the British Institution, just to show him that I hadn't neglected my painting. What do you think of a cut lemon, Cecil ? one of those big clumsy lemons one sees in old pictures, with the rind trailing from it. Or what would you say to a silver salver, or one of Mr. Lobyer's great chased tankards, or a Sèvres vase ? I positively must have something to relieve the insipidity of my *camellia japonicas*."

While Mrs. Lobyer was debating this important subject, Major Gordon was announced. Cecil and Florence were seated very near each other ; and after shaking hands with both ladies, the soldier took the chair nearest his hostess.

Then for the first time Cecil felt the extreme embarrassment of her position. The man who had once loved her approached her as a stranger, and yet, in spite of her prayers—in spite of her struggles to hold firmly to the right, the vision of the past came back to her ; and she thought of him, not as she saw him now, courteously indifferent, conventionally polite—but as she had seen him on that last day at Fortinbras, with his head bent, and his eyes dim with tears.

But with him it was otherwise, thought Cecil. Surely if any recollection of that time had been present to his mind, he could not have seemed so entirely at his ease. He inquired about his aunt. He had not seen her since his return to England, and he was very anxious to see her, dear soul, he said. She was visiting, of course, always visiting at this time of year. He had received delightful letters from her, and invitations to some of the houses at which she was staying.

"If I can get away from Chiverley for a week, I shall run over to Thornley Grange, in Leicestershire, where she is to be in March," he said ; "but at the worst I shall see her in town I suppose early in the spring."

This last remark seemed to require an answer, so Cecil replied that she had no doubt Mrs. MacClaverhouse would return to Dorset Square in the spring.

And after this the conversation became general. Florence told Major Gordon her difficulties with regard to the *camellia japonicas*.

"They will come out so stiffly," she said despondingly ; "no one but a Miss Nutrie or a Van Huysum could make any thing out of them."

Mr. Lobyer came in from a morning's ride while the Scotchman was talking to the two ladies, and on this parti-

cular occasion Mr. Lobyer happened to be in very good humour with himself and the world in general. The Chili Island loan, in which he was vitally interested, was beginning to look up in the market, after having been for some time in bad odour; and the influence of a rapid advance of seven-eighths brightened the millionaire's countenance. He made himself as agreeable as it was in him to be, and invited the Major to dinner the next day, when some “other fellows” were coming from Manchester.

The Major hesitated just a little before he accepted the invitation, and it seemed to Mrs. Lobyer that he glanced towards Cecil in that moment of hesitation; but he did accept it.

“Why, Cecil, you never told me that Major Gordon was related to you,” said Flo when that gentleman had departed.

“He is not related to me. My aunt, Mrs. MacClaverhouse, is only his aunt-in-law; there is no real relationship even between Major Gordon and her whatever; there is no relationship between him and me.”

“Indeed! But you did not even tell me that you knew him. How very nice he is—and a young widower! I think there is nothing so interesting as a young widower. One generally associates a widower with baldness, and stoutness, and half-a-dozen children in rusty mourning: but a young widower is delightful: and he is, or is to be, very rich, is he not? Mr. Lobyer says so, and he keeps a kind of mental register of other people's banking accounts. I wish there were no such person as Mr. O'Boyneville.”

“Florence!”

“Oh, I don't mean any unkindness towards him. But if you were only single, it would be so nice to make a match between you and the Major. Match-making is the natural occupation of a married woman, and I want an eligible couple to operate upon. Depend upon it, Mrs. Vancourt will set her cap at our Major.”

This was said *sotto voce*, for Mrs. Vancourt was the sentimental widow.

The lady in question looked up from her book five minutes afterwards to expatiate upon a passage thereof.

“Is not this true?” she said. “How well this man knows the human heart! ‘Il n'y a jamais d'oubli où il y a eu de l'amour. Durant l'absence on croit toujours oublier, et on se trompe toujours. Mais lorsqu'on revoit celle qu'on a aimée, les années passées s'envolent comme le songe d'une nuit d'été, et on s'aperçoit qu'on n'a jamais cessé d'aimer.’”

A faint blush spread itself over Cecil O'Boyneville's face as

the widow finished her lecture ; for there seemed to her some grain of truth amidst the French romancer's flimsy sentimentality.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BETWEEN CARTHAGE AND KENSINGTON.

WHILE the splendours and gaieties of Mr. Lobyer's household afforded conversation for the neighbourhood of Pevenshall, William Crawford the painter worked his hardest at a picture which he fondly hoped would be one of his best achievements. It was for this that he had declined his daughter's invitations,—for this, and perhaps just a little because the society of Mr. Lobyer was distasteful to him, and the gorgeousness of the Lobyer *menagé* stifling and oppressive.

He had refreshed himself with a month's holiday during the past autumn, and had spent his holiday in Venice, the city of his love,—the city to which he had taken flight after his first success,—to rest for a while amid the dreamy beauty of the Adriatic, the poetic glories of the past.

After his holiday he had returned to the Fountains with a sketch for his new picture in his portfolio—a sketch that had been thought out and dreamed over as he lay back in his gondola, or basked, at full length, in some woody island, with pine-trees murmuring above his head, and blue and emerald-tinted wavelets creeping to his feet.

The union between the painter and his only child had never been a very close one ; and although pretty, frivolous Florence was very dear to his heart, her marriage had not made any great break in his life. He looked forward to seeing her early in the spring, when a Tyburnian mansion which Mr. Lobyer had hired at a rental of something between five and six hundred per annum, was to be furnished and fitted for the reception of its occupants ; and in the mean time he was very happy alone in his painting-room, with the grand old cedars making a solemn shade in his garden, and his big canvas on the monster easel under the north-west light.

He was very happy, with ample leisure for his art ; and, alas for the weakness of earth's grandest spirit ! there was no other passion besides his worship of art which absorbed the painter's mind in these quiet January days.

Mrs. Champernowne had returned to the Hermitage before Christmas, and had been pleased to write a little note of inquiry about Mr. Crawford's labours, and had been pleased to

welcome him graciously when he called in response to her note, and to bestow her sweetest smiles upon him whenever he chose to visit her.

His visits to the Hermitage had been very frequent of late, and it seemed as if the fascinating Georgina could not see him too often. She talked of his art and of his own special triumphs that had been and were yet to be, with as much appearance of interest as if she had been his sister or his wife; for sisters are not always given to enthusiasm upon the subject of a brother's successes. She made him strong tea; she played Mozart to him; she ordered her niece to sing pretty little ballads for his pleasure; she spent a small fortune in the purchase of French and German photographs in order to have something new to show him whenever he came to the Hermitage; but in the presence of other people she always carefully avoided any thing like *empressement* in her manner to the great painter.

"She is very cautious," he thought bitterly. "It amuses her to indulge me as she indulges her cats; but if I were to tell her that I adore her, and that she has rendered my life a burden to me without her, she would elevate her eyebrows with the most innocent air of surprise, and demand what justification she had given me for my presumption."

But in spite of this conviction the painter was a constant visitor in that tranquil abode, where there was always a faint odour of hyacinth and myosotis, and a delicious atmosphere of repose not to be found elsewhere. Ah, if the lively matrons, the brilliant rattles, only knew the profound charm which a wise man finds in the companionship of a quiet woman! Mr. Crawford dined sometimes with the widow, who altered her old-fashioned hours, and took her dinner at seven to serve his convenience. The little dining-room at the Hermitage was very delightful to the painter, with its sombre colouring of grey and green, its few perfect bronzes, and three or four rare pictures, and instead of the glare of gas, the subdued light of half-a-dozen yellow wax candles in antique silver candlesticks. The widow's dinners were perfection on a small scale; her wines were of the rarest and best; and above and beyond all this, she possessed the talent of bringing together people who suited one another.

William Crawford abandoned himself entirely to the dangerous delights of this acquaintance. The cup which the siren's hand offered his thirsty lips contained a beverage which he knew to be poisonous; but he drank nevertheless, and grasped the fatal chalice with a feverish eagerness.

He was in love—as entirely engulfed in the terrible ocean as the most ignorant plunger who ever leapt blindly to his

doom in the stormy waves. He had allowed himself to drift imperceptibly down the stream ; and it was only when the current had grown too strong for him that he discovered whither the cruel tide was hurrying him. And when the discovery came it was too late—too late to recede—too late to be wise.

“At the worst she can only break my heart,” thought the painter. And having a good deal of the *laissez-aller* in his composition, he gave himself up to the delights of the Hermitage, and shut his eyes upon the darksome vision of the future.

He worked hard ; but not so indefatigably as he would have worked if there had been no such person as Mrs. Champernowne in existence ; not as he had worked in the Buckingham-Street lodging in the days of his obscurity. The real artist should care for nothing but his art. This is the doctrine which William Crawford had preached and practised for fifteen years of his life ; but in these latter days he was false to his own teaching, and tried to serve two masters. The great canvas on his easel progressed slowly, and he began to look at it hopelessly as he thought how soon the fitful sunshines of April would steal upon him.

“A year sooner or later can make little difference to me,” he thought, “and yet I should like to have made my mark in the Academy this season. There are new men springing up, and—and I want the critics to see that my colour has not lost all its brilliancy since the days of the *Aspasia*.”

Throughout the progress of his picture Mrs. Champernowne was his sympathising and encouraging friend. She entered heart and soul into every subject connected with his work—all his ambitious hopes—his depressing fears. He trusted her entirely—laying bare all the weaknesses of genius, and confiding himself wholly to her mercy. He talked to her as he had never talked to man or woman in his life before ; and perhaps she in all the world was the only creature who knew that Mr. William Crawford believed in his own genius.

“I know how small I am, if you weigh me in the balance with the men of the past,” he said. “Good Heavens ! where did they get their power, those demi-gods of art ? There is a head of Christ by Quentin Matsys, in the Museum at Antwerp, and the eyes that look at you out of the canvas are human eyes, dim with tears. There is a *chasse* in the hospital at Bruges, painted by Hemling, which you could look at for a year, and find new wonders in it every year. And you remember Van Eyck's Adoration of the Lamb—the crimson and purples, all the brightness of summer in the green trees and winding blue rivers. The power to paint like that seems to

have vanished off the face of the earth. And yet we love our art, and work hard, and do good things, too, in our way. I wonder whether the men of the future will measure themselves against us, centuries after we are dead and gone, and talk despairingly of our power. I suppose every work of genius is sanctified by time, and that if Rubens lived in the next street, we should have plenty to say about the violence of his colour and the audacity of his foreshortening. What should we think of the Pyramids if they had been built yesterday? We go into raptures about those great piles of stone because it is some thousands of years more or less since they were erected; but who ever talks of the monster hotels? And yet I think the monster hotels are quite as wonderful as the Pyramids, and I should just as soon expect domestic comfort in the one as in the other. Depend upon it, Mrs. Champernowne, we are all just a little fooled by the past. If a man sent the Venus de Milo to Trafalgar Square to-morrow, there would be plenty of Art-critics ready to declare that her head was too large for her body, or that her knees were afflicted with white swelling."

Many times during that early spring did the siren plead for a glimpse of the picture; but on this point William Crawford was resolute—even to her.

"What would you have thought of my Aspasia, if you had seen her a month before she was finished?" he said, when the widow entreated for one peep at the Dido. The inexhaustible *Æneid* had furnished the subject for the new picture. "I assure you there was a period in which she appeared in the last stage of intoxication. My model is a figurante at Drury Lane. Don't shrug your shoulders so contemptuously, Mrs. Champernowne. She is a very good little girl, though she does dance behind a row of footlights for a guinea a week—a girl with the face of an angel, and the figure of a Dutch doll. I have to find my Dido her arms and shoulders between this and May; but if you will come to my painting-room during the first week in April——"

"If I will come!" cried the widow impatiently; "I have a good mind to make my way into your painting-room some night like a burglar, and look at Dido and your *Æneas* by the light of a bull's-eye lantern, as they say Mr. Morlais painted his 'Queen of Lydia unrobing.' I hope *Æneas* is handsome."

"Oh, poor fellow, he is a professional model, who has been handsome in his day, but whose beauty has succumbed beneath the influence of gin-and-water. My *Æneas* shall take after his mother. I have been studying all the types of the Greek Aphrodité in order to find the head I want."

"I heartily despise that poor stupid Dido, and I have always

detested Æneas," said the widow; "it is my belief that his piety was of the Pecksniffian order, and that he only carried his father in order that he might have an excuse for losing his wife. But I am dying to see your picture nevertheless, and I shall count the days between this and April."

The days passed quickly enough in spite of Mrs. Champernowne's impatience; and early in that capricious month the painter stood before his finished picture, waiting the widow's visit. He had been putting the last touches to the canvas during that very morning; and even now he had his palette in his hand, and hovered restlessly before his easel every now and then, as if he would fain have made some new attack upon Dido or her cruel lover.

"If Mrs. Champernowne doesn't come directly, I shall do something dreadful to the Trojan's nose," he muttered, looking at the big clock. "His nostrils are a thought too red, as it is: another touch of vermilion, and he would look as if his nose had been bleeding. You are a lovely creature, Dido; though perhaps I have no right to say so. There are the wheels, and the bell,—'She is coming, my love, my sweet.' I hope they have arranged a nice luncheon. I'll go out and meet her."

The painter laid down his palette and ran to the portico, beneath which Mrs. Champernowne appeared with her niece in attendance. Charming as she was always, she had never been more delightful than to-day, with her pretty air of impatience, her bewitching assumption of sisterly interest in the painter's triumph.

"Take me straight to the painting-room, please," she said, as Mr. Crawford moved towards the open door of the drawing-room. He obeyed her, and led her at once to the big tapestried chamber, where the perfume of jonquils and hyacinths blew in under the open window.

The great picture stood opposite to the door, and Mrs. Champernowne sank silently into a low chair which the painter had placed for her at some little distance from the easel. It was a perfect feast of colour, a banquet of beauty. The painter had chosen for his subject the humiliation of the Carthaginian queen at the feet of her lover. Dido has heard of the Trojan's intended departure, and the first storm of passion has spent itself. She has come to implore him to remain; she came to reproach him for his cruelty, but love has been stronger than indignation, and in her tears and her passion she has fallen prostrate at his feet, her hands clasped, her eyes uplifted to his thoughtful face, her golden hair falling about her in a glittering shower, her regal mantle of white and gold streaming on the ground as she kneels. There are real tears in her blue

eyes, so deep in their violet shadow, so brilliant in their light. You see the traces of tears that she has dashed away with an impassioned hand, still glittering on the golden fringe of her lashes; and in every articulation of the intertwined fingers, in the convulsive contraction of the lovely lips, the lines that wrinkle the ivory brow, you behold the evidences of her despair. William Crawford's Dido is no beautiful doll, but a living, breathing woman, sublimely lovely in her womanly anguish.

Æneas, disturbed and compassionate, but still resolute, has only a secondary interest in the picture. He is listening, and will speak presently; and you feel that he will be courteous, and tender, and gentlemanly, in his answer to that fond, appealing creature. But the passion and the despair are Dido's, and the interest of the picture is hers.

In every detail of his great work William Crawford had shown himself a poet as well as a painter. The atmosphere was not of Kensington, but of Carthage. It was evening; and athwart barbaric pillars you saw the sun going redly down behind a waveless sea, while far above dim stars glimmered in an opal-tinted sky. A faint languorous mist crept over the purple distance; but the foreground of the picture was one glow of gorgeous colour. The tessellated pavement on which the queen of Carthage knelt was inlaid with mother-of-pearl and gold, curtains of strangely-mingled hues trailed from the cornices of the chamber, revealing glimpses of a wall covered with broad bands of black and red. The gaudy plumage of strange birds made a confusion of colour amidst the purple cushions of a low couch that filled a niche in the curtained wall, and the western sunlight was reflected redly on the water in a shallow basin of jasper and onyx, over the margin of which hung a woman's embroidered garment.

The widow sat before the picture in perfect silence. There was no affectation in her love of art; and seated before the painter's work, she seemed unconscious of the painter's presence. But it was not so with her niece, who gave utterance to all those rapturous exclamations peculiar to persons of her sex and age.

"Oh, how lovely, Mr. Crawford!" cried this young lady; "your Dido is a most exquisite creature, and I am sure your picture will be *the* picture of the year. I had no idea the Carthaginian costume was so becoming, or that Carthaginians ever had that lovely golden hair. Isn't she beautiful, Aunt Georgina?"

"Go and amuse yourself in Mr. Crawford's garden, Helen," Mrs. Champernowne exclaimed impatiently. "If I am to enjoy this picture, I must see it in peace. Your 'how lovely's!'

and 'how beautifuls!' are most distracting. You are always going into raptures about hyacinths; you can look at Mr. Crawford's hyacinths and go into raptures about them."

"I should very much like to see the garden," the young lady replied discreetly; and having received the painter's permission, she flitted away through the open window and disappeared in the trellised walk in which Philip Foley had nursed his despair.

The widow sat for some minutes after her niece's departure still silent, with her hands clasped in her lap and her eyes fixed on the canvas in solemn contemplation. At last she drew a long breath, a sigh of relief, as of one who had been held for a while breathless and spell-bound: and then the painter ventured to speak to her.

"Are you satisfied?" he asked nervously.

She turned to look at him with eyes that were dim with tears.

"It is great," she said, in a voice so subdued as to be almost a whisper; "it is worthy of you. I am proud of your triumph. I cannot tell you how proud I am."

Never until that moment had he seen tears in the eyes of his siren; never until that moment had he lost command of himself; never until then had sober common-sense failed to pluck him backward with a relentless hand when he faltered on the brink of folly; but the tears in Georgina Champenowne's eyes were too much for common-sense. For the last six months the painter had known that the moment must come sooner or later when his own rash hand would destroy the airy fabric of his folly. The fatal moment came to-day, and he was powerless to struggle against his destiny. He gave one furtive glance towards the garden, where Miss Vicary's light-silk dress glanced hither and thither among the flower-beds, and then he laid his hand on the back of the widow's chair and bent his head to speak to her.

"Do you know how dangerous it is for you to speak to me like that?" he asked.

"Dangerous? How or why dangerous?"

She looked up at him with the very expression he had so often imagined, the pretty air of unconsciousness, in which there was neither displeasure nor alarm; only an innocent surprise. It seemed to him as if he had acted this scene a hundred times before, and knew what the end was to be—so constantly had he acted it in his day-dreams, so often had he imagined its bitter termination.

"Dangerous for you, trebly dangerous for me, because when you assume an interest in my work, a pride in my fame, you tempt me beyond my strength. You tempt me to say

that which may make us strangers from the moment you leave this house to-day. My work and my fame are yours,—yours to trample under your feet if you please; for you have only to tell me to-morrow that my art is distasteful to you, and I, who have been the slave of art for five-and-twenty laborious years, will never touch a brush again. You have been fatally kind to me during the past few months, Mrs. Champernowne. You have admitted me to a friendship which must embitter the remainder of my existence—unless you are prepared to make that existence unspeakably happy. You must have expected this—or something like this. You could not imagine that I could see you day after day, and be with you week after week, without loving you, as I do love you; as I think only a man of my age and of my concentrated life can love.”

The widow sat with her face turned away from the painter, her eyes fixed on his picture. The soft folds of her cashmere shawl were slightly stirred by her hurried breathing, but her attitude was statuesque as the attitude of Dido herself.

“I am very sorry,” she said softly; “very, very sorry.”

“Sorry that I love you?”

“I am sorry that you should speak so seriously.”

“How would you have me speak? How can you expect that I should be otherwise than serious? You must know that I love you—you must know that I have loved you ever since you first admitted me to your intimacy, ever since you first assumed a friendly interest in my career. Yours is too sympathetic a nature for the coquette’s heartless ignorance. You could not have been unconscious of such love as mine.”

“I never dreamt that you felt so deeply. If—if I fancied sometimes that you valued my friendship more, far more than it was worth, I thought you were only like some of my other friends, who are pleased to think better of me than I deserve to be thought of; friends who pay me pretty compliments whenever they come to see me, and forget my existence half an hour after they have left my house. Why should you be so much more in earnest than they?”

“You are only equivoeating with me, Mrs. Champernowne; you must have known that I was in earnest.”

“I never thought about it. I knew that your society was very delightful to me, but I never for a moment imagined that such a friendship as ours could result in unhappiness to either of us. And why should our friendship have any such result? Why should I not continue to be interested in your career? why should not you come to see me whenever you please? Is friendship impossible between a man and woman, even when both have bidden adieu to youth? Promise me that you will

never again say the desperate kind of things you have been saying to-day ; and I will promise to take pleasure in your society to my dying day. Why should we not be like Cowper and Mrs. Unwin ? You are not mad, and I am not evangelical ; but I think that is rather an advantage. Promise, Mr. Crawford, and let us be friends for ever and ever."

She held out her hand, and the painter took it tenderly in both his own. Could he have refused to take that hand, even if it had held the sentence of his death ?

"I cannot make such a promise," he said gravely ; "I love you too dearly to be your friend. There is not an hour I have spent in your society during the last two years in which I have not been on the brink of telling you what I have told you to-day."

"Oh, but that is positively dreadful," cried the widow archly ; "friendship must be quite impossible if one's friends are always to be on the brink of saying desperate things."

"Don't laugh at me, Mrs. Champernowne ; my future life depends upon the answer you give me to-day. Against my own reason, against my own will, I have yielded myself up heart and soul to the fascination you exercise over me. I had not been in your house half-a-dozen times before I knew that if it was not my road to paradise, it was my road to perdition—and yet I came. I knew that you had money, high family, fashion ; and that in your narrow world of the West-end I should be laughed at for my presumption, if it was known that I hoped to win you for my wife : and yet I came. I was quite prepared for what has happened to-day. I never really hoped. I never in sober sadness believed that you would answer me otherwise than you have answered me. I only let myself drift. You asked me to come to you, and I came ; and I should have gone on and on, crawling to your feet like a lap-dog for ever and ever, if the impulse of the moment had not been too strong for me to-day."

"Our friendship was very dear to me," answered Mrs. Champernowne ; "I am sorry that it must end."

"I am sorry that it should ever have begun," responded the painter passionately ; "do you think a man has no more heart nor mind than one of your Angora cats ? Do you think you can play with his heart for a year or two, and then give it back to him none the worse for your year's amusement, and tell him to take it somewhere else ? You have no right to trifle with honest men as you have trifled with me. You have no right to encourage my folly for your own amusement, and then tell me that you never thought I was in earnest. You knew that I was in earnest ; and it was because of my earnestness that you found me more amusing than your other ad-

mirers. Where they burned the conventional flame that passes in society for real fire, I consume my heart and soul ; and now you affect uneonseiousness. You offer me your friendship ; the right to go on being miserable, the privilege of sacrificing my life and my heart for the sake of an occasional hour in your drawing-room. You have been selfish and cruel, Mrs. Champernowne."

He walked to the window, turning his baek upon the siren. But the siren was not made angry by this discourtesy. She was sincerely sorry for his grief and his passion. It was the story of Dido and Æneas over again ; only in this modern instance of the classic legend, it was the lady who was cool and clear-headed, and the gentleman who was passionate and unreasonable. The painter threw himself into a chair, by the fire-place ; and sat with his elbow resting on the arm of the chair, his face hidden by his hand. Miss Vicary, who had been flitting restlessly about the garden, came towards the window at this moment ; but the widow waved her back with a gesture which was unseen by William Crawford.

He had been sitting in the same attitude for some minutes, when his visitor came softly to the hearth, and seated herself in the chair opposite to him.

"Come, Mr. Crawford, let us talk seriously," she said.

"I have been only too serious from first to last."

"I believe that ; and I am bound to speak frankly to you. You will think me very cold-hearted, very unwomanly, very selfish, when I have spoken ; but it is better that you should think of me as I really am. Let me first assure you that I truly value your friendship, and that I shall be heartily sorry if I cannot retain it. But—but—I am selfish ; and my present mode of life is so agreeable to me, that I cannot bring myself to change it. You, who have been your own master always, free to follow your art, free to live your own life without question or hindrance, can scarcely imagine what a precious thing liberty is to any one who has suffered a long slavery. I am not going to tell you any piteous story of my past life ; it has been what people call a very fortunate and favoured existence. But until I was thirty years of age I never knew what it was to be my own mistress. Up to my eighteenth birthday I was subject to the discipline of a convent. Very gentle, very wise, that discipline was ; but every book I read, every letter I wrote, every country ramble or summer holiday, every garment I wore, was regulated and arranged for me by others. I left my convent-school pining for freedom, and found myself subject to the guardianship of a very strict father and an uncompromising elder sister. In a twelvemonth a visitor came ; there was a little private dis-

cussion. I was summoned to my father's study one summer morning, and was told that my fate had been arranged for me; and that I had nothing to do but to thank Providence for my good fortune. Six weeks afterwards I married a man old enough to be my father, and began a new slavery. I had the best and kindest of masters, and my bondage ought not to have been very irksome to me; but it was bondage, and I thirsted for liberty. I ventured to hope that I did my duty. My husband thanked and blessed me on his death-bed, in words whose memory is very tender and precious to me. Since his death I have been free; and I have lived my own life. A very simple life, as you know; but, oh, so delicious to me in its untrammelled ease. I read what books I like; I keep what hours I like; I choose my own friends; I abandon myself to every caprice of the moment. If I want to waste my time, I waste it, and there is no one to complain. If I want to throw away money, I throw it away with open hands, and there is no one to show me a long list of items in his banker's pass-book. If I were seized to-night with a fancy for starting off to Naples, or Cairo, or Constantinople, or the Caucasus, I should tell my maid to pack a portmanteau, and be off by the first train to-morrow morning. But a woman with a husband must employ the diplomacy of a Metternich to obtain a trip to Brighton. Many men have asked me to abandon this precious freedom; but I have never been so candid as I am with you to-day. I know you must despise me for my selfishness; but I hope you will try to forgive me. Accept me, if you can, for what I am worth, and continue to be my friend."

"I cannot continue to be that which I have never been," answered the painter sadly. "I have never been your friend. I am inclined to think that friendship is only possible where any thing beyond friendship is out of the question. I have always loved you; and I must go on loving you till the end of my life. I think it will be better for us both that all intimacy between us should end to-day. I thank you for your candour. There are some men, perhaps, who would go on hoping against hope, even after what you have said to me. But then I have never really hoped. I spoke to you to-day because I was no longer able to keep silence; not because I thought that any good could come of what I had to say. There is one thing more that I am bound to speak of, and then I have done for ever. I know that you are too generous to suspect me of being influenced in the smallest measure by the consideration of any worldly advantage to be derived from a union with you. But I am bound to tell you, that had your answer been a different one—had it been the answer which I never hoped it would be—I should have religiously abstained from profiting

in the most insignificant manner by any superiority of fortune which you may have over me. My art brings me four or five thousand a-year, and would, I am told, bring me double that amount, if I cared to throw myself in the way of making larger gains. I feel myself compelled to tell you this, Mrs. Champernowne; for while there are fortune-hunters in the world, honest men must defend themselves from the possibility of suspicion."

"I am sorry you should think it necessary to defend yourself where I am concerned."

"Forgive me for thinking it barely possible you might do me wrong.—And you really like the Dido?"

There was a long pause between the two sentences. Mrs. Champernowne felt the full significance of that pause. She knew that in returning to the subject of his picture, the painter had made an end for ever of that other subject, so much nearer to his heart.

"I think you have surpassed yourself; and I shall look forward with pride to your success.—Surely you have seen enough of those hyacinths, Helen! You may come in and see the picture now, if you will promise to moderate your raptures."

Thus appealed to, the young lady crossed the threshold of the window with as unconscious an air as if she had been quite unaware of any thing peculiar in the interview between her aunt and the painter. She became straightway absorbed in the contemplation of Dido, while the widow arranged her bonnet strings before the cheval-glass provided for the accommodation of the "young persons" who sat to Mr. Crawford.

Mrs. Champernowne was some little time arranging her bonnet-strings; and the face which the painter's furtive glance showed him reflected in the glass was very pale.

"You will stop and take some luncheon," he said presently, when his visitors were leaving the painting-room. "I have had it prepared for you."

"You are very kind; but we dine at four; and it is half-past three now. A thousand thanks for our private view; and good-bye."

"Good-bye. I am coming to the carriage with you."

When she was seated in her brougham, Mrs. Champernowne for the second time offered her hand to the painter, while the most discreet of nieces looked out of the opposite window.

"Is it really to be good-bye?" she asked, as Mr. Crawford pressed the slender hand gently before releasing it.

"Believe me it is better so. I thank you much for your

interest in my work. I shall be hoping to please you when I am painting for other people. Good-bye."

"And you are not angry with me?"

"I have no right to be angry. What am I to tell your servant?"

This inquiry had relation to the most discreet of footmen, who hovered in attendance; second only to the most discreet of nieces in his assumption of unconscientiousness.

"Home, if you please," answered Mrs. Champernowne with a little sigh of vexation. The siren had entertained a special penchant for this particular victim, and she did not like to see him escape alive and whole from amongst the corpses floating in the dim shades of her fatal cavern. The most discreet of nieces found her aunt by no means easy to please during the rest of that day; and the favourite Angora cat, repulsed and discomfited, was fain to creep into his elegant lair of quilted satin and wicker-work.

"It is very hard that at five-and-thirty a woman cannot have a friend," thought the widow, as she pretended to doze by the hearth where the painter had so often found her in the dusky light, with her feet buried in the fleecy depths of the Polar-bear skin, and a faint glow from the fire glimmering here and there among the silken folds of her dress. "It is really very hard, for I liked him so much."

William Crawford watched the widow's brougham drive away, and then went slowly back to his painting-room. He carried a weary spirit to the shrine of Art, the great consoler; but to-day even the face of the serene goddess was darkened for him; as it had been years ago, when his young wife's death left him desolate. He stopped before his picture for a few minutes, looking at it wonderingly, lost in admiration of his own work.

"I have painted *that*," he thought; "and yet I am not happy!"

It was no impulse of vanity that prompted the thought. The artist would be something less than an artist if he did not recognise the beauty of his own creations. Even in this picture, to which he had given so much thought and labour, there were shortcomings which the painter's eye was quick to perceive; but he was proud of his finished work nevertheless; and he sat looking at it with a strange mixture of pride and sadness.

"I have nothing but my art now," he said, "nothing—nothing. My daughter is a lady of fashion, too busy to spend a day in this quiet house. The woman I love is selfish and heartless. I have nothing but my art. Perhaps I ought to be

very glad of that. I can make my painting-room my pillar, and live in a solitude as complete as St. Simeon Stylites found in his uncomfortable elevation. You shall have a companion, Dido, before the year is done."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE EASY DESCENT.

MR. O'BOYNEVILLE presented himself at Pevenshall early in the month of February, in response to Cecil's renewed entreaty that she might be allowed to return to her home and its duties. There was no small sacrifice involved in his tearing himself from the delights of the law-courts even for a few days; but having once turned his back upon Westminster Hall, he abandoned himself freely to the pleasures of social intercourse. He was delighted with his wife's improved looks, and thanked Mrs. Lobyer in his heartiest manner for the change which her influence had wrought.

"However closely I may stick to my work, you must never lead such a dreary life again, dear," he said.

"She never shall," cried Flo eagerly. "We are coming to town in March. Mr. Lobyer has taken a house in Mortimer Gardens—one of those new houses overlooking Hyde Park—and I mean to be tremendously gay; and Cecil must come to all my parties."

Lady Cecil declared that the gaieties at Pevenshall were sufficient to last her a twelvemonth; but neither Mr. O'Boyneville nor Mrs. Lobyer would hear of this; and there was a friendly compact concluded between them, to the effect that Cecil was not to be permitted to bury herself alive in Brunswick Square during the ensuing season.

Mr. O'Boyneville spent three days at Pevenshall, where he made himself as completely at home as it was his custom to make himself wherever he went. There was a dash of the Yankee in the character of the popular Hibernian, and it was not in him to be constrained or ill at ease by reason of any lurking doubts as to his own merits. Big, and hearty, and genial, he stood with his back against Mr. Lobyer's own particular mantelpiece, and talked down the best of the club-men and the grandest of the county squires; careless whom he pleased or whom he offended.

Major Gordon dined at Pevenshall on one of the three days; and Mr. O'Boyneville attacked him on the subject of the late war. Always well posted in his *Times*, the barrister seemed

to be as familiar with the Indian campaign as the man who had been through it.

"And how about that affair at Allacapoodur, when Sir Tristram Belpier made his fellows put their lances under their left arms, and job downwards as they rode over the enemy? That lying down of the Sikhs and firing after the charge was a clever move; but they got it hot that day. And what of Colonel Menkinson's tactics at Bundlebad? was that charge of the light infantry a wise thing or not?" demanded Mr. O'Boyneville. This sort of conversation went on all through the dinner. At first there was some slight reserve in the Major's manner to Lady Cecil's husband; but the ice melted little by little beneath the influence of Indian reminiscences; and before the evening ended, a friendly familiarity had arisen between the two men.

The barrister begged that Major Gordon would make a point of visiting Brunswick Square whenever he found himself in London; and the Major responded with a vaguely-polite acknowledgment which committed him to nothing.

"You are a kind of relative of my wife's, you know," said Mr. O'Boyneville; "and we ought to know more of each other."

Very early in March, Mrs. Lobyer's thoroughbred chestnuts and powdered footmen astonished the quiet inhabitants of Bloomsbury, and Cecil found herself seated by her friend's side in the Lady's Mile. Whatever preference she might have had for the dull tranquillity of her own drawing-room she was obliged to forego; for her husband and her friend conspired together in order to force her into the agreeable whirlpool of West-end London. And then she was really attached to Flo. She was really anxious about this frivolous, unstable creature, surrounded by so many temptations, supported by so little moral strength. She was really concerned for the tranquillity of Mrs. Lobyer's life; for Sir Nugent Evershed had taken possession of chambers in St. James's Street, and was to be met very frequently at the new house in Mortimer Gardens; and where Florence Lobyer was concerned, Sir Nugent and danger were associated in the mind of Lady Cecil.

In the new Tyburnian mansion all the glories of Pevenshall were repeated on a smaller scale. There were more encaustic tiles, more parqueterie floors, more bronze and or-molu balustrades, more ceilings picked out in gold and colour, more monster Sèvres vases, and tiger-skin rugs. The glittering freshness and brightness of the rooms had an oppressive effect upon the senses of people accustomed to ordinary dwellings.

"There might be some hope for a *parvenu*, if he could live

long enough to wear the edge off his wealth," said one of the clubmen, after dining for the first time in Mortimer Gardens ; " but the modern span of life does not give a millionaire time to overcome the appalling freshness of his possessions. He is like a working man in his Sunday clothes. The Sunday clothes are always new. In such a house as this you see the stamp of the *nouveau riche* on every object, from the virgin gilding on the ceilings to the untarnished lacquer on the letter weights. Show me a man's carpets, and I will tell you the length of his pedigree. The *vieille roche* rarely indulges in fresh upholstery. At Lord Scamander's you can poke your cane through the carpet ; and if any one attempted to draw the window-curtains, they would crumble into ashes, like the draperies of a house in Pompeii. Old Lady Teucer will have an action for damages brought against her some day, if she doesn't take up her stair-carpets ; for one runs the risk of breaking one's neck every time one calls on her. If I were a millionaire, I would watch the sales at Christie's, and buy up all the dilapidated bull cabinets and rotten tapestry, in order that I might swear they had belonged to my great-grandfather. I wouldn't have an ounce of plate on my table of a later date than the reign of Queen Anne, or a sound carpet on my floors."

Mr. Lobyer was supremely indifferent as to what his guests might please to say or to think about him. In London, as in Yorkshire, the cares of the speculator had possession of him. That undying worm which torments the rich man, who never knows when he has made enough money, and is always trying by every tortuous and darksome process to make more, had made its home in the breast of Mr. Lobyer ; and for such a man the frivolous pleasures which amuse ordinary people have very little attraction. In London as in Yorkshire, Mr. Lobyer had amusements of his own and companions of his own, and left his wife to amuse herself after her own fashion, and amongst whatever acquaintance she might choose for herself. For this helpless young creature—so lonely amidst so much splendour, so friendless amidst so many friends—Cecil felt unbounded compassion.

" But what am I, that I should be any comfort or protection to her ? " the barrister's wife thought sadly. " Who could be weaker than I was at the first sound of *his* voice ? Who could cling more wickedly to the memory of the past than I have done since I have seen him ? "

At her husband's wish Lady Cecil went back amongst her old set. The season was a brilliant one, and she went out two or three times a-week. Sometimes with her aunt, often with Mrs. Lobyer ; sometimes, but very seldom, with Mr. O'Boyneville. He wished her to be gay and happy ; and she obeyed

him. At first with reluctance ; but by-and-by with a guilty pleasure. The words which Ruth spoke to Naoni contain the epitome of a wife's duty ; and Cecil had long abandoned all hope of doing her duty in such a spirit. Her husband's people were not her people ; his home was not her home. If she had been suffered to go her own way, she would have observed the letter of her duty ; and the spirit would perhaps have come to her in due time. But a kind of fatality seemed to pervade her life ; and the hand which should have sustained her within the quiet precincts of her home pushed her, with well-intentioned ruthlessness, out into the world.

Hector Gordon came to London in April ; and Lady Cecil met him very often. There were so many places at which they were likely to meet, and they were constantly meeting, though the Major paid no visit in Brunswick Square ; whereupon the barrister condemned him as a snob, who did not care to risk his reputation by being seen in an unfashionable neighbourhood.

Lady Cecil and Hector met very often. At first the icy reserve with which they accosted each other seemed an insuperable barrier, not to be broken down or worn away ; but little by little this freezing coldness of manner gave place to a gradual thaw. Some chance allusion to the past, to a book read at Fortinbras, the subject of some old argument worn threadbare in those idle autumn days, carried them back all at once to something of the old intimacy ; as it had been before the storm cloud of passion disturbed the serenity of their friendship.

Mrs. MacClaverhouse was delighted to have her nephew with her again, and he came to Dorset Square as he pleased. If by a series of coincidences he happened generally to be there when Lady Cecil was with her aunt, the dowager was too frivolous and too much absorbed by her own pleasures and her own interests to be alarmed by the fact. She was very fond of Hector ; and she knew that his return to England had brought her many things which were dear to her heart. Besides his usual tribute of Indian shawls and ivory caskets, the Major made his aunt many substantial and useful offerings. He begged her to recruit her exhausted cellar from the stores of his wine-merchant ; and with his own pencil marked the choicer vintages in the merchant's catalogue. He presented the dowager with a stylish landau in place of the phantom chariot ; and in divers manners enhanced that lady's comfort and respectability by his generosity.

"He brings sunshine with him wherever he goes," said the incautious dowager. "And to think that he should be a widower, with all the girls in London setting their caps at him,

I dare say! Oh Cecil, Cecil, what a pity you were in such a hurry to marry that big blustering barrister!"

This was the most cruel blow which Mrs. MacClaverhouse had ever inflicted on her niece. Cecil's reproachful look smote her with some sense of shame.

"Well, I know I encouraged Mr. O'Boynville," she said; "and of course he's a very excellent fellow, and tolerably well off—only tolerably, as things go nowadays. But still it *is* a pity, you know, Cecil. However, there is nobody to be blamed; for who could imagine that poor namby-pamby wife of Hector's was going to die?"

"Auntie, you mustn't talk like that," Cecil answered hastily. "My husband is good and kind and generous-minded, and I am very happy with him."

This last statement was false; and what is worse, the speaker knew it to be false. But she fancied that it was her duty to say it, nevertheless. Perhaps she had some faint hope that by force of repetition it would come in time to be true.

At what point did the path in which she was treading swerve from its straight course and become a fatal and crooked way, leading she knew not whither? Lady Cecil never knew when her footsteps first strayed across the invisible border-line between right and wrong; but she did know that a time came when her eyes met her husband's honest glance with a gaze that was not altogether fearless, when a vague sense of remorse oppressed her in her husband's presence.

Alas for that fatal whirlpool of West-end life, those dangerous meetings on staircases and in conservatories, those idle mornings at horticultural fêtes, those sunny afternoons on race-courses, where the clamour of half-a-million voices drowns the insidious whisper of one voice for all but the too eager listener! and the chance encounters in the crowd, and the water parties, and the festal gatherings in shadowy gardens by the rippling river! Alas for all the machinery which the modern Mephistopheles finds made ready for his hand when he undertakes the perdition of any given victim!

Before the season was over Cecil and Hector had drifted back into the old companionship. No word had been uttered by the Major to which the most fiery of Hibernian husbands could have taken objection. But the friendship of a man and a woman who have at one period in their lives been something more than friends is very apt to be a dangerous friendship. In this whirlpool of West-end life Cecil had no time for self-examination—even if self-examination were a process to which the human mind is inclined. If she was doing wrong—if she

had passed the impalpable boundary-line, she shut her eyes to the fact, and would not remember those hidden dangers towards which she was drifting. If the days on which she met Hector Gordon were very pleasant to her, she beguiled herself with the idea that her pleasure arose from other causes than the soldier's presence. What was he but an element in the crowd? And as a woman is not gifted with the faculty of logic, Cecil did not take the trouble to ask herself why the crowd seemed so dull and vapid without him.

She could see Mrs. Lobyer's danger, for that was a peril of a palpable and obvious nature. It is impossible for a young matron to indulge in a chronic flirtation with one of the most eligible single men of the season unnoticed and unslandered. But Flo did not object to being slandered a little. The furtive glances of dowagers and the whispers of faded beauties gave zest to her life.

"It's no use talking to me, Cecil," she said when her friend remonstrated with her. "You know that I care about as much for Sir Nugent Evershed as I care for this parasol; but it gives me tone to have him dancing attendance upon me. He brings me people whom Mr. Lobyer's money would never beguile across my threshold; and I should be a lost creature without him."

"But if your father were to hear one malicious word about you, Flo——"

"My dearest Cecil, that is just the kind of thing one's father never does hear. If I were to commit a murder to-morrow, I should like to know who would tell my father anything about it. Unless he read the affair in the newspapers, he might go down to his grave in happy ignorance of my iniquity. And after I had been hung, his acquaintance would shake their heads and say, 'That sad attack of bronchitis,—so young—so lovely; but I always told Mrs. Lobyer that the throat was the vulnerable part,—' and so on."

Between Florence Lobyer and Major Gordon there arose a very cordial alliance. He as well as Sir Nugent had the power of bringing nice people to Mrs. Lobyer's house; and to surround herself with such people was now the supreme ambition of that lady's mind. All the substantial glories and granddeurs of this life—all the splendours that can be bought with money were hers—and she had now only to find eligible guests for her brilliant drawing-rooms, the last fashionable lions to roar at her crowded assemblies. Directly Aladdin has hung up his roe's egg, he begins to spread his lures for the *élite* of the city; and will be miserable if they remember his father's trade, and are slow to attend his parties. All the best military men in London were known to Hector Gordon; and through

his agency the heaviest of martial swells were secured for Mrs. Lobyer's evenings. Her gratitude was boundless. Her dear Major Gordon could not come to Mortimer Gardens too often.

"And you must come to Pevenshall in September," she said. "I believe the woods swarm with hares and pheasants—if you care for that sort of thing—and you shall bring as many people as you like; and dear Mrs. MacClaverhouse must come, and Cecil of course. We shall not go on the Continent this year. I couldn't go through another autumn of picture-galleries and cathedrals without endangering the state of my brain."

While Flo extended the circle of her acquaintance, and vied with women of established position in the splendour and number of her entertainments, William Crawford went his quiet way, and held himself aloof from the parvenu grandeurs of Mortimer Gardens. The "Dido" was an undisputed success, and Florence received the congratulations of her artistic acquaintance on her father's triumph. There was another success of the season, which she heard of with strangely-mingled feelings of pleasure, pride, and shame—the achievement of a young landscape-painter called Foley, whose "Sunset on the Danube" had raised him at once to no mean position in the ranks of young painters. Flo went to see the picture, and thought a little sadly of her old adorer. There were two little bits by the same hand, hanging low down beneath larger subjects; and finding both these bits unsold on the day of the private view, Mrs. Lobyer secured them for Pevenshall. For some unknown reason she did not choose that her own name should appear in the transaction, and commissioned Sir Nugent to buy the pictures.

As the season advanced, Cecil spent less and less of her time in Bloomsbury. If she contrived to dine at home three or four times a-week, her mornings were generally spent in some fashionable amusement, her evenings devoted to some fashionable assembly.

Mrs. Lobyer had her box on the grand tier at Covent Garden; and was never happy unless her dearest Cecil accompanied her to hear every new opera, and to criticise every début. So, when there were no other engagements, there was always the opera; and it seemed as if Cecil was never again to spend her evenings at home.

What did it matter? Mr. O'Boyneville had his after-dinner sleep, and his papers; then his long evening in the seclusion of his study. He received his cups of tea from the respected Pupkin, instead of from the white hands of his wife; and beyond this, Lady Cecil's absence or presence must have been the same to him.

This is how Cecil reasoned when her conscience smote her on the subject of her perpetual gaieties. Of course she was quite ignorant of that vague sense of satisfaction,—that dim consciousness of a dear companionship,—which the barrister had been wont to derive from his wife's presence even while he slept. And was not her husband always the first to urge her acceptance of every tempting invitation ?

"Enjoy yourself as much as you can while the season lasts, dear," he said ; "and don't trouble yourself about me. In a few years I shall have made the future safe ; and then you shall have a house at the West-end, and I'll enjoy life with you."

At the opera Cecil almost always met Hector Gordon. He was one of the privileged visitors to Mrs. Lobyer's box, and he availed himself of his privilege very frequently ; not dropping in for a few minutes between the acts to murmur polite inanities, with his opera-hat in his hand, but abandoning his stall altogether, and taking up his place behind Cecil's chair.

One night when Sir Nugent Evershed was in attendance upon Mrs. Lobyer, and when the two were too much engaged by their own conversation to be observant of their companions, Hector Gordon spoke to Cecil for the first time of that forgotten interview at Fortinbras. The frozen barrier that had separated them at first had long ago melted. A dangerous friendship had arisen between them ; but as yet no fatal word—no actual transgression of the right, had sullied Cecil's life. Her sin had been that she had wilfully shut her eyes to the perils of such a friendship,—that she had obstinately refused to see the gulf towards the brink of which her footsteps were straying. She had loved him so dearly ;—alas for her broken marriage-vow, she loved him so dearly still !—and his companionship was so sweet to her. She could not banish this charm from her life. This year, for the first time since those autumn days at Fortinbras, she had known entire happiness—dangerous happiness,—fatal happiness, perhaps ; but that all-absorbing delight of the present,—that brief intoxication of perfect joy, which shuts out all thought of the future.

If she had sinned unconsciously until to-night, she must henceforward sin with a full knowledge of her guiltiness : for to-night the flimsy veil of a pretended friendship was rent aside, and Hector Gordon spoke to her as he had no right to speak to another man's wife.

The conversation arose out of one of those accidental commonplaces from which such conversations generally do arise. It began amidst the crash of a chorus in the *Huguenots*. The Major had been admiring Cecil's bouquet of white azalias. As he bent over the flowers, he tried to draw one of the frail

blossoms away from the rest, but Cecil took the bouquet from his hand.

"You will spoil it," she said; "those fragile flowers will not bear being disturbed."

"And you refuse me even that? Do you know that I have not a shred of ribbon, a scrap of writing, a book, a flower, not the smallest object that has belonged to you?"

She tried to look at him bravely, but the guilty throbbing of her heart told her how weak she was, and her eyelids fell under his gaze; the same gaze she remembered at Fortinbras, but with less mournfulness and more passion.

"What of that?" she asked; "why should you have any thing of mine?"

He did not answer her question, but continued, in a tone of reproach:

"And now that I want to take away some relic of to-night—perhaps the last night that I may ever spend in your society—you refuse me even a flower—a flower that your hand has touched!"

"The last night?" said Cecil.

"Yes, in all probability, the last night. These are no times for feather-bed soldiers. We have sailing orders for Japan, and we shall leave London in a few days."

"And you go to Japan?"

"Naturally, I go where my regiment goes. Are you sorry that I am going? Oh Cecil, for pity's sake tell me that you are sorry!"

"I am very sorry."

She would have recalled the words the moment they were spoken, but it was too late. The soldier's head bent in the shadow of the curtain, and his hand clasped hers. She drew it away from him indignantly; but she was obliged to repress any overt expression of her indignation, since Florence and Sir Nugent were so very close at hand.

"I am sorry on my aunt's account," she said; "for myself individually your departure can make very little difference. If your regiment were not ordered to Japan, I suppose it would be sent to Manchester, or Edinburgh, or York, or Dublin. You would be quite as far away at Manchester as you can be in Japan."

"Do you think the distance between London and Manchester would separate me from you, Cecil? Do you think any distance—the whole width of the world—would divide me from you if—But you talk to me as if I were the most commonplace acquaintance on your visiting-list. You have always been cruel to me:—cruel to-night; cruel at Fortinbras; cold and cruel. You thought that what you did was for the best,

but it was not for the best; and if you had loved me you could never have done it. I tried to do my duty, but I was never really happy with that poor devoted girl. I was never really happy with her, though I was heartily sorry for her untimely fate. At the best I was only resigned. And then I come back to England, and find you married to a man who is utterly unsuited to you——”

“Major Gordon,” exclaimed Cecil, “it is eowardly of you to talk to me like this, when you know that I am powerless to answer you. Do you wish me to get up and go away in order to escape from you?”

All this was said in a half-whisper, amidst the crash of the orchestra.

“Cecil, I have a right to speak to you,—the right of the wrong you have done me. My life was in your hands that day at Fortinbras. If you had loved me, surely you would have helped me to escape from the tie that had become so painful to me. A word from you that day would have saved me. I should have written honestly to my poor girl, telling her all the truth; and I know she was too generous to have withheld my release. But you did not love me, and you sent me back to India to do my duty. It is very easy for a woman who does not know what love is to preach eloquently about honour and duty——”

“Major Gordon!”

“If you had loved me, you would not have married so soon after I left England. If you had loved me, you would have been true to my memory a little longer.”

“It is you who are cruel,” cried Cecil.

She turned to look at him as she spoke—she had been looking towards the stage before, with her face hidden from him—and he saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

“Cecil,” he exclaimed passionately, “you have been crying. Tell me that you loved me that day; confess that you love me, and I will never torment you again; only tell me that you love me, and I will go away to Japan. You shall never see my face again.”

“You know that I love you.”

The curtain fell upon Valentine's passionate despair; and there were passion and despair elsewhere than on the mimic scene. Cecil rose suddenly and wrapped her opera-cloak round her.

“Will you send some one to fetch my carriage, Major Gordon?” she said.

“You are not going away, Cecil?” cried Flo; “there is the party at Mrs. Hetherington's, you know. You promised to go with me.”

"I can't go any where else to-night, dear. The heat and the music have made my head ache."

"That's the worst of Meyrcbeer. He's delightful, but he is very apt to make one's head ache. If there could be a fault in an orchestra of Costa's, I should think there were too many trombones in the orchestra to-night. And you really can't go to Mrs. Hetherington's?—You may order my carriage too, if you please, Sir Nugent; I sha'n't stop for the last act."

The two ladies left the theatre together, escorted by Sir Nugent and the Major. It was Hector who handed Cecil into her brougham; and in bidding her good-night he bent his head over the carriage-window and kissed the gloved hand resting in his.

"God bless you!" he said; "God bless you, and good-bye!"

"She saw him standing under the portico with uncovered head as her carriage drove away; and she thought that she had heard his voice and seen his face for the last time.

"How can I ever go home?" she said to herself; "how can I ever go home and look into my husband's face after what I have listened to to-night?"

And then she began to wonder if it could indeed be that she had fallen into the dreadful list of false and wicked wives, whose lives are foul secrets to be hidden from the eyes of unsuspecting husbands. She remembered the women whom she had met in society; the women whose sins were suspected but not discovered; the women about and around whom there hovered an impalpable cloud, but who faced the world boldly notwithstanding, secure in the strength of their beauty, or rank, or wit, and defiant of mankind.

Lady Cecil had met such women, and had contemplated them with that morbid curiosity which all social mysteries inspire. But to-night she thought of them with a shuddering horror.

"Shall I ever be ranked among them?" she asked herself; "or can I hold myself any better than them henceforward? I have let a man talk to me of his love; I have confessed my own mad folly. But he will go away—thank God for that!—he will go away; and I will try to forget all the folly and wickedness of this year."

She sat back in a corner of her carriage with her hands clasped upon her knees. Could there be a stranger picture than this—of a woman seated in her brougham in all her fashionable finery, praying for strength to escape sin? Even as she prayed, she thought that Hector Gordon was indeed going to leave England filled her soul with a dull despair.

She was never to see him any more. The sweet intoxication of the bright summer-time had come to an end; the brief dream had been succeeded by all the bitterness of the awakening.

"Why should he have spoken to me as he did to-night?" she thought: "we were so happy,—and if our happiness was sinful, I was unconscious of the sin. After to-night I can never look upon his face or hear his voice again without deliberate treachery to my husband."

During the week succeeding this evening at the opera, Lady Cecil withdrew herself entirely from that frivolous circle in which Mrs. Lobyer reigned supreme. It was in vain that the devoted Florence sent one of the matched footmen to Brunswick Square in a hansom day after day with little perfumed notes of entreaty or reproach. Cecil withdrew herself into her dingy back drawing-room as into a fortress, and declined to yield to the advances of the enemy. She pleaded nervous headache, and a general disinclination for society; and she implored Mrs. Lobyer not to come to see her, as rest was all she wanted.

"In a few days I have no doubt I shall be able to come to you, dear. In the mean time do not trouble yourself about me. I know how many engagements you have, and I beg you to attend to them without thought of me," she wrote, while the matched footman waited in the hall, and wondered at the manners and customs of the faithful Pupkin.

"Such fellers hadn't ought to be allowed to live," said the superb creature, in the confidential converse of the servants' hall; "which I sawr him, while she kep' me waitin' for her note, washin' the glasses in a little hole of a place over the ketching leads. And there was boots on a mahogany slab waitin' to be took up stairs, which it's my belief he'd cleaned 'em with his own hands. While there's sech fellers as that in the world, you can't wonder if a man gets called a dam lazy beggar for spendin' a quiet hour over his noospaper."

Hector Gordon called twice during the week after that performance of the *Huguenots* at which he and Cecil had assisted; but the barrister's wife was denied to him on both occasions. There was a little scrawl in pencil on the card which he left for her on the first visit. "My regiment leaves on Wednesday. *Il faut que je te voie.*" The inestimable Pupkin brought the card on a salver and handed it solemnly to his mistress. It seemed to her as if he had presented her with a scorpion. She tore the flimsy pasteboard into half-a-dozen fragments, and threw them under the empty grate directly the door had closed upon the servant.

"He has no right to call here—he has no right to send me

messages," she thought indignantly. And yet those two brief sentences, "My regiment leaves on Wednesday.—*Il faut que je te voie,*" repeated themselves perpetually in her brain, like the scrap of a verse which sometimes haunts one with absurd persistence.

On Tuesday Major Gordon called again, and again left a card with a pencil-scrawl for the mistress of the house, and another card for the barrister, with P P C. in the corner.

"*Tu es bien cruelle,*" he had written on the card intended for Cecil; and again Pupkin handed her the scorpion with all due solemnity—although with by no means the cleanest of hands, having left his blacking-brushes to attend the street-door.

The pencil-scrawl and the "*tu*" seemed to Cecil a supreme impertinence; but when a woman has confessed to a man that she loves him, he is apt to fancy himself privileged to employ that tender pronoun. Lady Cecil destroyed this card as she had destroyed the first; but she kissed the fragments before she cast them into the grate. She had reached that stage in folly—or perhaps in wickedness—when a woman's soul oscillates like a pendulum between right and wrong.

Mr. O'Boyneville espied the Major's card in the basket, as he took his tea.

"Ah, by-the-bye, I saw by the *Gazette* that your cousin's regiment had the rout for Japan," he exclaimed as he examined the slim morsel of pasteboard; "the Plungers haven't had much of a holiday after their Indian exploits. And Gordon hasn't dined with us once, after all. I suppose he has all the confounded impudence of your thoroughbred military swell, and would consider he sacrificed himself if he came to such a house as this."

The next day was wet and dismal. A wet summer day is the most depressing of all days. Doleful organs alternated selections from the *Trovatore* with the "Old Hundredth," "Home, sweet home," and "I'm leaving thee in sorrow, Annie"—with a dreadful emphasis upon the Annie—below the windows of Brunswick Square, as Cecil sat in the drawing-room trying to occupy herself; trying not to think of the transport vessel which was to leave Southampton that day; trying not to remember that it was just possible Hector Gordon might make one last effort to see her before he left England.

If he had called in Brunswick Square that day, Cecil would have resolutely refused to see him; and yet as the day wore on, a dreary feeling took possession of her, which was something like the sense of disappointment. The inevitable

dinner-hour, the inevitable evening, the disjointed scraps of information out of the *Times* newspaper, the joke that had convulsed a Westminster audience in the morning, but which sounded so flat and vapid when recorded in the evening—all the petty commonplaces which composed the dull routine of her married life—seemed utterly intolerable to Cecil to-day. She had lived too much with the butterflies of late; she had feasted on the intoxicating perfumes of the rose-garden; and coming back to the hive of the working bee, it was scarcely strange if she found his dwelling dreary and darksome.

The day came to an end; the hopeless rain always pattering on the pavements of the square; the organ-man always droning his "*Ah che la morte*" somewhere or other within hearing. Mr. O'Boyneville came home to his substantial commonplace dinner, and his after-dinner sleep; and sitting under the dining-room lamp, with an unread novel lying open in her lap, Cecil thought of the transport vessel which by this time must have left Southampton Water and the green shores of the Wight behind her.

"Thank God he is gone!" she thought; "can I ever be thankful enough for that?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A MODERN LOVE-CHASE.

MR. O'BOYNEVILLE was to leave London for his circuit-work a week after the departure of the 11th Plungers; and again there was a discussion as to the disposal of Cecil's life during his absence. This time she placed herself entirely in her husband's hands.

"Perhaps you are right," she said; "and it is better for me not to stay in town while you are away."

"Will you go to the Mountjoys'? you know how often Mrs. Mountjoy has asked you. I'm sure she'd be pleased if you went."

"I think I would rather go to some little watering-place, where I could have quiet and rest."

"Rest! Ah, to be surc. I dare say you want rest. You have been going about a good deal this year, and I suppose that sort of thing tires even a woman in the long-run. For my own part, I have always found one evening-party worse than a week's work; but I'm not a party-going man. You shall go to Scarborough, if you like; and I'll try to spend an

occasional Sunday with you. I can get across from Manchester and Liverpool."

"I should like that very much."

"Then it shall be so."

But it was not so; for a little note came from Mrs. Lobyer in the course of the morning to say that that lady was coming to dine in the evening, unless her heartless Cecil told her she was not to come.

"I know you are at home," wrote the lively Florence; "and I know your nervous headache is only an excuse for shutting your doors upon me. So I shall make a desperate attempt to force the citadel."

Cecil had no motive for excluding her friend. There was only one person whom she had wished to avoid, and that person had now left England.

"Come to us by all means, dearest Flo," she wrote, "if you don't mind a dull evening."

So at half-past six Florence's unapproachable chestnuts pawed the macadam of Bloomsbury, and the barrister's dinner was enlivened by that young lady's vivacious chatter.

"I have come to make a petition," she said; "and it is to you I shall address myself, Mr. O'Boyneville. I have grown heartily tired of London within this last week or two. I think the Ascot week is the season's apogee, and after that every thing begins to fade. There are to be cheap nights at the opera next week, and how can any decent person stay in town when there are cheap nights at the opera? So I am going to rush off to Pevenshall the day after to-morrow, and I want Cecil to go with me. I know your circuit-work begins next week, Mr. O'Boyneville; and I don't intend to accept a refusal. You can come to us from some of your Northern towns whenever you please; and we shall always be glad to have a flying visit."

It was in vain that Cecil told her friend of the plan that had already been made for Scarborough. Mrs. Lobyer poo-pooed Scarborough. Cecil urged her desire for perfect rest and quiet; but Mrs. Lobyer declared that Pevenshall would be a perfect hermitage during the month of July.

"None of my people are coming till the twelfth of August," she said. "It is impossible to beguile a decent man into the country till there is something for him to shoot. Sir Nugent is yachting in some uncivilised Northern region, and Grace Evershed is going to Switzerland with her father. Mr. Wilnot—that young clubbish man, you know, who played so well in our comedy—is going on a walking expedition in Brittany; and in fact every body worth having is engaged between this and September. So, if you want quiet, Cecil, you shall

have plenty of it at Pevenshall. I have secured the dearest and dearest of matrons to play propriety—a delightful old creature who dozes in a snug corner half the day, and deludes herself with the belief that she is doing Berlin-wool work—so we can live our own lives, and enjoy ourselves thoroughly. I am going to try and do something for the good of my fellow-creatures this year; and I shall want your advice about some schools I wish to establish, and some cottages I mean to build near Pevenshall.”

Mrs. Lobyer was in the habit of pleading as earnestly as a spoiled child for the gratification of her wishes, and on this occasion, as on almost every other, she contrived to have her own way. It was arranged that Cecil should go to Pevenshall, and that she and Flo should travel together.

Cecil was busy with her packing next day, when a card was put into her hand, and she was told that a gentleman was waiting for her in the drawing-room.

“A gentleman for me?” she said, without looking at the card.

“Yes, my lady. The same gentleman who called twice before, Pupkin says.”

Cecil looked at the card, and saw that it was Hector Gordon's; but over the inscription in the corner—11th Plungers—the words “late of” were written in pencil.

“I cannot see Major Gordon,” said Cecil. “Tell Pupkin to say that I am particularly engaged.”

The servant stared, but obeyed. When the door had closed upon her, Cecil sat with the card in her hand, staring blankly at that half-written, half-printed sentence, “late of the 11th Plungers.”

“He has not gone,” she said to herself; “and he has left his regiment. What does it all mean?”

Something like actual fear took possession of her as she thought that Hector Gordon was in England—near her—ready at any moment to intrude his presence upon her.

“He has betrayed me,” she said; “he made me believe that he was going away, on purpose to extort my secret from me. And now he will come, and come, and come, until at last he forces me to see him; and then——! Nothing but misery can come of our meeting; nothing but wretchedness and remorse.”

And then her mind went back to that subject of which she had thought as she drove home from the opera. The images of women whom she knew and had known arose before her; the women who hovered on the border-land between the Eden of respectability and the region of outer darkness far away.

She began to understand the stories of many of these women ; the stories which had been such dark enigmas for her until to-day.

"They have been like me, perhaps," she thought ; "they have believed in their own strength of mind, their own honour ; and all at once they have sunk into a degradation as deep as mine. And my husband leaves me to my fate ; to take my own course, without help or care from him. I doubt if he remembers my existence, except when I am with him ; and I know he is often unconscious of my presence even when I am sitting by his side."

For the first time in her life, Cecil felt a sense of resentment as she thought of her husband's indifference. He was kind, he was generous. She tried to remember this, and to be grateful ; but to-day she could remember only his indifference. She had long ago reconciled herself to the idea that he loved his profession better than he loved his wife ; but to-day she was angry with him for the unflattering preference, and argued that he must love his wife very little if the dry-as-dust work of the law-courts could be dearer to him than she was. To-day for the first time she was angry with him for not loving her better ; for to-day she felt herself in supreme need of his love.

She went on with her packing, mechanically enough ; but still the work was done. The housemaid, who assisted in the process, thought her mistress just a little paler and a little quieter than usual : and was rather inclined to wonder about that military gentleman who had called three times, and had been refused admittance every time ; and who, according to Pupkin, was such a splendid and gracious creature.

"He's never been here except those three times," thought the Housemaid. "Perhaps she knew him before she was married to master, pore thing !"

When the packing was finished, Cecil ordered her brougham, and drove to Dorset Square. She was feverishly anxious to know the meaning of those two words—"late of"—on Hector Gordon's card. She found her aunt at home, but that lady could throw no light upon the mystery.

"I fully thought he had sailed for Japan in the Satrap," said the dowager. "He came to bid me good-bye a week ago ; and he didn't say a word then about the probability of his exchanging or selling out. I don't read the *Military Gazette*. He might have called upon me, I think, to tell me the change in his plans ; but he has been very mysterious in his manners of late. Perhaps he has seen some one who is to be the second Mrs. Gordon. Those young men with too much money and nothing to do are always falling in love."

Cecil could obtain no more than this from the dowager. She bade her aunt good-bye, and went back to Brunswick Square, where she received a little note from Mr. O'Boynville, announcing that he found himself suddenly compelled to dine at Blackwall with Sleghammer and two or three others. So she was left alone all the evening, too pre-occupied to read, and with nothing to do but to sit in the summer twilight listening to the fifes and drums in the quadrangle of the Foundling, and the ebb and flow of hansom cabs.

The train by which Mrs. Lobyer was to travel left the Euston Station at ten o'clock. There had been some talk of Mr. Lobyer accompanying his wife; but on the eve of the journey that gentleman announced the necessity of his immediate departure for Rouen to complete some great cotton transaction, involving considerable strategy, and the mystification of the calico trade in general, for the enrichment of Lobyer and Co. in particular.

"It's a fluke," said the ardent young speculator; "and it's just one of those affairs in which half-an-hour on the right or the wrong side may make a difference of two or three thousand pounds. You can send what servants you like to Pevenshall; and if I am obliged to stop in town when I come back, I can use my club."

Cecil found Flo in the waiting-room with her maid in attendance, while one of the matched footmen stood on guard at the door, holding a box of books by a strap, and evidently suffering from an acute sense of ill-usage. This dignified person was employed to secure a carriage for the two ladies; and after ushering them to their seats, retired to a second-class compartment with the maid.

Of course it was the fastest of express trains. Such people as Mrs. Lobyer rarely consent to travel at less than sixty miles an hour.

Whirling northwards across the bright green country with the lively Flo for her companion, Cecil felt as if she had been escaping from danger and unhappiness. Major Gordon might call again in Brunswick Square; but he would find her gone; and would abandon his persecution of her.

"It is persecution," she thought, "after the circumstances of that night at the opera. He entrapped me into a confession, and he will be worse than a traitor if he uses my guilty weakness against me."

She tried to despise him for the dishonour; but even the dishonour was a sacrifice which he made to his love.

"My husband will not waste an hour from his profession for my sake," she thought; "and this man, who was once so

true and honourable, is ready to sacrifice truth and honour for love of me."

She thought this—not in set phrases, as it is written here. But some such thought floated vaguely in her brain, as the express carried her towards Pevenshall.

The rooms Cecil had occupied in the winter had been made ready for her now, bright and gay with birds and flowers to-day, as they had been bright with lights and fire of old. Flo sent a useful young person, who did plain needlework and waited upon maidless visitors, to assist in her friend's unpacking; and aided by this young person, Cecil dressed for dinner, and found leisure to sit by the open window of her little sitting-room, looking out at the broad expanse of hill and valley that stretched beyond the gardens.

She was roused from her reverie by Mrs. Lobyer, who came tripping into the room with more than customary animation.

"I have come to tell you some good news," she said, perching herself upon the arm of Cecil's chair, like something frivolous and fashionable in the way of birds;—"that mauve-and-white grenadine becomes you admirably; and I like the sash worn across the shoulder that way—like the Queen's blue ribbon. What darling cameo earrings! If there is any thing in the world I adore, it is cameos."

"Is that your news, Flo?"

"Oh no; my news is something better than that. I was dying to tell you all the time we were travelling; but I was determined to reserve it for a *bonne bouche*. And now, shall I give it you in ten, shall I give it you in twenty, shall I give it you in one of Mr. Lobyer's billions? I have secured an eligible male visitor!"

Cecil shrugged her shoulders.

"I thought we were going to seclude ourselves from the world, in order to carry out some philanthropic schemes, Flo."

"Oh, the philanthropic schemes shall go on all the same. *ça ira!* But Pevenshall entirely given over to the curates of the neighbourhood, and two or three narrow-minded county squires, would have been insufferably dull. And then *this* gentleman is a friend of yours!"

"What gentleman?"

"Major Gordon. He has been wise enough to sell out just as his regiment was going to sail for Japan. He called on me yesterday, and I told him you were coming with me; and I made Mr. Lobyer ask him to come to us. He accepted the invitation immediately; and it was all arranged on the spot. This was before Mr. Lobyer knew that he would be obliged

to go to Rouen ; but if he had known that, I don't suppose it would have made much difference. I am blessed with the least jealous of husbands."

"Flo !"

"Is it wiked to say that ? Mustn't I thank Providence for my blessings ?"

"And Major Gordon is really coming !"

"Really and truly. He is here by this time, I dare say. There is a fast train that leaves London at half-past twelve.—And now come and let me introduce you to my deaf darling, Mrs. Henniker. Why, child, you stand there with your eyes fixed as if you were in a trance !—and the second dinner-bell has rung. *Filons !*"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"HE COMES TOO NEAR, WHO COMES TO BE DENIED."

LADY CECIL stayed at Pevenshall. Her first thought on hearing that Hector Gordon was to be an inmate of the house had been to go straight back to London, without having so much as seen the man she dreaded. But a woman is very seldom free to follow her first thoughts. If a man wishes to escape from any given place at a moment's notice, he has only to declare himself called away on business, and lo ! he is free to spring into the first hansom he encounters and start for the Antipodes, if he so pleases, without let or hindrance. But a woman cannot take an unexplained morning's walk without the dread of question and scandal. A few moments' reflection showed Cecil that escape from Pevenshall was a moral impossibility. What motive could she allege for such a proceeding ? How account to the impetuous Flo, who would press her closely for her reasons ? How explain her return to London to her husband, whose wonder would be aroused by her caprice ? And if onee people began to wonder and to question, might they not arrive at the miserable truth ? An overwhelming terror seized her on the discovery of her helplessness. She found herself hemmed in on every side, powerless to fly from the pursuer she dreaded, run to earth like some hunted animal ; and with no resource but to stand at bay and defy the cruel hunter.

A strong-minded woman would perhaps have made light of the difficulties which surrounded the lawyer's wife. A real heroine would have bidden her hostess a hasty adieu, and left the danger-haunted mansion without explanation or delay. But Cecil was not strong-minded. She had lived all her life

in the dread of those little social laws which a woman sometimes finds it more difficult to break than to violate the law of Heaven itself.

She gave up all idea of flight. There was only one course which seemed possible to her, and that was to make an *ad misericordiam* appeal to Hector Gordon. A woman always hopes so much from the honour and generosity of a man—until she has made her appeal and discovered how frail a straw manly generosity may prove in the hour of peril.

So Cecil met Major Gordon in the drawing-room where the Pevenshall guests had assembled. The party consisted of the deaf matron, who had an aristocratic nose and a placid imbecility of countenance; the deaf matron's husband, who was a retired half-pay colonel, with a very red face, and that genius for gastronomy which seems the special faculty of the middle-aged warrior who has retired on his laurels; two stylish girls who had been schoolfellows of Flo's; and a brace of curates from the neighbourhood. It was a very small assembly compared to the brilliant gathering of the last winter; and the great drawing-room looked almost tenantless.

Cecil was very pale when she followed Florence into the room. The first glance told her that the man she dreaded was present. He was standing by one of the open windows talking to Colonel Henniker, while the curates entertained the two young ladies with mild local gossip; during the progress of which the deaf matron assumed that amiable air of interest which a man who has forgotten the French he learned at some juvenile academy is apt to wear during the recital of some piquant Parisian anecdote.

Mrs. Lobyer conducted her friend straight to the placid matron. “My dear Mrs. Henniker, how shameful of me to be the last to come down, and on the first day too! But I had no idea it was so late. How kind of you and the dear Colonel to come to me at such a short notice! And how have you left every one in York? I looked for my Yorkshire friends in vain all the year. No one came to town except the Spaldings and the Apperleys. Let me introduce my friend Lady Cecil O'Boyneville. You were not with us last winter when she was here. And now I must go and welcome the Colonel and Major Gordon. Take care, Lucy, Mr. Summerton is dreadfully High-Church.—How do you do, Laura? I'll come and talk to you presently,” said the young matron to her sometime schoolfellows, as she tripped away.

Cecil plunged at once into a laborious conversation with Mrs. Henniker. How delightful the country was at this time of year! And how especially beautiful the scenery about Pevenshall! and so on. It was weary work, that stereotyped

talk, while the sense of Hector Gordon's vicinity exercised a bewildering influence on her thoughts, and rendered the most commonplace conversation difficult. She was safe under shelter of the matron's wing, when Hector came presently to greet her. She would not see his outstretched hand, and received his greeting with freezing coldness. A desperate kind of courage possessed her in this extremity, and she determined all at once that she would humiliate herself by no *ad-misericordiam* appeal. She would compel him to leave Pevenshall. She would awaken him to the sense of his own dishonour. Brave and defiant for the moment, she looked up at him with a proud steady glance, and silently challenged him with his baseness. He felt all the significance of that cold gaze, and his eyelids fell beneath it.

"I have followed you, you see, Lady Cecil," he said in a very low voice. She did not answer him, but turned to Mrs. Henniker and took up the thread of her vapid talk.

"No, I never was in York; and I am really most anxious to see the Minster. Papa used to say he thought it finer than Rouen Cathedral. But I cannot fancy any thing—" and so on, and so on.

Hector Gordon placed himself opposite the two ladies; and sat looking steadily at Cecil. She was conscious of that determined contemplation, but did not flinch beneath it. And she went on perseveringly with her disquisition upon the show-places and rural beauties of Yorkshire. Major Gordon was obliged to offer his arm to Mrs. Henniker presently, when dinner was announced; while the portly Colonel conducted his hostess, and Cecil was relegated to the care of the High-Church curate.

All that evening and all the next day, and for many days and evenings to come, Cecil preserved the same frigid demeanour towards Hector Gordon; and yet he did not leave Pevenshall. Again and again he tried to obtain a few moments' confidential conversation, but on every occasion he found himself baffled and repulsed; and yet he did not leave Pevenshall. A silent duel was always going on between these two. The poor hunted victim was always on the defensive; the hunter was merciless. By every possible stratagem Cecil avoided the explanation she feared; but still the Major held his post obstinately, waiting for the chance which must come sooner or later.

It came at last, when Cecil had been some weeks at Pevenshall, and when the house was beginning to fill. The York Summer Meeting was close at hand. Mr. Lobyer had returned from Rouen triumphant, and was happy in the society of some of the choicer spirits of Manchester, renowned for their

achievements on the turf, and all full of their York engagements.

The Major's opportunity came at last. The nights were oppressively warm; and all visitors at Pevenshall under forty years of age were in the habit of abandoning the drawing-room soon after dinner for the broad terrace in front of the open windows. Here, in the delicious moonlight, the party broke up into pleasant groups to saunter up and down the broad walk, or to gather in a knot at some angle of the stone balustrade; and hence more adventurous spirits wandered away in twos and threes and fours to circulate among the winding pathways of the gardens, where the rarest specimens of the pine tribe imparted a spicy odour to the night air.

The windows of the billiard-room, as well as those of the drawing-room, opened on this delightful terrace: and a cluster of iron chairs in the neighbourhood of these windows marked the spot where Mr. Lobyer and his particular friends were wont to congregate, making a little constellation with the luminous ends of their cigars. These summer evenings in the open air were very agreeable to the guests at Pevenshall, and the great clock in the quadrangle had generally struck twelve before the last of the strollers left the terrace. It was the place of places for flirtation; the place of places for that intimate converse which the French call *causerie*, and which is the next thing to flirtation. The eligible young men who had come down for the York Summer and the marriageable young ladies found a good deal to say to one another on these balmy moonlight nights; and appropriate couplets from Tennyson, Owen Meredith, and Alfred de Musset were at a premium. Byron and Moore are *rococo* nowadays; and the most sentimental of damsels would stare in amazement at an admirer who should quote the *Corsair* or *Lalla Rookh* for her entertainment.

Sir Nugent Evershed was still yachting; but Florence seemed very little affected by the absence of the chief of her worshippers. Other adorers flocked round her shrine, and she was content to receive their homage. To be admired was the only art she knew; and a life spent in the perpetual excitement derivable from new millinery left little time for serious thought.

“I really believe I am the happiest creature in the world, Cecil,” she said to the one friend whom she trusted with her secret thoughts; “for I am only unhappy when I think; and as I may almost say that I never think, it must follow that I am never unhappy.”

It was while sauntering on the terrace with Cecil on one of the warmest of the July nights that Florence thus addressed her friend. They had wandered away from the rest of the

party, who gathered chiefly about the lighted windows of the drawing-room, whence an extra chair, or a forgotten shawl, or a cup of tea, or a glass of water, or any one of the trifles that womankind is always demanding from attendant man, could be fetched at a moment's notice; and where some one was always found willing to sing or play for the edification of the loungers outside the windows.

Cecil and Florence had been walking up and down the deserted end of the terrace for some time, when the voice of Mr. Lobyer, bawling "Flo, Flo! come here; I want to speak to you," was heard from the distance; and Cecil's companion hurried away to attend the bidding of her lord and master.

Cecil was not sorry to find herself alone. Her life at Pevenshall since the hour of her arrival had been one perpetual excitement. The silent battle for ever being fought against the man who loved her, and whose love had shown itself more pitiless than another man's hate, was not without its agony. The helpless wild creature brought to bay, and facing its hunter in the desperation of bitter despair, must suffer anguish something akin to that which Cecil had endured in the daily companionship of the lover she feared.

She feared him. In vain she called upon her womanly pride to help her; in vain she supplicated better and surer help from that Heaven her sin offended, even while she prayed. Day by day she fought her battle bravely; but a dim consciousness of coming danger perpetually oppressed her. The old simile of the precipice is the only comparison which fits the state of her mind. She felt like a creature walking in outer darkness near the verge of an abyss. She felt herself near the horrible danger. It was not inevitable that she should fall over the precipice, but the precipice was always there—always hidden by the thick darkness, and at any moment her ignorant footsteps might stray too near the fatal boundary. Thinking of that day of temptation and trial at Fortinbras, and all that had occurred since then,—the young wife's untimely death, the return of Hector's regiment, the chance that had brought him to Pevenshall,—Cecil was inclined to yield to the weakest theory ever propounded by an invisible Satan for the corruption of womankind. The old classic machinery, the work of the Eumenides, seemed to have had part in all this story of unhappy love. Hector Gordon's return to England was Agamemnon's return over again,—only this time the hero returned to destroy rather than to be destroyed; and it was the heroine for whom the fatal net was spread. Surely, when beguiling Eve to her ruin, the Miltonic Satan must amongst other arguments have urged that the

Fates had ordained her disobedience, and that she was predestined to taste the forbidden fruit. A weak-minded woman is always ready to mistake the action of a man's selfish obstinacy for the handiwork of the Fates.

To-night Cecil fancied herself abandoned to the Eumenides ; for, a few minutes after Mrs. Lobyer had quitted her, a dark figure came between her and the moonlight ; and looking up, she recognised Hector Gordon.

"At last, Cecil!" he said.

She had been walking away from the animated assembly outside the drawing-room windows, but at sight of her persecutor she turned abruptly. He laid his hand upon her arm to stop her.

"I must speak to you, Cecil," he said. "You have avoided me as if I were a pestilence ever since I came to this house ; but do you think I am likely to submit to be avoided after the sacrifice I have made in order to come here?"

"The sacrifice! what sacrifice?" cried Cecil.

The barrier fell and the foe rushed to his triumph. Cecil's only chance of defending the citadel had lain in a steady refusal to hold parley with the enemy. Entrapped into a conference, her best strength abandoned her.

"Is it possible that you do not know how much I have sacrificed in order to be here by your side to-night? Oh Cecil, there is a meanness in this affectation of ignorance. I have sacrificed my career—my position as a soldier—for your sake. Do you know what it is for a man to sell out of his regiment on the eve of a perilous service? If it were not for what I have done in India, I might be branded as a coward. As it is, in spite of what I did out there, there are men who will hint the possibility of my cowardice. You don't know, perhaps, how dear a soldier's career is to him. And yet, by the way men court dangerous service, you must know how much dearer reputation is to them than life."

"Why were you so foolish—so mad, as to remain in England?"

"Because I love you."

"You had no right to remain. Do you remember what you said to me that night? You were going away: we might never see each other again. After that you were bound in honour to go."

"I know that. But I could not go—after——"

He paused for a moment, and then said in a lower voice, "After what I heard that night."

"I wish I had died before that night!" cried Cecil passionately. She felt the darkness growing thicker round her, her feet wandering nearer to the precipice—and she

was powerless; as powerless as a dreamer fighting with shadows.

"It is my fate to be wicked and miserable," she thought.

"I wish *I* had died before that night," repeated Hector Gordon. "I wish I had died in India, or at Fortinbras. Oh Cecil, you claim a right to blame me! It is I who have a right to reproach you for your coldness that day. One word and we should have been so happy: not for a moment only—and there are some moments of happiness worth a commonplace lifetime—but for all our lives,—innocently, serenely happy. It wanted only one word from you, Cecil—only one little word."

"I tried to do my duty. And yet—I loved you so dearly!"

The words were spoken unconsciously. She was thinking of that painful struggle between love and duty, and of the useless victory which she had gained. Utterly useless since the battle had to be fought over again.

"No, no, Cecil! I cannot believe that you loved me," cried the soldier, seizing the slender hand which struggled in vain to free itself; "you could not have been so cruel if you had loved me."

They had walked away from the lights and the crowd, and were standing at the end of the terrace, where there were vases full of flowers on the broad balustrade, and a life-size marble figure of Pomona, which cast its shadow over them as they stood looking down at the sloping landscape, sublimely beautiful in the moonlight.

The sense of her own dishonour, and of the dishonour of the man who loved her, was paramount in Cecil's mind; and yet she let him talk to her. That feeling of perfect helplessness which holds the dreamer in its spell possessed her as she stood by her lover's side in the dreamlike light and shadow of the summer night.

"I have not been altogether base," pleaded Hector. "I spoke the truth that night at the opera when I told you that I was going to leave England. It was not till some days after that I resolved to sell out. I should have held to my purpose—I firmly believe I should have left England—if you had not so obstinately refused to see me when I called in Brunswick Square. I think an interview with you would have given me strength, Cecil; and I should have gone out yonder resigned to the misery of our separation."

"You had no right to try to see me after that night. You call me cruel;—what could be more cruel or dishonourable than your conduct to me? You persecute me in my own house; you follow me here where I am powerless to escape

from you. Is this the conduct of a gentleman, Major Gordon?"

"It is the conduct of a man who is ready to trample reputation, honour, every thing under his feet in order to be near the woman he loves. But how can I expect you to understand all this? You have never loved me. If you had loved me, you would not have married O'Boyneville."

"I have married a man who is more than worthy of my affection and gratitude."

"Yes; and who is about as capable of appreciating you as Mr. Lobyer is capable of understanding that Leonardo da Vinci which he brought from Rome."

"Major Gordon, I will not allow you to speak so of my husband. If you cannot respect him as I respect him, it is better that his name should never be mentioned between us."

"Much better; for I cannot speak of him with patience. Can you imagine what I felt, Cecil, when I received my aunt's letter announcing your marriage? I had married another woman—loving you, and you only, all the time—because you had decided that I was bound to keep my promise. I kept my word to my poor true-hearted girl at the cost of my happiness. But you, Cecil, you were bound by no old contract; and yet within so short a time of our parting, all memory of my love was blotted from your mind, and you were ready to marry this O'Boyneville!"

"All memory of the past was not blotted from my mind. I had tried to forget, honestly and truly, but I know now to my cost that I never really forgot that time at Fortinbras. Oh, Major Gordon, why do you force me to say these things? I hate myself for listening to you; I hate myself for talking to you. You could never understand why I married Mr. O'Boyneville. You could never have imagined the weariness of my life and my bitter need of some friend and protector. My chief unhappiness arises from the fact that my husband's profession will not allow him to be the friend I hoped he would be; and you know this. You know how lonely I am, and you take advantage of my defencelessness. It is cruel and unmanly, Major Gordon."

She lost all self-command as she said this, and burst into tears; whereupon Hector humiliated himself to the very dust, imploring her forgiveness, and declaring that he would leave Pevenshall—he would tear himself from her for ever and ever, rather than he would inflict pain upon the woman he loved so dearly. And then came those perilous promises which a man is apt to make on such occasions. He implored her to trust him. What was there in all the world so precious to him as

her happiness? He confessed his own guilt. He had been reckless, heedless of every thing, in his passionate desire to see her once more, to speak to her once again; and now that he had spoken, he would be content. He would go away resigned to the idea of their eternal separation.

Cecil dried her tears during these protestations.

"I wish to believe in your sincerity," she said; "but there is no occasion for you to leave Pevenshall; I shall go back to town to-morrow morning. Good-night!"

"You are going in at once?"

"Yes: I am very tired."

"Let me take you back to the house, at least."

"No, thanks; I would rather go by myself."

She walked away, leaving him leaning against the balustrade under the shadow of the marble Pomona. This time she believed the battle had been won; but there was a keen sense of shame mingled with the triumph of victory. She contrived to reach her own rooms without encountering any one, and packed every thing ready for her departure before going to bed. She announced her intention to Mrs. Lobyer before breakfast the next morning, and encountered the opposition which she had expected from that lady.

"You must stay for the York Summer," Flo said decisively;

"Sir Nugent Evershed's horses are to run, and he and all his set will be there in full force. Grace is coming home from Switzerland, and is to give me a week immediately; and you know you like Grace."

"I like her very much, and I am very sorry to leave you, Flo; but I must go."

"Why must? give me an adequate reason, and you shall be worried no more; but I must have a reason."

"Mr. O'Boyneville wishes me to return."

"Has he written to tell you so?"

"Yes."

It was the first deliberate falsehood Cecil had ever told, and she blushed as she uttered it.

"But I thought he was on circuit?"

"His circuit work is just over."

"Oh, very well, Cecil; if your duty as a wife compels you to depart, I suppose I must submit. But I am so sorry to lose you."

"And I am sorry to leave you, dear. There is a train leaves Chiverley at three; I thought of going by that."

"Then we will take an early luncheon, and I will drive you to the station.—Good-morning, Major Gordon," cried Mrs. Lobyer, as that gentleman entered the room; "here is Lady Cecil going to run away from us just as our party is

beginning to be pleasant. Don't you think she is very unkind?"

"I think there can scarcely be any real reason for Lady Cecil's departure," answered the Major; "a lady is always mistress of her time. It is another matter with us. I find by my letters of this morning that I shall be obliged to leave Pevenshall in a day or two. I need scarcely say how much I shall regret going away."

"There now!" cried Flo; "that is always my fate. If one nice person goes away, other nice people begin to take fright directly. You army men find that desertion is infectious, I believe, Major Gordon."

Cecil spent the morning in her own rooms under pretence of making preparations for departure that had been made overnight. She was feverishly anxious to be away from Pevenshall; and she went down to luncheon in her travelling dress.

"The ponies are to be ready at half-past one," said Flo; "and one of the men has taken your luggage already in a cart. You see I am heroic enough to speed the parting guest when I am told departure is inevitable. Major Gordon, will you give Lady Cecil one of those cutlets?"

Cecil declined any thing so substantial as a cutlet; but took two or three sips from a glass of pale sherry, for the satisfaction of her hostess. In her eagerness to escape from the house that sheltered Hector Gordon she felt an unreasoning dread of some hindrance to her departure. Her eyes wandered to the clock on the chimney-piece every now and then, while Flo was absent preparing for the drive: and it was with difficulty that she went through the ordeal of bidding adieu to Mrs. Lobyer's guests, who were all "so sorry" to find she was really going, and "so anxious" to meet her again before long. "Though I am sure we can never meet in such a pleasant house as this," said a genial widow, who appreciated the liberty and luxury of Mr. Lobyer's mansion.

Flo came back to the dining-room at last, equipped for the drive; and every body left the table to bid a last good-bye to Lady Cecil. The two ladies went out together with a posse of people following them; and in the hall they encountered a stalwart gentleman who had just alighted from a lumbering fly, and who pounced upon Cecil and kissed her before the assembled multitude.

"I have not forgotten your hearty invitation, you see, Mrs. Lobyer," said the stalwart gentleman, who was no other than the great O'Boyneville. "My circuit work has been rather lighter than usual this year, and I have come over from Carlisle to spend a few days at Pevenshall."

"I am so glad," cried Flo. "And that letter!"

"What letter?"

"The letter asking Cecil to go back to town."

"I wrote no letter asking Cecil to go back to town."

"Oh Cecil!" said Mrs. Lobyer, "I am sorry you were so tired of us all."

Cecil blushed crimson, and cast an imploring look at her friend, who stared at her in supreme mystification.

"I suppose I may send away the pony-carriage," said Flo. "You will not think any more of leaving us."

"Not till Mr. O'Boyneville goes."

"And that will not be till after the races, I hope."

"I will stay for the races—I will stay for any diversion you please to offer me, Mrs. Lobyer," cried the barrister cheerily. "I am my own man for the next six weeks, and your devoted slave. What a delightful place this is in summer; and what scenery!—Ah, Gordon, how do you do? I thought you were off to Japan."

He seemed bigger and more boisterous than usual, Cecil thought, as she went back with him to the dining-room, where the interrupted luncheon began again, and where Mr. O'Boyneville entertained the company with some delightful anecdotes of the provincial law-courts. So Lady Cecil stayed at Pevenshall, trusting that Hector Gordon would keep his promise and depart immediately.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"WERE ALL THY LETTERS SUNS, I COULD NOT SEE."

WHILE the butterflies of fashion enjoyed the bright summer time, and brazen bands brayed their loudest in horticultural gardens, and foreign glee-singers carolled in every imaginable European language at morning concerts and lawn parties, William Crawford shut himself in his painting-room, and worked as he had never worked since the old days in Buckingham Street, when the world had yet to learn that there was a painter called Crawford.

He had nothing left him now but his art. He reminded himself of that fact very often as he stood before his easel in the balmy summer weather, while suburban butterflies wheeled above his roses, and a suburban bee boomed and bounced against the old stained-glass in his bay-window. Time had been when the painter had found his art more than sufficient for his life, and when his chief regret had been that life was

not long enough for art. But the elegant siren of the Hermitage had disturbed the even current of his existence ; and it was in vain that he tried to coax the stream back into its old course.

“I begin to think that I shall never paint another picture,” he said to himself, after abandoning more than one design in despair. “I make sketch after sketch, but my ideas lose their freshness before I am ready to begin upon my large canvas. Have I lost my love for my art, in loving her ? or what is this restless, feverish uncertainty which takes the power out of my hand ? I will not be the slave of this folly. I have outlived bitterer sorrows than the loss of Mrs. Champernowne’s society. I lived down the trouble of my young wife’s death ; I survived ten years of perpetual failure and disappointment ; and am I to succumb at the very last because a woman is selfish and heartless ? No ; I *will* forget Georgina Champernowne ; I *will* paint a better picture than I have ever painted yet.”

After arriving at this resolution, Mr. Crawford abandoned his brushes and palette for one entire day, and shut himself in his library. He took down his favourite volumes,—the sweet familiar stories of the Greek fairyland ; and all the lovely images which had made the brightest dreams of his inspired boyhood came back to him, and floated around him once more, in spite of Mrs. Champernowne. His Psyche’s enchanting face bent over him as he sat dreaming in the drowsy summer noon ; his Cupid peered at him in all the godlike beauty of immortal youth ; and innumerable nymphs, innumerable sirens filled the room with their ærial loveliness.

He went back to his painting-room the next morning with new enthusiasm, and with all the details of his picture fully developed in his mind.

“Come, my divinity,” he cried ; “come, my bright incarnation of the immortal soul, and put to flight all earthly follies by your divine presence. As I am a man and a painter, I will forget you, Mrs. Champernowne ; and my new picture shall plant me a round higher on the glorious ladder.”

From the beginning of May to the end of July William Crawford worked incessantly at the large canvas which he had set up for himself in his despair. No hand but his own had any part in the work ; for he was possessed with a feverish delight in his labour which he had never, even in his most industrious days, felt before. He worked all through the long summer days, by good lights and bad lights ; entering his painting-room at eight o’clock in the morning, rarely to leave it till seven in the evening. He took his hasty meals in that

tapestried chamber, amongst the black oak cabinets and trailing draperies.

The servants at the Fountains remarked the change in their master's habits, and talked gravely of his haggard face and restless impatient manner.

"He used to be the best of tempers," said the painter's man-of-all-work; "but now it's as much as you can do to open your mouth without getting your nose snapped off, which the young person that comes to sit for his Fishky says his tempers about her attitudes is somethink offul, and that he's got no more consideration for her elbow-joints than if she was his wooden dummy; which I'm sure, up to two or three months back, there wasn't a pleasanter gentleman or a better master than Mr. Crawford."

It is good for a mortal to be reminded of his mortality at that moment when his yearnings towards a brighter universe have lifted him away from this dull earth, and are wafting him towards that serener region in which dwell the perfect images of his fancy. There are limits beyond which no man can go; and during the last three months of his life William Crawford had been trying to overstep those limits. In the hope of forgetting the woman he loved, he had thrown himself into his work with a burning eagerness for success that was dangerous to him alike as a man and an artist.

"If other men work six hours a day, I will work twelve," he thought. "I have nothing to live for now but my work."

This was the refrain of his life nowadays. What had he to live for but his art? and if he did not do great things in that, what purpose was there left for his existence?

The subject of his new picture was only another chapter in his favourite fable—the story of Psyche. She lay asleep under a tent, with the young god by her side, sleeping like herself, divinely innocent in the unconsciousness of slumber. A crowd of zephyrs, holding one another by the hand, have come to peep at the sleeping lovers. They float on a wandering ray of moonlight, they hover in aerial circles about the lovely sleepers. Never had William Crawford achieved a greater triumph than in the creation of these ethereal beings, transparent as water-drops against a moonlit sky, with sweet arch faces and gauzy wings. And the slumbering Psyche, with her fair infantine face, and her veil of pale golden hair; and the divine moonlight, and the mysterious depths of cool shadow,—every detail of the picture was a triumph; and as the work neared its completion the painter began to feel that he had at least surpassed himself.

"When Sheridan was slow to write a new comedy, they

said he was afraid of the author of the *School for Scandal*. And people have declared that I should never equal the painter of the ‘*Aspasia* ;’ but I think I have beaten the *Aspasia* at last,” mused Mr. Crawford as he stood before his easel, and pondered on the aerial charms of his zephyrs.

He had worked by bad lights and good lights—in sunshine and shadow. He had grappled with and mastered the difficulties to which he had been wont to succumb. Not content with doubling the daily hours of his labour, he had worked at his background at night. There had been no reason for his abnormal industry except his own restlessness ; but that restlessness was unconquerable. The intoxication of success took possession of him, and he allowed himself neither pause nor respite.

There came a time when under any other phase of circumstances he would have laid down his palette and left his painting-room. There came a time when he felt that his sight was beginning to suffer from unwonted use ; but still he went on.

“I can rest as long as I like when my zephyrs are finished,” he said to himself. “If I were to leave my picture, I might lose the freshness of my ideas ; I might even take a disgust for my lovely *Psyche*.”

So the painter held on steadily, in spite of a curious languor which made his eyelids heavy, and an occasional visitation from a strange throbbing pain above his eyebrows. He went on ; promising himself a consultation with some distinguished oculist, and a long rest when his “*Psyche* and the *Zephyrs*” was finished. He continued his work with unrelenting industry, indomitable determination : but there were moments in which the beautiful faces upon his canvas disappeared suddenly behind a dazzling mist, until he was fain to lay down his brushes and walk up and down the room for a little while with his hands before his tired eyes.

It was the middle of August, and the picture wanted little more than a week’s work for its completion, when the painter yielded for the first time to that languid feeling in the eyelids, and abandoned his work in order to indulge in a brief siesta. All the clocks of Kensington had just struck three, and the vibration of the different chimes came floating across the painter’s garden. It was an almost insupportable summer day—sultry and oppressive—the day of all others on which the hardest worker is apt to be seized with a distaste for his labour.

“It’s no use,” said Mr. Crawford, as he gave a last look at his canvas ; “I can scarcely see the colours I am using. I can’t stand against this drowsiness any longer.”

He threw himself upon a sofa, a noble couch of strictly classic form, upon which had erst reclined Aspasia the wise and beautiful, or at any rate the dark-haired model who had sat for the Grecian beauty; that maligned enchantress who sinned against poetry by descending from a Pericles to a cattle-dealer. The painter fell asleep almost immediately; but for some time after he had lain down he had a dim consciousness of pain above his eyebrows. By-and-by, however, the slumber grew deeper; he no longer heard the bees humming in his roses, the subdued roll of distant wheels. He fell into a long dreamless sleep, from which he awoke at last very suddenly, with a feeling that he had slept for many hours.

He had slept for a very long time as it seemed, for it was quite dark when he awoke.

"No more work to-day," he thought with a sigh. "I counted on getting an hour between five and six. Why hasn't Dimond lighted my lamps?"

The painter groped his way to the bell and rang violently.

"What a night!" he muttered; "there must be a storm brewing. I haven't known it as dark as this all the summer."

He stood by the mantelpiece waiting. The window was opposite him, and he felt the warm summer air floating in upon him where he stood. But he could not even define the broad opening of the window through the profound darkness.

"Lights, Dimond," he said impatiently, as the man opened the door.

"Lights, Sir?"

"Yes; of course. Why have you left the lamps till this time? Why isn't that passage lighted?"

"But it's so early, Sir—not much after five—and such a bright afternoon. I didn't think you'd like me to light the gas yet awhile."

"Not much after five o'clock!" repeated the painter in a tone of utter stupefaction.

"No, Sir; just a quarter-past by your own clock, Sir."

"And a bright afternoon?" he asked in the same tone.

"Well,—of course, Sir, I don't presume to say as regards paintin'; but in a general way a very bright afternoon."

"Oh my God!" cried the painter suddenly.

The servant ran to his master, alarmed by that sudden exclamation, which sounded like a cry of agony.

"Is anything the matter, Sir?"

"No; go—go and get me a cab—immediately—I must go out—and I shall want you to go with me."

"Mc, Sir?"

"Yes, you, Sir! Go at once, man, for God's sake—and lose no time about it."

The servant departed in bewilderment of mind, and William Crawford groped his way through the outer darkness to the nearest chair. He sunk into the chair, covered his face with his hands, and burst into tears.

"Blind!" he cried; "blind! blind! I said I had nothing but my art, and now my art is lost to me."

He sat with his head bent forward on his breast, staring hopelessly into the darkness. Strain his eyeballs as he might, they could not pierce that darkness. He saw no Psyche and the Zephyrs, no lovely images created by his hand, no bright glimpse of summer sunshine on the smooth green lawn, no changing light upon the summer flowers, no tender shadows from the grand old cedars,—only darkness, utter darkness; beyond which it might be that his eyes were never again to penetrate.

"Cab, Sir," said the man, presenting himself in the doorway.

"Come here, Dimond," William Crawford said very quietly; "come close to me, and give me your arm, please. I beg your pardon if I was impatient just now, but I have had a great shock. I have been working too hard lately and have injured my sight. God only knows whether the injury is to be a lasting one; but for the moment I am quite blind. I think perhaps I shall manage better if you give me your hand to lead me to the cab. I must go at once to an oculist, and I shall want you to go with me."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A TIMELY WARNING.

MR. O'BOYNEVILLE enjoyed himself amazingly at Pevenshall. The man whose ordinary existence was one unceasing round of hard work was the most social of creatures when once set free from the daily round of labour. He enjoyed himself with a boisterous boyish delight in simple pleasures, and the Pevenshall visitors found his gaiety contagious. There are some people who succeed in society by mere force of animal spirits, and who are pardoned for solecisms that would be the perdition of a more timid blunderer. Laurence O'Boyneville did what he liked and said what he liked, with the reckless impulsiveness of his nation, and people forgave him and were pleased with him.

He gave himself up so thoroughly to the social delights of Mr. Lobyer's mansion, which was made all the pleasanter by the frequent absence of its master, that he had no leisure for morbid anxieties of a domestic nature. The idea that he had any need to doubt the allegiance of the wife he loved and honoured had never presented itself to him in any shape, however impalpable. She was his wife—a creature so much above suspicion, that only the rudest of awakenings could disturb his perfect confidence in her honour and truth. That he might leave her in one moment bright, beautiful, and smiling, and return in the next to find her dead, was a possibility within his power of conception; but that he could awake from his trust in her to find her false to him was a monstrous impossibility which his mind would have been unable to grasp. So he gave himself up to the pleasure of the hour, and devoted himself to the service of the fair sex with an indiscriminate and laborious gallantry, which the gilded youth fluttering around Mrs. Lobyer, and drawling some subtle half-implied compliment once in the twenty-four hours, beheld with amazement from afar off.

"I had no idea that Mr. O'Boyneville was such a delightful creature," Flo remarked to Cecil. "I hope I shall never again be without an Irishman in the house when I have a large party. That dear good-tempered husband of yours contrives to keep all the women in good humour. I'm sure that poor Miss Skairkrow had never had a civil word said to her on the subject of her personal appearance till Mr. O'Boyneville told her she was the image of the Empress of the French. He assured Miss Skeckchoule that her voice reminded him of Grisi in her prime. And then there is pretty Mrs. Fitz-Cavendish, the *attaché's* wife, who has been surfeited with admiration, but who declares that there never was such an absurdly-delightful creature as your husband."

Cecil acknowledged these praises somewhat coldly. This noisy frivolous Irishman, whom other people thought so delightful, was no nearer to her than the overworked barrister of Brunswick Square. She was weak enough to feel something like anger against him for his genial good temper—for his utter blindness to her own deadly peril. Hector Gordon had broken his promise. He had stayed at Pevenshall; and in the social intercourse of that pleasant mansion it was impossible for Cecil to avoid his companionship. Nor did Laurence O'Boyneville's presence shield her in any manner from that dangerous association. Serene in perfect confidence, the barrister amused himself noisily at one end of the drawing-room, while Major Gordon talked to his wife at the other.

So perverse is the human heart that this placid trustfulness

offended the woman who was trusted. Cecil resented her husband's confidence as an evidence of indifference, and was angry with him for not being jealous.

"If I had a husband who loved me, he would come between me and my danger," she thought bitterly; "but my husband does not know what love is."

Unhappily there was some one at Pevenshall who did know, or who pretended to know, all the mysteries of that fatal passion; some one whose voice sounded very often in Cecil's ear, whose eyes were for ever seeking hers. Heaven knows that she did her best to avoid him; but her best efforts were very weak and futile as compared to the machinery which the Eumenides employed against her. A thousand little circumstances conspired to force her into the society of the man she feared. At races, and picnics, and water parties, and rustic gatherings of every description, she was always finding Hector Gordon by her side. The old companionship of the Fortinbras time rose again; but now there was always a guilty consciousness, a remorseful agony lurking amidst the unhallowed happiness; and oh, the meanness, the deception, the grovelling guiltiness, which was the everyday cost of that forbidden joy! Balancing one against the other, Cecil knew how heavily the perpetual remorse outweighed those brief moments of feverish gladness, when the sound of Hector's voice lulled her with its fatal music, and the tender pressure of Hector's hand lifted her above the common earth.

"If I could get away to some quiet hiding-place at the other end of the world, where he *could not* follow me, I might escape him, and be innocent and happy once more," she thought. That escape for which she yearned seemed every day more difficult. The poor frail rudderless bark was hovering on the very brink of a whirlpool, and there was no friendly hand to steer it back to safety. Sometimes Cecil resolved that she would confess every thing to her husband, and demand the shelter she needed; but the barrister's good humoured indifference was more repellent to her in her present frame of mind than the fiercest severity of a jealous husband could possibly have been. It would have been a relief to her to be suspected. She wanted an occasion to throw herself into her husband's arms, and cry, "Have pity upon my wickedness, and save me from myself!" Perhaps in these latter days, when the chronicles of the Divorce-Court furnish such piquant reading for middle-class breakfast-tables, it would be well if husbands were a little more inclined to jealous watchfulness, and somewhat less disposed to believe implicitly in their own invincible claims to all love and duty. More than once had Cecil nerved herself for the ordeal. She had resolved on humiliating herself

before the husband whose indifference wounded her; but after waiting for an hour or more in the loneliness of her own apartment until it should please her lord and master to withdraw himself from some social masculine gathering in the smoking-room below—after waiting with the words she meant to speak arranging and rearranging themselves in her brain, the remorseful wife found it impossible to begin her guilty story, and to open her heart to a man who was chuckling over the capital things he had been saying, and who insisted on relating the triumphs he had just achieved in argument.

Against that everyday joviality, that commonplace good-humour, the flood-tide of passion dashed impotently, as storm-beaten waters break against a groin of solid masonry. So the days went by, and Mr. O'Boyneville enjoyed himself, while the Fates worked their worst against helpless Cecil, who found herself day by day in more frequent association with the man who loved her, and who persisted in reminding her perpetually of his love.

Pevenshall was very full and very gay. Amidst so many people and so much gaiety flirtations that would have made scandal in a quieter household passed unnoticed, except by a few quiet watchers unengaged by schemes of their own. Sir Nugent Evershed appeared at the York Meeting, where one of his horses ran a bad second for the Great Ebor, and after the races was almost a daily guest at Mr. Lobyer's mansion. The Irish barrister had been some time at Pevenshall when Mrs. MacClaverhouse arrived on a flying visit. She had been visiting further north, and she took Mrs. Lobyer's house on her way homewards, in accordance with an old promise made to Flo, who liked the lively dowager.

"I must only stay with you three or four days at the most, my dear," she said to her hostess; "for I am due in Hampshire next week, at a dear old rectory which is supposed to be haunted; though I must confess the ghosts have never come my way. But there are some people who may spend their lives in tapestried chambers and not see any thing out of the common."

Before Mrs. MacClaverhouse had been half-a-dozen hours at Pevenshall she had taken occasion to interrogate her nephew respecting the sale of his commission. She put him through so sharp an examination that the Major was fain to confess the existence of motives which it was impossible for him to explain.

"Then they must be bad motives," exclaimed the dowager, "and unworthy of the true-hearted lad I used to be so proud of. You can't suppose that *I* wished you to go out to Japan to be killed by a herd of horrible creatures with small eyes

and pigtailed ; but I have heard people speak sneeringly about your sudden selling out, and the malicious wretches have made me feel quite uneasy."

"You needn't be uneasy, my dear aunt," answered Hector ; "it's not a case of 'the white feather,' if that's what you mean."

"That's not what I mean, and you know as well as I do that it is not. I don't like those mysterious motives which you can't explain."

The Major shrugged his shoulders with a deprecating gesture. He might give his aunt Indian shawls and ivory caskets and *carte blanche* upon his wine-merchant ; but there were secrets which he did not hold himself bound to reveal to that lady. She took his refusal very quietly.

"When people object to tell me things, I generally contrive to find them out for myself," she said calmly ; and from this time, though she enjoyed the delights of Pevenshall to the uttermost, she kept a sharp eye upon her handsome nephew, and an assiduous ear for all floating gossip that accidental breezes wafted in her way.

She stayed a week ; and on hearing that Mr. O'Boyneville had occasion to run up to town on the day following her intended departure, she delayed that departure in order to avail herself of his escort.

"I suppose you won't object to take care of an old woman between this and King's Cross, Mr. O'Boyneville," she said after proposing this arrangement. Of course the barrister declared himself delighted to be of service ; but Cecil, who knew her strong-minded kinswoman's independent spirit, was not a little surprised by this sudden desire for masculine protection. Mr. O'Boyneville was only to sleep one night in Brunswick Square, and then go on to the west of England, where he had business of importance to transact for a friend. The affair would not occupy him more than a week, he said, and he should hurry back to Pevenshall directly he was free to do so. Cecil made no objection to this arrangement. It pleased her husband to leave her in order to attend to his business, and she let him go. A strange calmness had taken possession of her during the last few days. She was absent-minded, and frequently answered at random ; more than once she had complained of headache, and had kept her room ; but when her husband asked her if there was any thing serious the matter, and intreated her to see a medical man, she assured him that her illness was only nervous. The dowager visited her on this occasion, and questioned her sharply ; but, for the first time in her experience, that worthy matron found herself repulsed by a sullen obstinacy on the part of her niece.

"Your questioning me won't cure my headache," Lady Cecil said; "believe me it is much better to let me alone. I am not worth the trouble you take about me."

"But, Cecil, if you are really ill, I must insist upon your having advice; and if you are not ill, this shutting yourself up in your room is very absurd. That dear good O'Boyneville is most uneasy about you."

The stentorian laughter of the dear good O'Boyneville floating upward in the summer air made itself heard at this moment through the open windows. The barrister was enjoying himself on the terrace with the most lively of the Pevenshall visitors.

"Yes; he is very uneasy about me, auntie," said Cecil; "any one can perceive that."

Mrs. MacClaverhouse gave an impatient shrug and departed.

"If I had been your mother in the days when George III. was a young man, and pert chits like you were taught to respect their elders, how soundly I would have boxed those pretty little ears of yours! A sound box on the ear is what you want, Lady Cecil, and I only wish that Laurence O'Boyneville were the man to give it to you."

Thus soliloquised the dowager as she lingered for a few moments at the door of her niece's chamber. She encountered Hector Gordon by-and-by in the lower regions, and treated him more cavalierly than that favourite of fortune was wont to be treated. He bore her ill-usage very meekly, and carefully avoided the severe glare of those hard grey eyes which had been apt to soften when they looked at him.

On the next morning the dowager and Mr. O'Boyneville took their departure. Cecil bade them adieu in a strange mechanical manner, which the barrister was too busy and too hurried to notice. He did indeed perceive that his wife was paler than usual, and that she drew herself away from him when he would have embraced her at parting; but the pallor was accounted for by the nervous headache, from which she confessed herself still a sufferer, and the chilling refusal of the embrace was attributed to the inconvenient presence of the matched footmen, who were on guard in the hall, and of Mr. and Mrs. Lobyer, who had emerged from the dining-room to speed their parting guests. The generous-minded Othello needs a hint from Iago before he can see flaw or speck in Desdemona's purity, though she may plead never so persistently for Cassio's reinstatement; and the idea that his wife's conduct had any hidden meaning was still far away from Laurence O'Boyneville's mind.

"I shall come back for you in a week, Cecil," he said; and

amid the confusion of adieus and good wishes he had no time to perceive his wife's silence.

At the station Mrs. MacClaverhouse suggested that the barrister should secure a compartment for their own special use by the diplomatic administration of a half-crown to the guard.

"I want to have a little quiet talk with you as we go up to town," she said.

Mr. O'Boyneville complied, wondering. At the first junction the branch train melted into an express, which tore London-wards at the rate of fifty miles an hour; but Mrs. MacClaverhouse and her nephew-in-law had their quiet talk in spite of the ponderous pantings of the giant that was bearing them to their destination; and the quiet talk must needs have been of a very serious nature, for the barrister was as pale as a ghost when he alighted at King's Cross.

He conducted Mrs. MacClaverhouse to a cab nevertheless, and saw her packages and her maid safely bestowed along with her in that vehicle. On bidding her adieu, he bent his head to say something which was not to be heard by the maid.

"I thank you very much," he said,—“very much. I am not afraid. No, Mrs. MacClaverhouse, with God's help, I am not afraid!”

CHAPTER XXX.

“HE'S SWEETEST FRIEND, OR HARDEST FOE.”

WHILE Mr. O'Boyneville was parting with the dowager at the terminus, Cecil walked with Hector Gordon on the terrace at Pevenshall.

The august afternoon was almost stifling in its sultry heat; and most of the Pevenshall idlers had taken shelter in the drawing-room. A group of young ladies were clustered under a great beech on the lawn listening to the perusal of a new novel: and with the exception of this party and the two promenaders on the terrace the gardens were deserted.

Cecil and Hector walked slowly up and down the terrace. For some time they had been silent. It was one of those oppressive days which weigh down the liveliest spirits; but on Cecil's face there was a profound melancholy not to be accounted for by atmospheric influences. Nor was the countenance of the Major much brighter of aspect. He seemed divided between his own sombre thoughts and an anxious curiosity as to the meditations of his companion.

"Tell me you are not unhappy, darling," he said at last ; "for pity's sake tell me that the idea of the step you have decided upon taking does not make you unhappy."

"You do not think that I can feel very happy, do you, Hector?"

"If you love me as I——"

"Does the thought of our future make *you* happy?" cried Cecil passionately. "Oh Hector, you know as well as I do that henceforward happiness must be impossible for you and me. It is agreed that we cannot endure the miserable deception, the shameful degradation of our lives any longer—that we must escape from this atmosphere of falsehood at any sacrifice—at any cost to ourselves. We have discussed this so often that there is no need of further discussion ; and you have brought me to see things as you see them. You have wrung a promise from me, and I am prepared to keep it. But for mercy's sake do not talk to me of happiness."

The soldier ventured no reply to this speech. The gloom deepened upon his countenance as he watched the pale face of his companion. They came to the end of the terrace presently, and paused under the statue of Pomona, as they had done in the moonlight some weeks before. They stood here side by side for some time, she looking straight before her at the drowsy summer landscape, he keeping close watch upon her face.

She had promised to leave her husband with Hector Gordon. She had promised to pass away with him into the outer darkness, beyond the confines of the only world she knew. By what passionate pleading, by what subtle argument, her lover had brought her to accept this course as a fatal necessity, need not be set down here. When a man's infatuation or a man's selfishness overrides his sense of truth and honour, he can find arguments enough to serve him in such a cause. That he loved her was beyond all question ; that the penalty involved in his dishonour was scarcely less than the sacrifice to be made by her was also true ;—but it was no less true that the passion which demanded so cruel a sacrifice was a base and selfish one.

It is difficult to imagine how any woman can arrive at such a decision as that made by Lady Cecil. The descent of Avernus is so gradual a slope, that it is only when the traveller finds himself at the bottom of the gulf that he perceives how terrible has been the rapidity of his progress. Ample opportunity had been given Hector Gordon for the pleading of his wicked cause. The Fates had conspired to assist his evil work ; and even when some short-lived pang of self-reproach prompted him to abandon his relentless pursuit, some little circumstance, too

insignificant to be remembered, always occurred to strangle the feeble resolution.

Little by little Cecil had learnt to believe that the tie between herself and her husband must needs be broken. She had learnt to believe that the daily and hourly deceptions of the last few weeks constituted a more terrible sin than any open rupture with the man she had sworn to love and honour. The seducer's fatal philosophy had done its work, and she accepted the justice of his reasoning. It was surely better that she should forfeit the place she had no right to hold in her husband's confidence and esteem—better that he should know her for a false wife, an outcast from him and from society, than that he should trust her as a true one while her love and allegiance were really given to another. This was the conviction which had taken possession of Cecil's mind. She was prepared to leave her husband, and abandon her home and station for the fatal protection of a lover; but she had no hope of any future happiness to be won by this terrible sacrifice. She sought only to escape from the daily falsehood that tortured and humiliated her. It was within a very short period that this fatal conviction had taken root in her heart. Before that time she had trusted in her own honour—in Hector Gordon's forbearance—in her husband's power to save her from herself. But her own sense of honour had been weak to sustain her against a lover's subtle power of reasoning. Hector had shown no forbearance; and her last hope in the protection of her husband had been disappointed by reason of Laurence O'Boyneville's unsympathetic joviality.

Looking at her this afternoon as they stood silently side by side, Hector saw something like despair in the pale still face. It was not a hopeful aspect of affairs for a lover who had sacrificed so much in order to induce the woman he loved to break the bonds that bound her to another man and plight her perjured faith to him. He had won her promise to be his, but she had not promised to be happy; and a chilling sense of terror thrilled through his heart as he fancied that perhaps she had spoken the truth just now, and that henceforward there could be no such thing as happiness for these two who loved each other so dearly. He had not calculated upon this. Cecil might desire only to escape from a miserable present, but Hector had believed in a bright future. What could mar his happiness, if the woman he loved was his companion, his own for ever and for ever? Loss of position, tarnished honour, the memory of a great wrong done to an unsuspecting man—what were these but trifles when weighed in the balance with an all-absorbing love?

The ordeal through which he must needs drag the creature

he loved so dearly might indeed be a terrible one ; but once passed, the future lay bright and fair before them—a future in which they would be together. But now all at once a new light dawned upon him. He might be happy—for how could he be otherwise than happy with her?—but would she be content? That calm despair in the pale face gave no promise of peace.

“Poor girl, poor girl! it is harder for her than for me,” he thought sadly.

And then presently some brief awakening of conscience impelled him to speak.

“Cecil,” he cried ; “it is not too late ! If you wish to retract—if you repent your promise——”

“No, I will keep my promise. I never can go back to my husband any more. If he loved me—if there were any sympathy between us, he might have saved me from myself, Hector—and from you. Oh, I know how selfish this must sound ;—you have sacrificed so much for me—your career—your future—I have learnt to understand the sacrifice since I have heard people wonder why you took such a step. And it was for my sake. No, Hector, I will not break my promise. I should be weak, dishonourable, selfish beyond all measure, if I could break my promise after what it has cost you to win it.”

A woman has always more or less inclination for self-sacrifice. Let her once be fully persuaded that it is her duty to throw herself away for the welfare or the pleasure of some one she loves, and she is in hot haste to take the fatal step that shall hurl her to destruction. Cecil was not a woman who could entertain any hope of happiness from such a course as that which she was about to take. If she could make her lover happy, if she could atone to him in some manner for the foolish sacrifice of his career, she would be content ; but no false glamour illumined her miserable pathway. She was going to her destruction—blindly perhaps—but with a full knowledge that there was darkness around her, and that no light could ever shine upon the way she was treading.

Hector talked to her of their plans ; and she listened quietly, and acquiesced in all his arrangements. The details of their flight had been settled before to-day. The Major was to leave Pevenshall in the evening by the mail, on pretence of some sudden summons for which his afternoon letters would furnish the excuse. Cecil was to leave the next morning, in obedience to a letter from her husband. In the way which they were going, there seemed to be nothing but falsehood and deception ; but Hector reminded his companion that this was only a brief ordeal through which they must pass to perfect freedom.

"I know how painful it is for you, darling," the Major said tenderly; "but in a few days we shall be far away from all this wretchedness, in the dear little Brittany village I have told you of so often, with the mountains behind us, and the sea before; and then we will go on to Italy, and wander from place to place till you come some day to the spot in which you would like to live. And there I will build you the brightest home that a man ever made for his joy."

"But you, Hector—your career, your ambition——"

"My career is finished, and I have no ambition except to be with you."

He had said the same thing a hundred times, in a hundred different fashions; but to-day the tender words could not bring the faintest smile to Cecil's face. She knew that she was about to commit a terrible sin; and she had none of the passionate recklessness which can alone sustain the sinner. A stronger will than her own was carrying her along the fatal pathway, and a perverted sense of honour kept her faithful to the promise which had been extorted from her by her lover's despair. She was like that unhappy knight whose

"Honour rooted ~~in~~ honour stood."

All the details of the flight had been planned by Hector before this afternoon; but he had found some difficulty in explaining them to Cecil. The paltry details seemed more detestable than the sin itself; and the soldier's pride and delicacy alike revolted against the necessities of his position. Yet in due course all had been arranged. Cecil was to go straight to Brunswick Square, there to make hurried preparations for her flight, and to write her farewell letter to her husband, who would have started on his western journey before she left the north. In Brunswick Square she was to see Hector, who would come to her in the course of the day to assure himself of her safe arrival, and on the following morning they were to meet at the station in time to leave London by the Dover mail. Before Mr. O'Boyneville returned to town they would be far away, and there would be little trace of them left to mark the way by which they had gone.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ON THE BRINK.

MAJOR GORDON left Pevenshall by the mail, and on the following morning Cecil bade adieu to her friend, who was rather inclined to resent her abrupt departure.

"I don't believe a bit in Mr. O'Boyneville's summons," said Flo; "you are tired of us, and you want to go away, Cecil; you are deceiving me just as you deceived me before. However, of course I cannot keep you here against your will; and I can only regret that we have not succeeded in making you happy."

Whereupon Cecil declared that Pevenshall was all that is delightful; and that she should never forget Mrs. Lobyer's kindness and affection. The impulsive Florence would upon this have embraced her friend; but Cecil drew herself away from the embrace.

"Wherever you go, dear, I shall remember you and your goodness," she said; "and oh, Florence, I hope you will be happy."

As the two women stood for a moment holding each other's hands, and looking in each other's faces, Cecil would fain have uttered some word of warning to the friend she never thought to see again. But she remembered what a mockery any warning must seem hereafter from her tainted lips; though who so well as this poor shipwrecked creature, newly foundered on a rock, could tell of the dangers that beset a woman's pathway? Holding Mrs. Lobyer's hand silently in her own, she fancied how her friend would remember that parting when her own name had become a byword and reproach.

"Will she have any pity upon me, I wonder, for the sake of our past friendship; or will she be as merciless as the rest of the world?"

This is what Cecil thought in that parting moment, while her packages were being put in the carriage, and the imperturbable footman attended with her shawls and parasols.

"You will come to us at Christmas," cried Flo.

"I fear not, dear. Good-bye."

Cecil was seated in the carriage in the next minute, waving her hand to Florence, and a little group of young ladies who had placed themselves at the hall-door to witness her departure. Splendid Pevenshall swam before her in a mist as she looked at that group of light-hearted girls fluttering like a cluster of butterflies in the morning sunshine.

"I shall never again pass the threshold of such a house," she thought.

All through the homeward journey, she felt like a traveller in a dream. She sat in a corner of the carriage with her eyes fixed upon the changing landscape; but she saw only a confusion of undulating corn-fields and summer verdure.

She went mechanically through the business of her arrival, and reached Brunswick Square without accident; but the clamour of the London streets resounded in her ears like the booming of a stormy sea.

An unearthly quiet seemed to pervade the Bloomsbury Mansion. The respectful Pupkin uttered some faint exclamation of surprise on beholding his mistress; but beyond this Cecil heard neither voice nor sound. She avoided her own apartments while they were being prepared for her reception, and went straight to the drawing-rooms, where every thing remained exactly as she had left it five or six weeks before. The birds set up a feeble rejoicing as they recognised their mistress; but she did not approach the window where their cages hung in the London sun.

She looked at her watch; her time to-day was a question of hours. She had her packing to accomplish—a painful kind of packing, for it involved the setting aside of every trinket her husband had ever given her. She intended to take with her only the plainest dresses and the absolute necessities of her toilet; she doubted whether even these things could be really hers when once she crossed the threshold of that house. There seemed to be a kind of dishonesty in taking with her the most insignificant trifle that had been bought with Laurence O'Boyneville's money.

There was one task before Lady Cecil even more painful than the preparations for her journey, and that task was the writing of the letter which should tell Mr. O'Boyneville that his wife had decided on leaving him. How could she do it? how could she put her wickedness into words? what could she say to him? "You have never been unkind to me; I have no accusation to bring against you; you have only been unsympathetic; and a man whom I love better than truth and honour has persuaded me to abandon you."

Never in all her life had Cecil suffered such anguish as the writing of that letter cost her. It seemed a cold, hard, cruel letter when it was written, so curtly did it announce her guilty design; but though there was little trace of feeling in the written lines, the slow tears rolled down her pallid cheeks as she wrote, and her hand trembled so violently that it was with difficulty she could make her writing legible.

"Oh, Hector!" she cried piteously; "if you could know what I suffer for your sake—for your sake!"

Somehow or other the letter was written, sealed, and addressed; and then she sat looking at it in a kind of stupor.

"If it were really not too late—if I dared ask him to release me," she thought.

But in the next moment she remembered the solemn nature of her promise, the sacrifice her lover had made to win it.

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried. "It is too late! I am bound to him by my promise."

And then she asked herself whether, if there had been no such promise, she could have remained in that house as Laurence O'Boynaveille's wife. She had wronged him so much in word and in thought, that her innocence of deeper and more irrevocable wrong seemed to be of little moment. Could she look in his face without humiliation? Could she accept his confidence without dishonour? No! a thousand times no; and this being so, she was no wife for him.

"Come what may, I must leave my husband," she thought. "Oh, if I could go alone! if I could only go away by myself to some quiet hiding-place, and never be heard of any more!"

She thought this in all sincerity. Her love for the tempter had been in a great measure annihilated by the horror of the temptation. The sense of her guilt was so great an agony that there was little room in her mind for any other feeling. It seemed as if the current of Fate was drifting her along, and that she was no more than a weed, carried onward by an impetuous torrent. She knew that destruction lay before her; but she had no power to resist the force of the stream.

After the writing of the letter, she sat for some time in a listless attitude, looking vacantly at the envelope with her husband's name upon it. Her head ached with a dull pain, and there was confusion in her thoughts. She could not ponder deliberately upon the step that she was going to take. This inability to think quietly had possessed her ever since she had arrived at the fatal conclusion to which her lover had urged her. She had accepted the doctrine of necessity; she had allowed herself to be persuaded that it was her destiny to do wrong; and once having yielded to this unnatural creed, the false god she had created was stronger than herself, and she became indeed a powerless creature in the hands of Fate.

Apollo had spoken; sorrow and shame lay before her, her inevitable portion.

The day crept on, and she knew that with every hour the current that was drifting her gathered new strength. Hector

was to devote this day to the settlement of his own affairs; for a man has need to make some little preparation on the eve of an exile that may last his lifetime. The day crept on—a dull sultry day at the close of August—and still Cecil kept her listless attitude by the table with her husband's letter lying before her. She knew that she was not to expect any visit from Hector until late in the afternoon, since the business he had to transact would occupy the best part of his day. But though she was lonely and yearned, she felt no eagerness for his coming. What relief or consolation could he bring her? What was he but her accomplice in wrong, with whom she had plotted a crime, and to whom she was pledged for the due accomplishment of that evil deed?

Amid the many thoughts that succeeded one another in the confusion of her brain, there was the thought that guilty wretches who had plotted the details of a murder must feel very much as she felt to-day. She could fancy them, when all had been planned, and the hour appointed, waiting in weary idleness for the time to come. She could fancy them watching the slow hands upon the dial, and wishing either that time could come to a dead stop for ever and ever, or that the hour had arrived and the deed were done. The stillness of the house seemed to her like the stillness that precedes death and horror. She fancied her husband coming home from his journey in a day or two to find the same quiet in the house, and his wife's letter waiting for him on the table.

"If he loved me, the blow would kill him," she thought; "but he does not love me. His profession is all the world to him. If he had loved me, I think it would have been easy for me to confess my wickedness and ask his forgiveness. He will be sorry, perhaps,—more sorry for me than for himself,—but his grief will not last long. He will have Westminster Hall, and his hope of getting into Parliament. He is not like Hector; he would never have allowed his love for me to interfere with his career."

It was nearly five o'clock when she aroused herself from this miserable apathy and went to her room to begin the preparations for to-morrow's flight. She was to dine at half-past six, so she had brief leisure for her work. One by one she set aside the jewels that her husband had given her. They were not very numerous, but they were valuable, and in a simple taste that did credit to Mr. O'Boyneville's judgment.

Like that wretched wife in Kotzebue's tragedy, Lady Cecil could not fail to remember the occasion on which each gift had been presented. The emerald-and-diamond bracelet on her birthday; the cameos in Etruscan setting on the anni-

versary of her marriage ; the suite of turquoise rings and bracelets in solid bands of lustreless gold, bestowed upon her in commemoration of some professional triumph of Mr. O'Boynville's, as grand in its way as Erskine's defence of Hardy. The thought of her husband's quiet pleasure in these offerings came back to her as she touched them.

"I think he must have loved me then," she murmured, as she remembered the ~~stone~~ on which he had taken the case of cameos from his pocket, and lay it on the little table by which she sat at work. He had ~~loved her~~ loved her a little at that time, she thought! he had loved her a little when he sought her as his wife ; but always with that moderate and negative affection for which alone there is room in the breast of a man who devotes himself to an arduous profession. It had not been given to Cecil to understand the possibility of hidden fires burning steadily beneath the dull outward crust of the working man's nature. She did not know the capacity for deep and passionate feeling which may exist in the nature of a man whose daily labour leaves him no leisure for the revelation of the better and brighter part of his mind. She had expected to find a husband only an improved edition of a lover ; and finding him something altogether different—a creature who accepted her affection as a matter of course, and was disagreeably candid on the subject of an unbecoming bonnet,—she concluded all at once that she was no longer beloved, and that her life was desolate.

The dismal dinner-hour had arrived by the time she had collected the trinkets in her jewel-case, and had packed two or three dresses and her most indispensable possessions in the one trunk which she was to take with her. She went to the dining-room, and made a miserable pretence of dining, with the inestimable Pupkin in attendance, and the evening sunlight shining into the dingy pictures on the wall opposite to her. Every thing in Brunswick Square looked unspeakably dull and faded and dusty after the splendour of Pevenshall. She thought of the moonlit terrace, and the fair summer landscape sanctified by the night. The very tones of Hector Gordon's passionate pleading came back to her ears ; but they moved her with no answering thrill of passion ; her love had perished in the misery which it had brought upon her. She thought of that little village in Brittany which he had described to her so eloquently ; the rustic retreat in which they were to spend the first few months of their union—oh God, what a union ! A vague horror was mingled even with the thought of that pine-clad mountain and the purple sea. Her lover had dwelt so fondly on the beauty of the scene ; and yet, in Brunswick Square, with the summer sunshine coming to her on a

slanting column of dust, and with a street-organ droning in the distance, she thought of that far-away paradise with a shudder. In this crisis of her fate, she felt like a creature standing between two lives—the dull slow river of commonplace existence; the stormy ocean of passion and guilt. She looked backward to the river with a vague yearning; she looked forward to the ocean with an unutterable fear.

The shadowy banquet occupied less than half an hour, and it was only seven o'clock when Cecil went back to the drawing-room. Seven: he would see with her soon! He too would have made his pretence of dining, no doubt, at one of his clubs. The crisis in a well-bred man's fate must be desperate indeed when he abandons that pretence of dining, or faces the universe with a reckless toilet. Seven. The windows were open; the canaries were making a discordant scraping with their beaks against the wires of the cages, and noisy children were emerging from the square. Cecil looked down at them from her window, and remembered the stories she had heard of women who had run away from such households as those. She remembered one especial history,—the wretched story of a woman who abandoned her husband and children under the influence of an infatuation which remained an unsolvable mystery to the last. It was from Brighton that the hapless creature took flight; and she told one of the few friends who remained to her after that time, how at the last, just as she had crossed the threshold of her husband's house, she heard, or fancied that she heard, a cry from one of her children, and would have gone back—would at that ultimate moment have repented and returned—if a cruel wind had not closed the door in her face, and set the seal upon her doom. She had not the courage to ring the bell. She went away to keep her tryst with the man who had made himself her master and to have her name a byword and reproach for ever after that fatal day.

The wheels of an impetuous hansom ground against the curb-stone while Lady Cecil stood at the window thinking of this dismal story; and her lover alighted from the vehicle. He stopped to pay the driver—he must have paid the driver even if he had been going to assist in the execution of a murder—and the man drove away slowly through the smoky summer gloaming, contented with his fare.

Cecil was still standing by the window when Pupkin announced Major Gordon: she turned her head and waited for her lover; and even in that moment of waiting, as he came towards her through the twilight room, she thought how different would have been her greeting of him, if she had been his wife—if she had had any right to be glad of his coming.

"My own darling!" said Hector, in a low tender voice.

She gave him her hand in silence, and he stood by her side in the window, holding the poor cold hand, and looking down at her with unutterable affection.

"My own dear girl, how pale you are in this dim light! I hope it is the light, and that you are not really looking so ill as I fancy you look. I have done every thing, dear. I have seen the lawyers, the bankers, the stockbrokers,—every body; and am free to go to the end of the world,—to the very end of the world! look up, darling; let me see the face I used to dream of on my way back to India, after our parting at Fortinbras."

She lifted her head from its drooping attitude and looked at him with a countenance in which there was a mournful resignation that sent a chill to his heart.

"Oh my darling, if you could only look forward as happily to our future as I do; I know that there is much for you to suffer—just at first; but when once we are clear of England, and all the brightest countries in the universe are before us, the miserable past will fade away like a dream."

"Do you think so, Hector? Shall I ever forget—shall I ever forget?"

"Let it be considered my fault if you remember. I charge myself with the happiness of your life. You cannot blame me too bitterly if you are unhappy. And now, darling, let us discuss our plans for the last time. I hope they won't bring us lights. It is so nice to sit in this dreamy twilight. I shall always think tenderly of Brunswick Square, for the sake of this one evening, Cecil."

They sat by the open window, and Hector talked about the future. He talked about the future, which, by his showing, was to be one long idyl; and while he talked, the woman who sat by his side would fain have cast herself at his feet, crying:

"Release me from my guilty promise! Have pity upon me, and set me free!"

She would fain have done this, but she sat by his side and listened quietly to hopeful words that jarred strangely with the dull anguish which had possessed her all through the long wretched day.

They were still sitting in the summer dusk, when a firmer footstep than Pupkin's sounded on the landing-place, and the door suddenly opened.

"Laurence!" cried Cecil, starting to her feet, as she recognised the stalwart figure in the doorway.

It was indeed Mr. O'Boyneville, with the dust of travel upon him. He took his wife in his arms and kissed her ten-

derly; and he gave friendly greeting to Major Gordon, but he did not offer his hand to that gentleman.

"Pupkin told me of your return," he said to Cecil; "what brought you back so unexpectedly?"

It was some moments before Cecil answered, and even then she could not reply without hesitation.

"I was so tired of Pevenshall."

"Tired of Pevenshall! I thought you were enjoying yourself so much there. Well, dear, you were quite right to come back if you were tired. Let us have the lights, and some tea."

The barrister went to the fireplace to ring one of the bells. He happened to choose the bell nearest that angle of the chimney-piece on which Cecil had placed two sealed envelopes addressed to her husband. One contained the letter announcing her flight; the other the key of her jewel-case and wardrobe. Mr. O'Boyneville's piercing gaze alighted on these letters as he rang the bell.

"For me?" he asked, advancing his hand towards the two packets.

"No!" Cecil cried eagerly; "they are mine."

She snatched them from the mantelpiece and put them in her pocket, and then she seated herself by the table on which she was wont to make tea. Mr. O'Boyneville walked slowly up and down the room. Major Gordon kept his place by the open window. Nothing could be more inconvenient than this unlooked-for return of the barrister, which in all probability would interfere with the arrangements of the next day. The Major felt all the degradation of his position, but was determined to hold his ground nevertheless. The barrister would most likely retire to his study directly after tea, and thereby afford Hector the opportunity of speaking to Cecil before he left. There was an unspeakable dreariness, a palpable desolation in that Bloomsbury drawing-room, which oppressed Hector Gordon as he stood by the window, looking sometimes out into the square where the lamps burned dimly in the grey evening light, sometimes into the dusky room, where the barrister's figure loomed large athwart the shadows. Cecil sat in a listless attitude, waiting to perform that simple household duty which must seem such a mockery to her to-night. The lamps came presently, and the big plated tea-tray and old-fashioned urn, with impossible lion-heads holding rings in their mouths. The light of the lamps was painfully dazzling to her aching eyes. She began to pour out the tea mechanically, and the two men came to the table to take their cups from her hands. As they stood side by side doing this, the thought arose in her mind of that one treason which stands alone amongst

all the treasons of mankind ; and the figure of her lover bending over the cups and saucers blended itself horribly with the image of Judas Iscariot dipping his hand into the dish.

Mr. O'Boyneville drank his tea after his usual absent-minded fashion, staring into space as he slowly sipped the beverage. He rose after emptying his second cup and began to pace the room again, while Hector sat near the lamp-lit table watching Cecil with anxious earnest eyes.

"You scarcely expected me to-night, I suppose, Cecil?" said the barrister.

"No; I did not expect you."

"I didn't think I should return so soon; but the business I am involved in just now is a very serious one."

"Indeed!"

She spoke mechanically, feeling herself called upon to speak. Hector did not even affect any interest in Mr. O'Boyneville's conversation. A kind of sullenness had taken possession of him since the barrister's entrance; and he kept his place silently with a dogged determination to remain, knowing all the time that he had no right to be there, and that Cecil's husband had good reason to wonder at his presence.

"Yes; it is a very unpleasant business—a painful business. Of course I have only to consider the technicalities involved in it. I am consulted on a question that has arisen respecting a marriage-settlement; but when people want a counsel's opinion, they are obliged to tell him other things besides technicalities. I am very sorry for the poor woman."

"What poor woman?" asked Cecil; still because she felt herself obliged to appear interested.

"The poor deluded creature who has left her husband."

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"Ah, I forgot," said the barrister; "you don't know the story. As I said just now, it's not a pleasant story, and perhaps I ought not to talk to you about it; but I can't get it out of my head. And yet it's common enough, Heaven knows; only it seems a little worse in this case than usual, for the husband and wife had lived so happily together."

"Why did she leave him?"

This time it seemed to Cecil as if some unknown force within her compelled the question, so painful was the nature of her husband's conversation, so unwilling would she have been to continue it had she possessed the power of bringing it to an end.

"Why did she leave him?" repeated the barrister. "Who can tell? There are women in Bethlehem Hospital who believe themselves to be queens of England, and there are miserable creatures in the same asylum who have murdered families of helpless children in sudden paroxysms of madness; but not one amongst them all could seem to me more utterly mad than this woman."

"You know the husband?" said Hector Gordon. He had risen during the barrister's discourse and was standing by the mantelpiece. He felt himself in a manner called upon to take some part in this discussion, and to defend the sinners if necessary.

"Yes; I know the husband."

"Was he so devoted to his wife?"

"I am not quite sure of your idea of devotion. You see, you are a club-man, Major Gordon; you belong to the West-end and to a set of men who can afford to be what you call 'devoted.' I don't suppose you could realise the idea of a stockbroker's affection for his wife. Your City-man has very little opportunity for playing the ideal lover or the ideal husband. His wife's image may be with him even on 'Change. The details of his business are dry and dull and sordid in the eyes of other people; but he may be working for his wife all the time, and his existence may be more completely consecrated to her welfare and to her happiness than if he dawdled by her side all day on the margin of some romantic Italian lake, and only opened his lips to protest the singleness of his affection. Yes, Major Gordon, the City-man's devotion is the nobler; for it takes the form of unremitting toil and unending care, while the dawdler's love is only a shallow pretext for a sensuous laziness amidst beautiful scenery."

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CHAPTER XXXI.

ON THE BRINK.

MAJOR GORDON left Pevenshall by the mail, and on the following morning Cecil bade adieu to her friend, who was rather inclined to resent her abrupt departure.

"I don't believe a bit in Mr. O'Boyneville's summons," said Flo; "you are tired of us, and you want to go away, Cecil; you are deceiving me just as you deceived me before. However, of course I cannot keep you here against your will; and I can only regret that we have not succeeded in making you happy."

Whereupon Cecil declared that Pevenshall was all that is delightful; and that she should never forget Mrs. Lobyer's kindness and affection. The impulsive Florence would upon this have embraced her friend; but Cecil drew herself away from the embrace.

"Wherever you go, dear, I shall remember you and your goodness," she said; "and oh, Florence, I hope you will be happy."

As the two women stood for a moment holding each other's hands, and looking in each other's faces, Cecil would fain have uttered some word of warning to the friend she never thought to see again. But she remembered what a mockery any warning must seem hereafter from her tainted lips; though who so well as this poor shipwrecked creature, newly foundered on a rock, could tell of the dangers that beset a woman's pathway? Holding Mrs. Lobyer's hand silently in her own, she fancied how her friend would remember that parting when her own name had become a byword and reproach.

"Will she have any pity upon me, I wonder, for the sake of our past friendship; or will she be as merciless as the rest of the world?"

This is what Cecil thought in that parting moment, while her packages were being put in the carriage, and the imperceptible footman attended with her shawls and parasols.

"You will come to us at Christmas," cried Flo.

"I fear not, dear. Good-bye."

Cecil was seated in the carriage in the next minute, waving her hand to Florence, and a little group of young ladies who had placed themselves at the hall-door to witness her departure. Splendid Pevenshall swam before her in a mist as she looked at that group of light-hearted girls fluttering like a cluster of butterflies in the morning sunshine.

"I shall never again pass the threshold of such a house," she thought.

All through the homeward journey, she felt like a traveller in a dream. She sat in a corner of the carriage with her eyes fixed upon the changing landscape; but she saw only a confusion of undulating corn-fields and summer verdure.

She went mechanically through the business of her arrival, and reached Brunswick Square without accident; but the clamour of the London streets sounded in her ears like the booming of a stormy sea.

An unearthly quiet seemed to pervade the Bloomsbury Mansion. The respectful Pupkin uttered some faint exclamation of surprise on beholding his mistress; but beyond this Cecil heard neither voice nor sound. She avoided her own apartments while they were being prepared for her reception, and went straight to the drawing-rooms, where every thing remained exactly as she had left it five or six weeks before. The birds set up a feeble rejoicing as they recognised their mistress; but she did not approach the window where their cages hung in the London sunshine.

She looked at her watch; to-day was a question of hours. She had her packing to accomplish—a painful kind of packing, for it involved the setting aside of every trinket her husband had ever given her. She intended to take with her only the plainest dresses and the absolute necessities of her toilet; she doubted whether even these things could be really hers when once she crossed the threshold of that house. There seemed to be a kind of dishonesty in taking with her the most insignificant trifle that had been bought with Laurence O'Boyneville's money.

There was one task before Lady Cecil even more painful than the preparations for her journey, and that task was the writing of the letter which should tell Mr. O'Boyneville that his wife had decided on leaving him. How could she do it? how could she put her wickedness into words? what could she say to him? "You have never been unkind to me; I have no accusation to bring against you; you have only been un-sympathetic; and a man whom I love better than truth and honour has persuaded me to abandon you."

Never in all her life had Cecil suffered such anguish as the writing of that letter cost her. It seemed a cold, hard, cruel letter when it was written, so curtly did it announce her guilty design; but though there was little trace of feeling in the written lines, the slow tears rolled down her pallid cheeks as she wrote, and her hand trembled so violently that it was with difficulty she could make her writing legible.

"Oh, Hector!" she cried piteously; "if you could know what I suffer for your sake—for your sake!"

Somehow or other the letter was written, sealed, and addressed; and then she sat looking at it in a kind of stupor.

"If it were really not too late—if I dared ask him to release me," she thought.

But in the next moment she remembered the solemn nature of her promise, the sacrifice her lover had made to win it.

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried. "It is too late! I am bound to him by my promise."

And then she asked herself whether, if there had been no such promise, she could have remained in that house as Laurence O'Boynaville's wife. She had wronged him so much in word and in thought, that her innocence of deeper and more irrevocable wrong seemed to be of little moment. Could she look in his face without humiliation? Could she accept his confidence without dishonour? No! a thousand times no; and this being so, she was no wife for him.

"Come what may, I must leave my husband," she thought. "Oh, if I could go alone! if I could only go away by myself to some quiet hiding-place, and never be heard of any more!"

She thought this in all sincerity. Her love for the tempter had been in a great measure annihilated by the horror of the temptation. The sense of her guilt was so great an agony that there was little room in her mind for any other feeling. It seemed as if the current of Fate was drifting her along, and that she was no more than a weed, carried onward by an impetuous torrent. She knew that destruction lay before her; but she had no power to resist the force of the stream.

After the writing of the letter, she sat for some time in a listless attitude, looking vacantly at the envelope with her husband's name upon it. Her head ached with a dull pain, and there was confusion in her thoughts. She could not ponder deliberately upon the step that she was going to take. This inability to think quietly had possessed her ever since she had arrived at the fatal conclusion to which her lover had urged her. She had accepted the doctrine of necessity; she had allowed herself to be persuaded that it was her destiny to do wrong; and once having yielded to this unnatural creed, the false god she had created was stronger than herself, and she became indeed a powerless creature in the hands of Fate.

Apollo had spoken; sorrow and shame lay before her, her inevitable portion.

The day crept on, and she knew that with every hour the current that was drifting her gathered new strength. Hector

was to devote this day to the settlement of his own affairs; for a man has need to make some little preparation on the eve of an exile that may last his lifetime. The day crept on—a dull sultry day at the close of August—and still Cecil kept her listless attitude by the table with her husband's letter lying before her. She knew that she was not to expect any visit from Hector until late in the afternoon, since the business he had to transact would occupy the best part of his day. But though she was lonely and yearned, she felt no eagerness for his coming. What relief or consolation could he bring her? What was he but her accomplice in wrong, with whom she had plotted a crime, and to whom she was pledged for the due accomplishment of that evil deed?

Amid the many thoughts that succeeded one another in the confusion of her brain, there was the thought that guilty wretches who had plotted the details of a murder must feel very much as she felt to-day. She could fancy them, when all had been planned, and the hour appointed, waiting in weary idleness for the time to come. She could fancy them watching the slow hands upon the dial, and wishing either that time could come to a dead stop for ever and ever, or that the hour had arrived and the deed were done. The stillness of the house seemed to her like the stillness that precedes death and horror. She fancied her husband coming home from his journey in a day or two to find the same quiet in the house, and his wife's letter waiting for him on the table.

"If he loved me, the blow would kill him," she thought; "but he does not love me. His profession is all the world to him. If he had loved me, I think it would have been easy for me to confess my wickedness and ask his forgiveness. He will be sorry, perhaps,—more sorry for me than for himself,—but his grief will not last long. He will have Westminster Hall, and his hope of getting into Parliament. He is not like Hector; he would never have allowed his love for me to interfere with his career."

It was nearly five o'clock when she aroused herself from this miserable apathy and went to her room to begin the preparations for to-morrow's flight. She was to dine at half-past six, so she had brief leisure for her work. One by one she set aside the jewels that her husband had given her. They were not very numerous, but they were valuable, and in a simple taste that did credit to Mr. O'Boyneville's judgment.

Like that wretched wife in Kotzebue's tragedy, Lady Cecil could not fail to remember the occasion on which each gift had been presented. The emerald-and-diamond bracelet on her birthday; the cameos in Etruscan setting on the anni-

versary of her marriage ; the suite of turquoise rings and bracelets in solid bands of lustreless gold, bestowed upon her in commemoration of some professional triumph of Mr. O'Boynerville's, as grand in its way as Erskine's defence of Hardy. The thought of her husband's quiet pleasure in these offerings came back to her as she touched them.

"I think he must have loved me then," she murmured, as she remembered the ~~place~~ on which he had taken the case of cameos from his pocket, and lay it on the little table by which she sat at work. He had ~~looked~~ ~~at~~ ~~her~~ a little at that time, she thought! he had loved ~~her~~ a little when he sought her as his wife ; but always with that moderate and negative affection for which alone there is room in the breast of a man who devotes himself to an arduous profession. It had not been given to Ceecil to understand the possibility of hidden fires burning steadily beneath the dull outward crust of the working man's nature. She did not know the capacity for deep and passionate feeling which may exist in the nature of a man whose daily labour leaves him no leisure for the revelation of the better and brighter part of his mind. She had expected to find a husband only an improved edition of a lover ; and finding him something altogether different—a creature who accepted her affection as a matter of course, and was disagreeably candid on the subject of an unbecoming bonnet,—she concluded all at once that she was no longer beloved, and that her life was desolate.

The dismal dinner-hour had arrived by the time she had collected the trinkets in her jewel-case, and had packed two or three dresses and her most indispensable possessions in the one trunk which she was to take with her. She went to the dining-room, and made a miserable pretence of dining, with the inestimable Pupkin in attendance, and the evening sunlight shining into the dingy pictures on the wall opposite to her. Every thing in Brunswick Square looked unspeakably dull and faded and dusty after the splendour of Pevenshall. She thought of the moonlit terrace, and the fair summer landscape sanctified by the night. The very tones of Heeter Gordon's passionate pleading came back to her ears ; but they moved her with no answering thrill of passion ; her love had perished in the misery which it had brought upon her. She thought of that little village in Brittany which he had described to her so eloquently ; the rustic retreat in which they were to spend the first few months of their union—oh God, what a union ! A vague horror was mingled even with the thought of that pine-clad mountain and the purple sea. Her lover had dwelt so fondly on the beauty of the scene ; and yet, in Brunswick Square, with the summer sunshine coming to her on a

slanting column of dust, and with a street-organ droning in the distance, she thought of that far-away paradise with a shudder. In this crisis of her fate, she felt like a creature standing between two lives—the dull slow river of commonplace existence; the stormy ocean of passion and guilt. She looked backward to the river with a vague yearning; she looked forward to the ocean with an unutterable fear.

The shadowy banquet occupied less than half an hour, and it was only seven o'clock, when Cecil went back to the drawing-room. Seven: he would be with her soon! He too would have made his pretence of dining, no doubt, at one of his clubs. The crisis in a well-bred man's fate must be desperate indeed when he abandons that pretence of dining, or faces the universe with a reckless toilet. Seven. The windows were open; the canaries were making a discordant scraping with their beaks against the wires of the cages, and noisy children were emerging from the square. Cecil looked down at them from her window, and remembered the stories she had heard of women who had run away from such households as those. She remembered one especial history,—the wretched story of a woman who abandoned her husband and children under the influence of an infatuation which remained an unsolvable mystery to the last. It was from Brighton that the hapless creature took flight; and she told one of the few friends who remained to her after that time, how at the last, just as she had crossed the threshold of her husband's house, she heard, or fancied that she heard, a cry from one of her children, and would have gone back—would at that ultimate moment have repented and returned—if a cruel wind had not closed the door in her face, and set the seal upon her doom. She had not the courage to ring the bell. She went away to keep her tryst with the man who had made himself her master and to have her name a byword and reproach for ever after that fatal day.

The wheels of an impetuous hansom ground against the curb-stone while Lady Cecil stood at the window thinking of this dismal story; and her lover alighted from the vehicle. He stopped to pay the driver—he must have paid the driver even if he had been going to assist in the execution of a murder—and the man drove away slowly through the smoky summer gloaming, contented with his fare.

Cecil was still standing by the window when Pupkin announced Major Gordon: she turned her head and waited for her lover; and even in that moment of waiting, as he came towards her through the twilight room, she thought how different would have been her greeting of him, if she had been his wife—if she had had any right to be glad of his coming.

"My own darling!" said Hector, in a low tender voice.

She gave him her hand in silence, and he stood by her side in the window, holding the poor cold hand, and looking down at her with unutterable affection.

"My own dear girl, how pale you are in this dim light! I hope it is the light, and that you are not really looking so ill as I fancy you look. I have done every thing, dear. I have seen the lawyers, the bankers, the stockbrokers,—every body; and am free to go to the end of the world,—to the very end of the world! look up, darling; let me see the face I used to dream of on my way back to India, after our parting at Fortinbras."

She lifted her head from its drooping attitude and looked at him with a countenance in which there was a mournful resignation that sent a chill to his heart.

"Oh my darling, if you could only look forward as happily to our future as I do; I know that there is much for you to suffer—just at first; but when once we are clear of England, and all the brightest countries in the universe are before us, the miserable past will fade away like a dream."

"Do you think so, Hector? Shall I ever forget—shall I ever forget?"

"Let it be considered my fault if you remember. I charge myself with the happiness of your life. You cannot blame me too bitterly if you are unhappy. And now, darling, let us discuss our plans for the last time. I hope they won't bring us lights. It is so nice to sit in this dreamy twilight. I shall always think tenderly of Brunswick Square, for the sake of this one evening, Cecil."

They sat by the open window, and Hector talked about the future. He talked about the future, which, by his showing, was to be one long idyl; and while he talked, the woman who sat by his side would fain have cast herself at his feet, crying:

"Release me from my guilty promise! Have pity upon me, and set me free!"

She would fain have done this, but she sat by his side and listened quietly to hopeful words that jarred strangely with the dull anguish which had possessed her all through the long wretched day.

They were still sitting in the summer dusk, when a firmer footstep than Pupkin's sounded on the landing-place, and the door suddenly opened.

"Laurence!" cried Cecil, starting to her feet, as she recognised the stalwart figure in the doorway.

It was indeed Mr. O'Boyneville, with the dust of travel upon him. He took his wife in his arms and kissed her ten-

derly; and he gave friendly greeting to Major Gordon, but he did not offer his hand to that gentleman.

"Pupkin told me of your return," he said to Cecil; "what brought you back so unexpectedly?"

It was some moments before Cecil answered, and even then she could not reply without hesitation.

"I was so tired of Pevenshall."

"Tired of Pevenshall! I thought you were enjoying yourself so much there. Well, dear, you were quite right to come back if you were tired. Let us have the lights, and some tea."

The barrister went to the fireplace to ring one of the bells. He happened to choose the bell nearest that angle of the chimney-piece on which Cecil had placed two sealed envelopes addressed to her husband. One contained the letter announcing her flight; the other the key of her jewel-case and wardrobe. Mr. O'Boyneville's piercing gaze alighted on these letters as he rang the bell.

"For me?" he asked, advancing his hand towards the two packets.

"No!" Cecil cried eagerly; "they are mine."

She snatched them from the mantelpiece and put them in her pocket, and then she seated herself by the table on which she was wont to make tea. Mr. O'Boyneville walked slowly up and down the room. Major Gordon kept his place by the open window. Nothing could be more inconvenient than this unlooked-for return of the barrister, which in all probability would interfere with the arrangements of the next day. The Major felt all the degradation of his position, but was determined to hold his ground nevertheless. The barrister would most likely retire to his study directly after tea, and thereby afford Hector the opportunity of speaking to Cecil before he left. There was an unspeakable dreariness, a palpable desolation in that Bloomsbury drawing-room, which oppressed Hector Gordon as he stood by the window, looking sometimes out into the square where the lamps burned dimly in the grey evening light, sometimes into the dusky room, where the barrister's figure loomed large athwart the shadows. Cecil sat in a listless attitude, waiting to perform that simple household duty which must seem such a mockery to her to-night. The lamps came presently, and the big plated tea-tray and old-fashioned urn, with impossible lion-heads holding rings in their mouths. The light of the lamps was painfully dazzling to her aching eyes. She began to pour out the tea mechanically, and the two men came to the table to take their cups from her hands. As they stood side by side doing this, the thought arose in her mind of that one treason which stands alone amongst

all the treasons of mankind ; and the figure of her lover bending over the cups and saucers blended itself horribly with the image of Judas Iscariot dipping his hand into the dish.

Mr. O'Boyneville drank his tea after his usual absent-minded fashion, staring into space as he slowly sipped the beverage. He rose after emptying his second cup and began to pace the room again, while Hector sat near the lamp-lit table watching Cecil with anxious earnest eyes.

"You scarcely expected me to-night, I suppose, Cecil?" said the barrister.

"No ; I did not expect you."

"I didn't think I should return so soon ; but the business I am involved in just now is a very serious one."

"Indeed !"

She spoke mechanically, feeling herself called upon to speak. Hector did not even affect any interest in Mr. O'Boyneville's conversation. A kind of sullenness had taken possession of him since the barrister's entrance ; and he kept his place silently with a dogged determination to remain, knowing all the time that he had no right to be there, and that Cecil's husband had good reason to wonder at his presence.

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"And you do not believe that your hard-working man has his own bright picture of an ideal home always before his mind? I don't think you can have studied the habits of Englishmen, Major Gordon, or you would understand the City-man better. Look about you, and behold the incarnation of English prosperity in the Englishman's home. It is for that he works. It is in order to achieve that luxurious haven

that he wastes the best years of his life in the smoke and dust and heat and turmoil of the commercial battle-ground. And what does his home represent, with all its splendour of pictures and furniture, and gardens and stables, but his devotion to his wife and children? Build what palaces he may, his clubs will give him better rooms than he can build for himself. Whatever salary he pays his cook, there will be better cooks at the Reform or the London Tavern. But the hard-working Englishman wants a home; a dining-room in which his children may gather around him as he sips his famous elaret; a drawing-room where, amidst all the splendour, there will be a corner for his wife's workbasket, a hiding-place for his baby's last new toy. And you eloquent drones of the West-end see this poor working bee—this dust-begrimed money-grub—and you say such a creature cannot know what it is to love his wife; and if the wife happens to be a pretty woman, you have neither pity nor respect for the husband. Poor, miserable, money-earning machine, what is he that he should be pitied or respected? It can be no sin to bring ruin and desolation upon such a creature's home."

"You are eloquent to-night, Mr. O'Boyneville."

"Oh, you know it is my trade to be eloquent about other people's business. I really do feel for this poor man. I have been in his house to-day: such a house—I could have fancied there had been a funeral, and that the coffin had only just been taken away; there was such palpable desolation in the place."

"And the husband," asked Cecil, with real interest this time, "was he sorry?"

"Sorry! Can you fancy the sorrow for a loss which is so much worse than death that it would be happiness to the mourner if he could awake from a dream to find his wife's coffin by his side? Sorry! Do you know what a broken life is? I do, Cecil. There are three lives ruined and broken by a woman's folly."

"Let the man who loves her bear the full burden of his guilt," said Hector eagerly. "Let him be responsible for the issue."

"God help him, poor creature!" cried the barrister.

"You pity him?"

"How can I help pitying him? You read of such a case in the papers, and think perhaps that the seducer is a very fine fellow. He has persuaded a silly woman to make her name a public disgrace, and he has destroyed an honest man's existence. All that sounds very heroic. People wonder what diabolical charm the villain possessed. There are piquant paragraphs about him in the papers: a social leader holding

him up to the execration of the million, but with a little flourish of poetry and passion for his glorification notwithstanding; and if his photograph could be published while his misdeeds had the gloss of novelty upon them, it would sell by thousands. But have you ever thought about the lives of these people after the nine-days' wonder is over, and they slip out of the public mind? Then comes the chastisement; then comes the old classic retribution: evil for evil, evil for evil. The man who did not scruple to destroy the entire scheme of another man's existence finds his own life wasted and broken. What is the universe for him henceforward?—a solitude, with the one wretched creature whom he has chosen for his companion."

"There can be no such thing as solitude with the woman he loves."

"The man who outrages honour and defies society will find his home something worse than a solitude—a prison, in which two galley-slaves pace to and fro, dragging at the hateful chain that links them together. Let the seducer love his victim never so fondly, the time too surely comes in which he learns to hate her. The time comes when the voice of a forgotten ambition reminds him how much he has sacrificed—for what? for the pale face of a penitent, whose wan eyes are filled with involuntary tears at the sight of the humblest peasant woman walking by her husband's side."

"A man must be a dastard who could count any sacrifice made for the woman he loves," said the Major.

"The man who steals another man's wife is a dastard," answered Mr. O'Boyneville. "Sooner or later he will count the cost of his folly; and the woman who has staked her salvation against the love of this one creature will awake some day to find that the game is lost. She will see the reflection of her own remorse in her lover's face, blended with something worse than remorse. She will watch his dreary, purposeless life, spent in a foreign country, under a false name most likely; and she will think what he might have been but for her. Heaven help her! She must have a servile love of life for its own sake if she does not creep quietly from the house some dusky evening to drown herself in the nearest river. Nothing but her death can set her lover free; and even her death cannot extinguish the disgrace she has inflicted on her husband's name."

A half-stifled sob sounded through the room as the barrister came to a full stop. He went to his wife and found her crying, with her hands clasped before her face.

"Forgive me, my dear," he said gently; "I forgot that this sort of story was not the thing to speak of before

you. I let myself talk as if I were in court.—Why are you going away, Major? my wife will be better presently. We won't say any thing more about these miserable runaways.—Look up, Cecil. There, you are all right now.—Must you really go?"

This question was addressed to Hector, who had taken up his hat, and was waiting to make his adieux.

"Yes; it is ten o'clock. I will call upon Lady Cecil to-morrow. I—I have something particular to say to her."

"Then I'm afraid that you must defer the something particular for a week or two. I'm going to take my wife to Devonshire by an early train to-morrow. Good-night; but I'm coming down to my study, so I can let you out myself."

"Good-night, Lady Cecil."

"Good-night."

The words were scarcely audible. She rose as she gave him her hand, and they stood for a few moments face to face, while Mr. O'Boyneville walked towards the door; Hector mutely imploring some sign, Cecil looking at him with a blank stupefied expression. To leave her thus, and on such a night—the night which was to have been the eve of a new life—was unspeakable anguish. But he had no alternative; the barrister's eye was upon him; and a word, a look might have betrayed the woman he loved. He had no opportunity to ascertain whether to-morrow's appointment at the railway-station was to be kept, or whether Mr. O'Boyneville's return was to hinder Cecil's flight. He could only take his departure after the fashion of the most commonplace visitor, and must trust all to-morrow's schemes and to-morrow's hopes to the chapter of accidents.

"Good-night, Lady Cecil," he repeated; and he tried to put as much meaning into those two words as can be infused into any two syllables of the English language.

Mr. O'Boyneville conducted his guest to the street door, and lingered on the threshold with him a few moments talking pleasantly.

"You really think of going to the West of England to-morrow?" asked the Major. There is no such thing as honour when a man is engaged in a dishonourable cause; and not being able to talk to the wife, Hector Gordon was fain to extract the information he required from the husband.

"Yes," answered Mr. O'Boyneville; "I have business in that part of the country; and as my wife is not looking well, I shall take her with me. A week or two at Clovelly, or some sea-coast village will set her up."

"Shall you start early?"

“Yes; by the eight-o’clock train.”

Half-past eight was the hour for the Dover mail, and at a quarter-past Cecil and Hector were to have met at the station. All had been planned by the Major. She was to have told her servants that she was going into Hampshire to join her aunt, and was to have ordered a hack-cab to take her to the station. All had been thought of; but now delay was inevitable, and Hector had a presentiment that in this case delay meant the ruin of his hopes. He bade good-night to the barrister, and went away from the quiet Bloomsbury quarter with a heavy heart.

Mr. O’Boyneville smiled as he closed the door upon the departing visitor. “Thank God it’s all over so quietly!” he muttered to himself. “It was best to take matters coolly. It would always have been open to me to blow his brains out.”

The barrister did not go to his study: he went back to the drawing-room, where he found his wife lying prostrate on the spot where Hector Gordon had bade her adieu. He lifted her in his arms, and carried her up stairs as easily as if she had been an infant.

He rang for one of the maids to attend on his unconscious wife; but before doing so, and before making any effort to restore Cecil from her fainting fit, he deliberately picked her pocket of the two letters which she had taken from the mantel-piece. Rapid as her movement had been when she took possession of these two packets, the barrister’s piercing glances had discovered that they were addressed to himself.

“It’s better that I should have them than any one else,” he said; as he transferred the letters to his own pocket.

He left Cecil in the care of the housemaid, and sent for a medical man who had occasionally attended his wife. All that night he sat by Cecil’s bed-side, and through the greater part of the next day he still kept his post. There was no journey to Devonshire; and Hector Gordon, calling day by day in Brunswick Square, with a desperate defiance of appearances, was apt to find a doctor’s brougham standing at the door, and for some time received an invariable answer from Pupkin—“Lady Cecil O’Boyneville was still very ill.”

It was a long wearisome illness; a low fever, with frequent delirium, and a most terrible languor of mind and body. But slow and wearisome as the malady was in its nature, Laurence O’Boyneville knew no such thing as fatigue. He nursed his wife as tenderly as ever mother nursed her fading child; snatching his broken sleep or his hasty meal now and where he could, and carrying a bag full of briefs for the coming term to the sick chamber, there to read and ponder in the dead of the night, with ears always on the alert for the faintest variation

in the low breathing of the beloved sleeper, and with his watch open before him to mark the hour when medicines were to be administered. The hired nurse who performed the commoner duties of the sick chamber, snored peacefully in Cecil's dressing-room during the dismal night-watch, and was loud in her praises of the husband's devotion,—“which if there was more like him, our dooties wouldn't be that wearin' as they are, and there'd be less complaints of givin' way to stimilants; and gentlemen which should be above blackenin' a pore woman's character would have no call to throw their Sairy Gampses and Betsy Prigses in a lone female's face,” said this member of the Gamp species.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BY THE SEA.

PSYCHE and the Zephyrs waited the last touches of the master's hand; but William Crawford painted no more. The eminent oculist would not give him any decided opinion as to the ultimate restoration of his sight.

“We must wait,” he said; “you must give me time.”

The painter obeyed his medical adviser implicitly; and after pursuing a certain course of treatment for a certain time, he went with his servant Dimond to a little sea-coast village in Dorsetshire,—still in accordance with the oculist's advice. Change of air,—change to a better and purer air than the atmosphere of Kensington, could do no harm, said the oculist, and might possibly effect some good.

William Crawford begged the oculist to select for him the loneliest and quietest spot he knew of; and to that spot he went, travelling by a night train, with a green shade over his poor useless eyes, and the factotum who had served him since the beginning of his prosperity for his sole companion and attendant.

As yet he had told his dismal secret to no one but the oculist and the man-servant. Friends and acquaintances called at the Fountains, and were told that Mr. Crawford was ill. Was it any thing serious? Oh no,—nothing serious; he had over worked himself,—that was all. The painter could not bring himself to reveal his sorrow even to his best friend; he could not bring himself to confess that his career had come to an end—that a living death had fallen upon him in the zenith of his fame. All through the long, dark, empty days,—the perpetual night of his existence,—he brooded upon his trouble:

never any more to behold the beauty of the universe ; never again to be the mortal creator of immortal loveliness. There are no words which can describe his despair when he thought that his career had ended,—that his hand would never again wield a brush, his eyes never more be dazzled by the splendour of his own colour.

He prayed night and day ; but he could not bring himself to repeat the inspired words which had formed his nightly and daily supplication before the hour of his calamity. He could not say, "Thy will be done." He cried again and again, "Oh Lord, restore my sight—restore my sight !"

He thought of other men on whom the same calamity had fallen ; but on those men it had fallen so lightly. Milton's grandest thoughts found their expression after the outer universe had become a blank to him. Beethoven achieved that which was almost a triumph over the impossible when his genius survived the loss of his hearing ; but oh, what anguish the musician must have endured when his fingers wove those divine harmonies which he was never to hear ! For the sightless painter what hope remained ? Henceforward there could be no light upon William Crawford's pathway but the pale radiance of past glories.

While his misfortune was yet new to him, the painter gave way to utter despair : he complained to no one—he demanded no mortal pity ; but hour after hour, day after day, he sat in the same attitude—dead in life. He knew that he had many friends who would have been inexpressibly glad to give him comfort in these bitter days ; friends who would have done their best to cheer his desolation with pleasant talk, grave reading, music, poetry, the stirring news of the outer world, the airy gossip of coteries. He could not bring himself to accept such consolation yet. The very thought of friendly companionship made him shudder.

"I shall never paint any more," he cried ; "I shall never paint any more. The young men would talk and think of me as they talk and think of the dead. They would be kind, and pity me ; but I don't want their pity. I want to show them that I have not emptied my sack, and that there is progress for me yet."

One day the painter groped his way to the easel on which the Psyche still stood, shrouded with dismal drapery. He plucked the veil from his divinity, and passed his tremulous hands over the canvas. They were hands as yet unused to groping in the dark, and he had none of the subtle delicacy of the blind man's touch ; but when he came to patches of solid colour here and there, he fancied he recognised familiar portions of his work.

"My Psyche's hair," he murmured; "I can feel the undulating touches of the brush; and here are her shoulders, the rounded pearly shoulders! Yes, yes, I remember; there was a thought too much of the palette-knife hereabouts."

He laid his face against the canvas presently, and some of the bitterest tears that ever fell from manly eyes dropped slowly on the picture which he could not see."

He was very glad to leave his own house and to escape from the inquiries of anxious friends and acquaintance. He had a nervous dread of any revelation of his calamity.

"Would *she* be sorry for me?" he thought; for even in this dark hour of his life his fancy took a forbidden flight now and then, and hovered about the lady of the Hermitage. "Would she be sorry? No; she would only be interested in me as a new kind of lion. She would come and beseech me to show myself at her parties. She would pet me, and exhibit me to her friends as the blind painter—the last new thing in drawing-room celebrities. No; I will not accept her pity—I will not sink so low as that. I will go and hide myself in some quiet corner, and let the world believe that I am dead, if it will."

Not even to his daughter had William Crawford confided his sorrow. She was far away from him—at Pevenshall—surrounded by gaieties and splendours; and what need had he to darken her young life with the knowledge of his affliction? He dictated a letter to the factotum Dimond, in which he informed Flo that he had hurt his hand, and was for that reason unable to write himself, but that he was in excellent health, and was on the point of starting for the seaside for a few months' rest and quiet.

The sea-coast village chosen by the oculist was one of the loneliest spots within the limits of civilisation. There was no fear of any observant stranger recognising William Crawford in the melancholy-looking gentleman who walked listlessly to and fro on the sands, leaning on his servant's arm, and never looking to the right or left. The little hamlet consisted of a cluster of fishermen's cottages, a general shop, and a rude village inn, where the voices of the fishermen might be heard sometimes after dark roaring the chorus of some barbarous ditty. One of those speculative individuals who are continually roaming the face of the earth, with a view to ruining themselves and other people in the building-line, had discovered that the air of Callesly Bay was the balmiest that ever restored healthful roses to wan and faded cheeks, and had erected an hotel, which might have had some chance of success at Brighton or Biarritz, but which was about twenty times too large for the possible requirements of Callesly Bay. Adver-

tisements had appealed in vain to the British public. The one sheep that leads the other sheep had not yet been tempted to jump through this special gap in the hedge ; and the Royal Phoenix Hotel and Boarding-house, with every possible attraction for noblemen and gentlemen, was a dreary failure. So much the better for William Crawford. What did he care if the waiters were listless and the cooking execrable ? For the last four or five months of his life he had been in the habit of eating without knowing what he ate ; and just now the most perfect achievement of culinary art would have been as dust and ashes in his mouth.

Callesly Bay suited the painter. His servant informed him that, with the exception of an invalid lady, who went out daily in a Bath-chair, and a paralytic gentleman, who took the air at his bed-room window, he was the only occupant of the great barrack-like hotel. This knowledge brought a sense of tranquillity to the painter's mind. In this quiet retreat he was safe. Here at least there were no prying eyes keeping watch at his gate ; no journalists, eager for information about every body and every thing, and ready to dip their pens into their ink-bottles to spread the tidings of the painter's calamity in less than five minutes after those tidings reached their greedy ears.

Day after day, day after day, William Crawford paced the sand of the bay upon his servant's arm, and felt the soft ocean-breezes on his face. There is no calamity so terrible, no affliction so bitter, that habit will not temper its anguish to the sufferer. Little by little, sweet Christian resignation began to take the place of dogged Pagan despair. The grief which had fallen upon him lost the first sharpness of its sting. The past, with all its artistic pride and triumph, drifted away from the present ; until it seemed to the painter that his blindness was an old familiar sorrow, and the days of his work and ambition strange and remote. Sweet fancies began to visit him as he walked slowly to and fro amid the scene of tranquil beauty which he could imagine but not see, and the subtle sense of the painter melted into the subtler sense of the poet. It is impossible for the mind of such a man to remain barren. There is in such a soul a divine light that cannot be extinguished. If the painter did not see that calm English bay in all its glory of sunrise and sunset, he saw a fairer bay, and a brighter sun going down behind enchanted waters. All the splendours of dreamland unfolded themselves before those sightless eyes. The peerless mistress of Praxiteles arose from a sunlit sea, beautiful as when Apelles beheld in her the type of his goddess. The shadows of the past grew into light in the blind painter's fancy. He forgot himself and his own loss while thinking of fairer creations than his own. The very

breath of the ocean brought divine images to his mind. It was not the coast of Dorsetshire which he trod : the sands beneath his feet were the golden sands of fairyland ; the sea whose rolling waves made music in his ears was the sea that carried Æneas to Dido , the fatal ocean that bore Telemachus to Calypso ; the wave that licked the white feet of Andromeda ; the waste of waters on which a deadly calm came down when Agamemnon launched his Troy-bound fleet, and offended Diana visited the impious hunter with her wrath.

"If I ever live to paint again, I will do something better than Dido or Psyche," said William Crawford ; for as the deep gloom of his despair vanished before the divine light of poetry, he felt a wondrous power in his fettered hands ; and brooding hour after hour on the pictures which yet remained to be painted, it seemed to him as if new lights had dawned upon him in the day of his darkness—lights that would abide with him for the rest of his existence, and guide him in his future work—if God were pleased to give him back his eyesight.

He had been at Callesly Bay for more than a month, and the ocean-breezes were beginning to lose their balmy summer warmth. He had grown accustomed to his affliction, perfectly resigned, very tranquil. Day by day he took the same walks, picturing to himself the changing beauties of the scene, and sometimes even questioning the matter-of-fact Dimond as to apparances in the sea and sky. Within the last two or three weeks he had begun to take some faint interest in that outer world to which he had once belonged ; and the factotum, who read a little better than the majority of his class, beguiled the evenings by the perusal of the newspapers, and sometimes even tried his hand upon a pocket-edition of Shakespeare, borrowed from the landlord of that splendid failure, the Royal Phoenix.

On one especially beautiful autumn afternoon the painter more keenly than usual felt the want of some companion a little more refined—a thought more sympathetic than Dimond the factotum.

He had paced the sands till he was tired, and had seated himself on a low rock, on which it had been his habit to sit since his first coming to that quiet shore. Sitting here, with the faithful Dimond by his side, Mr. Crawford abandoned himself to the influence of the balmy air. He knew that at such an hour and with such an atmosphere there must be unspeakable beauty in the western sky—delicious gradations of colour which he was never more to see ; and he would fain have wrung some translation of that unseen beauty from the prosaic lips of the factotum.

"Is the sun low, Dimond?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir,—uncommon low. I never did see any thing like the sunsets in these parts—they've got such a sudden way with them."

"I thought the sun was low. I can feel a light upon my face; there is a light upon my face,—a red light, isn't there, Dimond?"

"Yes, Sir."

"And the sky? I'm sure the sky is very beautiful—isn't it, Dimond?"

"Well, yes, Sir; it's a very fine afternoon; but, if my corns don't deceive me—asking your pardon for talking of 'em, Sir—there'll be some rain before long," added the prosaic Dimond.

"Never mind your corns, Dimond," exclaimed the painter impatiently; "I want you to tell me about the sky. I have always fancied one might do something good with an Andromeda standing out in sharp relief against an evening sky; with nothing but the rock, and the low line of purple sea, and with one white sea-gull hovering on the edge of the water," he soliloquised; while Dimond looked doubtfully to windward and pondered on the prophetic shootings of his corns.

"Tell me about the sky!" cried Mr. Crawford; "a broad band of deep rose-colour melting into amethyst; and then a pale transparent opal—eh, Dimond?"

"I don't know about opal, Sir; but there's a bluish and greenish way with it—something like that bad lumpy glass you see sometimes in wash-house windows."

"Wash-house windows! Oh Dimond, go home and get me Shakespeare,—the second volume of the tragedies,—and I'll give you a lesson in reading. You shall read me the description of Cleopatra before we go back to dinner."

The factotum obeyed, nothing loth to escape from that trying cross-examination about the sky; and the painter sat alone by the sea, listening to the low harmonies of the waves and pondering that possible picture of Andromeda. He could fancy every curve of the beautiful rounded form, sharply defined against a sombre background of rock; the dark streaming hair; the white, lovely face faintly tinged with the last rays of sunset; the sad despairing eyes looking seaward for the monster. Andromeda's pale beauty filled the painter's mind. He heard the dull moaning of the pitiless waves, the sighing of the night winds amidst the victim's hair; he could almost fancy he heard the swooping wings of the deliverer's steed; and thus beguiled by sounds that were not, it is scarcely strange that he did not hear sounds that were,—the silken rustling of a woman's dress, the soft fluttering of a woman's shawl.

"I may dream of pictures ; but I shall never paint again !" cried William Crawford hopelessly.

A gentle hand was laid upon his arm as he spoke ; and he awoke from that vision of Andromeda to know that there was a living, breathing woman by his side.

"Oh yes, you will paint again, Mr. Crawford. The trial is a bitter one ; but, please God, it will not be enduring. Why did you leave me to find out what had happened ?"

"Mrs. Champernowne !"

"Yes ; the woman whose friendship you rejected so cruelly last April, and who comes now to offer it once more—on her knees, if you like. I think one might almost venture to fall upon one's knees in this delightfully lonely place."

"Mrs. Champernowne !"

"Call me Georgina," said the widow, in her lowest and most harmonious accents. "I have come to offer you my friendship ; and to-day friendship means any thing you like. I have learnt to hate my own selfishness since that day at Kensington. I have learnt to know that a woman cannot live her own life ; that the time will come sooner or later when the presence of one dear companion will be necessary to her existence, when the loss of one friend will take every charm from her life. I have missed you so cruelly, William—so cruelly. You don't know what a dreary season this summer just departed has been to me."

"My darling, can I believe—can I imagine——"

This waking dream,—the tender words sounding in his ears, the tender hands clinging round his arm, seemed to the painter to constitute a far wilder vision than any dream of Andromeda. And yet it was all a sweet reality ; the tender hands were warm with life, and sent a magnetic thrill to the very core of his heart.

"My darling, do you want to make me mad ? Oh, Georgina, your presence here is like nothing but a dream. But if I wake presently to find that you have been trifling with me, I shall die. The anguish of such a disappointment would kill me."

"Do you know that you have behaved very badly to me ?" said the widow. "You must have known that I loved you. Remember how humbly I besought your friendship : and you scorned me and sent me away, just because I was not ready to renounce my precious liberty at a moment's notice for your pleasure. I think you might have had patience with me a little longer, Mr. Crawford. Rubens would never have had three wives, if he had not shown ; a little more forbearance to womanly caprice. But I forgive you that offence. What I cannot forgive is your cruelty in letting me remain ignorant

of this sorrow that has come upon you lately. You ought to have known that the more uncertain and hard to please a woman may be in a general way, the more fitted she is to play the ministering angel on occasions. Yes, Mr. Crawford, it was very cruel of you. All through the summer I have been thinking of you, and wondering about you,—wondering what you were doing, wondering why you did not relent and come to see me. It was only this morning that I learned what had happened from a little gossiping paragraph in a newspaper. I ordered my carriage, and drove straight to the Fountains, where I *made* the servants tell me your whereabouts."

"My darling, my angel! Are you laughing at me, Georgina; or may I really call you by these dear names?"

"You may call me any thing you please, if you will call me your wife by-and-by. Helen Vieary is with me. I only gave her twenty minutes' notice about the journey. Do you know what I said to her?"

"No, indeed, dearest."

"I am going down to Dorsetshire, Helen, to ask Mr. Crawford to marry me. Pack your things immediately, and be sure you put a white dress in your trunk; for in all probability I shall want you to be my bridesmaid."

"Mrs. Champernowne, this is pity! I will not accept such a sacrifice. My calamity has fallen upon me by God's will, and I will bear it bravely. I will not trade upon it in order to win from a woman's generosity that which I could not obtain from her love."

"Was there ever such a provoking creature?" cried Mrs. Champernowne. "Must I reiterate the confession of my folly? I did not know what I was doing that day when I rejected your love. It was only afterwards, when the days and weeks went by and I was obliged to endure my existence without you—it was only then that I knew I had lost something without which life was worthless to me. Am I to tell you again and again how dearly I love you? I have loved you so long that I cannot tell you when my love began. But it is possible that my humiliation comes too late. You have learnt to forget me, or worse, perhaps you have learnt to love some one else as you once loved me."

"To forget you—to love another woman after having known you—my idol—my goddess! I love you to distraction. My only fear is that compassion, generosity, self-abnegation——"

"Self-abnegation! You ought to know that I am the most selfish of women. But here is your servant. Will you take my arm to go back to the hotel? I have apartments in

the same hotel, and poor Helen is waiting for her dinner. Will you tell your servant to follow us, and trust yourself to me, William?"

Would he? The sweet magnetic thrill went to the core of his heart once more as Georgina Champernowne slipped her wrist under his arm. How gently she guided his footsteps! how easy the walk was to him by her side! He was no longer blind. He possessed something better than eyesight, in the protection of the woman he loved.

Before the month was out, there was a quiet wedding at Callesly Bay; and the letter which gently broke to Florence the tidings of her father's affliction was no ill-spelt missive from the factotum, but an affectionate feminine epistle, signed "Georgina Crawford," and written when the painter and his wife were on the eve of a journey to Italy.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A COMMERCIAL EARTHQUAKE.

THE autumn wore away, and the Pevenshall coverts afforded sport for a succession of visitors. This second autumn of Mr. Lobyer's married life was very much like the first. The only change worthy of record was the fact that day by day Flo saw less of her husband, and more of Sir Nugent Evershed. Howden Park was so near the millionaire's handsome dwelling-place, and Sir Nugent was such a popular person, that it was scarcely strange if the young mistress of Pevenshall deferred to him in all her arrangements, and considered no dinner-party complete without his presence. If Mrs. Lobyer had elected the elegant young baronet as her chief friend and adviser, there was no one to gainsay her election. Vague murmurs and piquant little whispers might circulate freely within a given radius of Pevenshall; but Florence was, of course, the last person likely to hear the little whispers, and not by any means a person to be warned or affrighted by the first breath of scandal if it had reached her.

Cecil was ill in London; Mr. Crawford was loitering on a sweet honeymoon ramble in the fairest pathways of Italy; and Mr. Lobyer was absorbed in gloomy watchfulness of the money-market and the cotton trade, on the horizon of which prosaic world a great eloud had been gathering during the last few months. There had been awful crashes in the commercial world; thunderbolts falling suddenly in the fairest places. Mr. Lobyer and his Manchester friends held solemn conclave

in the millionaire's snuggery, and discoursed of the failures amongst the mighty with grave ominous faces, but with a certain unction and relish nevertheless.

Florence did not even pretend to be interested in the commercial crisis or the commercial earthquakes. "Every body in our way is being ruined, I understand," she said gaily to her intimates at the breakfast-table. "Grey shirtings are obstinately bent on being dull, and those foolish people in America are putting us to all sorts of inconvenience; and every body who sells cotton is going to be ruined—at least, that's what I gather from the gloomy tenor of Mr. Lobyer's conversation. But that sort of thing is a monomania with very rich people, is it not? The more billions a man possesses, the more obstinately he broods upon the idea that he must ultimately die in a workhouse. I have heard of men with billions cutting their throats under the influence of that idea about the workhouse. But seriously I do hope that we shall not be ruined. It would be so dreadful to have one's carpets hung out of the up stair windows, and dirty men making inventories of one's china."

Thus discoursed Mrs. Lobyer in her gayest and most delightful manner, to the extreme amusement of her chosen friends, to whom the cabala of the cotton-trade was as dark a mystery as to herself. But there were one or two grave business men seated at that sumptuous breakfast-table to whom Mrs. Lobyer's frivolous talk seemed like the twittering of some innocent bird, which is premonitory of a tempest.

The painter's daughter went her own way, and there was no friendly hand to stay her progress on that dangerous path which a woman is apt to take when she wanders at her own sweet will. She was not happy. Already the glories and splendours of her life were beginning to grow flat and stale. She had sold herself for a price, and the price had been freely paid to her; but of late she had begun to wonder whether the barter of womanly pride and maidenly purity had been made on the most profitable terms within the possibilities of the matrimonial market. Pevenshall Place was a most lordly mansion; but it seemed a poor thing to be mistress of a parvenu's dwelling-place, when in the remote depths of her inner consciousness lurked the conviction that she might have reigned in the quaint old tapestried chambers of Howden, and held her place among the magnates of the land, by the indisputable right of rank, instead of the half-contemptuous sufferance accorded to money. She was not happy; that faculty for womanly tenderness and devotion which constitutes woman's highest charm and most perilous weakness had not yet been awakened in this young wife's heart. Sir Nugent Evershed's companionship

was very agreeable to her ; his devotion was the most delicious food supplied to that all-devouring monster, feminine vanity. But no pulse in Florence Lobyer's heart beat the quicker for the baronet's coming ; no blank place in her life bore witness to his absence when he left her. She liked him ; and she bitterly regretted not having met him in the days when she was Florence Crawford. But if there was indeed one tender spot in her heart, one remnant of girlish romance still lingering in her breast, it was not this elegant baronet, but a dark-eyed, bearded young painter, whose image was enshrined in that one sacred corner of the worldly soul. Sitting alone in her room, Mrs. Lobyer was apt to look pensively at Philip Foley's little *chef-d'œuvre*, and to wonder about the painter as she looked.

"I dare say he is married by this time," she thought, "and has set up a house for himself somewhere in that dreadful Islington. I can fancy his wife one of those gigantic creatures whom vulgar men call fine women," mused Flo, as she lifted her eyes to the *duchesse* glass in which her slender little figure was reflected.

But if the one green spot in the arid waste of a worldly nature was given to the landscape-painter, it was no less certain that Sir Nugent Evershed's presence was eminently calculated to endanger the domestic peace of Pevenshall. If his delicate consideration, his quiet homage, his apparently unselfish devotion did not imperil Flo's position as a wife, they had at least the effect of rendering her husband day by day more hateful in her eyes. She had never liked him, but she had married him with the honest intention of trying to like him ; just as some people go through their lives with the intention of learning the German language or thorough bass. She had tried perhaps a little, but had speedily given up the attempt in despair. And from the hour of her rencontre with Miss de Raymond she had considered herself privileged to dislike and despise the man whom she had married.

She had quarrelled with him for the first time in her life during the last few weeks ; and though the dispute had arisen out of some trifle scarcely worthy of remembrance, it had not been the less bitter. Hard words had been uttered on both sides ; the hardest perhaps by the impetuous Flo, who was apt to say even more than she meant when she felt herself aggrieved and injured.

"Thank you very much for all the civil things you've said to me, Mrs. Lobyer. I think I know *you* pretty well after the charming eandour with which you have favoured me to-day ; but I don't think you quite know *me* yet. You are very young and very inexperienced, and you have a lesson or two to learn

before you are much older. I hope I may have the satisfaction of teaching you one of those lessons."

This was Mr. Lobyer's parting-speech as he left his wife's apartment. The vague threat occasioned Florence neither alarm nor anxiety. She would have been ready to apologise to her husband, if he had given her the opportunity of doing so; but any thing in the nature of a threat was eminently calculated to steel her heart against the lord and master whom at the best she had only tolerated.

After this domestic storm there came a deadly calm, during which the husband and wife treated each other with frigid politeness; but little by little the storm-cloud passed away from Flo's sunshiny nature, and she drifted back into the good-humoured nonchalance of manner with which she had been wont to accept Mr. Lobyer, and all other necessary evils.

Of late Mr. Lobyer had been, if possible, even less agreeable than usual. A dense gloom had come down upon him; and systematically as his guests were wont to ignore his presence, there were times when he brought a chilling influence into the brilliantly-lighted drawing-room, as of a man newly arrived from some frozen region, and bearing the icy blasts of that region in the folds of his garments. Flo made one or two feeble attempts to penetrate this gloom—merely as a matter of duty—but found herself rudely repulsed. So she concluded that the monomania which is the peculiar chastisement of millionaires had attacked her husband, and that his gloomy musings were darkened by the shadow of a workhouse. After having come to this conclusion, she troubled herself with no further anxiety on a subject which was foreign to the usual current of her thoughts. Mr. Lobyer went his way, and his wife went hers; and that delightful calm which generally reigns in households where husband and wife are utterly indifferent to each other reigned for a while at Pevenshall, and might have continued, if a most insignificant event had not occurred to cloud the serene horizon. The insignificant event was the resignation of one of those superb creatures the matched footmen. How the calamity arose Mrs. Lobyer was unable fully to ascertain; but it appeared that the master of Pevenshall had expressed himself to the superb creature in language which such a creature, knowing his own value, could not and would not brook from any master living. The footman had immediately tendered his resignation, had received his salary and departed, leaving his brother lackey in lonely grandeur, and as much deteriorated in value as a Sèvres vase which has lost its companion vase.

Flo did not hear of her loss till the man had left Pevenshall.

On receiving the dismal tidings she abandoned herself for the moment to despair.

"They were so exactly the same height," she cried piteously, "and the same breadth across the shoulders. One might get two men the same height easily enough, I dare say; but what is the use of that, if one man is a lifeguardsman and the other a thread paper? And now Jones is gone Tomkins is positively useless, unless I can match him. Oh Sir Nugent, you really must assist me to find a decent match for Tomkins."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Lobyer; "I'll have no more of your matched footmen; fellows who are as insolent on the strength of their legs as your *primi tenori* on the strength of their voices. I know a man who can take Jones's place at a minute's notice."

"But will he match?" exclaimed the despairing Flo; "that is the question—will he match Tomkins?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," answered Mr. Lobyer coolly. "He'll suit me, and that's enough."

Florence opened her eyes to their widest extent, and remained for some moments staring fixedly at her husband, as in a trance. Brutal though the man was by nature, he had chosen heretofore to let his wife exercise unquestioned authority in all household arrangements; and that he should interfere with her now, that he should come between her and those sacred symbols of her state, the matched footmen, was something more than she could understand.

For a moment her breath seemed to fail her; but she recovered herself presently, and replied with fitting dignity,

"You may engage what servants you please, Mr. Lobyer; but I decline to be waited upon by any one who does not match Tomkins."

After which Mrs. Lobyer summoned the housekeeper, and requested that functionary to make arrangements for the earliest possible filling-up of the hiatus in the servants'-hall; and having so far asserted her position, Flo resumed the occupation of the moment, and dismissed the subject of the twin lackeys from her thoughts.

At dinner, however, she was reminded of her bereavement by the appearance of a stumpy, pale-faced man, in a livery which was a great deal too large for him; but who moved about amongst the other servants with a quiet self-possession and a noiseless footfall which spoke well for his past training.

She saw no more of this man till the following day, when he came into the morning-room, where she happened to be for a few minutes alone with Sir Nugent, trying a new song which he had brought her. The strange footman came into the room

to remove some flowers from a *jardinière* in one of the windows. Flo turned round from the piano to see what he was doing.

"Who told you to move those geraniums?" she asked.

"One of the gardeners sent for them, Ma'am."

The man performed his duty noiselessly, and retired.

"I don't like that man!" exclaimed the baronet, as the door closed on Mr. Lobyer's *protégé*.

"He seems a very good servant; but he doesn't match Tomkins," sighed Flo.

"He does his work quietly enough," answered Sir Nugent; "but he is not *like* a servant."

"How do you mean?"

"There's something in his manner that I don't like; a watchfulness—a stealthy, underhand kind of manner."

"Is there? I haven't noticed it. Ho might be as stealthy as an assassin in an Italian opera—so far as I am concerned—if he only matched Tomkins."

After this Mrs. Lobyer took no further notice of the servant who had been hired by her husband in place of the splendid Jones. She submitted to his presence very patiently, relying on the ultimate success of her housekeeper's researches amongst magnificent creatures of the Tomkins stamp. But Sir Nugent Evershed—who had no right to take objection to any arrangement in the house at which he was so constant a visitor—could not refrain from expressing his dislike to the strange footman; while that individual, by some fatality, seemed always to be on duty during the baronet's visits.

"I think you must have a mystical attraction for the man, as strong in its way as your antipathy to him," said Flo; "for I very seldom see him except when you are here. Really the prejudice is so absurd on your part that I can't help laughing at you."

"I never could endure a sneak," answered Sir Nugent; "and that man is a sneak. I will tell you something more than that, Mrs. Lobyer—he is not a footman."

"Not a footman! What is he then? Surely not a gentleman in disguise!"

"Decidedly not; but he is no footman. There is an unmistakable stamp upon a footman—a servants'-hall mark—which is not on that man."

Mr. Lobyer heard nothing of the baronet's objection to his *protégé*; for Mr. Lobyer had absented himself from Pevenshall of late, and was heard of now in Manchester, now in London, anon in Paris. There were vacant chambers now in the luxurious mansion; for as her guests of August and September

dropped off, Mrs. Lobyer did not care to invite fresh visitors without the concurrence of her husband. Even while going her own way, she had always made some shadowy pretence of deferring to his wishes; and he was in a manner necessary to her—a social lay figure without which her drawing-room was incomplete. His spasmodic departures to Manchester had not interfered with the arrangements of the mansion; but now that he was absent day after day and week after week, Mrs. Lobyer felt herself called upon to maintain a certain sobriety in the household over which she presided.

Visitors who had been staying in the house dropped off; and no other guests came to fill the vacant chambers. No invitations were issued for dinner-parties or hunting-breakfasts in the millionaire's absence. Major and Mrs. Henniker, and one inane young lady, were now the only guests; and Florence would have found the spacious rooms very dreary if it had not been for the perpetual droppings-in of Sir Nugent Evershed, whose horses spent the best part of their existence between Howden and Pevenshall.

He came perpetually. There was always some pretext for his coming—some reason for his loitering when he came. He had turned architect and philanthropist, and was intensely interested in these schools and cottages which Flo was going to build; and the plans, and specifications, and estimates for which were the subjects of interminable discussion. Sometimes deaf Mrs. Henniker, sometimes the inane young lady, played propriety during these long visits of the baronet. Sometimes, but very rarely, Sir Nugent and Mrs. Lobyer sat alone in the drawing-room or morning-room, or strolled up and down the terrace on some fine autumnal morning, discussing the schools and cottages.

It was upwards of a month since the new footman had replaced the splendid Jones; and during the best part of the man's service Mr. Lobyer had been absent from home. Flo's spirits drooped in the empty house. She suffered acutely from that dismal reaction which is the penalty that must be paid sooner or later by all who have tried to create for themselves a spurious kind of happiness from perpetual excitement. The long dreary evenings sorely tried Mrs. Lobyer's patience. Mrs. Henniker's Berlin-wool work, the inane young lady's performances on the piano, the Major's long stories of Indian warfare, were all alike vanity and vexation to her; and she must have perished for lack of some distraction, if it had not been for her schools and cottages and Sir Nugent Evershed.

He came to Pevenshall one cold October afternoon, when Major Henniker had driven his wife and the inane young lady

to Chiverly on a shopping expedition, leaving Florence alone in the drawing-room with a very ponderous historical work newly arrived from the London librarian; a work which the young matron set herself to read with a desperate resolution.

"I really must improve my mind," she said; "my ideas of history have never soared above Pinnock, and I have all sorts of old-fashioned notions. I don't want any thing at Chiverly; so I shall stay at home this afternoon, dear Mrs. Henniker, and devote myself to the Tudors. I am going to read about that dear, good, high-principled Henry VIII., who has only been properly understood within the last few years."

When the pony-phaeton had started with her three guests, Mrs. Lobyer ensconced herself in one of the most luxurious of the easy chairs and opened her big volume in a very business-like manner. The day was cold and windy, and fires burned cheerily at both ends of the spacious apartment.

Perhaps no historical work has ever yet been written in which the first half-dozen pages were not just a little dry. The grave historian has of late years borrowed many hints from the novelist, but he has not yet been bold enough to make a dash at his subject in *medias res*, and to start his first chapter with "'*Ventre St. Gris*,' said the king, 'I have heard enough of this matter, and will brook no further parley; the man dies to-morrow!'" Nor has he yet deigned to wind himself insidiously into his theme under cover of two travellers riding side by side through the sunset.

Mrs. Lobyer was beginning to yawn piteously over a grave disquisition upon the merits and demerits of feudalism and villeinage, when a servant announced Sir Nugent Evershed.

"My dear Sir Nugent, this is kind of you," cried Flo, closing the big volume with a sigh of relief: "I didn't expect to see you again for an age after the dreary evening we gave you on Tuesday."

"I have never spent a dreary evening in this house," answered the baronet, as he laid his hat and riding whip on a little table, and seated himself in a low chair very near Flo's; "you ought to know that, Mrs. Lobyer."

There was some shade of intention in his tone; but Florence Lobyer was accustomed to that tone, and knew how to parry all such impalpable attacks.

"Indeed, I do not know any thing of the kind," she said in her liveliest manner; "I thought you might possibly be a little tired of Major Henniker's Indian stories. You must have heard some of them several times. But he certainly tells them well."

"I confess to being heartily tired of them notwithstanding. But the attraction which brings me to Pevenshall, in spite of myself sometimes, is not Major Henniker."

Flo gave that little look of innocent surprise which is always at the command of a thorough-paced coquette.

"You have brought me some new idea for my cottages," she said, pointing to a roll of paper in the baronet's hand.

"Yes; I have a friend in Oxfordshire who has built schools for his poor, and I've brought you a sketch of his buildings."

After this there was a good deal of discussion about the merits of Tudor architecture as opposed to the Swiss-cottage or Norman-tower style of building. And then the baronet and Mrs. Lobyer began to talk of other things; and by some subtle transition the conversation assumed a more interesting and a more personal character; and Flo found herself talking to Sir Nugent more confidentially than she had ever talked to him before, in spite of their intimate acquaintance. They had been so much together, and yet had been so rarely alone, that there had been little opportunity for confidential converse between them. This October afternoon, with the early dusk gathering in the room, and the fires burning red and low, seemed the very occasion for friendly confidence. Flo talked with her usual candour of her father, herself, her husband, the empty frivolity of her life; and all at once she found that the conversation had assumed a tone which every experienced coquette knows to be dangerous. Sir Nugent was beginning to tell his companion how terrible a sacrifice she had made in marrying Thomas Lobyer, and how bitterly he above all other men mourned and deplored that sacrifice.

Even at this point Flo's liveliness did not desert her.

"Please don't call it a sacrifice, Sir Nugent; nothing annoys me so much as for my friends to take that tone about me," she said. "I married Mr. Lobyer with my eyes open, and I have no right to complain of the bargain. He has given me every thing he ever promised to give me."

"But can he give you the love you were created to inspire? No, Florence; you know he cannot give you that. There is not a field-labourer on this estate less able to comprehend you or less worthy of your love than the man you call your husband."

Before Florence could reprimand her admirer's audacity he had pounced on the little hand lying loosely on the cushion of her chair, and had lifted it to his lips. As she drew it indignantly away from him, and as he raised his head after bending over the little hand, he uttered a sudden exclamation and

started to his feet, looking across Mrs. Lobyer's head at the great glass-doors of the palm-house, which opened out of the drawing-room.

"I knew that man was a spy," he exclaimed, snatching his riding-whip from the table.

"What man?" cried Flo, alarmed by the unwonted fierceness in Sir Nugent's face.

"Mr. Lobyer's footman. He has been amusing himself by listening to our conversation. I recognised his agreeable face flattened against one of those glass-doors just this moment. Don't be frightened: there is not the least occasion for alarm; but I must ascertain the meaning of this man's insolence."

The baronet went into the palm-house, and closed the doors after him. Flo followed him to the doors, but could follow him no farther; for she found that he had bolted as well as closed them.

"Why did he do that?" she thought. "I hope he is not going to make any *esclandre*. What does it matter if the man did listen? I dare say many servants are fond of listening."

She looked through the doors, but it was very dark in the palm-house; and if Sir Nugent and the footman were there she could not see them. There were other glass-doors opening on to the terrace, and in all probability the man had made his escape by that way.

"I hope Sir Nugent won't be so absurd as to follow him," thought Flo. "He is getting very tiresome. I suppose he has been allowed to come here too often. I shall have to be dignified and make a quarrel with him."

She stood peering into the darkness for some time, but she could neither hear nor see any thing in the palm-house. She went to one of the windows and looked out upon the terrace, but she could see nothing there; so she seated herself by the fire and waited very impatiently for Sir Nugent's return.

She had been waiting more than half an hour when he came back through the palm-house.

"Well," she cried; "what does it all mean?"

"It means that the man is a private detective set to watch you by your husband," answered Sir Nugent quietly. "I dare say a person in that line of life gets a good many thrashings; but I don't think he can ever have received a sounder drubbing than the one I have just given him."

"A detective, set to watch *me!*" echoed Flo, with an air of stupefaction.

"Yes, Florence. I made the man acknowledge his calling, and name his employer. If you doubt me, he shall repeat his

confession for your satisfaction. These sort of fellows think nothing of going over to the enemy. I have made him anxious to serve me by the promise of handsome payment ; and I have made him afraid to disoblige me by the threat of another thrashing. The proceeding is worthy of your husband, is it not ? ”

“ But what does it mean ? ” cried Flo ; “ what in Heaven’s name does it all mean ? ”

“ I am ashamed to tell you.”

“ But I insist on knowing.”

“ You insist ? ”

“ I do.”

“ And you will not reproach me for any pain my revelation may cause you ? ”

“ No, no.”

“ Then if you ask me what I really think of this detestable business, I will tell you my thoughts in the plainest words. I think your husband is a scoundrel, and that he has placed that wretched sneak in this house in the hope that he might be able to trump up some flimsy evidence against your truth and honour as his wife ; evidence that would serve Mr. Lobyer in the divorce-court.”

“ Evidence against *me* !—the divorce-court ! Are you mad, Sir Nugent ? ”

“ No, Florence ; I am only telling you the naked truth in all its hideousness. Forgive me if the truth is horrible to you. I wrung the worst part of that truth out of the spy’s throat just now, when I caught him and grappled with him yonder. He spoke pretty plainly ; for I think he knew he had never had a nearer chance of being strangled than he had at that moment. Mrs. Lobyer, your husband’s conduct has been an enigma to me from the first day in which we met in Switzerland ; but in the happiness I found in your society I was content to leave that enigma unsolved. To-day, for the first time, I read the riddle. Thomas Lobyer hated me as a boy ; Thomas Lobyer hates me as a man. He has chosen to cultivate my acquaintance down here because my acquaintance happened to be useful to him amongst people with whom wealth does not stand for every thing. He has made use of me, hating me while he did so, and holding himself in readiness for the first chance of vengeance. And now he thinks the chance is in his hand ; and you are to be sacrificed to the meanest spite that ever festered in the heart of a villain.”

“ I don’t understand,” murmured Florence helplessly ; “ I don’t understand.”

“ It is difficult for a woman to understand such baseness. Your husband has set his spy to watch you. He knows that

you are good, and true, and puro; but he knows something else besides that."

"What does he know?"

"He knows that I love you, Florence. Yes, the time has come in which you must speak plainly: the time has come in which you must leave this house, which is no longer a fitting shelter for you. Mr. Lobyer knows that I love you,—has known as much, in all likelihood, for some time past; but he has waited very patiently for his opportunity, and the opportunity, as he thinks, has arrived. He has set his spy to watch us, and no doubt the spy is by this time well up in his lesson."

"What lesson? What has the man to discover?" cried Flo indignantly. "You must know, Sir Nugent Evershed, that if you had dared to speak to me before to-day as you have spoken now, you would have been forbidden this house."

The fragile little figure seemed to grow taller by two or three inches as Mrs. Lobyer reproved her admirer. She felt as much outraged by his audacity as if no spice of coquetry had ever tainted the purity of her nature. She was just one of those women who may balance themselves for ever upon the narrow boundary-wall between propriety and disgrace and never run the smallest risk of toppling over on the wrong side.

"If this man is a spy, I have no fear of him," she exclaimed resolutely. "Let him go back to his employer to tell of his wasted labour."

"Such a man as that will not allow his labour to be wasted. Your husband does not want to hear the truth: he is ready to accept any falsehood that will serve his purpose; and that man is a less-accomplished rogue than I take him for, if he cannot get enough out of the tittle-tattle of the servants' hall to make a case for some pettifogging lawyer; a case that will break down ignominiously perhaps, but which will be strong enough to tarnish your name for ever and ever."

Florence looked at her lover with a colourless, bewildered face, in which there was a brave expression of defiance nevertheless. Sir Nugent Evershed was not a good man; and if Thomas Lobyer the parvenu had basely plotted the disgrace and ruin of his young wife, Sir Nugent the country gentleman was not above profiting by the *roturier's* baseness. He did not think there was any infamy in his conduct. He admired Florence very much. He loved her as much as it was natural to him to love any body except himself, and he felt most genuine indignation against her husband. But he felt at the same time that this shameful business came to pass very conveniently for him, as it was eminently calculated to bring matters to a crisis; just as he was beginning to be rather tired

of a flirtation which had pursued its even tenor for the last twelve months without giving him any firmer hold upon the heart of the woman he loved.

The crisis had come; and he discovered all at once that he, the accomplished courtier, the experienced Lovelace, had been very much mistaken in his estimate of this pretty, frivolous, coquettish young matron. He had expected to find Florence Lobyer utterly weak and helpless in the hour of trial; and lo! to his surprise and confusion, she turned upon him resolute and defiant as a heroine, and he felt his eyelids droop under her fearless gaze.

"Why do you tell me this?" she asked. "If the tittle-tattle of the servants' hall can injure my good name, it is you who have brought that injury upon me. If your visits here in my husband's absence have been too frequent, the blame lies with you, who have had twice my experience of the world, and should have protected me against my own imprudence. I have trusted you as a gentleman and a man of honour, Sir Nugent Evershed. Am I to think that you are neither?"

"Think nothing of me, except that I love you, Florence, and that I am only anxious to protect you from a scoundrel. The presence of a hired spy in this house, and the confession I wrung from the spy, are sufficient evidence of a deep laid scheme. You must leave this house, Florence."

"I must, must I?" Mrs. Lobyer repeated innocently; "but when, and how?"

"To-night," whispered the baronet; "and with me."

Flo made her lover a low curtsy. "I ought to be very much flattered by your desire to burden yourself with me at the very moment when it seems my husband is trying to get rid of me," she said; "but I have no intention of leaving Pevenshall, Sir Nugent. If my husband has been pleased to set a spy over my actions, it shall be my business to show him that I am not afraid of spies. But it is a quarter to seven, and I must run away to dress. Good-afternoon, and good-bye, Sir Nugent. Perhaps, so long long as the detective remains, and Mr. Lobyer stays away, it will be just as well for you to discontinue your visits."

"As you please, Mrs. Lobyer," answered the baronet with a stately sulkiness.

He retired from the apartment, and waited in the portico while his horse was being brought round to him. He had known what it was to fail in his character of a Lovelace before to-day; but he had never before experienced a failure so ignominious and unexpected.

Flo tripped off to her room, smiling defiance upon insolent admirers and private detectives; but when the door of her

dressing-room was closed behind her, and she found herself alone in that sacred chamber, she buried her face in the pillows of a low sofa and burst into tears.

"What a miserable, empty, frivolous life it is!" she cried; "and what a despicable creature I am!"

The private detective disappeared from Pevenshall after his encounter with Sir Nugent Evershed. Flo made some inquiries about the man next day, and was informed by her housekeeper that he had left in a most mysterious manner without a word of warning.

"But I never liked the man, Ma'am," said the housekeeper; "there was something underhand in his manner, and I always used to feel a cold shivery sensation when he came near me."

Sir Nugent Evershed came no more to the splendid mansion on the hill; and Mrs. Lobyer waited very quietly for whatever Fate had in store for her. There was no sign of Mr. Lobyer; neither letter nor message to announce his coming. The inane young lady returned to her relatives; and Flo was fain to entreat her dear Major and Mrs. Henniker to remain with her, lest she should be left quite alone in that spacious dwelling.

"I might send for my Aunt Jane," she thought, when she brooded upon her position; "but I think a very little of Aunt Jane would be the death of me just now."

A change came over the spirit of the young matron. She was no longer the airy volatile creature who had wasted her days in skipping from one amusement to another, in exchanging an extravagant toilette of the morning for a more extravagant toilette of the afternoon. She undertook a gigantic enterprise in the way of Berlin-wool work, and sat hour after hour by her dear Mrs. Henniker's side, counting stitches and picking up glittering beads on the point of her needle. She listened with sublime patience to the Major's Indian Stories; and yet all this time the traditionary fox was gnawing its way to her heart,—emblem of all hidden care courageously endured.

She knew that a crisis in her life had come. She knew that there was something ominous in Mr. Lobyer's long absence, his obstinate silence. She remembered the foolish recklessness with which she had provoked and defied scandal. Above all, she remembered Mr. Lobyer's vague threat on the occasion of her one serious misunderstanding with him; and connecting that threat with the spy's presence, and Sir Nugent Evershed's positive assertions, Florence Lobyer saw herself menaced by no small danger.

Her husband was a scoundrel; she had known that for a

long time. False to her from first to last himself, he was yet quite capable of wreaking some terrible revenge upon her for the shadow of falsehood to him.

"I know that he can be pitiless," she thought; "I remember his face that day after our quarrel; and I know that I have no mercy to expect from him. I have not been a good wife, and I can scarcely wonder if he wishes to get rid of me; but if he had loved me when he married me, honestly and truly, as I believed that he did, I think I should have done my duty."

Mrs. Lobyer waited very patiently for the unknown danger which she dreaded from her husband's vengeance; but the days and weeks drifted by, and no prophetic cloud darkened the quiet horizon. This dull period of suspense was the most painful ordeal she had ever been called upon to endure in all her thoughtless life; and it is to be recorded to her credit that she endured it bravely.

The cloud appeared at last—a big black cloud, but not prophetic of that social tempest which Flo had dreaded. The cloud was the shadow of commercial failure. At first faint rumours came to Pevenshall; then more definite reports; at last the fatal tidings. The greatest of all the great crashes of the year was the crash with which the master of Pevenshall went to ruin. The pitiless Money Article recorded the great man's destruction very briefly: Mr. Lobyer, of the Lobyer Cotton-mills, and King Street, Manchester, of Mortimer Gardens, Hyde Park, and Pevenshall Place, Yorkshire, had failed for half-a-million.

The next tidings that came to Pevenshall were of even a darker nature; so dark and terrible indeed, that Major Heniker felt himself called upon to despatch two telegrams in Mrs. Lobyer's interest,—one to Rome, where Mr. Crawford and his wife had newly arrived; the other to Russell Square, summoning Mrs. Bushby post-haste to the succour of her niece.

Before Mrs. Bushby could arrive, Florence had discovered that some new calamity had befallen her, and had extorted the dismal tidings from the lips of the Major himself.

The commercial crash had only been the first act of the social tragedy. There had been a second and more terrible act. While the news in the Money Article was still fresh upon men's lips, Thomas Lobyer had shot himself through the head in his Manchester counting-house.

The details of his ruin are not worth recording here. By what false moves upon the chessboard of commerce, by what mad lust for gain, by what sudden impulses of caution at

moments when rashness would have been prudence, by what reckless speculation in the hour when timidity would have been salvation, by what fatal steps upon the speculator's downward road he had hurried to his destruction, can have little interest here. It may be set down to his credit as a thoroughly practical and business-like person, that no act of generosity had ever made him the poorer by a sixpence, and that no honourable scruple had ever hindered him from enriching himself at the expense of other people. His iron hand had closed relentlessly upon every chance of profit, his iron heart had been adamant to every plea. If the end of all was failure, he had at least some title to the respect of the practical; and no man could insult his memory by that half-contemptuous pity which a money-making world bestows on the good-natured *ne'er-do-well*, who has been no one's enemy but his own.

THE EPILOGUE.

AFTER the terrible crash which ended her brief married life, Florence Lobyer took shelter with her Aunt Bushby until such time as her father should return to England and be able to receive her at the Fountains. Tender letters, dictated by that generous father, and written in Georgina's elegant Italian hand, came to comfort the poor terror-stricken young widow.

No Aladdin palace floating skyward through the thin air ever vanished more completely from its sometime possessor than the splendours of Pevenshall vanished from her who had once been the queen of that gorgeous mansion. Of all the grandeurs of her married life Mrs. Lobyer did not carry away with her so much as a trinket. Iron-hearted functionaries swooped down upon the noble dwelling which honest, hard-working Thomas Lobyer the elder had created to be an abiding monument of an industrious and honourable career, and the widow was given to understand that the gown upon her back and the wedding-ring on her finger were about the only possessions she had any right to carry away with her.

Poor Florence was glad to part with the costly frivolities for which she had sold herself; she was glad to separate herself from every evidence of that ill-omened bargain. She looked back upon her past life with unspeakable horror. The letters found in her husband's desk had confirmed Sir Nugent Evershed's suspicions of that husband's baseness. They contained ample proof that Thomas Lobyer had been engaged in the attempt to get up evidence against his wife's honour at the moment when commercial ruin overtook him, and that he had

plotted a vengeance that should involve the enemy of his boyhood and the wife of whom he had grown weary in the same destruction.

It was scarcely strange, therefore, if Florenco was glad to escape from Pevenshall, and from every thing associated with her married life. She secluded herself in one of the remoter chambers of her aunt's house, and would see no one except Lady Cecil, who had early tidings of her friend's affliction, and who came to see her, looking very pale and weak after that tedious illness through which Mr. O'Boyneville had nursed her so patiently.

The two women embraced each other tenderly. For some minutes Cecil sat in silence with Flo's slender black-robed figure folded in her arms. Then they talked a little in low suppressed voices of the dreadful event which had occasioned the wearing of that dismal black raiment.

"You must come to Chudleigh Combe with Laurence and me," Cecil said by-and-by. "Mr. O'Boyneville has bought the dear old place where I spent my childhood, Flo. It was the negotiation about the purchase which took him away from Pevenshall that time. Oh Florence, I can never tell you how good he has been to me. I shall never dare to tell you how unworthy I have been of his goodness. But we are very happy now—thank God, we are completely happy now. He nursed me all through my long illness; and I used to wake and see him watching me in the dead of the night, when I was too languid to speak, and powerless to tell him that I was conscious of his goodness. It was in those long night-watches that I learnt to understand him; and now I think there is nothing in the world that could come between us."

This was all that Cecil said about herself. She stopped with her old friend for some hours; and in the course of their conversation it transpired that Major Gordon had gone to Spanish America with a party of savans and explorers, on a mission which involved as much peril as could be found on any battle-field.

Flo accepted her friend's invitation, and spent some weeks in the old-fashioned house surrounded by Devonian woodland, and within sound of the low murmur of the sea. She stayed with Cecil till she was summoned to the Fountains, where her stepmother received her with quiet tenderness that was infinitely soothing, and where she found her father just beginning to hope that he might live to paint his *Andromeda*.

"I am equal to either fortune," he said, turning his face towards his wife, illumined by a more beautiful smile than even his pencil had ever transferred to canvas; "for in Geor-

gey I have something better than mortal eyesight. I have been so happy as the poor blind slave of my Delilah, that I am almost afraid I may lose something by regaining my sight."

In that bright peaceful home, with all fair and pleasant images around her, Florence found it easy to forget the past. Sometimes when she lingered before the glass, arranging the bright rippling tresses under her widow's-cap, the image of Sir Nugent Evershed flitted through her brain.

"I was weak enough to think that he really loved me, and that if I had been free, he would have been at my feet," she thought with a blush; "and though I have been a widow nearly a twelvemonth he has never come near me, or made the faintest sign of any interest in my fate. It was very pleasant to flirt with the foolish mistress of Pevenshall Place, but Sir Nugent is too wise to marry a bankrupt cotton-spinner's widow. I begin to think there is only one person in the world who ever truly loved me."

That one person is an individual who is rising gradually in the estimation of his fellow-men as a landscape-painter, and who comes to the Fountains now and then on a Sunday evening, and seems always glad to find his way to the quiet corner where Florence sits in her widow's-weeds. If the sombre dress—invested with a grace by the artistic hands of Mrs. Crawford's milliner—happens to be very becoming, it is no fault of the young widow, who owes her present charm to no coquetry of manner, but rather to a pensive gravity, which the dismal close of her married life has left upon her. She is so young and so pretty that no one looking at her can doubt for a moment that the hour must come sooner or later when a new life will begin for her, and a bright future open itself before her thoughtful eyes like a sunshiny vista in one of Philip Foley's landscapes. There are people who venture to prophesy that the landscape-painter will be the happy individual for whose enchantment those dismal draperies of black will be transformed into the white robes of a bride.

Meanwhile life glides smoothly by at the Fountains. Never was ministering slave more devoted to an idolised master than the elegant Georgina to her husband. The bronzes, and cabinet-pictures, and Persian carpets, and Angora cats have been removed from the Hermitage to Mr. Crawford's dwelling; and the little retreat in the lane near Hyde Park is again in the market, at the moderate rent of 700*l.* per annum. It is scarcely necessary to say that Mrs. Champenowne's admirers were surprised and indignant when the tidings of her marriage fell like a thunderbolt amongst the ranks of her victims: but Time, which brings resignation to all earthly mourners, has consoled the idolaters of the widow, and they

flock to the Fountains, as they flocked to the Hermitage, to burn incense at the shrine of the most charming woman in London.

The one trouble of Mr. Crawford's married life has been but of brief duration, for the painter has regained the use of his eyes in time to see his daughter in her widow's-cap, and in time to begin his *Andromeda* before the success of his *Dido* has been forgotten by the most fickle of his admirers.

Amongst the Sunday-evening visitors at the Fountains appear very often Mr. and Lady Cecil O'Boyneville. The barrister has fought his way into the House of Commons; and there is some talk of his speedy elevation to the bench. He has removed his household gods from Bloomsbury to sunnier regions within sight of the verdant vistas of Kensington Gardens; and Mrs. MacClaverhouse tells her niece that she has reason to be thankful to the Providence that has given her so good a husband and so handsome an income.

Cecil lives to look once more upon Hector Gordon's wedding-cards; but this time the sight brings her no pang of regret. She hands the little packet to her husband with a smile and says:

"I am so glad he has married again; and I hope he will be as happy—as we are."

The barrister looks up from his *Times* to reply with a vague murmur; and then resumes his reading. But presently he looks up again with his face radiant.

"I knew Valentine would make a mess of his defence in *Peter versus Piper!*" he exclaims; "that's a case I should like to have had the handling of myself!"

THE END.

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