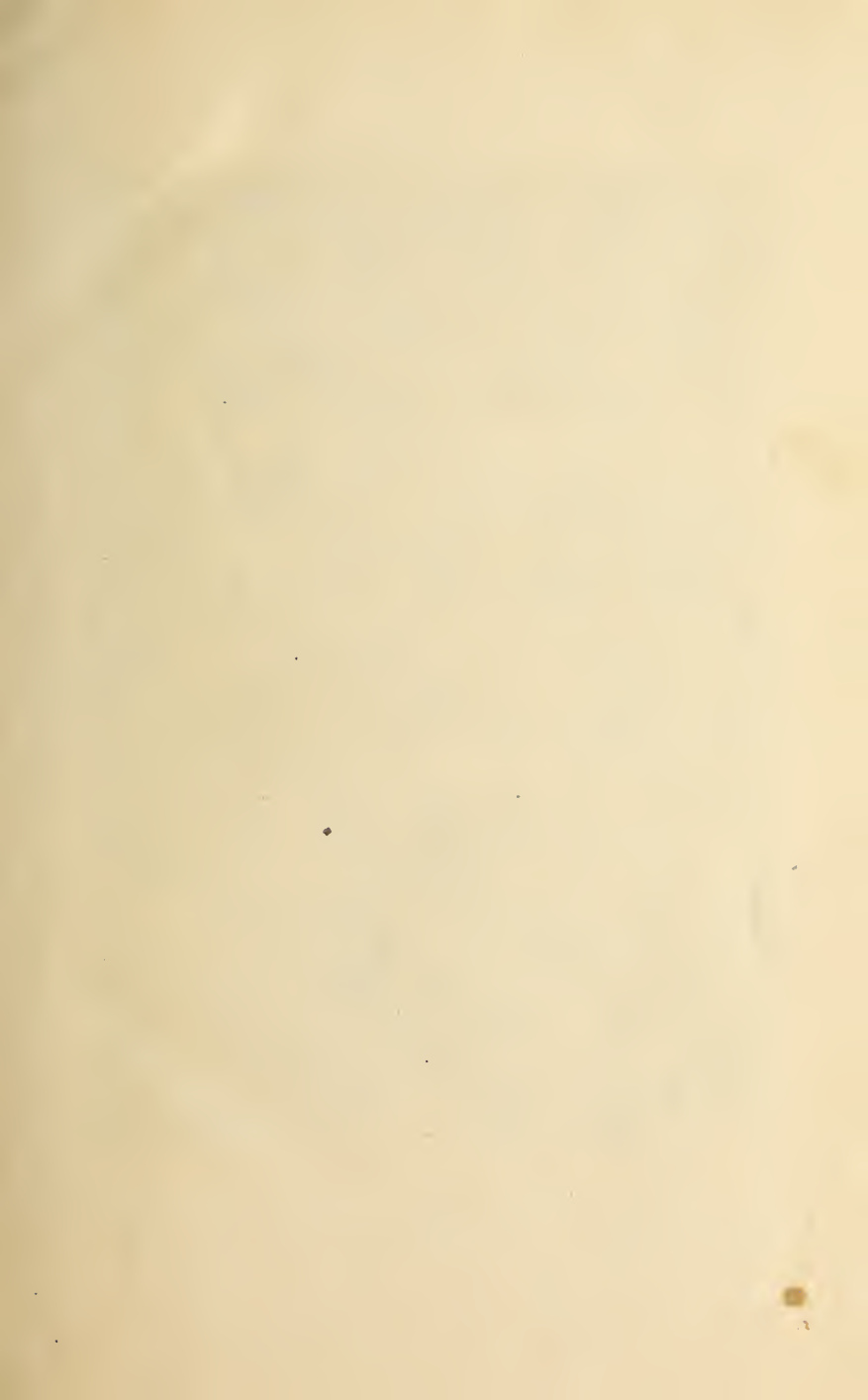


LADY SAXONDALE'S CRIMES
VOLUME XV



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The Works of
George M. M. Reynolds

**Lady Saxondale's
Crimes**

Volume V

**The Mysteries of the Court
of London**



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REYNOLDS' WORKS

CHAPTER I

A FRIEND IN NEED

YES, it was indeed Don Diego de Christoval who thus made his appearance. This, too, was the very band he had once commanded, though necessarily, during the interval of about five years since he resigned his post, there had been changes as to a few individuals, wrought by violent death on the one hand and by fresh membership on the other. But six or seven males and two or three of the females were still the same whom Don Diego had known and who knew him. To all the rest was his name familiar as a loved and an honoured one; and thus was it that the moment it was mentioned there was a general rush, prompted by enthusiastic feelings, toward him.

It was now the turn of Ramon de Collantes and all the members of the band, male and female, to be astonished at the recognition which took place between Don Diego Christoval and the captive lady, as the latter flew toward the former for protection. The Spanish nobleman shook her kindly by the hand. He could not forget that it was through her, on his arrival in England ten weeks back, he had obtained a clue to the discovery of Elizabeth Paton's residence; and, moreover, he instantaneously knew, by the manner in which she bounded toward him, that she was the captive Englishwoman whom he had expected to find with the band. He was aware that his influence would suffice to effect her liberation, and he was well pleased at having the opportunity of rendering her a service.

We will pause for a moment to explain how it happened that the count thus made his appearance upon the scene. As the reader is aware, he had left England soon after he was formally accepted as Elizabeth Paton's suitor, to settle some affairs in the Spanish capital, and procure such documents as would convince the Marquis of Eagledean he was the wealthy individual he represented himself to be. Being desirous to get back again with the least possible delay to England, so as to enjoy the society of his well-beloved Elizabeth, he brought his business at Madrid to a speedy termination, and set off in his travelling-carriage on his return. Scarcely had the banditti quitted the spot from which they bore off Kate Marshall, when the equipage of Count Christoval dashed up. From the muleteers he learned an account of what had taken place; and though they were unable to tell him the name of the Englishwoman whose abduction had thus been forcibly effected, they nevertheless made him aware that she was in a state of the most cruel tribulation. The muleteers were well acquainted with the band led by Ramon de Collantes, and, from the information they gave, Don Diego thus discovered that it was the very same which he himself had once commanded. Anxious to perform an act of generosity, he ordered his equipage to await his return; and judging from his topographical knowledge that the band would be encamped at the extremity of the gorge, he proceeded in that direction, making his appearance under the circumstances already described.

When the first greetings had taken place between himself and the lawless tribe, he made a rapid sign for Kate Marshall to retire to a little distance, while he spoke aside to the bandit-captain. Ramon de Collantes revered his late chief with truly enthusiastic devotion, and it therefore required but little suasion on Don Diego's part to induce him to consent to restore Kate Marshall to freedom. The reader can be at no loss to comprehend that it was the name of Don Diego Christoval which Kate was about to pronounce, in the hope that it would have a certain effect in her favour upon Collantes, at the very instant when the nobleman himself so timeously made his appearance.

The conference between Christoval and Collantes lasted but a few minutes, and when it was over, the former drew

forth a pocketbook containing a number of bank-notes, a large portion of which he insisted that Ramon should accept as the ransom money for Kate Marshall and to be shared amongst the band. Collantes at first positively refused to receive the bounty of his former chief, but Don Diego insisted; and when Ramon made known to his followers the amount thereof, they once more surrounded the liberal donor, pouring forth their heartfelt gratitude.

In a few hasty words Don Diego informed Kate Marshall that she was free, for which announcement she proffered the sincerest thanks and exhibited the liveliest joy. Christoval assured her that her post-chaise was still waiting in the road, adding, "We must stay a few minutes to partake of refreshments with these people, or they will consider me churlish and unfriendly, and for the sake of old associations I am unwilling to earn their displeasure. Besides, you perceive, Miss Marshall, how advantageous it may be under certain circumstances to wield an influence over these wild Catalonian bands. Tarry you therefore until I take my departure, and I will escort you back to your vehicle."

Kate could not, of course, refuse, and Ramon de Collantes, now accosting her, expressed a hope that she would not bear him any ill-will on account of his conduct toward her. She was in too good a humour at having regained her freedom to give an unfavourable response, and she proffered him her hand as a proof that all was forgiven. The entire party then sat down to the banquet, and at the expiration of half an hour Don Diego Christoval took his leave of his former friends, Miss Marshall accompanying him.

"And now, might I ask," he said, as he conducted her through the gorge, "how it is that I find you a traveller in my native land? Perhaps I may be of some service to you, for I presume it must be more on business than on pleasure that you are journeying thus alone?"

"Ah, my lord," responded Kate, a sudden gleam of hope fighting up her handsome features, which had become clouded as Christoval questioned her relative to her object in visiting Spain, "I am certain you could assist me. Your rank, your influence, your connections, might be used for the best and kindest of purposes, and to save my happiness from becoming a total wreck."

"Rest assured, Miss Marshall," responded Christoval,

“that if I can thus forward your aims, I shall be truly delighted. But pray explain the peculiar circumstances to which you thus allude.”

“I must inform your lordship,” answered Kate, bending down her eyes, while a blush mantled upon her countenance, “that I am engaged to be married to as gallant a sailor as ever dared the perils of the ocean. And a handsome man, too, a generous and kind-hearted one, is Edward Russell. He is the owner of a small trading-vessel, and commands it as its captain. By several voyages up the Mediterranean he has acquired some little property, and when he set out upon this present voyage, it was understood it was to be his last, provided success should still attend his ventures. It appears that poor Ned, anxious by a bold stroke to realize a considerable profit ere settling down in married life, freighted his vessel with a quantity of those English goods for which there is always a considerable contraband trade on the coast of Catalonia. It was in the middle of the night that he endeavoured to land his cargo about ten miles north of Barcelona; but it would appear that the revenue officers had obtained an intimation of the design, for Russell and his crew were attacked while landing on the Spanish coast. They made a desperate defence, several of the Spanish officers were killed, but my unfortunate lover was overpowered by numbers and taken prisoner, while his men managed to reach the boat, push it off, and effect their escape to the vessel. The vessel itself got away after being chased by some Spanish cruisers, and poor Ned Russell was conducted a prisoner to Barcelona. There he lies in a dungeon. His trial will shortly come on. Alas! my lord, I dare not even allude to the probable result — or I should rather say the result that is inevitable, unless you will kindly interest yourself on our behalf. Yes, our behalf,” added Kate, weeping, “because I feel that the death of him would be the death of me — and, oh, such a death, it is madness to think of it!”

“And you have journeyed all the way from England to see your lover?” said Don Diego, gazing with admiration upon the heroic young woman.

“The moment he was plunged into the gaol at Barcelona,” responded Kate, “he wrote me a letter, breaking as delicately as he could the dreadful intelligence, for poor Ned feared

that he should never see me more. And yet though in that letter he asked me not to come to him, his heart must have told him that I should do so. Yes, I should have come, were the distance even ten thousand times as great. He knows it, and expects me — I am sure he does.”

“Magnanimous young woman!” exclaimed the count, “you shall have whatsoever little assistance I may be enabled to render you. But this, I fear,” he added, gloomily, “will scarcely avail under the peculiar circumstances of the present case, for, as you tell me, there has been a conflict, blood was shed, lives were lost —”

“But Ned Russell’s broadsword slew not one of those unfortunate men,” Miss Marshall hastened to observe. “His weapon was drawn only in self-defence; he parried blows, but dealt none. His men took those lives that were lost.”

“This may be a consolation for him and for you, Miss Marshall,” observed the count, “but in the eye of the law it will scarcely be deemed a palliative of the offence, inasmuch as Captain Russell was the leader of those men who took these lives. However, the best that I can do shall be done.”

“And my eternal gratitude is your lordship’s due,” answered Kate, with fervid enthusiasm.

“Surely, Miss Marshall,” observed Don Diego, “you had some other hope of being enabled to interest yourself on behalf of your intended husband? If so, leave no stone unturned.”

“I had indeed some slight hope in a certain quarter,” responded Kate. “The Marquis of Villebelle, the French *chargé d’affaires* at the court of Madrid, is under some obligation to me on account of a certain matter wherein I was enabled a few months back to render him a little assistance.”

“The Marquis of Villebelle?” ejaculated Don Diego, to whose ear the name was well known, inasmuch as Elizabeth Paton had told him all her past history.

“Yes, my lord, it is he,” rejoined Kate, “on whom I did somewhat reckon for succour in this dreadful dilemma. I know wherefore the name has thus startled you.”

“By all means,” said the count, “fail not to communicate with the marquis, or see him, as soon as possible. Wherefore should you proceed first of all to Barcelona? Wherefore not repair straight to Madrid?”

“I was bewildered, my lord, I knew not how to act,”

answered Kate, weeping. "Methought that the best course would be to visit poor Russell first of all, to ascertain precisely how matters stood, — for I am even in ignorance whether the trial has yet taken place or not —"

"Ah, if so —" interrupted Christoval, but he suddenly stopped short, fearing to shock the afflicted young woman; for what he was about to say was that the execution of the sentence would speedily follow its pronounciation.

"I know what your lordship means," murmured Kate. "What would you advise me to do? Shall I proceed to Barcelona, or shall I pursue the road to Madrid?"

Don Diego Christoval reflected for a few minutes, and then he said, "I have made up my mind what course I will pursue in the matter, and the line of conduct I shall counsel you to adopt. I will myself repair to Barcelona."

"You, my lord?" cried Kate, with enthusiastic gratitude. "Oh, this kindness! It can never be repaid."

"Cheerfully will I interest myself on your behalf," responded Christoval. "Yes, I will proceed to Barcelona. The newly appointed captain-general of this principality is an acquaintance of mine, and I think I may faithfully promise that everything shall be suspended until after the result of the Marquis of Villebelle's appeal in Captain Russell's favour to the supreme authorities at Madrid. For the marquis must make this appeal at your intercession."

"Oh, he will, he will," exclaimed Kate, "I know that he will! And now there is hope, there is hope!" and her countenance became radiant with joy.

By this time the gorge was passed, the grove was threaded, and the road reached. The two equipages were waiting, and after a little more conversation, during which Count Christoval gave Kate instructions how to proceed when she reached Madrid, they were about to separate, when one of the brigands suddenly emerged from the wood with Miss Marshall's trunk upon his shoulder. This, in the liveliness of her joy at being rescued from Ramon's power, she had altogether forgotten. The banditti themselves had likewise forgotten it when she and Christoval had taken their leave, but scarcely had they departed from the spot when Collantes remembered that the trunk was in his possession, and he lost no time in despatching one of his men in the direction of the road. It came just in time, and Miss Marshall, having

once more expressed her fervid gratitude to Don Diego Christoval for the kindness he was showing her, proceeded in the post-chaise in the direction of Madrid, while the count took the road to Barcelona.

On arriving in this city, Don Diego at once made inquiries respecting Captain Russell, and was much shocked on learning that the trial had taken place on the previous day, that sentence of death had been pronounced, and that the culprit was to be executed, by the strangling process of the garrote, on the following morning, that is to say, the morning after the count's arrival in Barcelona. He lost not a moment in visiting the palace of the captain-general, — not the same, be it well understood, who was governor of the principality at the time when Christoval was an outlaw amongst the mountains. The present captain-general had only recently been appointed to his present post, and Don Diego had met him in society at Madrid. The general knew everything in favour of Don Diego, and nothing to his discredit; or if he were at all informed on the latter point, he did not choose to remember it on the part of one who was now possessed of considerable wealth. He therefore received the count with becoming courtesy, but he shook his head when the latter unfolded to him the nature of his business.

“It is impossible, my dear count,” answered the captain-general. “I dare not suspend the execution of the sentence. You are aware the smuggling on this coast has of late years reached a pitch perfectly intolerable, and even without collateral circumstances of a dark nature, it would be necessary to make an example. But in the present instance there are these circumstances, and they are of the blackest dye. Three lives were lost —”

“I am aware of it — too painfully aware of it,” responded Christoval, “but your Excellency must bear in mind that the unfortunate prisoner only acted in self-defence, and could not restrain his own men.”

“All this was alleged on his behalf at the trial yesterday,” responded the captain-general, “but it could not be denied that he was the leader of the men by whom the slaughter was perpetrated. It was his own vessel whence the landing was effected, his own goods that were attempted to be run ashore. No, Count Christoval, it is impossible, I cannot suspend this sentence.”

"I know not how I can persevere in beseeching your Excellency to grant me the boon I solicit," resumed Don Diego, "but nevertheless, I am emboldened to be thus urgent because I have before me the image of the young woman who said so emphatically that his death would be her death likewise."

"And you tell me, count," said the captain-general, evidently deliberating within himself, "that this young woman feels confident of being enabled to enlist the interest of the French Embassy on behalf of the prisoner?"

"I have the positive certainty that she will thus far succeed," responded Christoval. "Therefore again do I conjure your Excellency to adopt a merciful view."

The captain-general paced to and fro in the spacious apartment for several minutes, and at length stopping short, he said, "Count Christoval, I grant your request. I will order the execution of the sentence to be suspended. Do you wish to see the prisoner? If so, you shall yourself convey to him the announcement that he is respited for the present, that is to say, until the result of an appeal which is being made on his behalf at Madrid can be known in Barcelona."

"I thank your Excellency for this additional proof of kindness," answered Christoval, "and I will lose no time in visiting the prisoner."

The captain-general furnished Don Diego with the necessary authority to see Russell, and the count proceeded at once to the gaol in which the prisoner was incarcerated. He was escorted by a turnkey to the massively built dungeon where Kate's lover, heavily ironed, was seated in gloomy reflection. The unhappy man had heard his death-sentence pronounced; he saw not the slightest hope of escape from the dreadful doom thus decreed. But it was not that he feared to die on his own account; he knew that his limbs would not tremble nor his nerves quiver when ascending the ladder of the scaffold. It was on behalf of Kate, handsome and well-beloved Kate, once so gay and mirthful, that he was thus deeply desponding. He was, as she had described him, a fine, handsome fellow, somewhat coarse-featured, it is true, but with the frank, open, honest look of an English sailor, and with a form the manly symmetry of which was not even concealed by the loose apparel that he wore. He was accustomed, on board his vessel, to wear the simple habili-

ments of a British tar, and it was in that raiment he had been captured, this raiment that clothed him now.

Count Christoval was, as the reader is aware, a perfect stranger to Ned Russell, but they were not many minutes alone together before the generous-hearted Spanish nobleman won the grateful esteem of the English mariner. And tears, too, trickled down Ned Russell's sunburned countenance on learning that his own Kate had travelled all the way from England, not merely to see him, but likewise to interest herself on his behalf.

CHAPTER II

THE LONELY INN

THE reader cannot do otherwise than admire the courage of Kate Marshall in having undertaken this journey from her own native land to foreign climes on behalf of her lover. Though perfectly ignorant both of the French and Spanish tongues, she had nevertheless made her way through almost the entire length of France, and we now behold her pursuing her travel in Spain. She had set out with no companion to cheer her, with no friend to succour, guide, or defend her. Her father was laid up with a severe attack of the gout at the time she left Dover, otherwise he would have accompanied her; her mother was compelled to remain at home in superintendence of the establishment, and it would have been useless, as well as expensive, for Kate to bring any one of her sisters with her. Therefore was it that she travelled alone, her only aids being a courageous spirit and a well-filled purse.

As may be supposed, her fortune at meeting with Don Diego Christoval had cheered her considerably, not merely because he was the means of rescuing her from the power of the Catalan bandits, but likewise because he had so generously volunteered to interest himself to the utmost of his power in the cause of Ned Russell. Kate therefore pursued her journey with brighter hopes than she had previously entertained; and what with the good offices of Count Christoval at Barcelona, and the succour which she expected to receive from the Marquis of Villebelle at Madrid, the heroic young woman was very far from despairing of ultimate success in saving her lover's life. There was much in her character to admire, notwithstanding that, by the way in which she had been brought up, she was not overnice or

particular in certain respects. For instance, smuggling in her eyes was no moral offence, and we have seen her laugh approvingly at the dashing exploits of her former friend and school companion, Elizabeth Paton. But in that virtue which constitutes the chief ornament of the sex, Kate Marshall's character was unimpeachable. Never had she strayed from the path of chastity, never had she given encouragement to any libertine look that was fixed upon her. Even before she was engaged to Ned Russell, her behaviour in this respect was most scrupulously proper, and the same may be said of her sisters. She moreover possessed a generous heart and kind disposition, the reader is already aware that she did not lack courage, and thus if her merits were weighed against her faults, it would be impossible to refuse her some slight meed of admiration.

Having parted with Don Diego Christoval in the manner already described, Kate pursued her journey in the chaise. Hours passed, the evening came, and as the dusk closed in, she could not help observing that the road was much narrower than the highway had hitherto appeared to be. Indeed, it had rather the appearance of a lane than of the main route. In a few minutes the chaise entered the precincts of a forest; the shade of the huge trees completely shut out the twilight; she was enveloped in darkness. The position was far from an agreeable one. Utterly unacquainted with the Spanish language, and the two muleteers being equally unable to answer her in her own native tongue, she could not question them as to whether they were pursuing the right road. At the several places where the cattle were changed since she parted from Don Christoval, the single word "Madrid," pronounced by her lips, had served as an indication of the direction in which she was to be borne; but she was now seized with misgivings as to the good faith of the muleteers belonging to the last relay. All the terrific tales she had ever read of travellers being murdered in lonely places on the Continent trooped into her memory, and notwithstanding her courageous disposition, she could not prevent the darkest suspicions from arising in her mind. She had no defensive weapon, and she regretted that she had not provided herself therewith, for though she might be certain to succumb beneath the murderous attack of the muleteers, if such were intended, it would nevertheless be some satis-

faction to possess the means of selling her life as dearly as possible.

While all these reflections were passing through her mind, she suddenly perceived through the chaise window a light glimmering at a little distance on the right hand, and in a few minutes the lumbering equipage stopped in front of what appeared to be a small inn or public-house. Kate's spirits instantaneously rose again as the thought struck her that her fears were groundless, after all, and that this must be the place where fresh cattle were to be obtained; for she had resolved to tarry not on the route, but to journey straight on with the least possible delay toward the Spanish capital. She did not therefore intend to alight, but remained seated inside the vehicle, hoping that it would soon be in motion again. A man and a woman, both of about middle age, and by their appearance evidently the master and mistress of the little inn, came forth with a lantern. Some conversation took place between these persons and the muleteers, and then one of the latter, approaching the vehicle, opened the door and made signs for Miss Marshall to descend. The innkeeper and his wife saluted her with as much courtesy as it was in their nature to display, and also by signs testified their readiness to conduct her into the hostelry. Thinking that it was imagined she needed refreshments, but having partaken of some at the previous halting-place, she intimated by signs as well as she was able that she was in a hurry to proceed; whereupon the muleteers, pointing to their own cattle, and then in the direction of the stable joining the inn, shook their heads, as much as to imply that there was no relay to be had. Kate understood what was meant, and felt sadly perplexed. Oh, if she could but converse with these people in their own language, so as to ascertain how long she was to make up her mind to be delayed; but she could not glean this information, and her only resource was to conjecture that the journey might be renewed at the expiration of an hour or two, when the mules had enjoyed rest and bait. She accordingly followed the innkeeper and his wife into the house, where she was shown to a room on the ground floor; and without any sign or intimation from herself, a young servant-woman began to spread the table for supper.

Spain is notorious for the indifferent accommodation of its hotels, inns, and taverns, even in the largest and most

populous cities, but the secluded and inferior kinds of hostelries are of the very worst and poorest description. The one where Miss Marshall now found herself was decidedly no exception to the general rule. The room was only lighted by a single candle, and wore the most poverty-stricken appearance, without even the recommendation of cleanliness as a set-off against its sordid aspect and poor accommodation. A few rickety chairs, a rude table, and a dilapidated side-board constituted the furniture, while a few miserable prints, representing scriptural scenes, served as embellishments for the walls. There was no drapery to the window, and two of the panes being broken were stopped up with rags stuffed through, recourse not even being had to the expedient of pasting paper over the apertures.

Kate sat down, dispirited and uneasy. She liked not this halt in so lonely a place. She could not prevent her previous suspicions from reviving in her mind, for she felt almost convinced that the highroad had been deviated from, and the longer she reflected on this circumstance the more ominous did it appear. By the light of the lantern when she first descended from the vehicle, she had observed the countenances of the innkeeper and his wife, and they were not overprepossessing. She now studied the features of the attendant who was spreading the table. This was a girl of about eighteen, decidedly pretty, but with one of those countenances which are too inexpressive, too quiet and reserved, to afford much indication of the individual's character. She was attired in a very homely manner, but yet with a certain degree of neatness. Her figure was light and graceful, and the short petticoats revealed all the lower part of her symmetrical limbs. Indeed, the skirt of her dress did not descend below the middle of the swell of the leg, thus completely displaying the well-turned ankles. She walked with steps of elastic firmness, carried her head and shoulders well, and, altogether, in personal appearance, was far from uninteresting. She said not a word, probably having been already informed that the lady guest was a foreigner and spoke not the Spanish tongue; but every now and then she fixed her dark eyes with an apparent curiosity upon Miss Marshall.

The viands which the girl placed upon the table were by no means calculated to provoke an appetite, and indeed Kate was in no humour to touch them at all, even if they had

been more inviting. She however took something on her plate, so as not to give offence by altogether repudiating the fare, and when the supper was over, the mistress of the inn made her appearance. Her countenance was very much flushed, she had a strange, vacant look, and for the first few moments Kate could not comprehend what was the matter with her. She was not, however, long at a loss to discover the cause of the woman's excitement, for the smell of her breath and her unsteady movements showed that she was considerably under the influence of liquor. Disgusted beyond expression, Miss Marshall recoiled from the woman's approach, but the latter was too far inebriated to notice the sentiment of loathing which her presence thus inspired. Taking up the candle, she beckoned Kate to follow her, but as Miss Marshall hesitated, not exactly understanding what this new proceeding meant, the woman made signs to show that she purposed to conduct her to a bedchamber.

Kate was now more than ever a prey to unpleasant misgivings when she found it was intended that she should pass the night at that lonely inn in the depth of a forest. She issued from the room, and repairing to the place which had already been pointed out to her as the stable, found the muleteers attending to their animals by the light of a lantern suspended to the roof. She pointed to the mules, and then to the chaise which remained standing in front of the hostelry, but the drivers gave her to understand, as well as they were able, that it was their intention to pass the night at the inn. She assumed a peremptory air, again indicating the animals and the vehicle, and making every possible sign to show her anxiety to proceed. The manner in which they shook their heads was that of dogged determination, and Kate, finding that it was useless to urge them further, beckoned them to bring her trunk from the chaise into the hostelry. This was at once done, and the inebriate landlady guided the fellow who bore the box up the narrow and dilapidated staircase. Kate followed, and in a few moments was left alone in a wretchedly furnished little bedroom. The candle, which the mistress of the tavern had placed upon the table, dimly lighted that gloomy-looking and poverty-stricken chamber. Kate sat down, and abandoned herself to her reflections.

Her mind was still full of misgivings, but with her natural courage, she endeavoured to reason herself out of them.

She had already received experience to the effect that the roads were bad, and the posting arrangements for travelling wretchedly incomplete in Spain. Might it not therefore be, after all, that the highway did really run in the form of a narrow road through this forest, and that previous travellers on this particular day had exhausted the relays of cattle? She had noticed that the stable was a spacious one, and such as might be expected to belong to a posting-house; she had likewise observed that the mules recently unharnessed from the chaise in which she travelled were the only cattle at present in that stable. Then, too, she argued that the muleteers might not choose to carry their beasts another stage until the morning, or else that the arrival of fresh animals, which might be expected in the night, must be awaited in order to furnish a relay. Such were the conjectures by means of which Kate endeavoured to reassure herself, and then she again thought of the people of the house. It was true that the master and the mistress were of no very prepossessing countenances, but it did not follow that they should be criminal on that account. The woman was evidently a drunkard, but it was not to be thence inferred that she was anything worse. Besides, there was something interesting about the servant-girl. It was scarcely possible for any crime to be committed beneath that roof without this girl's knowledge, and Kate Marshall did not think so ill of human nature as to suppose that one of her years and appearance was an habitual accomplice in deeds of turpitude.

These were the reflections which her natural courage and intelligence suggested, but still they were not potent enough to reason away the dark suspicions and gloomy apprehensions which had forced themselves upon her mind. What, however, was she to do? To ensure her safety by flight was out of the question. She could not quit the hostelry unperceived, and if she were indeed in a nest of robbers and murderers — she shuddered at the idea — they would not hesitate to pounce upon her and consummate their purposed criminality at once if she were to make an attempt at escape. It was therefore absolutely necessary to remain and risk whatsoever perils might menace her. As for putting off her apparel and retiring to rest, — as she had at first intended when ordering her box to be brought into the hostelry, — it was out of the question. She felt that if she went to bed she

could not sleep; and, moreover, haunted by misgivings as she was, she must sit up so as to be prepared for anything that might occur.

She rose from her seat to examine the door, but fastenings there were none. This was a circumstance that did not, however, tend to confirm her apprehensions, inasmuch as it was by no means likely that such a poverty-stricken place would be furnished with any means of security of that kind. She looked at her watch; it was now half-past ten o'clock, and the sound of voices reached her ears from below. She gently opened the door and listened; the muleteers, the master and mistress of the hostelry were laughing and talking, most probably drinking together. Yes, they were drinking, for Kate now caught the sounds of bottles and mugs, and the odour of tobacco-smoke likewise reached her. She thought to herself that if those persons were thus indulging in an orgy it was by no means likely they had any criminal intentions.

Still she resolved not to be thrown off her guard. The window was at the back of the house. She opened it gently and looked forth; the giant trees of the forest were dimly seen through the deep gloom of night. Again the thought of escape entered her mind, but she knew not what might be the height of this window from the ground in the rear of the dwelling. The level of that ground might be much lower than in front; the descent from the casement would therefore be perilous to a degree, and besides, the savage growling of a dog now reached her ears. She shut the window, and sat down again. Notwithstanding her courage, poor Kate was much dispirited. Even if she were assured of her own personal safety, the delay thus experienced in her journey was sufficient to trouble her sorely. Was it not a matter of life or death on which she was bound? Was it not to save one who was dearer to her than her own existence, and therefore was not her time most precious? And, how, too, was she to while away the long mortal hours that must elapse ere morning dawned?

She felt fatigued, but dared not lie down to rest. She needed slumber to enable her to sustain the fatigues of the long journey which yet lay before her, but she felt like a person benighted amongst the snows of Alpine regions, where to yield to sleep is to meet certain death. And then,

too, she was tortured with the reflection that even if this night should pass away in safety for herself, and that the advent of the morn should enable her to smile at the fears which had haunted her, she might, after all in the meantime undergone, experience failure in her attempt to save the man whom she loved so well; she might in the end be doomed to encounter the saddest and bitterest disappointment. A few hours back her heart had been elate with hope, but now this hope succumbed beneath the dispiriting influences which surrounded her, and became absorbed in the general despondency which engulfed her soul.

Wearily, wearily did the minutes drag their slow length along. Again she looked at her watch, in the hope that at least an hour had elapsed since last she consulted it; but only half that period had fled, — it was eleven o'clock. The sound of voices still came from below. Once more she opened the door to listen, and she heard the mistress of the hostelry talking in the thick, stammering, hiccuping manner of complete intoxication. Closing the door again, she took from her trunk a book for the purpose of whiling away the time in its perusal, but she could not settle her attention upon its pages, and once more she found herself debating upon the circumstances in which she was placed. She remembered that these muleteers who accompanied this last relay had seen her draw forth her well-filled purse. She regretted that she had thus displayed it, and yet she reasoned that even if she had not done so they must naturally suppose she had ample funds to meet the expenses of her mode of travelling.

Another half-hour passed, and Kate Marshall no longer heard the sounds of voices coming from below. She was almost inclined to lie down and repose her wearied frame. She was deliberating with herself whether by piling her trunk and what little furniture there was in the room against the door she might not be enabled to guard against the surprise, when she heard light footsteps approaching across the landing outside.

The latch was raised gently, the servant-girl appeared upon the threshold, and as the light of the candle burning upon the table reached her countenance, Kate immediately saw that it was very pale. Indeed there was something of subdued horror and deep dismay in the hitherto inexpress-

ive features of the young Spanish woman, so that Miss Marshall was at once smitten with the conviction that peril menaced herself, but that she had found a friend in this girl. The latter, whose name we may as well state to be Paquetta, laid her finger upon her lip, which was naturally of bright vermilion hue, but now ashy colourless, and quivering also. Then advancing into the room, she made a sign for Kate not to be alarmed, and extinguished the light. At the same moment she took Miss Marshall's hand, and gently led her forth from the chamber. The crazy boards creaked beneath their feet, light though their steps were, and Paquetta squeezed Kate's hand as an intimation that everything depended upon the noiselessness of their tread. They ascended another flight of stairs; the girl opened a door, still maintaining the utmost caution, and Miss Marshall was guided into a miserable attic where a light was burning. This was evidently Paquetta's own chamber.

Having closed the door as noiselessly as she had opened it, Paquetta made Kate sit down upon the mean and sordid bed. Then placing herself by her side, she gazed upon her with a look of mingled compassion, interest, and affright. Having now more leisure to contemplate the girl, Miss Marshall saw that there was evidently a profound horror and dismay influencing her; and, oh, how earnestly she wished that they could understand each other by means of language, so that explanations on Paquetta's part might relieve Kate from the terrible suspense which was devouring her. She however comprehended sufficient to be aware that the girl was acting a friendly part toward her, and that the present proceeding was undertaken with the hope of rescuing her from some danger, but of what nature could not be exactly conceived, though it was scarcely difficult to surmise that it was threatened on the part of the people of the house. Kate, taking the girl's hand, pressed it warmly, and by her looks endeavoured to show the amount of gratitude she felt toward her.

Paquetta, again making a sign that the utmost caution must be observed, went to the door, opened it gently, and listened. All, however, was still, and having closed the door again, she made another sign to the effect that it was necessary to extinguish the light, but that Kate must not suspect her of any treachery. She took Miss Marshall's hand,

pressed it to her bosom, and with a look full of eloquence, gave her to understand that she would lay down her own life sooner than injure her. She then extinguished the candle, and the chamber was enveloped in total darkness.

Almost immediately afterward, steps were heard ascending the lower flight of stairs, and by their uneven pace, and the sounds of a person staggering and stumbling about, Kate had no difficulty in judging that it was the drunken landlady. A door opened and shut on the landing below, — the same landing as that on which was situated the chamber whence Miss Marshall had been so mysteriously and ominously fetched away. Then all was still again, and half an hour elapsed, during which Kate and Paquetta sat side by side upon the bed, the latter holding the hands of the former with a kind of firm, convulsing pressure in her own. By the way the girl breathed, by the frequent quick starts she made, as she doubtless fancied she heard some ominous sound, Miss Marshall conjectured that she was expecting something terrible to take place; and it may easily be supposed that her suspense was of the most poignant character, her feelings wrought up to a pitch that was scarcely tolerable. Indeed, the sensation she endured transcends all power of description. The hideous conviction of imminent danger was excruciating to her soul, and the torture thereof was still more exquisitely refined, rendered still more keen and goading, by the vagueness of her ideas as to what the precise nature of that danger could be. That she was really in a nest of murderers, she could scarcely doubt; whether she should ever go forth thence alive, was involved in a horrible uncertainty; how the Spanish girl hoped to save her by the mere change of one room to another, she could not possibly imagine.

We said that about half an hour passed from the moment that the ascent of the inebriate mistress of the hostelry was heard, — half an hour of complete silence through the house, but of torturing, rending, excruciating suspense for Kate Marshall, and likewise, as it appeared, for her Spanish companion. At the expiration of that interval, a faint sound, like the creaking of a footstep upon the stairs below, reached their ears. Kate's breath was suspended, nor could she catch the breathing of the girl, which was evidently suspended also, but she felt the clasp of her companion's fingers

tighten spasmodically on her own hands, as if under the influence of intense and awful horror. They listened, we say, with suspended breath. Miss Marshall felt her bosom upheaved, as it were, with that terrible state of mind, — upheaved, and remaining so, for a fearful consternation was upon her. Paquetta drew closer to her, now clinging to her as if conscious that something dreadful was occurring or about to take place. And there in the darkness were they enshrouded, — in the black darkness which the shade of the trees produced, shutting out whatsoever glimmering light there might be of moon or stars on the face of heaven. And that darkness appeared to be of even Egyptian depth, a darkness that might be felt; for it was associated with the idea that some crime of congenial blackness was about to be consummated.

And now a door was heard to creak on its hinges on the landing below; all was still again for a few instants, and then followed stifling, suffocating sounds, accompanied by strugglings, as of two human beings together, one endeavouring to smother out the life from the other. And therewith was blended the noise of a bed agitating and creaking and swaying to and fro, beneath the weight of the strugglers; and this lasted for more than a minute, during which Paquetta clung with the tenacity of horror and affright to Kate Marshall, thus clinging with her left arm, while her right hand was placed upon Kate's mouth, — a dread and significant intimation that no word nor cry must go forth thence. But from the girl's dreadful condition of mind altogether, Kate could not help fancying, even amidst her own horrible thoughts, that something was taking place different from what her companion had at first apprehended, and of a nature which, though fully sustaining the tenseness of her feelings, had nevertheless turned them all into another channel.

Those sounds had ceased; stillness prevailed again for a few moments, and then a sudden ejaculation of horror rang through the house. But at the very same moment, the rapid trampling of horses reached the ears of the appalled and dismayed Paquetta and Kate. Those steeds galloped up to the front of the tavern, and then the Spanish girl, with an exclamation of joy, sprang to the window, threw it open, and looking forth, cried out something, which, by its rend-

ing tones of entreaty, struck Kate as being a prayer for succour. She also flew to the little latticed casement, which was in the front of the house, and flinging her glances forth, she felt that she was saved, for the rays of a light gleaming from one of the lower windows were reflected by the sword-hilts of a body of mounted police.

The door of the hostelry was immediately burst in by these officials, and Paquetta, flinging herself with wild joy upon Kate's bosom, fainted in her arms.

CHAPTER III

EXPLANATIONS

INFINITE were the confusion, the din, and the bustle which followed this forcible entry of the Spanish *gendarmes* into the tavern. Kate, while doing her best to restore her companion to consciousness, heard the rush of footsteps up the first flight of stairs, also the loud and menacing voices of the police, and the despairing ejaculations of the landlord. In a few minutes hasty and heavy footsteps ascended the flight to the attic, the door opened, and a *gendarme*, with a candle, appeared upon the threshold. He spoke to Kate Marshall, but she understood him not, and shook her head to make him comprehend that she was a foreigner unacquainted with the Spanish tongue. At this conjuncture Paquetta came back to consciousness. The light which the official carried showed Kate where there was a pitcher of water in the room; she hastened to give the young woman some of it to drink, and in a few minutes more she was completely recovered. Then Paquetta and the *gendarme* exchanged rapid observations, and the official beckoned her and Kate to descend.

They obeyed his signal, and on reaching the landing below, they perceived the innkeeper in the custody of two of the police. Despair and horror were depicted upon his countenance; he looked the most abject wretch alive. A glance, flung down the staircase, showed Kate that the two mule-teers were also in the hands of other officers, and thus was it but too evident that she had experienced a truly miraculous escape from the hands of a set of murderous monsters. But there was yet another phase in the night's proceedings to meet her view. For on the bed in the room originally allotted to herself, and whence Paquetta had so noiselessly and

mysteriously conducted her away, — upon that bed was stretched the corpse of the landlady, her countenance blackened and swollen, presenting a hideous and loathsome spectacle, with all the evidences of having been smothered or strangled. Now did the terrific truth flash to the comprehension of the horrified Kate Marshall. The mystery was cleared up. She comprehended it all.

The measures of the *gendarmes* were promptly taken. A couple of them hastened to attach the mules to the vehicle, and into this Kate Marshall and Paquetta, by their direction, entered. Kate's trunk was not forgotten; indeed she was treated with the utmost courtesy and respect, and she comprehended that it was as a witness her presence was thus to be required elsewhere. One of the *gendarmes* drove the chaise. The muleteers and the innkeeper, their arms pinioned with cords, were compelled to march on foot in the midst of the mounted band of police, who took good care to keep a firm hold of the long ends of the ropes which bound them. We should add that no other persons belonged to the hostelry besides those already mentioned, — the landlord himself having been accustomed to act as his own hostler, the murdered woman and the servant-girl performing all the domestic duties of so limited an establishment. Before the party quitted the house where the terrific tragedy had occurred, the doors were carefully secured, the police taking the keys away with them, thus leaving the corpse of the murdered woman behind.

As the chaise rolled on through the darkness of the forest, Kate Marshall testified to the utmost of her power the immensity of that gratitude which she experienced toward her young companion, to whom she indeed deeply felt that she owed her life. She embraced her, she pressed her hands to her lips, she caressed her in the most affectionate and endearing manner; she could not lavish too many proofs of friendship, love, and attachment upon one to whom she lay under such incalculable obligations. Paquetta had by this time recovered her fortitude and presence of mind, and the joy she experienced on account of the providential arrival of the *gendarmes* absorbed a portion of the otherwise stupendous horror which the tragedy was but too well calculated to excite. Such was also the case with Miss Marshall, and her deliverance from the dreadful dangers which had

evidently menaced her appeared to have the force and significance of an omen of good in respect to the enterprise which she had in hand on behalf of her lover.

The equipage and the police, with their prisoners, proceeded to the nearest town, which was about three miles distant, beyond the verge of the forest, and situated on the highway. Indeed, as Kate subsequently discovered, this was the town where she ought to have halted, had not the muleteers diverged from the proper route to take her to a den where murderous work was purposed to be done, and where indeed a victim had been made that night, though not the one whom blackest turpitude had intended to immolate to its greed for gold. On reaching this town, the equipage stopped at a tavern, the inmates of which were summoned from their beds to receive the guests, for Paquetta remained there with Kate Marshall. A chamber was speedily provided for them, and they shared the same couch, while the police conducted their prisoners to the gaol.

On the following morning Miss Marshall and Paquetta were summoned to the office of the *alcalde*, or mayor, who was prepared to examine into the occurrences of the preceding night. An interpreter was present to assist Miss Marshall in making her deposition, and through this medium she explained how the muleteers had borne her to the lonely hostelry in the forest, how she was compelled to remain there, and the incidents which had subsequently taken place, until the arrival of the *gendarmes*. From this same interpreter she afterward learned those particulars which we shall proceed to record. But first of all we must observe that the muleteers, confessing their guilt, revealed such details as threw additional light upon the character of the hostelry and the previous night's tragedy.

It appeared that the innkeeper and his wife had tenanted that hostelry for about a dozen years, during which time they were in league with several muleteers of the district, who were frequently in the habit of conveying unwary foreigners to that den of iniquity, where the unfortunate victims were murdered for the sake of whatsoever they might have about them. Until within six months of the date of which we are writing, no servants were kept at the hostelry, but in consequence of the intemperate habits of the woman, her husband was at length compelled to take a female assist-

ant. Through the recommendation of a shopkeeper in the town, — who little knew, however, to what a place he was sending a servant, — Paquetta obtained the situation; and during those six months that she was there, she saw nothing to excite her suspicions as to the evil character of her master and mistress. On the particular night to which we are referring, Paquetta overheard some observation between the innkeeper and his wife, immediately after Kate Marshall's arrival, which suddenly filled her with the darkest misgiving. She however had presence of mind sufficient to conceal the suspicion which had thus been engendered, but she resolved to remain on the watch. Though the words which had caught her ears were vague and indistinct, she nevertheless felt assured that Miss Marshall's life was menaced, and this idea, agitating in her mind, will account for those looks of interest which she fixed upon Kate when laying the supper-cloth, and which Kate mistook for regards of curiosity. At one moment Paquetta thought of flying from the hostelry and hastening to the town, to give information to the police, but at that late hour she feared to venture through the forest. She moreover dreaded lest she should be pursued and overtaken by the landlord, who in that case would have secured his own safety by making away with her; and in addition to these reasons for abandoning her first thought of flight was the consideration that she might, after all, be mistaken, and had put a wrong meaning on the few vague and indistinct words which her ear had caught. So she tarried at the hostelry, and kept upon the watch. After Kate had been conducted up to the bedchamber, the girl listened to what was going on, but without being observed, and her worst fears were speedily confirmed. She heard her master speak to the muleteers in a way which corroborated her dark suspicions; she caught the whispered explanation which the landlord gave of how the plan was to be carried out.

“ He said,” quoting Paquetta's own words in giving her deposition to the alcalde, “ care must be taken that I should obtain no inkling of what was going on. It was therefore too dangerous to cut the Englishwoman's throat, as it would be impossible to efface the stains of blood. He accordingly declared his intention of stealing into her chamber when she was asleep, and smothering her with a bolster. This, he said,

he felt convinced of being able to do without any noise to alarm me. The remainder of the plan was thus laid down: the muleteers were to get the equipage ready at about two in the morning; the corpse should be placed inside the vehicle, to be borne into the depths of the forest, and there buried; and when I came down at the usual hour in the morning, I was to be told that the traveller had taken her departure, leaving a gratuity for me, which trifling sum the landlord would accordingly place in my hand. Such was the horrible project which I overheard, and for awhile I was utterly bewildered how to act. I was nevertheless determined to do all I could to save the English lady, even though the attempt should fail and my own life should be forfeited to my master's vengeance. I saw that there were no means of issuing forth unperceived from the house, no means therefore of getting Miss Marshall off in safety.

"The only chance of accomplishing my purpose," continued Paquetta, "was to induce Miss Marshall to remove stealthily up into my own chamber. I calculated that when my master should penetrate into her room and find she was not there, he would conclude that she had by some means or another suspected his design and made her escape. I also reasoned to myself that if he should come up to my door and ask whether I had seen her, he would be contented with the denial which I should boldly and firmly give; and as he had no reason to suppose that I had been a listener to his plans, there was the greater probability of his putting faith in that denial on my part, and adopting the conclusion that the lady escaped of her own accord and unassisted by any one else. I accordingly entered Miss Marshall's chamber, expecting to find that she had at least laid herself down, even if she were not disapparelled. I was therefore surprised to find her sitting up. It was however all the more suitable to my purpose, inasmuch as there was no need for delay; and as I saw at once that some suspicion was agitating in her own mind, I had not the slightest trouble in making her comprehend the necessity of following me. I extinguished the light in her room, so as to create as much confusion as possible on the part of my master when he should proceed thither, and by bewildering him to the utmost of my power, render him all the more accessible to the belief that Miss Marshall had fled. For a moment I entertained the idea of putting open

the window of her room, tying the bedclothes together, and letting them hang forth, to confirm the impression that she had escaped, but a second thought convinced me that this stratagem would defeat itself, inasmuch as there was a savage dog in the back premises that would have torn her to pieces if she had really sought to fly in that direction. I therefore abandoned that idea. When Miss Marshall and I were seated together in my own chamber, we heard the landlady scramble up the staircase to the first landing, and methought that she entered her own room, which was next to the one which Miss Marshall had so recently quitted.

Half an hour afterward we again heard footsteps upon the stairs. Then I knew the crisis to be at hand, or at least I fancied that my master would steal into the room, to find no one there. My emotions may be conceived when to my ears were borne the subdued and stifling sounds which but too intelligibly proclaimed that murder's work was being done. I comprehended it all: the miserable wretch was killing his own wife! For an instant I was on the point of shrieking out, of rushing to the door, of tearing it open, and at all risks of raising an alarm. But then to my mind flashed the conviction that such a course on my part would be followed by the murder of Miss Marshall and myself. Oh, it was terrible to be thus compelled to remain silent and quiet while a human life was being taken, but there was no alternative. Life is dear to me. I had vowed also to do my best to save Miss Marshall, and shocking though it were to adopt such a course, it was absolutely necessary to suffer one life to be smothered away, rather than ensure the certain taking of two, and one of these two my own. The wild cry which burst from the landlord's lips bore to my ears the conviction that he had just then discovered his horrible mistake; and while that cry was yet ringing through the house, the body of *gendarmes* galloped up to the door. Not an instant did I lose in speaking to them from the window, and imploring succour, as murder was being done beneath that roof; and it must have been Providence itself who sent them at that critical moment to bait their horses at the inn, for it was the means of ensuring our safety and uprooting a nest of assassins."

But little more remains to be told in order to make the

reader fully acquainted with the details of that tragedy in the Spanish forest. From the statement of one of the muleteers it was gathered — as indeed previously surmised — that the innkeeper's wife, being completely overcome with liquor, was ordered by her husband to get up to bed, so that the house might be quiet and the murderous scheme carried into execution as soon as possible. It was but too clear that the miserable woman staggered into the first chamber to the door of which her uncertain steps brought her, and throwing herself upon the bed, at once fell into a profound sleep. From this slumber she was only awakened for a few swift brief passing moments, to struggle and writhe in death-agonies beneath the bolster which her miscreant husband retained with tremendous force over her countenance. There can be little doubt that on her ceasing to move he felt amongst her garments for the purse which he supposed to be concealed there, and that the texture of the raiment suddenly sent the hideous, horrible, blasting conviction to his mind that it was his own wife whom he had thus assassinated.

All the depositions being duly taken down in the presence of the mayor, Miss Marshall intimated, through the medium of the interpreter, that it was of vital consequence for her to be allowed to continue her journey to Madrid, and she therefore hoped that the purposes of justice might be served without any further detention on her part. This request was promptly acceded to, there being ample evidence against the accused to ensure their conviction. The mayor was so much pleased with the conduct of Paquetta throughout the transaction that he introduced her to his wife, who proposed to take her into her service in the capacity of lady's-maid. The girl, being an orphan, and entirely dependent on her own resources, joyfully and gratefully accepted the proposition. Before parting from Paquetta, Kate Marshall — speaking by means of the interpreter — offered to make her a present of as large a sum from her purse as she could possibly spare, but the young Spanish girl replied, through the same medium, that there were services which one fellow creature could render to another of too holy and sacred a character to be recompensed by gold, and that the service she had been enabled to afford Miss Marshall was one of these. In short, she positively declined to accept anything,

and Kate parted from her with the most affectionate and lively demonstrations of gratitude.

In order to finish this episode without the necessity of recurring to it, we may as well observe that in the course of a few weeks after the tragedy in the forest the innkeeper and the two muleteers expiated their crimes upon the scaffold, death being inflicted by the infamous process of the garrote.

CHAPTER IV

THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR

KATE MARSHALL arrived safely in the Spanish capital, and took up her residence at a modest but respectable tavern to which Count Christoval had directed her amongst other parting instructions which he had given her in Catalonia. One of the principal reasons which he had for recommending her to this hostelry was that the landlady spoke English with tolerable accuracy, and being a good-hearted woman, was certain to afford Miss Marshall all necessary aid and information.

It was night when Kate arrived at Madrid on the day after the examination by the *alcalde*, and on the following morning she repaired, with the hotel porter as her guide, to the residence of the Marquis of Villebelle. Infinite was her disappointment on learning that this nobleman had left the day before for Paris, in company with the marchioness, and that they were likely to remain absent for six weeks, even if the marquis should return to that diplomatic post at all, he having the prospect of a higher and more lucrative appointment. This was a terrible blow for poor Kate. She knew not what to do, but dispirited and desponding, she retraced her way to the hostelry.

She was not, however, a young woman likely to abandon herself to utter despair, and though seriously afflicted, she summoned all her energies to her aid, that no time should be lost in adopting some specific course. She sat down and wrote two letters, — one to Count Christoval at Barcelona, beseeching his advice, the other to the Marquis of Villebelle, which, at the landlady's suggestion, she addressed to the care of the Minister of Foreign Affairs at Paris, it being certain that to this functionary Villebelle's first visit would

be paid on his arrival in the French capital; and as he was not likely to travel day and night without intermission, the letter would in all probability reach its destination before him.

On the following day Kate had the satisfaction of receiving a letter from Don Christoval at Barcelona, written, however, before he could of course have received hers. It was to the effect that he had completely succeeded with the captain-general in procuring a respite for Edward Russell until the result of her proceedings on her lover's behalf should be made known. Don Diego moreover informed Kate that the captain-general was vested with sufficient authority to extend this respite for three weeks, which he had no doubt would be done; and therefore the count expressed a hope that in the interval Miss Marshall would find her endeavours crowned with complete success. The intelligence thus conveyed in Count Christoval's letter was satisfactory even beyond her hopes, under present circumstances, for there was ample leisure in the meantime for the Marquis of Villebelle to interest himself in her lover's behalf. She felt assured that he would do so, and she awaited in confidence the arrival of letters from that nobleman in due course. But before any came, she received another communication from Don Diego Christoval, in answer to her own. It was to the effect that he himself possessed not the slightest interest with the ministers then in power, their politics and his being at extreme variance; otherwise he would have before volunteered to exert himself in those quarters. He gave Kate to understand that if he were thus to take up her cause, such a step would only prejudice it and lead to a certain refusal. It was therefore useless for him to make the attempt; while, on the other hand, it was of the highest consequence that he should remain at Barcelona in order to prevent the captain-general from signing the warrant of execution until the full period of respite which he was enabled to grant should have elapsed. The count's letter, which was penned in a strain of true brotherly sympathy, concluded by encouraging such hope as he dared hold out, and proffering such condolence as it was proper for him to express.

A few days afterward, Kate received letters from Paris. One was from the Marquis of Villebelle, couched in the

kindest terms, and enclosing a note of the most urgent entreaty to the Minister of the Interior, beseeching that the boon which the bearer thereof might solicit should be granted. The other letter was from Constance, whom we suppose we must call the Marchioness of Villebelle; and this was penned in the warmest and most affectionate strain, assuring Kate that neither herself nor her husband would ever forget the services they had received at her hands when at Dover, and proffering the sincerest sympathy. This letter also contained an enclosure; it was addressed to the wife of the Minister of the Interior, beseeching this lady to espouse the cause of Miss Marshall and to use her influence with her husband to procure the grant of the boon which would be requested. Both these letters — we mean that of the marquis to the minister, and that of the marchioness to the minister's wife — were written in English, thus proving that those for whom they were intended were conversant with that language, and also serving to convince Kate (they being left unsealed for her perusal) that the cause which she had at heart was espoused in no lukewarm manner by the generous friends whose interest she had thus secured.

Miss Marshall arrayed herself in the handsomest garb she had brought with her from England, and indeed she looked uncommonly handsome. Her fine shape, rich in its modelled but well-adjusted proportions, was set off to the best advantage, while the flutter of hope and suspense sent up a carnation hue to her cheeks. When her toilet was completed, she repaired in a hired vehicle to the private residence of the Minister of the Interior, this being about noon, and her kind-hearted landlady informing her that it was the best hour for waiting upon that functionary. On arriving at the minister's house, Miss Marshall was conducted to a waiting-room, where some half-dozen other persons desirous to see the great man were seated, and each of these was summoned in turn to the reception apartment. At length Kate found herself alone in the waiting-room, and her heart palpitated with still more anxious flutterings than hitherto, as she said to herself that the next time the door opened it would be to admit the usher who was to summon her into the presence of him who with a breath could restore her to perfect happiness or plunge her into the deepest abysm of woe. Half an hour elapsed while she thus remained alone, and it appeared

to her the longest half-hour she had ever passed in her life. But at length the door opened, the usher made his appearance, she was conducted across a spacious landing, a door was thrown open, and she entered a large and splendidly furnished cabinet, where the Minister of the Interior was negligently lounging in a large armchair, and a secretary sat writing at a desk.

When a person is about to enter for the first time into the presence of a celebrated or highly placed individual, the imagination invariably depicts to itself some portraiture as the ideal of such individual's appearance, and with the possessor of ministerial functions is generally associated the idea of at least a mature age, if not an advanced one. Thus was it that Kate Marshall had fancied she was about to behold an elderly or an old man, with gray hair, a calm and dignified expression of countenance, and sedate manners, accompanied with a certain degree of awe-inspiring reserve. The portraiture she had thus in imagination drawn was not justified in any one single point by the actual reality. The Minister of the Interior was a young man, scarcely thirty years of age, with a profusion of raven black hair, a glossy moustache, and well-curved whiskers. His features were regular, his countenance pale, with a slight tinge of sallowness; his eyes were dark and full of fire, while the somewhat bluish circles in which they appeared to be set denoted either the wear and tear of close application to business, or else the workings of strong passions combined with habits of dissipation. He was of slight figure, short of stature, but well made. His looks had a certain vivid keenness; his glances were of penetrating sharpness, as if he sought to pierce through and through the soul of any one accosting him. He was dressed in deep black, but with a certain air of fashionable elegance not altogether devoid of pretension.

We may here as well observe that the minister was one of those unscrupulous and ambitious political adventurers, who, taking advantage of the disturbed state of Spanish politics, and attaching themselves to the faction which was then dominant, had suddenly arisen from comparative obscurity into power and importance. Only a year had elapsed since the storm of insurrections, sweeping over Spain, had terminated in the abdication of the regency by the liberal-minded and magnanimous Espartero, and the reign of

military terrorism, established by Narvaez and the adherents of Queen Christina, was now rampant. Men of unscrupulous dispositions were required as the chief political agents of this revived despotism, and the present Minister of the Interior was one of these. He had been the editor of a journal noted for its violent animosity to Espartero. At the beginning of the insurrection he had done his best to defame the character of that true-hearted patriot, and his services were rewarded by a portfolio in the Cabinet. But his induction into the ministry was not merely a recompense for his past conduct; it had likewise been brought about by the want of such personages as himself to carry out the views of the new régime. Of all these circumstances Kate Marshall was ignorant, she knowing but little of Spanish politics; and the landlady of the hotel, being too much accustomed to behold mere adventurers suddenly rising into high places, had not thought it worth while to give her English guest any detailed information upon the subject.

It is not the custom for persons seeking an interview with a Spanish minister at his own private residence to send in their cards, or make any previous announcement of the object of their visit. Thus, until Kate Marshall entered that room, the high functionary whom we have described had not the least notion who was about to appear before him. He was evidently struck with the handsome person of the English woman, and his dark eyes, having surveyed her from head to foot, settled upon her countenance, where the colour was coming and going in rapid transitions according as she was swayed by the varied emotions excited in her heart. She would much rather have found the minister to be a personage corresponding with the portraiture which her imagination had drawn than what she now found him to be, for there was something about him but little encouraging to one who had so important a boon to solicit. In a word, he seemed an individual who could be merciless and implacable if he chose, and poor Kate was for the first few instants tortured by her apprehensions. He did not at once address her, but with his eyes fixed upon her countenance, evidently waited for her to give an explanation of her business. With trembling hands she drew forth the letter which the Marquis of Villebelle had sent, addressed to the minister; and as she presented it, her looks fell beneath the searching, almost burning and gloating

gaze, which he riveted upon her. Then his eyes settled upon the paper, and having perused it, he made a sign for the secretary to retire. The command was obeyed, and Kate was now alone with the Minister of the Interior.

“And you are Miss Marshall, I presume?” he said, speaking in very excellent English. “Be seated,” and he indicated a chair close by his own, and nearly opposite, so that by turning slightly around he could still survey his fair applicant from head to foot as she tremblingly took that seat. “The Marquis of Villebelle,” he went on to observe, “has written very strongly on your behalf. Will you explain the nature of the boon you seek at my hands?”

“Your Excellency may perhaps be aware,” responded Kate, speaking in tremulous accents, and still with looks bent down beneath the ardent gaze which was fixed upon her and filled her mind with a vague trouble, — “your Excellency is perhaps aware that an English sailor named Edward Russell —”

“Enough, Miss Marshall!” he gently interrupted. “I am acquainted with all the incidents.” Then, pointing to the desk at which his secretary had been writing, he added, “Amongst those papers lie the documents connected with the case. I learn from his Excellency the Captain-General of Catalonia that by virtue of the authority invested in him he has temporarily suspended the execution of the sentence. Can you point out to me any substantial reasons wherefore a commutation of the sentence should be effected — or,” added the minister, more slowly, and as Kate thought, with a strange significancy of look, “a pardon should be granted? But first of all I should perhaps inquire wherefore you yourself are so interested in this man? The Marquis of Villebelle merely represents you as being thus deeply interested, but leaves all explanations to be given by yourself.”

“Edward Russell is my affianced husband,” answered Kate, the colour now mantling vividly upon her cheeks, down which tears were at the same time trickling.

“Ah, the romance of a love-affair!” ejaculated the minister, with a smile; and as Miss Marshall raised her eyes at the moment, she thought that smile was somewhat encouraging.

“Oh, sir,” she exclaimed, “I have travelled from my native place in England with the hope of saving a life which

is dearer than my own! I have endured and suffered much, I have journeyed day and night, I have deemed no fatigue too great, no peril too menacing, to be encountered in the prosecution of my object. In the midst of a forest my life was within a hair's breadth of succumbing to the murderous designs of assassins."

"Ah, I recollect," exclaimed the minister. "The papers have been forwarded to me, and methought when I ere now read your name in the Marquis of Villebelle's letter it was not altogether unfamiliar. Yes, I have perused those official documents, sent by the alcalde of the town where the investigation took place, and from the depositions it is indeed but too clear that you experienced a very narrow escape. But you must love this Edward Russell very much that you have dared such fatigues and so many dangers on his behalf?"

"Oh, I have endured more than has come to your Excellency's knowledge," cried Kate, thus alluding to her arrest by the Catalan banditti; but instantaneously recollecting that this was an episode to which, for Count Christoval's sake, she ought not even to have glanced, she quickly added, "But no matter, sir. All that I have undergone will be esteemed light indeed if the result should prove favourable to my object. Oh, let me not implore your Excellency in vain!"

The young woman, full of acute suspense, and not knowing what to hope at the hands of this man who gazed upon her in a way that filled her heart with vague uneasiness, spoke in vehement and impassioned accents, while the tears continued to trace their crystal pathway down her cheeks. The minister still surveyed her with an attention which might be merely replete with compassionate interest, but which nevertheless had a certain expression of libertine ardour, and this expression it was that caused the trouble which was racking the afflicted applicant.

"You are too intelligent, Miss Marshall," he said, "not to comprehend that this offender — to use no harsher term — has rendered himself obnoxious to the severest criminal laws of the country. I am aware it was argued in his defence that no life was taken by his special hand, but he was the leader of a party committing an unlawful act, and the weapons of his followers spilt the blood of Spanish subjects. Were he a Spaniard himself, were he possessed of high interest and in-

fluent connections, I should still be unable to listen favourably to any appeal made on his behalf. What, then, can I say to you? With every disposition to attend to the strong and urgent recommendations of my friend the Marquis of Villebelle, with every disposition, too, to serve a young lady of your appearance, I am afraid — ”

“ No, sir, do not crush me with despair at once. Do not — do not, I entreat you! ” and Kate Marshall fell upon her knees before the minister.

“ Rise, ” he said, taking her hand; and as she obeyed him, he still continued to hold that hand in his own, while at the same instant an unmistakable expression of passionate desire glowed upon his features. “ Perhaps, ” he went on to observe, “ a means may be found — ”

Kate understood him in a moment. It was no longer possible to doubt his meaning; it was conveyed in the significancy of his look, the pressure which she felt her hand was sustaining, his entire appearance. In short, that high public functionary had revealed himself as an unprincipled libertine, about to make an overture which was comprehended even before it was uttered. Kate snatched away her hand; the flush of indignation glowed upon her features, and she was turning away, when, suddenly smitten by the idea — it was a last faint hope — that she might possibly have misinterpreted his meaning and done him an injustice, she fixed her eyes steadily upon his countenance, saying, “ Surely, sir, surely you will not suffer me to depart with the conviction that there is no mercy in the soul of a Spanish statesman. ”

“ Sit down once more, Miss Marshall, ” responded the minister, suddenly becoming cold and haughty. Then, as she resumed her seat, he went on to observe, “ I explained to you ere now that even if the plea for mercy on behalf of this offender were backed by high family interest, I should not know how to concede the point. You yourself must comprehend the difficulty of obtaining such a concession. There are no grounds upon which a pardon can be accorded or a commutation of the sentence be decreed. But if it would be difficult to yield to an interest really powerful, how can you expect me to give an affirmative answer to the intercession of a stranger? Should I not be seriously compromising myself? Should I not be liable to the attacks of those ill-conditioned

persons who are ever ready to hold up public men to scorn and hatred, to suit their own factious aims? In a word, should I not be running an immense risk by diverting the tide of justice from its course, in a case which presents not the least ground for such a proceeding on my part?"

"I am aware of all this, sir," responded Kate, "but, oh, the satisfaction which your own heart will experience —"

She stopped short, as a half-scornful smile began wreathing the moustached lip of the minister. Hope, which had again been rising — though faintly enough, it is true — in her bosom, sank down again, like the wing-wearied bird from some ineffectual soaring into a celestial region; and she felt that her heart was weeping tears of blood, at the same time that a fresh gush of the crystal tide poured forth from her eyes.

"Yes," the minister resumed, "great indeed is the risk that I should run, and permit me to remind you, Miss Marshall, that the days of romance are over. We live in times of stern reality, in times when the actions of individuals are necessarily influenced by a certain degree of personal selfishness. The Marquis of Villebelle, were he now present, would himself assure you that the boon you solicit is one which no minister would be likely to grant, save and except under circumstances of an extraordinary character. In a word, you ask a life. What if I grant it? Is there to be no recompense for me?"

"Yes, sir," responded Kate, now speaking with renewed firmness, "your reward will be found in the consciousness of having performed a deed which will raise up two of your fellow creatures from the abyss of woe to the height of exultant happiness. And in the warm gratitude of our heart —"

"Oh, that universal word 'gratitude!'" exclaimed the minister, scornfully. "It is uttered by every one who has a favour to ask. Young lady, do you not reflect that every criminal now in a Spanish gaol might send a relative, a lover, or a friend, to demand of me a similar boon, and offer a similar reward, — the boon being a life which is implored, the recompense, gratitude? In good sooth I should thrive upon so much gratitude were it of a substantial, a tangible, and a serviceable value. But it is nothing, a mere airy word, an empty name. Must I once more remind you that individual actions are now ruled by selfishness? You ask me a

life; the favour you demand is immense, — the greatest the highest which it is in mortal's power to bestow. And in return you offer a recompense the meanest, the poorest, the paltriest, the most contemptible."

"Oh, sir," murmured Kate, rising from her seat, and almost convulsed with affliction, "if the treasures of the whole world were at my disposal, I would lay them at your feet; but, alas! I have not wherewithal to give you such reward as may be commensurate with the boon that I implore."

"Gold? — who spoke of gold?" said the minister, contemptuously. "I have enough. It was not to paltry dross that I for a moment alluded. Were you an old wrinkled hag, and if you were enabled to lay at my feet countless sums of the yellow metal, I should at once return an abrupt negative to your demand. But is there no reward which a young and beautiful woman can bestow?"

"Now, sir, I dare not for another moment seek to blind myself to the true nature of your meaning," and as Kate Marshall thus spoke, her whole appearance indicated the sudden uprising of womanly pride and dignity. "You wield great and almost sovereign power, you have authority of life and death, but your present conduct toward a friendless foreign woman who implores a boon at your hands is not the finest chapter in your career. He whom I love must perhaps die, and my own heart will be broken, but the time may come when your Excellency will look back with remorseful sorrow upon the incident of this day, and when perhaps you will regret that you have thus planted a dagger into a bosom already too deeply wounded."

Having thus spoken, Kate Marshall was moving toward the door, when the minister exclaimed, "Stop! Perhaps you may yet think better of your own conduct, and then it will be too late. Remember that with one stroke of the pen I can give you the life which you demand, but also with a stroke of the pen I can order it to be taken away within the week that is passing."

"But you will not do this deed of cruelty," cried Kate, once again having recourse to intercession. "No, you will not do it. Ah, sir, you are a married man, you have a wife who doubtless loves you —"

"It is useless, young lady," interrupted the minister, "for

us to continue arguing thus. Understand well your own position, think not of mine. Your lover lies under sentence of death; with the least sacrifice on your part you can save him, — a sacrifice, too, the secret of which need never be known to him — ”

“ Enough, sir! ” ejaculated Kate Marshall, once more displaying all the prideful dignity of an injured, outraged woman. “ I have already heard too much. Edward Russell must die — ” She paused for a few moments, as the tide of unutterable feelings surged up into her throat, and the tears came to the very brims of her eyes, but with an almost preterhuman effort she kept them back, and in a voice of unnatural calmness went on to say, “ Yes, he must die, for he would not consent to be saved at such a sacrifice as that which you have dared to suggest. Ah, you spoke of keeping the foul atrocity away from his ears? Think you that I could look him in the face without the telltale blush of shame revealing my dishonour? No, I am not the adept in dissimulation which your Excellency may be. And as for him whose life I am come to ask, I repeat that he would scorn to accept it on such conditions; he would execrate you, he would loathe me, he would refuse to retain a life that had been purchased by so much villainy on the one hand and so much pollution on the other. Yes, sir, the contemned, the branded, the doomed smuggler has his own fine feelings, at least in one sense, and those feelings finer than you, who are a great minister, can possibly boast of possessing. These feelings, sir, shall not be wounded nor outraged by me. Oh, in my eyes, infinitely superior is that contemned, branded, and doomed smuggler, though wearing the felon’s chains in a dungeon-cell, infinitely superior is he, I say, than the great statesman who stands before me now, proposing in his dastard cowardice and abhorrent meanness of soul to make a human life the subject of barter for a woman’s honour. I leave you, sir; I leave you to the enjoyment of such feelings as you may be enabled to experience after a scene such as this. I leave you for the purpose of writing to the Marquis of Villebelle, and informing that generous nobleman how his well-meant letter has been received, and the treatment it has procured me at your hands. But that is not all, for where-soever words may proclaim the infamy of your conduct shall I make it known; and there is in my heart the conviction

that the day must come when you will shrink appalled and in utter loathing from the contemplation of your villainy."

The Minister of the Interior had listened coldly in one sense, but with impassioned feelings in another, to the long, the eloquent, and the reproachful address which Kate Marshall thus delivered. He listened coldly, we say, because he was unmoved and unaffected by the bitterness and terrible satire of her remarks. He was not even angered by them; the words, though barbed like arrows, fell innocuously away from a soul too much indurated by an utter unscrupulousness of character to be penetrated by them. But on the other hand the minister was more than ever excited by the beauty of Kate's appearance. Indeed, superbly handsome did the young woman seem then, with the flush of indignation upon her cheeks, her blue eyes lighted up with fire, her nostrils dilating, her ivory teeth looking brilliant between the coral lines that were wreathed with the strong accentuation of her language, her fine bust swelling as if about to burst through the corsage which imprisoned it, her whole form appearing to expand into a nobler stature and more magnificent proportions, as she thus boldly stood dealing forth the terrible invective of her outraged feelings. The minister had likewise risen from his seat, and though his attitude seemed indicative of a cool nonchalance, yet there was a burning fire of lustful passion in his eyes, the hectic of that same gloating desire upon his cheeks, and the hot breath came thick and almost panting from his parched throat and between his quivering lips. Strange and striking was the contrast between those two beings, — the fine form of the Englishwoman expressing the prideful indignation of her sex, the short slender figure of the minister seeming as if it might be overwhelmed by the immensity of that anger. And yet the one whose aspect was so glorious was impotent for all such purpose, while the one whose presence was so insignificant was endowed with the mightiest power.

"Stop yet one moment, Miss Marshall," said the minister, as she was turning away. "It is not the proposition which I am about to renew, but a piece of advice that I am about to give. Beware how you write to the Marquis of Villebelle aught that shall be derogatory to myself. Remember that I have the power of intercepting your correspondence at the post-office, and of suppressing it if unpalatable to me. Be-

ware likewise how, on going forth from this cabinet, you breathe a single word to my prejudice, for again I say, remember that I have powers whereof I should not fail to make use. And those powers I would exercise ruthlessly, mercilessly. Your chamber should be invaded by *gendarmes*, ignominiously should you be hurried through Spain in their custody, and turned adrift on the frontier of Portugal or of France. If therefore you have a friend, a confidant, or an adviser in the Spanish capital, see that you explain in guarded terms the particulars of this interview. Madrid is vast, its buildings are numerous, but there is not a wall which hath not ears to drink in whatsoever may be spoken to the disadvantage of those who occupy high places. Follow my counsel, and you will not be molested; disobey me in only a single tittle, and you shall be made to rue the consequences. And now one word more. From a certain date the captain-general of Catalonia had power to suspend your lover's sentence for three weeks: of that period ten days have already expired. It would not be safe for you to suffer more than another week at the very outside to elapse ere you definitely resolve upon the course you will adopt. During this week, therefore, which is now to ensue, I shall at any instant be prepared to receive another visit from Miss Marshall. But if you come again, — and you will come, — let it be with the foreknowledge that argument is useless, intercession vain, upbraiding a mere airy nothing. If you come, therefore, let it be with the firm resolution of adopting the only alternative that may save your lover's life."

During the delivery of this infamous speech, Kate Marshall's countenance expressed, as she listened, every variety of feeling which the several portions thereof were but too well calculated to excite. Pain the most mentally acute, indignation the most highly wrought, astonishment the most confounding, disgust the most ineffable, abhorrence the most intense, — all in their turn were these experienced by the young English woman. When the speech was over, she was about to turn away, and in silence take her departure, but she felt that she could not thus withdraw unavenged by the only weapons which she had to wield, namely, words, and therefore she tarried a few moments longer to give expression to her sentiments.

"I had read and I had heard," she said, with flashing eyes

and flushing cheeks, "that Spain is degenerate, but sunken indeed it must be below the uttermost extreme of my conception when amongst its rulers it reckons such a man as thou. What? You would violate the sanctity of correspondence entrusted to the very means of conveyance which the government itself monopolizes, leaving none other open? You commit a hideous crime by proposing to barter a human life against a woman's honour; and yet if the injured one dares speak of your enormity, you threaten to treat her as if she were the culprit and you were the law's vindicator. And you tell me that you know I shall come back to you, and that when I do come, I must be prepared to surrender myself without another murmur to your arms? Oh, sir! is it possible that you could address me thus and not avert your looks in shame?"

Having thus spoken, Kate Marshall turned away from the minister's presence, and issued forth from the cabinet. Had she paused another moment to observe his countenance, she would have seen that so far from being moved or affected by the way in which she had spoken, there was only a slight perceptible scornful wreathing of his lip, and as the door closed behind her, he said to himself, as if in allusion to her prideful indignation, "Nevertheless, she will come back again."

And in the afternoon of that same day, the Minister of the Interior appeared in the Chamber of Deputies, and in an eloquent speech proposed a measure for giving an impulse to the moral and religious improvement of the people. And any one to have heard him dilate with all his oratorical power upon the necessity of encouraging lofty, refined, and honourable notions amongst the masses, would have thought that he himself must be deeply imbued with the sense of his high and important subject.

CHAPTER V

THE MINISTER'S WIFE

MISS MARSHALL issued from the private dwelling of the Minister of the Interior with mingled feelings of anguish and indignation. Such was indeed her state of mind, she forgot she had about her the letter of the Marchioness de Villebelle, addressed to the minister's wife. She entered the hired vehicle which had brought her thither, and was already half-way back to the hotel, when the circumstance of this letter flashed to her mind. Hope for a moment sprang up within her, but it vanished almost as quickly, as a second thought suggested that no wife, however excellent-hearted, could possibly wield any influence for good over such a husband as the man whom she had just left. She was almost inclined to abstain from delivering the letter altogether, when she reflected that not a single stone should be left unturned that might, even by the remotest possibility, tend to the accomplishment of the aim which was dearer than her own life, and she resolved to present this letter.

Not choosing, however, to return to the ministerial abode in the vehicle which might be recognized by the minister himself from the windows, supposing that he had watched her departure, and being also unable to make the driver understand that she wished to return thither, Kate stopped the chaise and alighted. She remembered the proper direction to be pursued, and, after a quarter of an hour's walk, came once more in sight of the mansion. At that very instant she beheld the minister issue forth and enter his carriage, which immediately rolled away, for he was now proceeding to the Chamber of Deputies. She was glad that he had thus left his house, at the time that she was about to seek an interview with his lady, and when the carriage was

out of sight, she proceeded to the private entrance of the dwelling. Mentioning the name of the minister's wife, she was at once conducted up a handsome staircase, into a large and elegantly furnished apartment, where the domestic, perceiving she could not speak the Spanish tongue, politely motioned her to be seated. She waited in that room for nearly half an hour, at the expiration of which interval, the door opened and a lady made her appearance.

The minister's wife was a remarkably fine woman, of about Kate's own age, — namely, between four and five and twenty. She was tall, well made, and of similar proportions to those of Miss Marshall. Indeed, her contours were precisely of that same Hebe-richness adjusted to the most admirable symmetry, which characterized the English-woman. To be more particular still, a dress that was made for the one would have exactly fitted the other. But if in the height of stature and in the modelled forms of shape there existed this similitude between the minister's wife and Miss Marshall, the personal resemblance went no farther, — the former being of Spanish duskiness of complexion, with raven hair and large dark eyes. Unlike the Spanish women generally, however, this lady wore her hair in a profusion of ringlets and tresses, which admirably became the perfectly oval shape of her countenance. She was handsome, with regular features, bright red lips, and a superb set of teeth, while the rich carnation blood appeared on the cheeks beneath the diaphanous olive tint of the skin. Altogether she was a lady whose beauty might be termed brilliant; and she was as commanding and gracefully majestic as her husband in stature and appearance was insignificant and sinister-looking. There was, however, upon her countenance a certain air of pensive melancholy, which seemed to denote that she was not altogether happy in her mind, and notwithstanding the affability of her manner, this spirit of thoughtfulness — almost amounting to mournfulness — displayed itself in a certain degree of languor. Kate was immediately prepossessed in her favour, for she felt convinced that the wife was very different from the husband.

“ Pardon this intrusion, madam,” she said, thus addressing in her native English the Spanish lady, “ but I have been emboldened to wait upon you in order to present a letter from the Marchioness of Villebelle.”

"Ah! my English friend, the marchioness, that sweet, amiable creature!" said the minister's wife, a smile appearing at once upon her lips, as if she heard with unfeigned pleasure the name of one whose acquaintance she valued. "Pray be seated, for whosoever comes with a letter of introduction from either the Marquis or the Marchioness of Villebelle must be truly welcome here."

Kate presented the letter, and in so doing she sighed audibly, through fear that the present proceeding would prove useless, as all the incidents of her interview with the minister swept vividly through her memory. The lady's ear caught that sigh, and fixing her large dark eyes intently upon Miss Marshall, she said, in a low, murmuring voice, but still speaking in the English language, "And you, too, are unhappy."

Kate hastily averted her head to conceal her tears, and the minister's wife, thinking that the letter would no doubt afford her some insight into the cause of that sorrow which her visitress but too evidently experienced, addressed herself to its perusal without saying another word.

"Miss Marshall," said the Spanish lady, when she had read the letter, "it is impossible for any one to appear before me more strongly recommended than yourself. To the extent of my limited power, you may command my services. Not merely on the ground of this recommendation will they be cheerfully afforded, but likewise because you belong to a nation for whom I entertain an esteem amounting to an affection. I was educated for some years in England, and received the kindest treatment from every one with whom I came in contact. Delay not therefore to give me such explanations as may enable me to tell you at once to what extent you may reckon on my influence."

Kate Marshall's tale was soon told, but in speaking of the interview which had so recently passed between herself and the lady's husband, she did not of course allude to the infamous proposal he had made her, but merely stated that his Excellency had declined to grant her request.

"Profoundly grieved am I, Miss Marshall, to enhance your affliction," said the lady, speaking in a voice indicative of the most compassionate sympathy, "for it would be wrong on my part to encourage a hope the realization of which I cannot foresee, — much less promise. You cannot

disguise from yourself — I am sure you are too intelligent to make such an attempt — that the case of the unfortunate man in whom you are so deeply interested is no ordinary one? ”

“ I know it, — alas, I know it but too well, lady! ” responded Kate, with profound mournfulness. “ Indeed, I have been made to understand that it is so. But surely, surely, there is mercy to be shown even to one who has so grievously offended against the laws of your country as he? ”

“ Did my husband hold out no hope? ” inquired the lady. “ None? Not the slightest whatsoever? ”

“ None, madam, ” answered Kate, but as she thus spoke, the colour mounted to her cheeks an instant before so pale; and if her own life had depended on it, she could not have prevented herself from looking troubled and confused, this trouble and this confusion, too, being enhanced when she perceived that the minister's wife was now gazing upon her with a peculiar manner of penetration.

“ And his Excellency held out no hope? ” said the lady, slowly emphasizing her words, and looking with keen earnestness at Kate, as if she did not altogether believe the response that had been given, and bade her tax her memory for something that lurked in the background.

“ Madam, I entertain no hope at the hands of your husband, ” replied Miss Marshall; then, feeling that her confusion and her trouble were augmenting, and consequently becoming all the more visible, she burst into tears, exclaiming, passionately, “ All my hope is now centred in yourself and in Heaven. ”

The minister's wife rose from her seat, with a certain expression of countenance that appeared to be almost anguished, and she turned abruptly aside; then, as suddenly accosting Kate again, she said, in a low voice, “ Miss Marshall, you have not told me all! I understand it. I comprehend the noble delicacy of your conduct, and I thank you. ”

And this voice in which the Spanish lady spoke was not merely low. It was likewise so altered from its natural tones that Kate was smitten with dismay; and gazing up into the countenance that was bent over her, as she herself retained her own seat, she saw that it was deadly pale, with that pallor, too, which is always the more ghastly and the more fearful when displayed by the face of a brunette. The

idea naturally flashed all in a moment to Kate's mind that the lady must be sufficiently aware of her husband's true character — possibly acquainted, also, with a sufficiency of his antecedents — to enable her to make the painful surmise of what had actually taken place. Her own uneasiness was therefore wrought up to the highest; her confusion was enhanced into bewilderment. She knew not what to say; her own position was most painful. If questioned pointedly, how could she deny what had taken place? But on the other hand, how could she admit it? To distress this kind-hearted lady who in the space of a few minutes had shown her so much sympathy, was an alternative to which she could not easily bring herself; and yet, as she still gazed on that fearfully pale countenance, and looked into those dark eyes where an unnatural light seemed burning, she felt convinced that the injured and outraged wife had indeed but too well conjectured what had passed at the interview between herself and the minister.

“Miss Marshall,” said the lady, resuming her seat, and making an evidently powerful endeavour to subdue her emotions, “you have not told me all, but I again thank you for having suppressed that which you have left unexplained. Ah, it was not without reason I involuntarily observed just now that you too are unhappy, — meaning thereby that in such unhappiness there was perhaps too much cause for the existence of sympathy between us.”

“Lady,” answered Kate, in a voice deeply compassionating this avowal of affliction on the part of the minister's wife, “if for a moment my presence beneath this roof should have led to aught that has given you pain, most sincerely and deeply do I regret it. You have shown me so much kind sympathy — and sympathy to one in my position is so sweet — that not for worlds could I find it in my heart to be the source of annoyance. Let me go, madam. I will take elsewhere the burden of my own sorrows — ”

“Miss Marshall,” interrupted the minister's wife, “there is something savouring of reproachfulness in your tone, your look, and your manner. Ah, if a doubt had previously remained in my mind, it would now be cleared up. Yes, it is indeed so. There is confirmation of my painful conjecture in every syllable you have uttered, in every glance you have flung upon me. Oh,” she cried, wringing her hands

bitterly, — but still she did not weep, — “ what must you think of a man who wields so much power to do good and yet uses it so unworthily? Oh, what must you think, I say? What must you think? Alas that I should have been compelled to speak thus openly and plainly in your presence, but I see how it has been. You, too, have experienced an outrageous proposal from that man whose conduct fills me with shame, as it causes my unhappiness, — that man, nevertheless, whom I love so devotedly and so well. Oh, if my dear friend Constance ” — thus alluding to the Marchioness of Villebelle — “ knew that I am unhappy, and suspected the cause — But no,” she interrupted herself vehemently, “ Heaven forbid that it should be suspected at all — Heaven in mercy forbid! ”

The unfortunate lady became convulsed with grief, or, rather, desisted from her impassioned outpourings through the augmenting paroxysms of that rending anguish; and Kate Marshall, forgetting whatsoever difference of rank there might be between them, took both her hands, pressed them warmly in her own, and besought her to be comforted. The gush of mental agonies was too violent to last long, and when its sweeping fury had passed away, or at least had yielded somewhat to a lull, the minister's wife caressingly acknowledged the display of Miss Marshall's sympathy, and after a brief pause went on speaking.

“ Circumstances,” she said, “ have led me into revelations to your ears which have never been breathed even to my mother or father, much less to friends or acquaintances. No, the pride of a woman has prevented that, — the pride of a Castilian, too. Were I ill-looking, unaccomplished, and coarse in manners, I might complain of a husband's neglect, because in that case I should not be sustained by a proper pride above the meanness of complaining. It is, however, different. My glass tells me that I am not ugly, a retrospect over the educational training through which I have passed convinces me that I cannot altogether be devoid of mental attractions, and the adulation which I receive in society forbids the notion that my manners are repulsive. Therefore have I the conviction that I am a woman to be loved, and for the same reason my pride prevents me from suffering the world to know that I have not the power of fascinating my husband's heart. But I will tell you more,

Miss Marshall. When, four years ago, I first formed his acquaintance, he was a poor, unknown, struggling advocate at the bar. We were married, and the dower which I brought him, though small, was nevertheless the foundation of his fortune. Therewith he established the journal which became such a power amongst the press, a power, too, amongst the people. It procured him a seat in the Chamber of Deputies, and thence the transition was by no means difficult to the elevated post of a minister. To me he owes everything; my recompense is — nothing, worse than nothing — it is neglect. For three years has our married life lasted; for two years we have occupied separate chambers, — yes, for two years we have been only as friends dwelling beneath the same roof. There has been as much alienation between us — or, rather, on his part toward me — as if no nuptial vows had ever been pronounced. It may seem singular to you, Miss Marshall, that within the first hour of our acquaintance I tell you all this; but it is because circumstances have led me into the revelation — And besides," added the minister's wife, suddenly looking as if she were ashamed and confused, "there is a project in my mind which may serve the purposes of us both."

"Serve mine?" ejaculated Kate, eagerly catching, like a drowning creature, at any straw. "Do you mean that there is hope of saving the life of him I love?"

"Hope? Yes, every hope," responded the lady. "But only if you will be guided by me."

"Guided by you?" exclaimed Miss Marshall. "You are an angel sent to raise me up from despair. Oh, you have but to speak, to give me your instructions, to tell me what to do, and I will follow your counsel in all things."

"Patience for a moment," said the lady, "and let me first understand you beyond the possibility of mistake. Deal frankly with me; think not of wounding my feelings by any painful disclosures. It is necessary that I should learn everything which passed between my husband and yourself."

"Do you indeed insist upon such full and complete revelations?" asked Kate.

"I do," responded the minister's wife. "Again I say, tell me everything. The success of the project which I have in my mind depends upon the accuracy with which you give me these details. Alas! did you not perceive that I only

conjectured them but too well almost from the beginning? You are not the first, Miss Marshall, to whom my husband has made such proposals; you are not the first to whom he has offered to sell that mercy which on no other condition would he vouchsafe. But you are one of the few who have had the honour, the spirit, and the rectitude to scorn and disdain the proposition. Oh, you know not how I love my husband, notwithstanding all his faults; and if I could but wean him back to my arms — But I am wasting time. Pray give me your explanations.”

Kate Marshall, perceiving that the minister's wife was firmly resolute in hearing these disclosures, and that they connected themselves with the plan she was revolving in her mind, no longer hesitated to acquiesce in her demand. She accordingly entered upon a narrative of those particulars of her interview with the minister which are already known to the reader; but inasmuch as she appeared disposed to glance at them more lightly than was consistent with minuteness of detail, in order to avoid as much as possible shocking the outraged wife, the latter was compelled to question her closely to elicit the fullest particulars. Ultimately every tittle was revealed, not even to the omission of the insolent prophecy thrown out by the minister to the effect that within the week which was passing Kate would return to him.

“Now I know all,” said the minister's wife, in a mournful voice, for she could not be otherwise than shocked at the cold-blooded cruelty and refined villainy of her husband's conduct; but speedily brightening up again, with the hope which was encouraged by the project then in her mind, she said, “Now, Miss Marshall, I will explain to you the course which is to be followed, — the only course whereby you can save your lover from an otherwise certain death.”

The minister's wife and Kate Marshall remained together for nearly an hour longer in deep and earnest discourse, but what the nature of it was need not now be particularized. Suffice it to say that Kate took her departure with hope in her bosom; and on returning to the hotel, she gave the landlady to understand that she had experienced no unfavourable reception at the hands of the Minister of the Interior and his wife, but that a definite answer could not be given to her prayer for three or four days to come.

CHAPTER VI

THE APPOINTMENT

It was on the fourth morning after the interviews with the minister and his wife, and consequently verging toward the end of the week within the limit of which it was so vitally necessary to adopt a decisive measure on behalf of Ned Russell, that Kate Marshall again apparelled herself in her handsomest costume. She expended a considerable time over her toilet, paying the minutest attention to every detail, and studying to render herself as attractive as possible. No doubt she felt that there was something meretricious in all this, but the image of her beloved, was uppermost in her mind, — she was doing it for his sake, and this was her consolation. Her heart, too, beat high with hope, and this inward excitement gave a rich carnation bloom to her countenance. Never had Kate Marshall appeared to greater advantage, never had her handsome countenance looked handsomer, never were the rich contours of her shape more admirably displayed by the aids of apparel.

It was bordering upon noon when, having finished this careful toilet, Miss Marshall entered a hired vehicle, and was driven to the private dwelling of the Minister of the Interior. This house, as already intimated, — and like many of the mansions at Madrid, — had two entrances. One was considered the private means of access to the family compartment, the other communicated with the official rooms of the minister himself; for we should have observed that although he transacted his principal business at the Ministry of the Interior, he nevertheless received, at a certain hour, applicants and visitors at his own private residence. Perhaps he had more motives than one in adopting this course; it might be that there were certain matters which

he could conduct with greater privacy at his own abode than at the building officially devoted to the department over which he presided.

It was at the entrance to the minister's apartments that the vehicle which bore Kate stopped to set her down, as on the preceding occasion. She was conducted up to the waiting-room. Several other persons were there assembled, but almost immediately after her arrival she was desired by the usher to follow him into the minister's presence. It was evident, therefore, that this usher had received his instructions how to act in case Miss Marshall should call again. The colour was heightened upon her cheeks as she followed the official into the same cabinet where she had before seen the Minister of the Interior; and on entering that apartment, she observed that he was now alone, the secretary having been doubtless ordered to withdraw. The minister endeavoured to maintain a cold reserve of manner, as if he did not choose to show too much pleasure at the fulfilment of his prophecy. At the reappearance of Miss Marshall, nevertheless, the gradual flushing of his previously pale cheeks and the fiercer burning of his dark eyes denoted but too plainly the flaming up of the devouring desires which her presence had on the former occasion excited within him. Bowing with a distant courtesy, he motioned Kate to a seat, and resumed his own, from which he had risen on her entrance.

"Your prophecy is fulfilled, sir," said Kate, speaking in a low but firm voice. "I am here once more."

"But have you been mindful of the warning I gave?" demanded the minister, his eyes travelling slowly and with gloating eagerness over her entire form. "Have you borne in mind the assurances I so emphatically held out, that it would be useless to have recourse anew to intercession and entreaty, to threat or upbraiding?"

"I have borne all this in mind," answered Kate, her looks sinking beneath the devouring gaze of the libertine minister.

"Then I am to understand, Miss Marshall," he went on to say, "that you have consented to my proposition?"

"I am resolved to save at any price the life of him whom I love," and still Kate spoke in a low but firm tone.

"It is well, and your decision is a wise one," said the

minister, every feature of his countenance being expressive of the inward exultation that filled his heart. "Doubtless you reflected that the period of delay is drawing to a close, and that to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow, at latest, the order for your lover's pardon should be transmitted to the captain-general of Catalonia?"

"Such has been my reflection," rejoined Kate, "and to ensure the transmission of that pardon have I returned to fulfil your prophecy."

"Then listen," said the minister, as he now approached Kate; and taking her hand, he bent toward her, so that his breath, hot with the fever of desire, played upon her cheek. "This night, as the clocks proclaim the hour of ten, must you be with me. No one need mark your arrival, no one shall be nigh to observe your approach. I will give you the key of that door at the entrance — In short, everything shall be managed with a becoming delicacy."

"I expect as much at your hands, sir," answered Kate. "For Heaven knows that if the shame and dishonour which I am this night to encounter became whispered abroad in the world, it would drive me to despair and to self-destruction."

"Fear nothing," quickly answered the minister, who was almost maddened by that close survey of Kate's countenance, — a survey which showed him that she was still in all the freshness of her charms, that no artificial colour lent the hue of the rose to her cheeks; while at the same time he could drink in the breath that was pure and balmy as the gentle breeze of a spring morning. "Fear nothing," he repeated. "You have but to hint at any other arrangements, and they shall be adopted. All that I require is the faithful keeping of the appointment. I care not for the circumstances under which it may be kept, so long as you will be mine."

"Can you not understand," asked Kate, averting her blushing countenance, "that henceforth I can never look you in the face again? Already am I overcome with shame and confusion."

"And wherefore, beloved one?" asked the minister, and he endeavoured to imprint a kiss upon one of those glowing cheeks; but she quickly repulsed him, starting up from her seat at the same time.

"No, no," she cried, "not now, not now! Have I not

assured you that I am already overcome with shame? Spare me, I beseech you!"

"I will," he answered, "because to-night you will be mine, altogether mine. But you will not come cold and inanimate, coy and reluctant, to my arms? It must not be a marble statue that I am to enfold in my embrace. No, you must come glowing with passion and with ardour —"

"Speak not thus, speak not thus!" interrupted Kate, trembling, perhaps shuddering from head to foot. "Oh, there is something shocking in the idea of talking thus in the broad daylight, when the sun is shining. But to-night, when darkness shall be upon the face of the earth, and when in the midst of darkness also I shall meet you, — then it may be different; then, perhaps, the plunge being resolved upon, I shall more than resign myself to my fate —"

"Oh, I understand you, I understand you," exclaimed the libidinous minister, literally trembling with the ardour of his passion. "You will be all that I require? But what meant you by those words you have just spoken, that in the midst of darkness we shall meet?"

"I mean this," answered Kate, still speaking with averted looks, and with a countenance crimsoned up to the very hair of her head, "that inasmuch as I never again can look you in the face without dying of shame, and inasmuch as you have promised that whatsoever arrangement may be suggested to spare my feelings shall be carried out, I have to stipulate that the only condition on which I will come is to the effect that we do meet in darkness; and that for the hour which I shall remain with you, your Excellency swears as a man of honour, by everything sacred in heaven, and in fear of everything terrible in Satan's kingdom, that you will not attempt to kindle lamp nor candle for the purpose of looking me in the face."

"No, no, I will not do it," answered the minister. "I will obey your behest in all things."

"You swear?" demanded Kate.

"I swear," responded the minister.

"You swear," she repeated, "as solemnly and as fearfully as I ere now indicated?"

"I swear by all my hopes of hereafter," was the rejoinder vehemently given.

"And understand me well," continued Kate, still speaking

with averted looks, and still, too, with cheeks of peony-redness, "there is something still more coercive than an oath."

"What mean you?" demanded the Spaniard, hastily.

"I mean this," was the quick reply, "that if you attempt to violate that oath which you have sworn, a dagger which I shall have with me —"

"A dagger?" ejaculated the minister, who was in his soul a coward.

"Yes, a dagger," responded Kate. "But not to drink your heart's blood. I am no murderess — no, not even to avenge such an outrage as that would be. But inasmuch as, if after having surrendered my honour up to you, it would be a shame goading me to madness to look you in the face, and as death would be preferable to such shame, that dagger which is to accompany me shall be plunged deep down into my own bosom if you were to attempt to violate your oath. Then your Excellency would have to account to the world as best you could for the tragedy thus occurring in the privacy of your own chamber."

"Fear not, beauteous creature," responded the minister, "that there will be need for such a frightful catastrophe. No, no, my imagination will depict the loveliness of your countenance, as it is already impressed upon my memory. Be it therefore as you say: we will meet in the darkness, we will continue in darkness, we will part in darkness likewise."

"And the decree of pardon," added Kate, "will be already drawn up, your signature will be attached thereto? You will have the document in readiness for me this night?"

"Fear not, all shall be done as you wish," replied the Spaniard.

"And now, one word more," continued Kate, "for all this has a businesslike regularity that must not be lost sight of. Your Excellency perceives that I trust entirely to your honour in faithfully placing in my hands the pardon for which I am to make so great a sacrifice. There is in our English history a terrible tale, of a certain Colonel Kirke, who obtained possession of a young damsel's virtue under circumstances somewhat similar to these which are taking place now, with this difference, however, that it was the girl's brother, and not her lover, for whom she sacrificed

herself to that pitiless soldier-judge. It is however recorded that Kirke — a vile traitor to his pledge, and inspired with the cruelty of a fiend — opened his casement in the morning, and showed the dishonoured sister the corpse of her brother suspended to a tree at a little distance. Now, your Excellency must understand me well — ”

“ What, do you believe me capable of such diabolic perfidy as that? ” ejaculated the minister.

“ I have a right to guard against it, ” responded Kate, calmly and firmly. “ Give me now a written acknowledgment signed by your own hand, sealed with your own seal, an acknowledgment which I shall bear away with me, that on certain conditions to be fulfilled to-night, the full and complete pardon of Edward Russell is to be placed in my possession. To-morrow I will remit you, by messenger or post, the acknowledgment you are about to sign. ”

“ Ah, but you will use it to wreak a vengeance upon me? ” cried the minister, almost astounded at the demand.

“ Think you that if I gain my end, namely, the salvation of my lover, ” asked Kate, “ I shall be willing to take a step which, by giving publicity to the whole dread and infamous transaction, would make known my shame to the world? No, sir; I should be but too anxious for the secret to be religiously kept. But if, on the other hand, you deceive me in respect to the pardon, then should I scatter all other considerations to the wind, and the idea of vengeance becoming paramount, I should proclaim all my wrongs, because when once that vengeance had been wreaked, I myself should have no longer a single tie to bind me to existence. I should perish, and in self-destruction throw off the coil of shame. ”

The Minister of the Interior perceived nothing unreasonable in all this. On the contrary, he merely beheld therein the natural precaution which a woman was likely to take when having to deal with a person of unscrupulous character. For his Excellency knew full well that such was his character, and that in such a light it must be viewed by Miss Marshall. But on this score he was altogether indifferent; he considered himself to have risen by his own talents and intrigues high above the opinion of the world at large, and consequently to place him in total independence of the opinion of an individual. He was infatuated with Miss Marshall's beauty. Possessed of the strongest passions,

he was excited to a more than ordinary degree by her handsome countenance and her fine shape; he longed to clasp her in his arms, yearned with avidity to make her his own. Therefore it was without any further hesitation that he yielded to what he regarded as a mere precaution on her part, and seating himself at the desk, he penned in the English language precisely such a document as she had suggested, appending his signature, and affixing the ministerial seal of the Home Department.

"One single embrace ere you leave me, Miss Marshall," he said as he presented the paper, and he made a movement to suit the action to the word.

"No, sir, not now," she emphatically exclaimed, retreating a couple of paces. "I am no brazen-face that can thus calmly and deliberately surrender myself to the arms of a stranger. Understand me well, sir," she continued, again with averted countenance, and with that crimsoning of the cheeks which showed how revolting it was unto the sensitive delicacy of her feelings to be compelled thus to argue and expatiate upon such a subject, "understand me well, sir. I am pure and chaste; it is no meretricious female whom you are thus wooing by coercion instead of by sentiment, and again do I repeat that in the broad daylight, with the sun shining, I cannot look you in the face and think of all that is to be consummated. This night, punctually as the clocks at Madrid proclaim the hour of ten, shall I keep the appointment which has been made."

With these words Kate Marshall, having secured the document in her bosom, moved toward the door, and the Minister of the Interior sought not to detain her, sought not even so much as to touch her hand again. That door closed behind her, and when he was once more alone he gloated over the idea that within a few hours thence the superb creature who had just quitted his presence would be his own, abandoned completely unto him, clasped in his arms.

Kate returned to the hotel, and in the course of the afternoon, a lady, wearing the graceful Spanish mantilla, which completely concealed her countenance, called upon her at that hostelry. They were closeted together for nearly an hour, and then the visitress took her leave, departing on foot as she had come, and with the mantilla completely hid-

ing her features, so that she could not possibly be recognized by any one belonging to the establishment. This lady was the wife of the Minister of the Interior, but wherefore had she thus stealthily sought an interview with Kate? This question will be speedily answered by the incidents which we are about to record.

The hours passed, evening came, the dusk set in, and at length the iron tongue of Time proclaimed the moment of the appointment which Miss Marshall had consented to keep with the Minister of the Interior. This functionary had given an intimation to his domestics that they were to be out of the way so far as his own private suite of apartments was concerned; and they, comprehending full well that their master had in hand one of his wonted affairs of gallantry, took the hint and were careful to obey it. Faithful to his promise to Kate Marshall, he extinguished the lights in the vestibule, on the staircase, in the spacious landing to which that staircase led, everywhere, in short, from the entrance door to that of his own chamber, and within the chamber itself likewise. He was apparelled in a dressing-gown, his feet were thrust into slippers. His heart was beating with the excitement of his passions, for his fervid imagination was enabled to define and delineate all the contours of that shape which the dress of his intended victim had concealed, although to a certain extent developing them. He thought to himself that the moment was now at hand which was to give him one of those rewards for which he had laboured and toiled and intrigued, inasmuch as he regarded the possession of power not merely as a crowning triumph of his ambition, but likewise as the means of gratifying his insatiate lust for pleasure.

It was, as we have said, ten o'clock, and already for at least five minutes had the licentious minister been waiting in the vestibule, — waiting there in the darkness for the arrival of her whom he expected. Nor was he kept long in suspense. The bell at the entrance rang; he flew to open the door, and a female form, closely veiled, passed into the vestibule.

“Beauteous creature, I thank thee,” exclaimed the impassioned minister, “for thus punctually keeping the appointment of love,” and now feeling that he had a right to consider her his own, shrouded in the darkness as they were,

and all arrangements being made by him in faithful compliance with Kate Marshall's stipulations, he tore up the veil, and straining her in his arms, pressed his lips to hers. "Now," he said, "let me lead you hence."

She had spoken not a word; she appeared to have surrendered herself like a willing victim to his embrace. She accompanied him up the stairs; the landing was crossed, the chamber was entered.

For obvious reasons we must pass with some degree of haste over this scene. Suffice it to say that half an hour had elapsed from the moment that the Minister of the Interior had conducted the female to his chamber, when he exclaimed, in the English tongue, "By Heaven, there is some mystery in all this! You answer my impassioned language in monosyllables, and these lowly murmured. A suspicion, yes, a suspicion has flashed to my mind — No, it has been growing and growing for some minutes past — now it is confirmed — By Heaven, I will be satisfied!"

"Remember your solemn pledge, sir," whispered a female voice, in the darkness of that chamber, and also speaking in English, "there is to be no light."

"Ah, this voice!" ejaculated the minister, full of wildering astonishment and affright, "it is not that of her whom I expected — though feigned, I know that it is not. It has not her accents — I am deceived — But, by the living God, I will clear up the mystery."

"Remember, sir, the dagger —"

"Away with all considerations!" cried the almost infuriate man. "At any risk —"

"Then the consequences be upon your own head," again murmured that female voice. "It is I who promised to meet you, it is I who have abandoned myself to you. Give me the pardon, and suffer me to depart."

The minister had remained perfectly still, and listening breathlessly to her words as she thus spoke, for he sought, with all the keenness of the sense of hearing, to discover whether it were really Kate Marshall's voice or another.

"No, no, I am deceived," he ejaculated, now speaking in his own native tongue. "There is something startling in all this."

He rushed to the chimneypiece, where there were materials ready for striking a light. His female companion

endeavoured not to prevent him from using those materials. She doubtless thought that such an attempt would be vain, and might only lead to the exercise of violence toward herself, and to the disturbance of the household. Therefore in a few moments a light sprang into existence in the room, but not more quickly blazed up that flame than did the eyes of the minister glance upon the female — and he beheld his own wife!

“Madam,” he said, becoming composed and calm all in a moment, and speaking in a cold, stern voice, “I will not pretend to declare that you are not justified in the course you have pursued. But on my side I have now only one alternative to adopt.”

Thus speaking, he took from a side-table a sealed packet, containing the pardon of Edward Russell, and deliberately tearing it in halves, he set fire to it by the wax candle which he had lighted. He watched the fragments until they were consumed; the baffled, disappointed, and even humiliated wife watched them also. Then, as the last sparks were expiring one after the other on the blackened tinder, the unhappy lady heaved a profound sigh, and tears trickled down her cheeks as she thought of what would now be the feelings of poor Kate Marshall. But as a recollection suddenly flashed to her mind, she accosted her husband, and looking him with earnest significancy in the countenance, said, “Miss Marshall has an acknowledgment, signed by your own hand, sealed with the ministerial signet, to the effect that the pardon of Edward Russell is to be presented to her.”

“On certain conditions,” responded the minister, coldly, “which have not been fulfilled.”

“But that acknowledgment,” quickly exclaimed his wife, “will prove your ruin. It will serve as the corroboration of the tale which she will tell — ”

“No,” interrupted the minister, “it will have none of these effects,” and he pulled the cord of the bell with some degree of violence.

“What would you do? What intention have you?” demanded his wife, seized with consternation.

“Listen to the orders I shall give,” rejoined her husband, still in that same cold, stern, implacable voice, “and you will hear.”

The bell which he had just pulled rang in the chamber of

a valet who slept overhead. Scarcely had the minister given that response to his wife, when a knock was heard at the door of the apartment, and the minister, partly opening the door, addressed his valet thus:

“Hasten and take with you a sufficient number of the police for the arrest of a woman, — this woman being a resolute and determined one. Lose no time in repairing to the hotel where she resides,” and he named it. “Let no mercy be shown her, let no delay take place. See that she communicates not with a single individual belonging to the establishment. It is of equal importance that all papers in her possession should be secured on the spot, sealed up, and brought to me. Let every nook and corner, every possible crevice of concealment, be thoroughly searched and examined, for this is a dangerous woman, a spy in the pay of the Carlists, and she has important documents with her. Her name is Catherine Marshall; England is her native country. Now depart, and at the expiration of an hour, at the farthest, I shall expect that you knock at this door to announce that the arrest is effected, and to place in my hands the sealed packet containing all the papers found in the woman’s room. Stop, one word more. When conveyed to gaol, let her be placed in a cell by herself, and see that some trustworthy individual be appointed as the turnkey.”

Having issued these instructions, the Minister of the Interior abruptly closed the door of the chamber; and as his eyes again settled upon his wife, he saw that she was pale, trembling, the picture of grief and despair.

“For Heaven’s sake, consummate not this stupendous injustice!” cried the unhappy lady, flinging herself at the minister’s feet. “Oh, do not, I implore you! Avenge not upon her whatsoever rancour you may cherish against me. It was I who devised the project, it was I who counselled her how to act.”

“How came you to form her acquaintance?” demanded the husband, folding his arms across his chest, and looking down in cold severity upon that wife who still knelt at his feet, and whom he bade not arise from her suppliant posture.

“She brought me a letter from the Marchioness de Villebelle. That letter I can show you. It was on the same day when she had a first interview with you. Oh, in mercy spare her! Send and revoke the order ere it be too late. I will

pledge my existence that no evil use shall be made of the written promise you have given. In mercy spare her, I conjure you!" and the unhappy lady extended her clasped hands in anguished entreaty toward her husband.

But cold and pitiless, he continued to gaze down upon her; he was moved not by her beauty nor her tears; he seemed not to reflect that in atonement for the monstrous injustice he had done toward her who was his wife, he was bound to confer any boon which she might demand. There, in seminudity, she knelt; there, clad only in the lightest drapery, was she, a suppliant at his feet, and he still remorseless and implacable.

"But wherefore," he demanded, "did you leave several days to elapse ere this project of yours, to which she became an accomplice, was put into execution?"

"Oh, because it was deemed more prudent to allow that interval to pass, so that it might appear as if she procrastinated the dread alternative until almost the latest moment —"

"I understand," interrupted the minister, a scornful smile appearing upon his lips. "It was indeed a stratagem altogether well worthy of woman's ingenuity, — a stratagem whereby two purposes were to be served: she to obtain the pardon of her lover, you to win back a neglectful husband to your arms. And pray, madam, was it your intent to keep this secret all to yourself?"

"No," she answered, suddenly rising to her feet, and assuming a firmer look. "To-morrow, after having placed the pardon in the young woman's hands, I should have come to you, I should have thrown myself at your feet, where I have now been so vainly kneeling, I should have confessed everything, I should have besought you to take compassion upon me, and to consider that the course I had adopted was not merely to save a virtuous and unhappy foreigner from the chance of succumbing to a foul wrong as the only alternative of rescuing her lover, but likewise as a proof of the affection, undiminished and undying, which I entertain for you. Oh, will you not be merciful? Do what you will with me, but spare that unhappy creature."

"It is impossible," responded the husband; "the order has gone forth. It is too late. And now, madam," he added, with another scornful smile, "since you have thus con-

trived to obtain access to my chamber, it suits me that you should remain here for the present, inasmuch as I will not conceal from you my apprehension that if left at liberty you would speed to the hotel in the hope of anticipating the visit of the police."

"And is it thus that you address your own wife?" exclaimed the wretched lady. Then, as her eyes suddenly flashed fire, and her form appeared to dilate with the inspiration of indignant pride, she exclaimed, "But enough of this humiliation for me. You have committed the foulest outrage which a husband can perpetrate toward a wife; you stand before me under circumstances which render your purposed infidelity undeniable; and not one word of regret, not one syllable of remorse has passed your lips. You take the highest ground, — that ground which I myself ought to occupy. You treat me as if I were the offender, whereas it is you yourself who are the criminal. But I will bear patiently with my wrongs no longer. Have you forgotten, sir, that Spanish blood flows in my veins, that a true Castilian vengeance can animate my soul?"

"Madam," answered the minister, coldly, "if you think that you have it in your power to ruin me, make the attempt. If it succeed, you pull down an edifice over your own head as well as over mine; if you fail, you will only widen the distance which of late has subsisted between us."

The unhappy lady saw but too keenly and felt but too forcibly the truth of these observations, and, flinging herself upon the couch, she gave way to a passionate outburst of grief.

At the expiration of the hour, there was a knock at the door of that chamber, and the minister hastened to receive the tidings which his valet brought. He passed out upon the landing, and the unfortunate lady heard the domestic speak thus:

"Your Excellency's commands are obeyed to the very letter. The English woman, bearing the name of Catherine Marshall, is in prison, and this packet contains the few papers which were found in her possession."

"Good!" responded the minister, and reëntering the chamber, he closed the door.

Then, tearing open the packet, he examined the papers one after the other, but his looks altered visibly to the

keen watching eye of his wife, when he found that the written promise given to Kate Marshall was not amongst them. This was an event for which he was but little prepared; he had felt confident the acknowledgment would be amongst those documents, but it was not. The case was dangerous — critical; that acknowledgment was in his own handwriting, bore his own signature, and was invested with all the formal sanctity which the ministerial seal could bestow.

“ You perceive,” said his wife, more in anguish than reproach, “ that you have woven a web which is closing around you, — alas, I fear to your utter ruin! ”

The minister gave no immediate response, but stood gazing upon the papers with looks of sombre moodiness. His wife continued to watch his countenance with painful anxiety; she knew that the circumstances must be perilous and threatening indeed when they could make this deep impression upon such a man as her husband.

“ You can save me,” he suddenly exclaimed, approaching the couch on which she reclined, her arm supporting her head.

“ Oh, if I could!” she cried, with an expression of joy and hope and love appearing upon her features. “ It would be the happiest moment of my life, because perhaps you would in that case give me back some portion of your heart? ”

“ Yes,” quickly responded her husband, whose soul, indurated though it were, was touched by all these evidences of that truly noble-minded woman’s devoted attachment, and who could not help feeling that this prompt anxiety on her part to succour him in his embarrassment was far more than he deserved after all the abominable infamy of his conduct, “ yes, I have indeed treated you too harshly. I were the veriest wretch upon earth if I did not appreciate so much goodness!” Then, in a voice rendered tremulous with the conflicting emotions which such a variety of circumstances had excited within him, he went on to say, “ I cannot blind myself to the fact — I do not hesitate to admit — that I stand upon the very verge of ruin. Ah, cursed folly that has brought me to this extremity!”

“ My dearest husband,” said the noble-hearted Spanish woman, seizing his hands and pressing them to her bosom, “ tell me what I can do to serve you.”

"I am about to ask you much," quickly responded the minister, but then, as a sudden thought struck him, he exclaimed, "Oh, you must know what Miss Marshall has done with that document? She acted under your advice —"

"Think you," interrupted the lady, with a reproachful look, "that I should have left you thus in suspense had I really known how she has disposed of the paper? No, on my soul, I am ignorant on the subject. I saw her this afternoon, and she acquainted me with all that had taken place between herself and you in the morning; she even showed me that paper, but I neither counselled her to make any special use of it, nor did she intimate that such was her intention. So far from myself having the knowledge that she thought of parting with it, it was a portion of my plan to obtain it from her on the morrow, when placing the pardon in her hands; and I should have come, as I ere now said, to throw myself at your feet, to reveal everything, and to restore to you this very written promise whereof we are speaking."

The lady spoke with such a voice and with such looks of completest sincerity that it was impossible for her husband to doubt the truth of her averments.

"I believe you," he said. "What right indeed have I to doubt you, — you who are exhibiting a kindness and an affection toward me which I so little deserve?"

"And the service I can render you?" asked the wife, anxiously. "Methinks I can anticipate what you would say."

"At an early hour in the morning," responded the minister, "you must repair —"

"This night! Now, if you will," exclaimed the lady. "I know what you mean: you would have me visit Miss Marshall in her prison — But, ah, my dear husband, you have still the power to make some atonement, and rest assured you will not be a loser thereby! Sign the order for this young woman's release; let me be the bearer of it to the gaol, and I stake my existence upon the promise I now make, which is, that I will save you if it be yet possible to recall whatever course Miss Marshall may have taken."

It was still more impossible than at first for the minister to remain insensible to the generous conduct of his wife. That heart which for nearly two years had remained so hardened

against her was melted. He would have been the vilest, the most detestable, and the most brutal of wretches were it otherwise, but unprincipled though he were, he was not so bad as all this. He seized his wife's hand, he carried it to his lips, and as she wound her arms about his neck, he clasped her to his breast.

"Admirable woman!" he exclaimed, "you have taught me a lesson this night which I cannot possibly forget. Whatsoever may be the result of these threatening circumstances, I shall not remain unmindful of your noble generosity. No, I shall not. Wicked and unscrupulous I have been. Not for an instant do I attempt to palliate my conduct, but I may atone for it, — yes, I may atone for it, and that atonement shall be made. I will now follow your advice in all things. You say that you will proceed this night —"

"To the prison?" exclaimed the lady. "Yes, at once. Lose not a moment in writing an order for the discharge of Miss Marshall; within an hour or two she may be back at the hotel, and the circumstance need not obtain publicity."

While thus speaking the minister's wife had begun to reapparel herself hastily, and he, taking writing materials which were in the room, sat down and penned the document wherewith she had enjoined him to entrust her.

"But is not Miss Marshall herself," he suddenly asked, "playing you false? I mean by the disposal of that written promise without your knowledge —"

"Let us not judge her hastily," interrupted the lady. "She may have secured it in some place where it has escaped the notice of the searchers. This is indeed most probable, for brief as my acquaintance has been with her, I have nevertheless obtained a sufficient insight into her disposition to feel assured that she would do nought to injure you, the effects of which should redound upon myself. I am now about to issue forth; I will repair to the prison — But you empower me to promise Miss Marshall that her lover's pardon shall be forwarded to her in the morning?"

"The matter is in your hands," answered the minister; "use your own discretion, adopt the course which may appear best. Fear not that I shall repudiate your actions."

He again embraced his wife, and drawing her veil closely over her countenance, the magnanimous lady issued forth into the streets of Madrid.

CHAPTER VII

THE GAOL

IT was soon after eleven o'clock on the eventful night of which we are speaking, that Kate Marshall's chamber at the hotel was suddenly invaded by the minister's valet, followed by three officers of the secret police in plain clothes. Kate had not retired to rest, nor indeed had she even begun to disapparel herself. Her mind was too much agitated with suspense as to the issue of the stratagem to permit her to seek her pillow. She was therefore sitting up, endeavouring to concentrate her attention upon one of the books which she had brought with her from Dover; but she constantly lost the thread of what she attempted to read, and found her thoughts wandering to far different subjects. Although in respect to the written promise received from the Minister of the Interior she had adopted a particular course, yet she could not satisfy herself that even this precaution would guard against the effects of his anger or the insidiousness of his treachery, should he discover that instead of the victim whom he expected, it was his own wife whom he was clasping in his arms. Thus, when the chamber was abruptly invaded by the valet and the policemen, Kate comprehended but too well that the stratagem was detected, and she was naturally smitten with the fear that all was lost. No, not quite all, for still there was the chance that some good might result from the manner in which she had disposed of the acknowledgment, and this idea was faintly — but only faintly — cheering for Miss Marshall.

The reader has seen enough of her to be aware that she was by no means deficient in courage, and though the shock produced by the sudden entry of those four men at this time of the night was naturally great, she speedily recovered her

presence of mind. She was however subjected to the grossest and most indelicate treatment on the part of the ruffians who now held her captive. They insisted upon searching with their own hands the pockets of her garments, and while two of the officers forcibly held her arms, the valet actually plunged his hand into her bosom, to ascertain if she had any papers concealed there. Crimson with indignation, and her eyes flashing fire, Kate Marshall with an almost preter-human effort disengaged herself from the gripe of those ruffians, and snatching up one of the candlesticks, hurled it with such force at the insolent valet that if it had struck him on the head he never would perhaps have had another chance of practising such dastard conduct in this world; but he stepped nimbly aside, and it fell at the farther extremity of the room. Her trunk was then minutely searched, her garments were tossed out upon the floor. The inspection was most minute, but all that the ruffians could discover consisted of a few of Ned Russell's letters which he had written to her at different times, and which she had brought with her for reperusal; because what young woman who loves is ever unaccompanied by the tender epistles of him to whom her heart is devoted? The search was extended to the bed in the chamber, to the drawers, indeed to every nook where anything might be concealed, but nothing more was discovered, beyond the letters referred to. These were duly sealed up, and taken possession of by the valet, in accordance with the positive instructions he had received from his master.

While the search was being prosecuted, Kate Marshall stood looking on with indignation still depicted upon her countenance; but she spoke not a word, because she was unable to make herself understood by the Spaniards, and even if it were otherwise, she was too full of wrathful pride and a sense of outraged modesty to deign even a syllable of remonstrance or rebuke in respect to such brutal ruffians. When the search was over, they made her a sign to put on her bonnet and shawl, and this being done, she was hurried downstairs to a vehicle waiting at the entrance of the hotel. She encountered not a soul belonging to the establishment; not even the kind-hearted landlady was nigh to bestow upon her a look of compassion, and therefore Kate full well understood that the seclusion of the inmates of the hotel in their

own chambers, while all these things were taking place, must be in pursuance of a strict mandate issued by the police officials to that effect. She likewise comprehended that she was being borne to gaol, for whither else could she be thus dragged away at that time of the night?

And it was so. In a quarter of an hour the vehicle reached the gate of the gloomy prison, and when the officials thereof were summoned, the valet gave whispered instructions relative to the consignment of Miss Marshall to a solitary cell. In a few minutes she was alone in that dungeon, for all the appearance of a dungeon had it, though not underground. It was a small chamber, surrounded with walls of massive masonry but too well calculated to beat back any cries of anguish which might issue from the lips of a captive imprisoned there. There was no window in those walls, and the air was only admitted by a narrow grating in the huge door. An iron bedstead, with mean and sordid bedding, a table, a chair, a basin and ewer, these constituted the furniture of the place. The turnkey, who conducted Miss Marshall thither, took away the light, locking and bolting the door behind him, and thus was she left in the depth of darkness and to the companionship of her own sad thoughts.

Still her presence of mind did not forsake her. Arbitrary as was the treatment to which she thus found herself subjected, yet she knew full well that even in a country where such things could be done, this same tyrannous power might not be stretched to such a length as to take her life secretly, nor publicly without some form of trial. She likewise reflected that the wife of the Minister of the Interior would most probably seek some means of befriending her, and she moreover knew that the course she had adopted in respect to the minister's written undertaking would be certain to lead to inquiries concerning her. Thus, altogether she was not without some slight consolation, but still she deeply felt the cruel treatment she was experiencing, while upon her cheeks still burned the glow of indignation on account of the brutality of the minister's valet.

For more than an hour she remained seated in the chair, giving way to her thoughts, and then, without taking off her apparel, she lay down upon the bed. Sleep did not visit her eyes, nor did she even woo it; she had no inclination for slumber. Nearly another hour passed, and it was verging

toward two in the morning, when she heard footsteps advancing along the stone corridor leading to her cell. A light streamed through the grating in the door, the key turned in the lock, and the bolts were withdrawn. Suddenly a wild terror seized upon Kate Marshall. What if the unscrupulous and remorseless minister had caused her to be brought thither that he might by force accomplish his detestable purpose? What if the hireling creatures belonging to that gaol would wink at the atrocities committed by one so highly placed and who wielded such power either to reward or to punish? Kate started up from the wretched pallet, and the grim-looking turnkey entered with a candle, which he placed upon the table. But who was it that followed him into that cell? To whom was it that he bowed with such profound respect, while standing aside for this person to enter? It was a female closely veiled, but by her form and stature Kate knew her at once. It was the minister's wife.

The turnkey withdrew, merely closing but not bolting nor locking the door behind him; the lady threw up her veil, and the next moment she and Kate were clasped in each other's arms.

"I come to save you — I come to deliver you, Miss Marshall," said the minister's wife. "I tell you this at once, without making it a condition for the information I seek. I would not insult you so unwarrantably as to adopt such a course —"

"Ah, my dear madam," exclaimed Kate, joy and gratitude beaming upon her countenance, "I felt assured you would not desert me, but I did not expect to receive so soon the proof of your friendship."

"It is afforded so soon as I could possibly show it," responded the lady. "You can but too well conjecture that my project failed, that all was discovered, but you will rejoice for my sake to learn that the incidents of this night have made so powerful an impression upon my husband he has suddenly become an altered man. The proofs he has given of this better state of feeling are most important for us both. To me he has promised amendment and a renewal of his love; to you he accords immediate freedom and the pardon of your intended husband."

Kate fell upon her knees, overcome with joy, and conveying the hand of the minister's wife to her lips, she covered

it with her kisses and her tears. The lady who brought this gladdening intelligence likewise wept. It was a touching scene — full of an exquisite pathos — as the minister's wife, compelling Kate Marshall to rise, once more strained her in her arms.

"I cannot regret," said the lady, "anything that has taken place, inasmuch as I feel assured it has given me back a husband, and that husband an altered and better man."

"To you, dear lady," answered Kate, smiling through her tears, "is the gratitude of all the rest of my existence due, — not only my gratitude, but that of him whose life is saved through your kindness. Ah! now I bethink me, you spoke of certain information which you required, and I am at no loss to conjecture what it is. My papers were seized, with the idea that your husband's written undertaking would be found amongst them, and it was not. No, I sent it away for a certain purpose, which I will explain — But fear not, dear lady! It will fall into the hands of a kind friend of mine, and no use will be made of it prejudicial to your husband's interests."

"Thanks, a thousand thanks for that assurance," answered the minister's wife; "you have relieved my mind from an immense load. For although I felt confident you would do nothing that should in any way violate the compact which was made between us, to the effect that if your aims were accomplished through my agency you would spare my husband from the chance of exposure, nevertheless I feared that it might be possible for that document to fall into other hands less scrupulous and less generous than your own."

"Listen, dear lady," answered Kate, "while I give you a few words of explanation. I have already spoken to you of that Count Christoval from whom I have received so much kindness, and through whose intervention the captain-general of Catalonia suspended the extreme sentence of the law. The count, as you are aware, still remains at Barcelona, in order to continue his generous services until the best or the worst being known, there should no longer exist a need for them. When you left me at the hotel this afternoon, I sat down to pen a few lines to Count Christoval, — not to make him aware of what was going on, but merely to give him to understand that within a few hours the question would be decided whether Edward Russell was to be par-

doned or not. It was, I can assure you, my first intention, when I took up my pen, thus to confine myself to a vague and simple statement. But as I began to write, other reflections entered my mind. What if your stratagem should altogether fail? What if the minister, exercising those terrific powers wherewith he had threatened me, should have me seized upon, even in the dead of night, hurried out of Spain, and cast upon the Portuguese or French frontier? I shuddered at the thought, and then, too, by a natural association, it occurred to me that the same agents of this arbitrary power might wrest from me the written document which I held, and that document was the only means by which, under any circumstances, I could retain a hold over your husband."

"I understand," observed the minister's wife. "It was indeed most natural that these reflections should force themselves upon you. But proceed; for I am in haste to conduct you away from this horrible place," and the lady threw her shuddering looks around the massive walls of the cell.

"Having reflected in that manner," resumed Kate, "I deeply deplored that I had not consulted you on this subject; but those ideas had not entered my head previous to your departure, and when you were gone, I did not dare seek you at your own abode, for fear that his Excellency might observe me. I therefore thought to myself that it was absolutely necessary to secure the document by some means or another, and to dispose of it in such a way that it might serve for eventual good, in case all other circumstances became adverse. I accordingly wrote the fullest details to Don Christoval, enclosing that document in the letter. I enjoined him the strictest secrecy, should it ultimately prove unnecessary to make use of the paper, and he is a man of honour, madam. He will not deviate one tittle from the injunctions I gave nor from the course that I laid down for him to follow. I argued to myself that it was scarcely a breach of the compact made between yourself and me to adopt this course, inasmuch as by your own counsel I obtained that undertaking from your husband."

"Not for a moment," responded the minister's wife, "do I consider it a breach of the compact. Yes, I counselled you to obtain that undertaking, so as to ensure the granting of

the pardon by my husband, and you did well to adopt the precaution which you are describing."

"My narrative will be terminated in a few minutes," resumed Kate. "Recollecting how his Excellency had threatened to avail himself of his power to intercept my correspondence at the post-office, I deemed that medium of conveyance to be an unsafe one for the transmission of my letter to Don Christoval. I accordingly despatched it by a mounted courier, who took his departure for Barcelona at about five o'clock this evening."

"And what course," inquired the lady, "did you instruct Count Christoval to adopt?"

"I requested his lordship to take no steps for eighteen hours after the receipt of my despatch, but if at the expiration of that time he received not a second despatch from me, he was then to conclude that circumstances were adverse, that I was no longer the mistress of my own actions, that I was either in a prison or else being hurried out of Spain —"

"And in that case?" inquired the minister's wife, anxiously.

"In that case," responded Miss Marshall, "I implored and entreated that his lordship would lose not a moment in taking horse, speeding to Madrid, calling on your husband, and making such use of my written narrative, corroborated as it was by that undertaking, as under all circumstances he might think fit."

"Then no harm is done which may not be repaired," exclaimed the lady, in a joyful tone. "You have conducted all these proceedings, my dear Miss Marshall, with a most delicate consideration toward myself, and with far more consideration than my husband deserved at your hands. But come, let us hasten away from this dreadful place."

Kate did not require to be told twice to put on her bonnet and shawl; the turnkey was waiting at the end of the passage, and as the door of the cell opened, he hastened forward to take the light and guide the two females forth. In a few minutes they stood in the open street and Kate breathed the air of freedom once more just as the prison clock was proclaiming the hour of three in the morning. The hotel where she lodged lay in the same direction as that which the minister's wife had to take, and therefore they proceeded together. Had it been otherwise, the magnanimous lady

would have all the same felt it her duty to see Miss Marshall safe to her own residence.

“ You will now snatch a few hours of that repose which must be so necessary,” said the lady to Kate, when they reached the door of the hotel. “ By ten o’clock I shall again be with you, the bearer of Edward Russell’s pardon, and you will then lose no time in despatching another courier with the precious document to Count Christoval at Barcelona.”

The minister’s wife bade Kate a temporary farewell, and the house porter speedily answering her summons at the gate, she obtained admission into the hotel. Seeking her own chamber, she lost no time in retiring to rest, and, well-nigh exhausted both in mind and body, she soon fell into a profound slumber.

When she awoke, it was nine o’clock, and the good-hearted landlady was standing by the side of the couch, infinitely rejoiced to have heard that her guest had come back in the middle of the night, and to find that the intelligence given to her by the house porter to this effect was indeed true. But inasmuch as the landlady had been kept in ignorance of all those transactions which were going on in respect to the minister, his wife, and the stratagem devised by the latter, the worthy woman could not conceive how it was possible Kate had been arrested as a Carlist spy, — an allegation which she herself had not for an instant believed. She accordingly said that she supposed it had been all a mistake on the part of the police, and Kate, not wishing to be led into further explanations, readily assured the landlady that such was the case.

At ten o’clock, faithful to her promise, the minister’s wife — again closely veiled — called upon Kate, and presented her with a packet, not only containing her lover’s pardon, but likewise the letters which had been taken from her trunk on the preceding night. Again did Miss Marshall pour forth her fervid gratitude to the excellent-hearted lady; again was her joy displayed with bright smiles and glistening tears. Oh, to think that she should have succeeded in her cherished aim after having experienced so many threatening adventures, so much affliction, and even at one time so much despair! This crowning happiness was almost too much for her, but she was not one of those women who are

apt to faint in periods of excessive grief or excessive joy, and thus her natural fortitude soon came to her assistance.

She lost no time, while the minister's wife was still with her, in penning a few hasty lines to Don Christoval, — a few lines likewise to her beloved Edward Russell, assuring him that she was about to set off in a post-chaise to meet him at Barcelona. The pardon, and this note for Russell, were enclosed in a packet addressed to Don Diego Christoval, and then Kate hastened to the landlady's apartment, to inform her that her lover's life was saved, without any condition of minor punishment, and to request that a courier should be at once obtained to bear this second despatch on the heels of the first. The worthy woman was so delighted that she could scarcely leave off embracing Kate, who was naturally impatient that not a minute's unnecessary delay should occur ere the messenger was in his saddle. She saw the man depart, and then hurried up to her own chamber, where the minister's wife was waiting her return.

"Now, my dear Miss Marshall," said this lady, "before we separate I have a certain duty to fulfil, — a duty which, I have much pleasure in stating, was suggested by my husband, for he feels that even the granting this pardon is scarcely an adequate atonement for his conduct toward you. You perceive, therefore, that his regrets of last night were not transitory. Indeed he had been profoundly touched by all these circumstances, and not the least by the proofs of love which I have exhibited toward him. He desires me to seek on his behalf the express assurance of your forgiveness, and he beseeches that you will not refuse to accept the contents of this purse — Nay, do not shake your head, my dear Miss Marshall. You will accept this trifling present from me, even if you have any scruple in receiving it from him?"

"Dearest lady," answered Kate, with tears in her eyes, "I consider that his Excellency has made every atonement, and from the very bottom of my heart do I forgive him the temporary uneasiness which he caused me. And you, dear lady, you have proved yourself the kindest, the best of friends. But I cannot accept that purse — I need it not. Though not rich, I have ample means for my present purposes —"

"Enough, my dear Miss Marshall," interrupted the lady. "We will say no more upon that subject. But you will not

refuse to wear this for my sake,"— and she drew from her finger a splendid ring set with brilliants.

Kate could not reject a gift so generously and also so delicately proffered; she accordingly accepted it, and after many embraces and kind words, she and the minister's wife bade each other farewell. Within the hour, Kate was seated in a post-chaise, issuing forth from the Spanish capital on the highroad to Barcelona.

CHAPTER VIII

NED RUSSELL

ALTHOUGH the captain-general of Catalonia had the power to suspend the execution of Ned Russell's sentence for three weeks, he had not granted a respite for that full period, but merely indefinitely. Don Diego Christoval was in reality somewhat alarmed at this circumstance, but in his letters to Kate he had not chosen to increase her anguish by mentioning it; he however determined, as the reader has seen, to remain at Barcelona, so as to be upon the spot to renew his intercession and exert his influence afresh with the captain-general, should it be necessary. He tolerably well comprehended the difficulty in which this great functionary found himself placed, and therefore understood how it was that he had not positively and specifically defined the respite for the full period of three weeks.

The fact was, that the utmost indignation prevailed amongst the inhabitants of Barcelona and the neighbourhood at the slaughter of the custom-house officers, and a vindictive spirit called loudly for the summary wreaking of the law's penalty upon the head of Russell. The political chief, or supreme civil authority of the principality, was to a certain extent at enmity with the captain-general, and he failed not to represent as a great grievance the leniency shown toward the English smuggler-captain by suspending the sentence. Again, the commanders of the Spanish revenue cruisers upon the coast were terribly enraged at the vessel having escaped them; and requiring a vent of some kind or another for their excited feelings, they also clamoured for the prompt execution of the law's judgment pronounced against Edward Russell.

Thus was it that the captain-general was sorely pressed

by the state of public feeling and by the opinions of the authorities in his district, so that, at the expiration of a fortnight, he sent for Don Diego Christoval, and assured him that he dared no longer delay issuing the warrant for the execution. This was on the very same day that Kate Marshall paid her second visit to the minister, to make the appointment for the night, which appointment, as the reader has seen, was in reality to be kept by the minister's lady. Count Christoval besought and implored that the captain-general would suffer the dictates of mercy to ride dominant above the pressure of vindictive sentiments. He assured his Excellency that most strenuous measures were being adopted at Madrid to obtain Russell's pardon, that no doubt this pardon would be vouchsafed, and that he (the captain-general) would therefore be much afflicted if by precipitating the execution he should so fatally render abortive the results of the good offices that were actively making their way in the capital. It was upon a Wednesday that these representations were made; that day week the full period of three weeks, to which the captain-general's discretionary power was limited, would expire. Don Christoval urged that it was but for this one poor week he sought the delay, and if nothing favourable transpired in the meantime, the sentence must then as a matter of course be carried into execution. Still the captain-general shook his head, refusing to comply. Don Diego would not leave him; he plied him with all possible arguments and intercessions, and ultimately he succeeded in gaining a portion of what he asked. To be brief, the captain-general consented to a compromise between his own inclinations on the one hand, and the clamour of the public on the other. He accorded a further delay of three days, adding emphatically that at eleven in the forenoon on the Saturday ensuing the culprit must be executed, if no counter-instructions of any sort should arrive from Madrid. More than this Count Christoval could not obtain, and therewith he was forced to content himself.

Finding it now, therefore, useless to remain any longer in Barcelona, — and not even tarrying to obtain another interview with Ned Russell, whom, we should observe, he had seen almost daily during the fortnight which had elapsed since his arrival at Barcelona, — he mounted his horse and set out on the highway toward Madrid. The distance be-

tween Barcelona and the Spanish capital is above three hundred miles, and therefore Don Diego did not entertain the hope of reaching Madrid and returning to Barcelona within the prescribed interval. But he adopted his present proceeding for two reasons. In the first place, he thought it probable that Miss Marshall — if she had obtained the pardon — would, in her loving zeal and tender anxiety, be hastening with it herself to Barcelona, — the more so, as he had led her to suppose that there was still another clear week of respite for Ned Russell. If therefore she were upon the road, he hoped to meet her; he would receive the pardon from her hands, and, to make everything sure, would gallop back day and night until he reached the Catalan capital once more. In the second place, he reasoned that she might have entrusted the precious document to a courier, and knowing that these individuals are apt to tarry and drink on the way, he resolved to make inquiries at every station and of every mounted messenger whom he might meet, to ascertain if the hoped-for paper were upon the road to Barcelona.

It was in the forenoon of Wednesday that he thus set out, and being an excellent horseman, as well as accustomed to the fatigues of travelling, he journeyed at a rapid pace. Resting as little as possible, and obtaining a fresh steed as often as circumstances would permit, he accomplished ninety miles by midnight, which, considering the nature of the Spanish roads and the sorry animals used for posting or for couriers, was remarkably good. Allowing himself but a couple of hours to recruit his strength, he continued his way. Morning dawned, and after another rest, he sped along. It was about noon on the Thursday that, at a distance of one hundred and sixty miles from Barcelona, he encountered a courier whom he stopped, and to whom he put the same inquiries he had addressed to all the others he had previously met. This courier bore a despatch addressed to himself. It was the one which Kate had sent off in the latter part of the previous day, after her interview with the minister's wife at the hotel, and it contained the written undertaking signed by the minister. Don Diego therefore saw that every hope was to be entertained, but as Kate intimated that another messenger would be sent off with a despatch to communicate the result, Count Christoval resolved to continue his ride toward the capital and thus fall in with the second messenger.

It was late on the Thursday night that he met him, and the letter which he bore contained the official pardon, duly signed and sealed by the Minister of the Interior. It would be easier to conceive than to depict the joy which the warm-hearted Don Diego experienced at this triumphant crowning of Kate Marshall's magnanimous endeavour to save her lover's life.

But the scene now shifts to Barcelona, and it is Friday night. In the principal square a number of men are raising the scaffold by torchlight. A guard of soldiers, drawn up around, keeps back the approach of the throng of inquisitive observers. The workmen wear masks upon their countenances, and the presence of the soldiery is to prevent the lookers-on from drawing so near as to be enabled to recognize any of these individuals so employed, either by their particular clothing, their stature, their voices, or the accidental slipping aside of their masks. In Spain it is considered infamous for any person to assist in erecting a scaffold for the purpose of a public execution, and it is therefore necessary to raise, as it were, by impressment the requisite workmen for this purpose. It is an act of rebellion on the part of those so impressed to refuse; the authorities, however, adopt precautionary measures, as just now explained, to save them from recognition, so that they may not be thereafter taunted by their companions as "gallows-builders." Hence the working at night, and the masks upon the countenances of the workers.

It was a spectacle of solemn and awful interest, — those men with black crape upon their faces, erecting the scaffold in the midst of the square, in the centre of a cordon of soldiers, the lurid glare of the torches guiding their operations, and throwing forth their forms with a Rembrandt-like effect. So closely were the soldiers marshalled in double ranks that they not merely formed a barrier against the pressure of the crowd without, but likewise a living wall to intercept the ruddy beams of the torches themselves; but these nevertheless played upon the bayonets, like lurid lightning on the points of so many conductors. In the iron balconies attached to the houses looking upon the square, crowds of persons — male and female, young and old, the well-born and the rich, the humble and the poor — were gathered to gaze upon the ominous spectacle; or, rather, to catch as much of it as

could be seen through the darkness which surrounded the centre of light where the torches blazed. The work advanced rapidly; in a few hours the scaffold rose above the heads of the girdling ranks of soldiery, and long ere the first streaks of dawn were discernible in the horizon which joined the eastern waves, the sinister upright post with the strangling iron was erected. Then, a portion of the guard being left to protect the scaffold the remainder marched away with the workmen in the midst, the crowd being forbidden to follow on pain of the most serious consequences. The masked workmen were thus escorted to some obscure part of the city of Barcelona, and, having received a liberal remuneration, they dispersed, sneaking stealthily away to their respective homes.

Morning dawned upon Barcelona; the scaffold, complete in all its appointments, stood in the market-place; a guard of soldiers surrounded it. The crowd was every instant becoming more dense, there being the same anxiety on the part of the Barcelonese to secure "a good place" to view the execution as that which the populace of London displays on a public strangulation day in the Old Bailey. The balconies, too, of the circumjacent houses were thronged from an early hour; high prices were paid for sitting or standing room, and at the casements of many of the principal habitations, well-dressed ladies might be seen. These, with their garments of black silk, their mantillas richly bordered with lace, their fans, and their satin slippers, appeared as if they were spectatresses awaiting the presence of some gorgeous pageant or gay scene, instead of the sombre and sinister procession of death. Yes, there they were, those lovely Catalan women, seated in their balconies, some sipping their chocolate, others conversing gaily, others quietly reading a novel, and all awaiting the dread ceremony with the easiest air in the world.

But what of Ned Russell? What of him for whom the paraphernalia of death had been thus elaborately prepared, and on whose account these crowds were assembled? He was a prisoner in his gloomy cell, — having bidden adieu to all hope, and manfully resigning himself to the fate which he deemed inevitable. He feared not to die, and yet the hardy sailor brushed away a tear as he thought of that loving and much-loved being who would have to deplore his loss.

He knew that she was at Madrid, endeavouring to obtain his pardon, or at least a commutation of his sentence; he knew likewise, from the same source (namely, Count Christoval), that she trusted to the strong letters she had received from the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle to accomplish her aim; and he knew that her disappointment must prove of the bitterest description. For disappointed she had evidently been. Alas, poor Kate — and again he wiped away a tear. But Count Christoval himself, wherefore came he not? It was now Saturday morning, and not since Tuesday had Russell seen him, nor in the interval had he heard from him. What could this mean? Not for an instant did the frank-hearted sailor suspect that the Spanish nobleman had deserted him at the very last, but he feared lest some accident should have befallen him. Once or twice during that interval, Ned Russell had caught himself giving way to the hope that this absence and silence on Don Diego's part were in some way or another favourably connected with his own case, that something had transpired to turn the progress of events into another channel, requiring the count's presence elsewhere, and that he had either no time to make a communication, or else that his message or letter had been entrusted to a neglectful emissary. But as the time drew near, Ned Russell suffered himself not to be buoyed up with this hope. He considered it not merely a weakness, but likewise a folly, to give way to hope on such slender grounds, and with true characteristic courage, he prepared to die.

A Franciscan chaplain, attached to the gaol, had on several occasions, since Russell's confinement, endeavoured to persuade him to kneel and pray, but inasmuch as the worthy priest could only convey this intimation by signs, — he being as ignorant of the English tongue as the prisoner was of the Spanish, — their intercourse had hitherto amounted to mere dumb show, the priest wishing to enforce his object by means of gestures, and the captive as peremptorily refusing in a similar manner. But on this Saturday morning, — the one fixed for the execution, — the prison chaplain made his appearance, accompanied by a brother Franciscan who could speak a little English, and the latter priest endeavoured to persuade Russell to accept the last consolations of religion. Now, Ned never had been at all of a religious character; not that he was an infidel nor a skeptic, — on the contrary, he

was a firm believer; but his mode of life had, for obvious reasons, somewhat militated against pious habits. He did not now choose to receive consolations from a Catholic; he therefore bluntly enough informed the priest who spoke English that he should certainly like to have the spiritual comfort of a Protestant clergyman, but that if this were impossible, he would sooner make his peace with Heaven in his own way than accept the ministry of an ecclesiastic belonging to another faith. The priest argued and reasoned with him; the prisoner was firm, though perfectly respectful, and finding that he could make no impression, the Franciscan knelt down, in company with the chaplain, the two thus offering up prayers in Ned Russell's cell, but in a language which he could not understand.

He wished to be alone, he wished to commune with himself during the last moments which remained to him in this life, but the Franciscans would not hear of it. They persisted in remaining, and as he gave them credit for good intentions, he said nothing rude. Withdrawing his attention from them, however, as much as possible, he prayed inwardly, and with a heartfelt devotion which never in his life had he experienced before. But the intercession which he sent up to Heaven from the very depths of his soul was far more on his beloved Kate's account than his own, and he besought Providence to endow her with the fortitude to bear the bitter bereavement which he felt to be inevitable.

The fatal hour approached, and at about a quarter to eleven, the executioner entered the cell, accompanied by the governor of the prison, a notary, and three or four *gendarmes*. The notary read the warrant of execution, signed by the captain-general, and of the issuing of which the prisoner had received due notice on the previous evening from the governor through the medium of an interpreter. The executioner then proceeded to bind the prisoner's arms and hands, which he did in such a way as to give him the appearance of being in the attitude of prayer. A glass of wine was next held to his lips, but this Russell refused; he would not have it thought that he was in the slightest degree indebted to alcoholic liquor for the courage which he felt sure he should be enabled to display.

A procession was now formed, the two priests leading it, and the front gate of the gaol was reached. Several streets

had to be threaded in order to arrive at the place of execution. These thoroughfares were completely lined with troops, behind whom there were but a few stragglers as lookers-on, those whose curiosity was excited on the occasion having long ere this secured their places in the vicinity of the scaffold. Nor were the balconies of the houses in these streets much crowded, — the inhabitants of those dwellings having likewise proceeded to that point which was the focus of supreme attraction.

Just outside the gate of the gaol, about twenty more Franciscan monks were assembled, attended by a couple of acolytes, each of whom bore a lantern fixed at the end of a wand, and with wax tapers burning inside, the breeze which blew from the sea rendering it necessary for the lights to be thus protected. But the main feature of the religious paraphernalia remains to be described. It consisted of an enormous crucifix, on which was a pasteboard effigy of the Saviour, the size of life. It was carefully and skilfully painted, but had a most hideous and ghastly effect; inasmuch as it represented the gore trickling down from the crown of thorns, from the hands and the feet, pierced with nails, and from the wound in the side. This figure was borne at the head of the procession, and as it advanced, the soldiers crossed themselves, and most of the stragglers behind the military rank fell upon their knees. The monks began to chant the litany in deep lugubrious voices, while two men wearing long dark cloaks solicited alms, which were to be expended in masses for the doomed man's soul.

In this way the procession threaded the streets leading toward the great square, on reaching which the hum of voices that had hitherto prevailed on the part of the crowds gathered there sank into a dead silence, and nought was heard but the chanting of the priests and the slow tread of footsteps. A pathway up to the scaffold was kept clear in the midst of the multitude by two lines of soldiers, and over their heads silver and copper coins were showered for the benefit of the prisoner's soul, — the money being duly gathered up by the collectors in the long, dark cloaks. Meanwhile Ned Russell had advanced in the midst of the procession with a firm step and a manly bearing. There was no bravado in his looks, — merely the fortitude of a truly courageous man. He was apparelled in his sailor's garb,

all except his hat, which had been taken from him, it being a part of the ceremony that he should walk bareheaded to the scaffold. But the masses of his coal black hair clustered in natural curls above his high forehead, and doubtless many a spectatress thought it was a pity that so fine a man should be doomed to die. However vindictive the public sentiment had been toward him while he was still in his dungeon, it demonstrated itself not now; neither by word nor gesture was an inimical feeling displayed. On the contrary, there were some evidences of sympathy in many parts of the crowd and at some of the balconies. Thus the procession moved on, the effigy being carried in front, the monks chanting, the alms being collected, the acolytes bearing the lanterns with the wax tapers, and the crowds crossing themselves in respect for that gore-stained image of the Saviour. The scaffold was reached; the priests ranged themselves in two rows near the steps, up which Ned Russell mounted, accompanied by the executioner, the notary, the *gendarmes*, and the Franciscan who spoke English.

Every eye was strained to observe how the doomed man now conducted himself, but not the slightest evidence of fear could be detected. His step was firm, his looks quailed not, neither did his lips quiver. He bent his gaze steadily upon the upright post to which the strangling-iron was affixed, and in obedience to a signal made by the executioner, he sat himself down upon a low, wooden stool placed against that post. A breathless silence pervaded the crowd; every neck was thrust forward, all eyes were riveted upon that focus of such dread and fearful attraction; the sky was serene above, the sunbeams glinted on the points of bayonets, and on the drawn sabres of the *gendarmes*. It was a perfect sea of faces upturned toward the scaffold; or, to borrow another metaphor, the vast square itself seemed paved with human countenances, while the spectators in the balconies had the appearance of countless groups of individuals suspended in iron cages to the house fronts. Yes, all was silent, save and except the deep hollow chanting of the priests, in which was drowned the voice of the Franciscan who spoke English, and who was earnestly enjoining the doomed man to press his lips to a small crucifix which the monk approached near enough to his countenance for the purpose. But Russell firmly though respectfully refused to comply with the

injunction, and the senior of the *gendarmes* made the executioner a sign to proceed.

The punishment of the garrote can be explained in a few words. It consists of a collar of iron attached to a post, and so contrived as to tighten suddenly by the abrupt turning of a screw. The windpipe is thereby instantaneously closed, and death quickly ensues. It is a hideous punishment, and yet perhaps is preferable to either hanging or beheading, for no blood is shed, neither are the spectators revolted by the three or four minutes' duration of spasmodic convulsions and horrible writhings on the part of the victim. It must not be thought more painful than decapitation, while it is assuredly less so than death by the halter. Startling as the assertion may seem, it is nevertheless a fact that the head of a guillotined person lives for some seconds, perhaps even a minute, after it is severed from the trunk; while all the most excruciating and keenly agonizing sense of existence is concentrated in the brain, until the nerves terminating there have ceased to throb and vibrate. As for hanging, the protracted convulsions — lasting even, as above stated, for some minutes — testify to the extent of the horrific agony endured. But in respect to the garrote, it is easy to comprehend how the sudden compressure of the windpipe in so violent a manner produces an almost instantaneous numbness or absence of feeling, in the midst of which life passes away. At all events, it is tolerably certain that this last-named mode of capital execution must be less painful as well as shorter than that of the other two, for the reasons set forth. All three are hideous, abominable, satanic. The punishment of death is a remnant of barbaric cruelty still lingering amidst our modern civilization; it is an atrocity which the good feeling and the good sense of the masses would abolish in a moment if they had the power, but which is maintained in spite of them by kings and aristocrats the better to enforce those savage laws which prevent society from making that rapid progress which, if it had its full play, would quickly abrogate royalties and patrician orders.

But to return to the scene in the great square of the Catalonian capital. Ned Russell — his arms closely pinioned — was seated upon the stool; the executioner had received the sign to finish the proceeding without delay, and the doomed man was made to place his back completely

against the stout upright post. The iron collar was then fastened around his neck; his eyelids quivered not, neither did his lips; he breathed, with the secret voice of his soul, a quick but fervent prayer for Kate Marshall, he commended himself to his God, he thought that he had done with all the affairs of this life, and that in a few moments more he should be a corpse. Profound was the silence which still pervaded the gathered multitudes, — a silence broken only by the low hollow dirge of the priests at the steps of the scaffold. Every neck was stretched out, all breath was held; the chests of the men moved not, the bosoms of the women remained upheaved. All was suspense — deep, solemn, awful. The fingers of the executioner were upon the screw; in another twinkling of the eye it would have been all over with thee, Edward Russell, when, from the extreme outskirts of the crowd, a voice cried out something. This something was taken up by other voices, hundreds of ejaculations swelled into thousands, and like the quick, successive fire of musketry the cries went on till they reached the foot of the scaffold, and then their meaning was understood by the persons standing thereon. It was a reprieve.

The crowd parted from the spot whence those cries had first commenced on the extreme verge. Yes, that living ocean of people parted even as parted the Red Sea to form a passage for the Israelites. And then was beheld a horseman covered with dust, urging the jaded steed along, and holding up a paper in his right hand. Whatsoever feeling of enmity the Barcelonese entertained toward Ned Russell, when he was still a prisoner in his cell, had been to a considerable extent changed into sympathy, not unmixed with admiration, when his fine person was seen moving along with manly bearing toward the scaffold; but now both sympathy and admiration swelled into enthusiastic delight, and it seemed as if a really generous feeling, until this moment latent, had blazed up on the part of the myriads gathered there. Hats were waved, fans and kerchiefs likewise; the dark eyes of the Catalan women flashed joy from the balconies and from the midst of the multitudes in the square; adown many a cheek, both male and female, did tears flow. On came the horseman, sitting like one intoxicated upon his steed, for full evident was it that he had journeyed far and had journeyed fast. We need scarcely say that the fingers

of the executioner turned not the fatal screw, while Ned Russell felt that he was saved. Then, not on his own account, — but for Kate's, dear Kate's, — did such a gush of feelings well upward into his throat as almost to suffocate him, and a tear trickled down each cheek. The strong-minded man who would have scorned to weep for himself was melted into tenderest feeling as the conviction smote him that he was saved through Kate, and that she at this moment was happy.

On came the horseman amidst the crowd which parted to afford him a passage, closing, however, again immediately behind the heels of the jaded horse. On he came, — that man so covered with dust, so travel-worn, that his nearest and dearest friends would not have recognized him at the time. On he came, amidst the plaudits of the crowd, with the pardon in his right hand. Although he saw full well that his mission was understood, — although he saw likewise that he came not quite too late, — yet did he urge the staggering, panting, labouring animal on, until the steps of the scaffold were reached, and then, the instant he pulled in the horse, it dropped down heavily, blood gushing from its mouth and speedily turning into crimson the masses of white foam so thickly gathered there. The horseman was so exhausted that he had not sufficient energy nor agility to vault from the steed as it fell, and he lay beneath it. A dozen eager hands were in a moment stretched forth to extricate him from his dire peril, and this was accomplished to the satisfaction of those who lent their assistance, because they perceived that he was uninjured.

The pardon was handed up to the notary, who at once read it and made known its nature. The Franciscan priest who spoke English, and who was in reality a well-meaning, kind-hearted man, hastened to communicate to Edward Russell that the document contained a full and unconditional pardon. In a moment the cords that bound his arms were severed, — he was free; and the next instant his hand was warmly and fervidly grasped by Don Diego Christoval, the wearied and travel-worn horseman. Then shouts of applause rent the skies, and the name of the count being mentioned as that of the bearer of the pardon, the warm-hearted Spanish nobleman found himself as much the object of enthusiastic interest as he whom he had come to save.

Let us pass over a few hours. It was evening, and in a well-furnished apartment at the principal hotel at Barcelona two persons were awaiting the arrival of a third. The table was spread for dinner; the light of the candles was reflected by a goodly display of plate, bottles of champagne were cooling in ice; it was evident that this was to be a banquet to be partaken of under no ordinary circumstances, although but three were to sit down to it. One of the two persons was Count Christoval, and he lay reclining upon the sofa, still much exhausted. The other was Ned Russell, who was walking to and fro in a kind of delighted impatience, every minute going to the window to see whether the chaise was approaching that was to bear Kate to his arms. He was apparelled in an entirely new suit of clothes which Don Diego had lent him, and which set off his fine form to the fullest advantage which such well-cut garments were calculated to produce. So full of Elysian animation was his countenance that whatsoever ravages imprisonment might have produced thereon were lost in that enthusiastic glow.

It was seven o'clock, and according to Count Christoval's computation, Kate might be expected every moment. It will be remembered that the despatch she had sent off by the second courier, and which was addressed to his lordship, contained a note for Ned Russell, telling him when she should depart from Madrid, and that she should travel as quick as possible to join him at Barcelona. Thus was it known that she could not be much longer ere she made her appearance. Nor was she. A chaise presently came dragging along the street; it stopped at the entrance of the hotel. Russell waited not to observe who alighted, but darting from the room, he precipitated himself down the stairs, and cries of joy echoed in the hall as he and his beloved Kate were clasped in each other's arms. Oh, that was a joyous meeting, — a meeting such as neither of them can ever forget for the remainder of their lives! Nearly nine years have elapsed (at the time this narrative is written) since that memorable evening, and often and often does the recollection thereof come back to them fraught with ineffable feelings; it comes back to them like a delicious harmony stealing over the ocean of the past, it comes back to them like a strain of heavenly music, and ever productive of chastening

sentiments, making them wiser and better and strengthening, if possible, the love which they bear for each other and which can know no ceasing.

But let us not anticipate. Ned Russell conducted Kate Marshall up into the room where Don Christoval was waiting. In a few rapid words he had informed her, as they ascended the stairs, how that excellent-hearted nobleman had arrived in the very nick of time, and how in another instant it would have been too late. Kate threw herself at Don Christoval's feet, she took his hand, she pressed it to her lips, she tried to speak, she could not; her emotions overpowered her. But he understood all that the grateful young woman meant to express; his tears showed that he thus comprehended her. They sat down to the banquet, and though they were but three, it was as joyous and happy a one as if there had been a hundred guests vowed to unalloyed hilarity. The sparkling champagne was drunk, and when the feast was over, Miss Marshall recited her adventures in full, from the moment she parted with Don Diego Christoval in Catalonia, until the instant the pardon was placed in her hands. Ned Russell shuddered when he thus heard of all that his beloved had gone through for his sake, — how she had so nearly lost her life in the forest, and what indignities she had suffered at the hands of the Minister of the Interior. But they all three commented lightly and gently upon these latter circumstances, for Kate had come harmless and unscathed through the fiery ordeal which had threatened to brand her chastity, and the minister had made as much atonement as a man could render for a grievous wrong, — a wrong which, however, was not, after all, irreparable.

On the following day Don Diego Christoval, Ned Russell, and Kate Marshall — accompanied by a young Englishwoman who happened to be at the hotel, and was desirous to return to her native country — set out in a post-chaise on their way to France. The young woman was a nursery governess, who had come to Barcelona with an English family, but whom she had left in consequence of ill-usage. For delicacy's sake, Kate was well pleased to have such a travelling companion added to the party; and the young female herself was rejoiced at the proposal to journey free of expense back to her own island. We need not follow

them on the route; suffice it to say that in due course they reached Calais in safety, and thence they embarked for Dover. Infinite was the joy of Kate's parents and sisters as they welcomed her arrival and hailed the presence of Ned Russell. There were such festivities at the Admiral's Head, such tales to tell, such adventures to recite, so much to talk over and over again, that it seemed as if neither the rejoicings nor the narratives would ever end. Don Diego was unfeignedly happy at this spectacle of perfect bliss, and he considered the circumstances favourable for a little piece of advice which he had intended to volunteer to Ned Russell. This was to the effect that it would be better for the gallant sailor to avoid his smuggling adventures in future. Thereunto Russell replied that he had already made up his mind, not merely to abandon such expeditions, but to give up the sea entirely, adding that even if he were utterly destitute of resources, he should consider it his duty to look to some other means of gaining a livelihood, so as to avoid being ever more separated from the admirable young woman who had saved his life. But he had some little property wherewith to commence the world anew, and, moreover, the sale of his vessel, which had arrived safely in port, would increase his store. Don Diego then proceeded to observe in as delicate a manner as possible, that by way of indemnifying Ned Russell for the loss of his freight, which fell into the hands of the Spanish custom-house officers, he intended to make him a present of five hundred pounds. Russell would not hear of it; the count insisted. Old Marshall overheard what was going on, and backing Ned's decision, promised to provide so bountifully for his daughter when the marriage should take place as to supersede the necessity of this further display of his lordship's generosity. The count was therefore overruled, but before he left Dover, he made Kate and Ned Russell such handsome presents that, so far as the amount went, they almost fulfilled his original intention.

"We shall be married in three weeks, my lord," said Russell, just previously to the nobleman's departure for Edenbridge Park, on the second day after his arrival at Dover, — the Marshalls having compelled him to give them his company thus long, treating him as if he were a god who had descended amongst them. "We shall be married in

three weeks, my lord, and depend upon it, I shall make the best of husbands, as I am sure that Kate will make the best of wives. Do you think, my lord, that if ever anything was to put her out and she did say a harsh word, which I know she won't, but even if she did, do you think I would give her one in return? No, never. I would kiss her back into good humour. I would sooner kill myself than draw a tear from her eye, or make her beautiful face look mournful by any conduct on my part. I shall never forget what she has done for me, — never forget all that she has gone through. The bare idea of it, as well as my own sufferings, has made me an altered, and, I think, a better man. As for your lordship, your name will ever be a household word with us. And," added Ned Russell, "if we are blessed with a son, I shall take the liberty — and hope no offence — of calling him Christoval after your lordship."

"And depend upon it," responded the warm-hearted nobleman, "I shall be rejoiced to stand godfather."

Don Diego took his departure, followed by the kindest wishes and sincerest expressions of gratitude on the part of Ned Russell and the Marshalls. On the very same day Kate gave away her carrier-pigeons to some neighbour who had long fancied them, and who she was well aware would treat them kindly; and the little reception-place, as well as the curiously contrived trap-door, disappeared from the roof of the Admiral's Head. Kate looked back with sorrow upon the somewhat lax notions which she had hitherto entertained in certain particulars, for she also felt, as did her intended husband, that the incidents of the last few weeks had their moral teachings which were not to be disregarded. In this better frame of mind she possessed all the elements to render her an admirable member of society, and such she was resolved to become. The same purifying influence was shed throughout the family, and no long interval of time elapsed ere they felt that calamity and adversity often have their sovereign uses.

Three weeks after the return to Dover, Ned Russell led Kate Marshall to the altar. It was a blithe and happy day, and again was the Admiral's Head a scene of festivity and rejoicing.

CHAPTER IX

THE WIFE

THE reader will not have forgotten that the mansion of the Viscount and Viscountess de Chateauneuf stood upon a gentle eminence about a mile distant from the picturesque village of Auteuil. We have already stated that by his marriage with the sugar baker's daughter, the viscount obtained an annual revenue equivalent to twenty thousand pounds sterling of British money; and this income, large for any individual in any country, was an immense one for a French nobleman. It is therefore scarcely necessary to observe that the chateau was furnished in the most sumptuous manner, or that there were troops of domestics forming the household establishment. But riches do not constitute happiness, and this was a truth which the poor viscountess could, if she had chosen, proclaim with the utmost sincerity.

Stephanie possessed a warm and generous disposition, but her mind was not as powerful as her heart was sensitive. She loved her husband with all that heart and with all her soul, and she had expected, on accompanying him to the altar, that his attachment would be equally fervid. She soon however found that it was not so, and, as Madame Durand had explained to Mrs. Chesterfield, the viscountess sought to find in herself the causes of this coldness on her husband's part, rather than to make them the source of reproach toward him. She exerted all her powers to please; she was never wearied of lavishing upon him the most delicate attentions and the tenderest caresses, if he would only give her an opportunity of proffering them. She studied to render herself agreeable; she scrupulously examined her own conduct, bearing, and manners, comparing them with those of her female acquaintances, in order to ascertain

wherein she herself was deficient, so that she might improve according to those finished models. But her endeavours were thrown away, so far as her husband was concerned. Two years had they been married at the time when we introduce them to our reader, and it seemed as if the viscount was thoroughly wearied of his wedded life. Any society was agreeable to him in preference to that of his spouse, and yet he had not as yet treated her with direct unkindness, much less with downright cruelty. But he was indifferent, or perhaps indeed he entertained a stronger feeling in respect to her, — one bordering upon aversion. Sufficiently magnanimous, however, to conceal this, he forced himself to treat her with courtesy when they were together, but courtesy from a husband to a wife is a very sorry substitute for the endearments of love.

The reader will recollect that we took a temporary leave of Augusta Chesterfield and the Viscount de Chateaufneuf, at the moment when the former consented to abandon herself to the latter, and when the young nobleman, full of rapturous delight, snatched her to his breast. A fortnight had now passed since that date, and the viscount was a constant visitor at the Durand's villa. He passed nearly his whole time with Mrs. Chesterfield; he was infatuated with her. Possession was not accompanied with satiety; on the contrary, it only augmented the vehemence of the passion which he experienced for her. Perhaps the ardour of her own temperament sustained the fiery feelings of sensuous desire which her truly remarkable beauty had in the first instance excited, while her conversation — for she was a highly accomplished and intellectual woman — rendered her an agreeable companion. Thus was it that the viscount was never wearied of her society, and he regretted that he could not be entirely with her from morning till night and from night till morning. But he had not as yet thought of perpetrating an abrupt outrage toward his wife by abandoning her altogether, though even this he would assuredly have done if Augusta Chesterfield required him. She however had said nought on the subject, but had rather acted as if she were anxious to avoid an explosion of scandal as much as possible, and to keep their amour as secret for the present as circumstances would permit. Such, at least, appeared to be her policy. As a matter of course, the

Durands saw what was going on, but they were by no means shocked thereat, nor did Madame Durand venture the slightest remonstrance. In the first place, those things are not thought of so much in France as they are in this country; and in the second place, the Viscount de Chateaufort failed not to make the Durands some very handsome presents almost immediately after his connection with Mrs. Chesterfield had begun. Nor were the servants at the little villa forgotten, and a liberal *douceur*, presented to each, ensured the secrecy that was thus sought to be obtained.

We have said that a fortnight had elapsed since the commencement of that amour, and we must now direct the reader's attention to a particular morning, when the following scene took place.

In a sumptuously furnished apartment at the chateau on the eminence, the viscount and viscountess were seated at breakfast. The young lady was, as Madame Durand had described her, eminently beautiful, with chestnut hair, dark blue eyes, and a transparent complexion. Of slender shape, she possessed a figure the lightness of which was replete with elegance and grace, but not of too sylphid a symmetry to be without well-developed proportions. She had not that vivacity which usually characterizes the women of France, but her manners, as well as her style of beauty, would have led a stranger to pronounce her a native of England. She was more tranquil than the gay Parisian ladies are wont to be; modest, unassuming, and without affectation, she was as incapable of coquetry or of flirting as she was averse to the fulsome adulation which is offered up at the shrine of female beauty in the brilliant circles of fashion. Thus, when she sought to be very cheerful, in the hope of pleasing her husband, the endeavour was visibly forced, because she was too unskilled in the arts of dissimulation to conceal it. But let us listen to their discourse, as they are seated at the breakfast-table between nine and ten o'clock on the particular morning of which we are speaking.

"My dear Jules," said the viscountess, after a long pause, and now speaking with a considerable degree of hesitation, though in the most affectionate manner, "I hope you will not forget that you have guests to dinner this evening."

"Ah, I remember!" he ejaculated, with an air of vexa-

tion. "A party made expressly for the Villebelles. It was absolutely necessary to invite them, for the marquis and I were schoolfellows, though he is some three or four years older than myself."

"You seem annoyed, my dear Jules," observed his wife, gazing upon him with tender anxiety, "that the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle should have been invited."

"Oh, no! not annoyed, I can assure you!" exclaimed the viscount, forcing himself to laugh with an assumed gaiety. "Annoyed? no, that is out of the question, only I was thinking that it was just possible I might be detained by business —"

"Pardon me for asking the question," said the viscountess, kindly, "but have you, my dear Jules, anything to trouble you? If so, pray speak, that I may do my best to soothe and console you."

"Trouble me, Stephanie!" he cried. "What could have put such an idea into your head?"

"Only," she answered, still more timidly and reluctantly than before, "because — because you have been away from home so much of late — that — that — I was fearful you had some business of a disagreeable nature —"

"And pray, Stephanie," exclaimed the viscount, somewhat sharply, "can I not be away a few hours of a day without subjecting myself to be thus catechized?"

"Oh, catechized, Jules! No — no — not for the world. I did not mean that," and as the big tears rolled down the poor young lady's cheeks, she rose from her place at the table, and throwing her arms around her husband's neck, besought him in a broken voice to pardon her if she had offended him.

"Offended me, no, Stephanie. You have not offended me," he said, forcing himself to give a single caress for the dozens she lavished upon him, and then he suddenly repulsed her, as if the kiss which he had bestowed was an act of treason toward Augusta Chesterfield.

Thus did he prove himself more scrupulously considerate on behalf of his mistress who was elsewhere, than on behalf of his beautiful wife who was there present, doing her best to demonstrate the love she bore him.

"Jules, wherefore repulse me?" she murmured, with a look of such deprecating tenderness that his conscience was

smitten. "What have I done to grieve or annoy you? You assure me that you are not offended with me, and yet I perceive the contrary. Tell me what I can do to convince you that it was unintentional on my part."

"Really, my dear Stephanie, you are most unreasonable," said the viscount. "Pray sit down and think no more of what I have said — what I have done —"

"But if you be angry with me, Jules?" she observed, as she meekly resumed her chair.

"Angry, no!" he cried, almost petulantly. "Wherefore should you persist in saying that I am angry? Really, Stephanie, I must henceforth be very guarded over my looks and my words that the least thing thus brings tears to your eyes."

"Do you not know, Jules," she continued, still weeping, "how much I love you? And will you be so cruel as to upbraid me for being sorry when I think I have given you offence, or when I fail to please you? I wish — I wish, Jules, that you would understand me better."

"Stephanie, I understand you full well," the viscount hastened to respond, "but we have been married two years, and are no longer lovers; we are husband and wife."

"No longer lovers?" she ejaculated, as if a new light had suddenly been flung in upon her mind; then, as the tears gushed forth anew from her eyes, she added, "Oh, I had hoped and thought we should always be lovers, and that we should not cease to exist as such because our hands were united at the altar."

"See, Stephanie," ejaculated the viscount, "how unreasonably, I might almost say, how foolishly, you talk. And it is because these ideas which you have just expressed rule your actions likewise that I may perhaps seem a little impatient toward you. At the slightest word you weep, you frequently give me hints that I am absent from home, and in the presence of friends your conduct is too endearing. You do not seem to know how to draw the proper distinction between the bearing which lovers adopt toward each other and that which husband and wife ought to maintain."

"I only know, Jules," was the unsophisticated answer of the beautiful viscountess, while her heart swelled with emotions, though she now contrived by a powerful effort to keep back her tears, fearing to give her husband renewed

offence, "I only know that I love you, and I obey the dictates of my own heart in all my conduct toward you."

"But do you not see, Stephanie," resumed her husband, "that a man cannot always remain tied to his wife's apron-string? When we are together, I do my best to render you happy and contented —"

"Yes, when we are together," she murmured, without the slightest intention of conveying a remonstrance or a reproach, but merely giving audible expression to her own unsophisticated thoughts; for the idea that was uppermost in her mind was that she had no earthly happiness save and except in the society of her husband, and that she could wish him to be always with her.

"Now, look how you answer me," he cried, with a sudden start of gesture and impatience. "If I make a simple observation, your reply is a remonstrance, an upbraiding, a taunt —"

"Good heavens, Jules, what a construction you put upon my words!" she exclaimed, an expression of anguish upon her countenance, and her hands clasped in despair. "I did not mean it — no, I did not mean it. Why will you thus take offence, dear Jules, where none was intended?"

"But, Stephanie, these scenes are little calculated to render my home happy. And," added the viscount, greedily clutching at any excuse which might satisfy his conscience for his treatment toward his beautiful and affectionate wife, "and — and — it is really no wonder that I should sometimes stay out longer than I otherwise intended —"

"Oh," she exclaimed, "now I have learned the fatal truth at last! Yes, yes, I all along suspected it. Nay, more, I was convinced of it. It is I who make your home wretched, it is I who drive you from it, and yet Heaven knows that I would make any sacrifice to keep you with me. I am miserable when you are absent, and therefore it would be madness on my part wilfully to force you to remain away."

With these words, the unhappy young lady covered her countenance with her hands, and burst into a fresh paroxysm of anguish. Her bosom was convulsed with sobs, and if the most dreadful calamity had just alighted upon her head, it was impossible for her to be more afflicted. In the midst of this scene a domestic in a splendid livery entered the room, bearing the morning's letters and newspapers upon a silver

salver. The viscount snatched them up in a petulant manner, while Stephanie, quickly removing her fair white hands from her face, leaned over her plate to conceal her tears from the lackey.

"See how you disgrace me!" ejaculated her husband, when the servant had retired and the gilded door had closed behind him. "Now I shall acquire the reputation of ill-treating you. That fellow will go amongst the other servants and say how he found you in tears."

"Forgive me, Jules, pray forgive me, my dearest husband. I see that I am always in the wrong —"

"There you are again, with your reproaches," interrupted the viscount. "You mean me to understand that I am in the wrong, that I treat you cruelly —"

"Good heavens!" murmured the unfortunate viscountess, now wringing her hands in despair, "what am I to do, what am I to say, to convince you that I had no such intention? Ah, Jules, if you could only read my heart, as God now reads it."

"Positively, Stephanie," ejaculated the viscount, starting up angrily from his seat, "this scene is becoming wearisome to a degree. If we were still lovers, it would be bad enough, but from a wife to her husband, it is really intolerable. I must beg and beseech that you will not give way to these gusts of temper."

"Temper?" she echoed, as if a new light had broken in upon her, thus suddenly making her aware that her temper was a bad one, an assurance which she was fully prepared to take on the mere word of her husband, and to adopt the fault as sincerely and contritely as if the imputation were perfectly correct.

"Yes, temper!" he answered, somewhat fiercely, for on his side the impression was that his wife had echoed the word in a spirit of indignant repudiation. "I said temper, and since it has come to this, I may as well be candid with you at once. Now, look you, Stephanie," he continued, and we must do him the justice to add that he did not at the moment perceive how his unfortunate spouse was regarding him with mingled affright and dismay, — "look you, Stephanie. I am getting thoroughly wearied of these scenes; they are repeated too often. Always tears, or else implied upbraiding, and then a perfect storm of lavished

endearments. That is not the life I wish to lead. Try and be always the same, and I shall be always the same to you. But don't disgrace me in the presence of our servants. You seem to think, Stephanie, as I just now said, that I am to be ever tied to your apron-strings, that now I have become the husband, I am still to play the lover. I can do nothing of the sort, and what is more, I do not intend to attempt it. If you think that because you brought me a fortune, you have a right to a devotion such as is only displayed during the period of courtship — ”

“ Jules,” exclaimed the viscountess, springing forward and falling upon her knees at her husband's feet, while her clasped hands were stretched out toward him, “ do not, do not, for Heaven's sake, attribute such unworthy thoughts to me! My fortune — or the fortune that I brought you — I have never once thought of it. Would to God that I had been ten times as rich, that I might have bestowed all, all upon you — ”

Here was another offence, though the reader may full easily comprehend how very far it was from the unfortunate young lady's intention to give it. But she stopped short suddenly, perceiving how her husband started, how his countenance became stern, and how he drew himself up with the haughtiest dignity.

“ Madam,” he said, “ rise from that posture. It is not one which I ever desire my wife to adopt toward me.” Then as the viscountess rose to her feet, cowed, dismayed, and full of anguish, he went on to say, in a tone which struck her as implacably severe, “ Your words have conveyed such a taunt as I little expected ever to hear issue from your lips. You would remind me that I owe my wealth to you, and though you gave the assurance the semblance of love, yet was it the cruelest of reproaches thus to declare that you wished you had been richer so as to lavish your fortune upon me. Ah! then I am a sort of pensioner — I am bribed with gold? Verily, madam, I would have you reflect that rank is above wealth, and that I gave you a name which all the sugar baker's money-bags never could have purchased.”

With this heartless speech the Viscount de Chateaufneuf turned abruptly upon his heel; but as a low moan struck his ear, he was smitten with remorse for what he had said, and, turning quickly around again, was only just in time to

catch his anguished wife in his arms. For, overpowered by the cruel violence of that blow which his words had dealt her, she was tottering and about to fall.

"Stephanie! Stephanie!" he exclaimed, half-petulantly, half-kindly. "How foolish of you to provoke these scenes!" yet he felt that he himself was wrong, though thus endeavouring to fling all the blame upon her.

"Forgive me, Jules," she murmured, feeling it was a luxury thus to be clasped in his arms. "I do indeed see that my conduct has been very wrong. I know that I make you unhappy. Every day tends to convince me of my own failings, and that I am not fitted to be your wife. But bear with me, Jules, and I will endeavour — oh, I will endeavour — to be more guarded in future!"

"Well, well, Stephanie," said the viscount, his conscience torturing him as if a scorpion were planting its sting in his heart, "let there be an end of this."

"There shall, Jules," she murmured, smiling sweetly upon him as his arms still clasped her slender waist. "But tell me that you love me. Do tell me that you love me —"

At this instant the door again opened, and the lackey reappeared, bearing upon the silver salver a letter which by some accident had been omitted from the batch previously brought in. The viscount became crimson, and turned away from Stephanie as if he had been caught embracing the wife of another instead of his own. The incident was a most untoward one. The quarrel — if such it could be called, where the quarrelling was all on his own side — had just been about to end in reconciliation, when the appearance of this servant made all Jules de Chateaufneuf's choler rise up again.

"Stephanie, this is perfectly intolerable!" he ejaculated, vehemently, and almost fiercely, the moment the lackey had again left the room. "You disgrace me thoroughly. At first it is whining and crying, so that the servants think you are ill-treated; then it is this maudlin embracing, so that they will fancy I am begging your pardon, confessing I am a naughty boy, and that I will never do such a thing again. Now, all this is only bringing me into contempt, and when I next look my servants in the face, I shall see a sneering smile upon their lips. It is brought about by your folly —"

"I am indeed most unfortunate," murmured the poor young lady, sinking down upon a seat. "I endeavoured to please you, but I cannot."

"There you are again," ejaculated the viscount, stamping his foot upon the carpet. "Why will you persist in this style of upbraiding? It does no good, it only creates ill-feeling —"

"My dear husband," said Stephanie, now rising up, and looking as well as speaking with a sort of despairing calmness, "I am afraid that you will never have real happiness with me. I am not fitted to be your wife, I am beneath you in birth, beneath you in education, beneath you in knowledge of the world —"

"Stephanie, you will drive me mad," cried Jules, for these were precisely the ideas which he did entertain in respect to his wife, but which nevertheless he could not bear to have so forcibly brought to his mind, and by that very wife herself. "You must not talk thus."

"Well, I will not. We will speak on other subjects. Ah, I remember, we were just now conversing about the dinner-party, for the Villebelles, you will remember, are coming. What little I saw of the marchioness the other day, when you introduced me to her, I liked very much. I should be pleased to cultivate her acquaintance, I think she would become my friend; and I feel that I do want a friend, a real friend. There are times when I am so lonely, so dull, so desponding."

This was another unfortunate speech, but made in a perfectly artless manner, and most unreflectingly.

"By Heaven, another taunt!" ejaculated the viscount. "How many more complaints? However," he immediately added, perceiving that his poor wife was becoming so deadly pale again that it seemed as if she were about to faint, "we will not say any more now, we will not renew these unpleasant topics."

"No, don't, pray don't," she murmured, with a look of earnest appeal. Then approaching him half-tenderly, half-timidly, but not venturing to embrace him, nor even to take his hand, nor place her own lovingly upon his shoulder, as she longed to do, she said, "Do not forget, dear Jules, that the company will be here by seven. And," she added, perfectly innocent of any sinister motive, "it is not yet

eleven o'clock, so you have plenty of time to amuse yourself till dinner."

He was about to ejaculate that this was another taunt, but feeling the inutility of renewing the war of words, or, rather, of prosecuting it on his own side, he said, "No, no, I shall not forget, I will be home by seven," and he quitted the room.

Stephanie proceeded mechanically toward one of the windows, and in a few minutes, as she gazed vacantly forth, she observed her husband hurrying along in the direction of Auteuil. He was on foot. She looked wistfully after him in the hope that he would turn his head and wave his hand, but he did not; and she could not help feeling disappointed that he should not think it possible she might be at the window. Then, as she remained there, watching his receding form, she could not help noticing the hurried manner in which he was proceeding; and now she bethought herself that for the last fortnight he had not been once out on horse-back. This circumstance had not occurred to her before, and though not for a single instant did she now regard it as suspicious, yet she nevertheless wondered thereat. She knew how passionately fond he had ever been of equestrian exercise, and it was therefore natural she should marvel that he had ceased to take it. But she soon fell into another train of reflections in respect to Jules, and retiring to her own boudoir, sat herself down to review all the details of the scene which had just taken place, so as to glean therefrom the necessary hints to reform her conduct for the future. For the poor creature really and truly believed that all the fault was on her own side, and that she therefore did indeed require such self-reformation.

CHAPTER X

THE MISTRESS

THE Viscount de Chateauneuf hurried along in the direction of the Durands' villa. He sped thus precipitately, in order if possible to outstrip his own thoughts. He was too intelligent not to comprehend that he had been harsh, severe, and cruel toward his wife, and he was too generous not to regret it. Still he really and truly did believe that she had intended as taunts some of the things which she had said, but he could not help acknowledging that by his own conduct he fully deserved them. He knew that he was wrong, he knew that Stephanie loved him, and he felt that he was guilty of a monstrous injustice in punishing her for the very testimonials of affection which she lavished upon him. There was a moment during this rapid run from his chateau to the villa when he felt inclined to turn abruptly back, retrace his steps, take his wife in his arms, confess his error, and vow that he would be cruel to her no more; for this was the first time that ever such serious words had passed between them, or that he had actually shown open resentment at what he had described as the "scenes" which were wont to take place. Hitherto those scenes had been insignificant in comparison with this one of to-day, and thus was it that his remorse was for an instant so poignant.

But, alas! that good resolution was abandoned almost as suddenly as formed. He had not the moral courage to retrace his way and perform the part which his better feelings had for an instant suggested. Besides, could he abandon his Augusta? No, no, he could not, and he hastened onward to the Durands' villa. For the rest of the distance he endeavoured to reason himself into the belief that he was

justified in the course he was pursuing, that Stephanie was indeed unfitted to be his wife, and that he had therefore a right to have a mistress. And then, too, he contrasted Augusta with Stephanie, — the former all fervid passion, the latter all girlish love without its fiery sensuality; the former glowing and ardent, the latter only sentimentally tender; the former a companion who could talk upon a thousand things, the latter an inexperienced creature whose very ingenuousness was irksome and whose naïveté was that of a school-girl. Still, as the viscount thus drew his comparison between his mistress and his wife, he could not crush the secret feeling which was in his mind that his conduct was an injustice, an outrage, and a cruelty toward that affectionate being who he knew would, if necessary, lay down her life to serve him. He was glad when he reached the villa, for he longed in the arms of Augusta to forget all these remorseful and compunctious feelings.

Mrs. Chesterfield was half-reclining upon a sofa in the sitting-room when Jules de Chateauneuf made his appearance. She wore an elegant morning-wrapper, somewhat more open at the bosom than was consistent with modesty; the luxuriant masses of her raven hair floated over her half-naked shoulders; and her large, dark eyes swam in a delicious languor, as she smilingly welcomed the viscount's presence. The logs crackled and blazed in the fireplace; the atmosphere of the apartment was warm and slightly perfumed. Though not yet midday, the appearance of that voluptuous creature and the fragrance which seemed to breathe around her made the hour appear as fitted for the blandishments of love as if night were upon the earth, the curtains were drawn, and the lamps lighted.

"You are later than usual, my dear Jules," said Augusta, as he placed himself on the sofa by her side and encircled her waist with his arm. "Ah, and I perceive that something has troubled you," she added, her taper fingers pushing back the masses of naturally curling hair from over the high forehead of that youthful countenance which was so fine a specimen of masculine beauty. "Tell me, dearest Jules," — and she imprinted a glowing kiss upon his cheek, — "what is it that has annoyed you?"

"Augusta," he replied, with the suddenness of a resolve taken in a moment, "I cannot lead this life any longer. I

cannot divide my time between you and my wife. My heart is here, and I am wearied of playing the dissembler there. It is cruel and unjust toward every one; cruel and unjust toward you, cruel and unjust toward my wife, cruel and unjust toward myself. No, I can endure it no longer. I must be all in all to you, as you are all in all to me. I will leave you no more."

"Tell me, dear Jules, what has taken place," said Mrs. Chesterfield, gazing with fervid tenderness upon her paramour. "Have you had words with the viscountess?"

"Words?" he ejaculated. "Henceforth I feel that we shall always have words, if we continue to live together. It cannot be. It is impossible that I can receive her caresses only to repulse them; that is a part my better feelings will not longer allow me to play. No, I cannot. Much rather would I break with her at once, candidly confess to her that I love another, and beseech her not to interfere with my happiness."

While he was thus speaking, Mrs. Chesterfield drooped her head upon his breast, and as her countenance was thus concealed from him, an expression of triumphant satisfaction appeared thereon, as if she felt that she had now brought him to the point toward which she had gradually and cautiously and skilfully been leading him on. And if he could only have seen that look, transient though it were, a veil would have fallen from his eyes in a moment. He would have penetrated the selfishness of the siren to whom he had abandoned himself, he would have had the conviction flashing to his soul that though the ardour of her sensual passions might be real enough, the tenderness of true love which she professed for him was nought but a delusion and a snare.

"What would you do?" she asked, assuming a low, tremulous voice. "Would you precipitate matters?"

"There can be no rash precipitation," he exclaimed, "in doing that which has now become imperative. I must either renounce you or my wife. I cannot renounce you, my Augusta, whom I love so devotedly, but I will renounce her whom I love not and have never loved. The world must know it at length, but the world shall say I have not been unjust toward her. I will give her half my fortune; the remaining half will leave me still rich, amply rich enough for you and me to live in comfort and even in splendour."

"Then do you mean, my beloved Jules," asked Augusta, "that we are to live openly together henceforth, that the necessity for secrecy shall exist no more, that caution shall no longer be used?"

"Such is my meaning," ejaculated the viscount, vehemently. "Do you object, Augusta? Do you still tremble at the idea of all this coming to your husband's knowledge?"

"Candidly I do," she answered, raising her head and looking him earnestly in the face.

"You have something in your mind?" he said. "Speak, what is it? Have I not sworn to be as a husband unto you? Wherefore need you care for him who is absent? Have I not vowed to be a father for your expected babe? What anxiety, then, can you entertain for the future welfare of your as yet unborn child? Speak, Augusta, speak candidly."

"Oh, it is all this," she murmured, forcing tears from her eyes, "which troubles me and makes me wretched. It is only when you are with me that I am happy, because then I forget everything, the virtuous past, the guilty present, the uncertain future. But when I am alone, a thousand terrors haunt me. I have a husband who is rich, and under whose care neither myself nor my expected offspring need ever tremble at the idea of want. It is not even now too late for me to take a step which will still leave me in that state of confidence. My husband need not know that I have been guilty, that I have dishonoured him. These people here are bribable, and you, as a man of honour, would never breathe to a soul what has taken place between us. But I must fly hence, I must see you no more."

"Oh, wherefore this language?" exclaimed the viscount. "What have I done to deserve it? You apprehend poverty. Good heavens, am I not far richer than your husband, from all that you have told me, and can I not at any moment place you in a state of independence? Ah, I comprehend! Your fears are natural, as the world goes, though in respect to me, they are not just. You fancy that my love may cool —"

"Remember, my dear Jules," interrupted the siren, murmuringly, "the love of man is different from that of a woman. A woman may conceive a sudden passion, and yet cling to it devotedly for all the rest of her lifetime, but a man who loves suddenly grows cool suddenly —"

“Augusta, I swear that you do me wrong,” ejaculated the Viscount de Chateauf. “The passion I have experienced for you has become interwoven with the very fibres and principles of my entire being. But it is my aim and my duty to ensure your happiness. Oh, full well do I appreciate the immensity of the sacrifice which you have already made for me, but which has still to be consummated. Now, listen, Augusta, and you shall have proof that I love you, you shall have proof, too, that I am an honourable man.”

“I know it, Jules, I know it,” she said, nestling still closer to him, and pressing her dewy red lips to his cheeks.

“What would I not do for you, adorable creature?” he said, straining her to his breast. “Again I say, listen. It is decided. I part from my wife, and from that moment must you be as a wife to me. But no care shall you have for the future. In resigning before the whole world the husband who is absent, you shall — as I before said — be placed in a condition of independence. My revenue consists of twenty thousand a year, speaking in the money of your own native land. One-half I assign to my wife, ten thousand remain to myself. Of this sum I shall settle a clear moiety upon you. Nay, offer no objection. It is paltry and miserable to proffer money considerations as proofs of love, but in existing circumstances it is needful, and you will regard my conduct in that light. I will proceed forthwith to a notary; I will order the deed to be drawn up. In a few days it will be in readiness, and at the hour when I sign it, in your presence, must you renounce your husband, renounce every family tie, if need be, and become wholly and unconditionally mine. From that hour, too, shall we dwell together, wheresoever your inclination may suggest that we fix our abode, and we shall be as husband and wife. But now, Augusta, not another word on the subject, not a remonstrance. I am determined; it is a duty, and I will fulfil it.”

The wily woman could well afford a perfect gush of enthusiastic feeling as she strained the young viscount in her arms and covered his cheeks and his lips with kisses.

“And now I go,” he said, “at once to give the requisite instructions to a notary. I shall return to pass a few hours with you. Unfortunately I have guests this evening at the chateau, and I must be there — inasmuch as for the present it is better I should keep upon terms with my wife until all

arrangements be carried out. So that at six o'clock I shall be compelled to leave you; but to-morrow I promise to be earlier with you than to-day."

Having embraced Augusta Chesterfield, the Viscount de Chateaufeuf took his departure to give instructions to a notary to prepare two deeds, one making over half his revenue, together with the chateau itself, to Stephanie, and the other assigning so much of his property as would produce five thousand a year to the woman with whom he was so profoundly infatuated.

Soon after six o'clock in the evening, the Viscountess de Chateaufeuf commenced her toilet for the party. One of her maids, on ascending to her mistress's chamber to render the wonted assistance, gave her the pleasing intelligence that the viscount had just entered and was likewise gone to dress. Thus Stephanie was relieved from her fears lest he should not be punctual. A little before seven they met in the drawing-room and for the first few moments the viscount was troubled and embarrassed, as he thought that in a few days he was to deal a blow fatal to the happiness of the unfortunate and confiding wife who now greeted him with such sweet smiles. This feeling rendered him unusually kind, and even affectionate toward her, — at least his manner had the appearance of affection; and Stephanie was radiant with happiness as she said to herself, "Yes, he loves me, he loves me! How could I ever have doubted it?"

In a few minutes the guests began to arrive, some fifteen or sixteen in all, and amongst them the Marquis of Villebelle and Constance. The marquis had within the last few days received a much higher and far more lucrative appointment than that which he had held at the court of Madrid. He was now to be accredited as minister to the court of Naples, but he had still leave of absence for a few weeks ere setting out for his new post. Being prosperous in his worldly circumstances and blessed in his love for Constance, he was supremely happy, and his fine countenance reflected the feelings of his heart. The Marchioness of Villebelle — for so we must call Constance — looked eminently beautiful; and she also was happy in her Etienne's love, as well as in the contemplation of the honours bestowed upon him by the king, and which his own talents had won. But still the felicity of Lady Saxondale's younger daughter was not com-

plete, inasmuch as she had for some time past been troubled and anxious on account of those relatives who were so dear to her. She had heard of the terrific exposure which took place a few months back at Saxondale Castle, when the double wedding was so strangely interrupted and broken off. She knew therefore that her sister Juliana was thoroughly and irredeemably disgraced, and that her mother's name had suffered at the same time in the estimation of the world. She likewise knew that her mother and Juliana were not now together, — that the former was in England, and the latter somewhere upon the Continent; and she was grieved that her sister suffered her not to become acquainted with the place of seclusion to which she had retired. Constance was also aware that her brother Edmund had married the Baroness de Charlemont, who was tried for the murder of her first husband, and all these circumstances were sufficient to depress her somewhat. Nevertheless, her husband's love — so sincere and so devoted — was powerful enough to mitigate much of that full amount of grief which she would otherwise have experienced, and no one, as she entered the brilliantly lighted saloon at the Viscount de Chateauneuf's mansion, would have suspected that the felicity of the Marchioness of Villebelle was thus alloyed.

We will pass over all details in respect to the sumptuous banquet which was served up. Let our readers suppose it to be over, and the company dispersed about the suite of gilded and brilliantly lighted saloons thrown open for their reception. There was music in one; in another the tables were spread with splendidly bound volumes and prints; in a third the card-tables were set out; and the fourth opened upon a spacious winter-garden, or conservatory of glass, heated by artificial means, and containing a varied selection of the choicest plants as well as of several fruit-trees from the tropics. The Viscountess de Chateauneuf and the Marchioness of Villebelle, who had already conceived a friendship for each other, were seated together upon a sofa in the music-room; a young lady was at the piano, another at the harp; others were sitting with young gentlemen, and listening to the melody, or perhaps whispering with each other; the elderly gentlemen and ladies were in the card-room. In short, all the company were agreeably occupied in some way or another. The Marquis of Villebelle had accompanied

the Viscount de Chateaufeuf into the conservatory, and for some little time they were engaged in examining the exotics and the fruits of the palm, the banana, the citron, and the orange-trees.

"My dear viscount," said the marquis, when the inspection was concluded, "you and I have known each other since our boyhood, and though there has been an interval of some years since last we saw each other, yet is the friendly feeling of other times in no way diminished on my part."

"Nor on mine, my dear Villebelle," responded Chateaufeuf, warmly grasping the hand of the marquis.

"I am sure of it," resumed the latter; "and therefore you will not think it strange or impertinent that I am about to speak to you on a certain subject. In a word, my dear friend, you are not happy, and if there be any circumstance in which you require the counsel or consolation of one who experiences a sincere regard for you —"

"But wherefore, Villebelle," interrupted the viscount, "do you think that I am unhappy?"

"I know it," was the response given by the marquis. "When I met you the other day in company with the viscountess, — although we were only a brief ten minutes together, — I nevertheless saw that you had moments of abstraction, and that your mind seemed to be wandering to other subjects far different from those which had arisen in conversation. After we separated, my wife observed to me that she thought you had something darkening your soul. To-day, my dear Chateaufeuf, I have observed the same manner on your part. My experiences of the world have been somewhat severe, and its teachings have enabled me to catch at a glance the slightest evidences of unhappiness in those with whom I come in contact. Think not for a moment that I seek to penetrate through mere impertinent curiosity into your affairs; but there have been times in my life when I should have hailed the counsel and the solace of a true and sincere friend as something as welcome as an angel visit. I am your friend, Chateaufeuf, and that is the reason I am thus speaking."

The viscount bent down his eyes, and reflected profoundly for more than a minute. He was too intelligent not to be perfectly aware how very serious a step he had resolved to take in renouncing his wife for the sake of Mrs. Chesterfield;

and though very far from entertaining the idea of retracing his way, or revoking the preliminaries which he had that morning initiated with the notary, yet it occurred to him that it was altogether a matter on which he really ought to consult friendly advice. The notary himself had strongly urged him to adopt this course, and though Jules, in his infatuation for Augusta, had impatiently rejected the legal gentleman's counsel at the time, it now recurred to him with added force, in consequence of the observations made by Villebelle.

"I do not know," he said, abruptly breaking silence, and raising his eyes as suddenly, "that I am unhappy. In one sense I am the happiest of men."

"You ought to be," said the marquis. "You possess ample revenues, a fine position, a beautiful, amiable, and affectionate wife — But, ah! I hope that I have said nothing indiscreet?" he ejaculated, perceiving that a cloud came over the handsome countenance of the young viscount.

"My dear friend," said the latter, taking the hand of the marquis and pressing it with a sort of convulsive force, "you have indeed touched a true chord, though not in the manner you intended or supposed. I said that in one sense I was the happiest of men, and I meant that I am thus happy in possessing the love of one of the most adorable of women. But this, Villebelle," added the viscount, lowering his voice to a scarcely audible whisper, "this is not my wife."

The marquis was amazed, for with all his experience of the world, and with all his penetration, he had failed to discern that the Viscountess de Chateauneuf possessed not her husband's love.

"Yes, it is as I tell you," continued the viscount, having glanced around to assure himself that they were alone together in the conservatory. "My wife is as nothing to me, my mistress is everything. The former makes me wretched, the latter is a source of all happiness. Ah, my dear friend, you cannot read the real disposition of women by merely beholding them at the dinner-table, or in the midst of brilliant society. Doubtless I have my faults, but who has not? Stephanie has, however, ten thousand times more failings than myself. Do not misunderstand me. The snow is not purer than her chastity as a wife, but I speak of infirmities

of temper which are but too well calculated to make a household unhappy and drive a man to distraction. Regarded individually, each perhaps is an airy nothing, but aggravated, accumulated, taken together, they constitute an insupportable tyranny. One single drop of water falling on the stone makes no impression, but the constant dripping wears it away. A single blow upon the head does little harm beyond the transient pain, but a continuous succession of blows produces madness. Thus is it with those infirmities of temper to which I have alluded, and now do you comprehend me?"

"I understand and I am astonished," replied the Marquis of Villebelle. "I am sorry that I should have turned the conversation in a manner to evolve such a topic, — a topic invested with the solemn sanctity of a family secret."

"Do not be sorry on that account, my dear Villebelle," replied Chateaufeuf. "I am glad that you have thus spoken. I do indeed require a friend, for I am about to take a step of paramount importance — nothing less than separating from my wife."

The Marquis of Villebelle looked deeply concerned, as indeed he was. He needed not to ask the question whether the viscountess was as yet aware of her husband's intention, for he felt assured that she was not. He therefore experienced an illimitable compassion for that young lady, who was evidently lulled into the security of her own love, cradled in the confidence of her own affection, unsuspecting of the storm which was gathering above her head. He was concerned, too, on account of his friend Jules de Chateaufeuf, for he could not but consider that it was indeed a fearful step that he had resolved upon taking.

"Yes," continued the viscount, "I am determined — unless indeed you show me good reason to induce me to alter my resolve. A man is bound to consult his own happiness; he must not sacrifice it for the sake of one woman, when it can be ensured by another, although the former bear the more sacred title of wife, and the latter be in the false position of a mistress. Such is my case. Can you therefore blame me? I shall not act dishonourably in financial matters with regard to Stephanie. Though none of her fortune is by deed settled upon herself, I purpose to give her half, and a moiety of my own half shall I settle on my mistress. This

is what I have promised the latter, and, indeed, I have already instructed a notary to draw up the requisite deeds."

"Jules de Chateauneuf," said the Marquis of Villebelle, addressing his friend in a solemn voice and with a grave countenance, "you have done well to consult me in this instance. You have brought yourself to the edge of a precipice. For God's sake, let mine be the hand which is to draw you back. You must reflect; this resolve which you have adopted in madness must be renounced in the hour of sober deliberation. What, for some of those little peculiarities of temper which no women are without, — and which, if we of the sterner sex study ourselves impartially, we shall find that we likewise possess, — will you on this account break up your home, perhaps deal your wife a death-blow, with the certainty of being yourself brought sooner or later to bitterest repentance?"

"Oh, my dear friend," exclaimed the viscount, "it is easy for you to talk thus, you, who are unacquainted with all the circumstances. I tell you that I cannot live with Stephanie. I never loved her; it was a marriage of expediency on my part. She brought me a fortune, I gave her a lofty title and a proud name in return. On that score, therefore, we are equal. This very day has there occurred between us a scene which, had you beheld it —"

But he stopped suddenly short, conscience-smitten, for with almost overpowering effect did the sense of his own harshness and severity toward Stephanie rush back to his mind. The Marquis of Villebelle comprehended in a moment wherefore his friend thus abruptly left off speaking, and his looks became graver still.

"Jules," he said, "you are conscious of faults on your own side. Now, I intend to speak plainly; it is my duty as your friend. Look you, I begin to understand your exact position. You have a mistress whom you love better than your wife, and you are seeking for every possible excuse and apology for abandoning the one so as to give yourself up entirely to the other. You are naturally magnanimous and generous, and a man with such a heart cannot be without scruples when about to perform a bad action. Yes, do not be offended. I repeat, a bad action. And it is in order to tranquillize the qualms of your conscience that you seek to throw upon the head of your wife all the blame of the pro-

ceeding you purpose to adopt. Thus is it that you magnify her failings into faults, and, if needful, you would exaggerate her faults into crimes. Come, Jules, be reasonable. You cannot shut out from yourself the conviction that I have spoken truly."

"I confess, my dear Villebelle, that I am much struck by all you have said," responded the viscount, who was now pale and agitated; but then arose before him the image of the brilliantly handsome Augusta Chesterfield, and he hastened to observe, "Oh, if you saw her to whom my heart is devoted, you would admit that any sacrifice ought to be made for such a being. She is grandly beautiful. She is a wife, too, who sacrifices husband, family, fame, and all that a woman can possibly hold dear — yes, of all will she make a sacrifice for me."

"And you have informed her, I think you said," observed the marquis, "of the nature and amount of the settlement you purpose to make in regard to her?"

"Oh, assuredly," was Chateauneuf's quick rejoinder. "She has given me so many proofs of her love that I have been but too anxious to afford her the evidences of my own in return."

"I see, my dear friend," resumed the Marquis of Villebelle, "that you are under the spell of an infatuation. This you cannot help. We are but weak mortals, and I know what it is to love passionately and devotedly."

"Your own wife?"

"Yes, and I am proud to confess it. And, by the bye, loving my wife as I do, feeling that no possible temptation would render me unfaithful to her, much less that I myself could take the initiative in making overtures to any other woman, you will not be astonished or offended at the proposition I am about to lay before you, and which you can have no scruple or fear in accepting."

"Speak, my dear friend, what is it?" said Jules.

"I will tell you. Permit me," continued the marquis, "to be introduced to this mistress of yours. You can take me to her in my capacity of your best friend, — one who has known you ever since you were eight years old. Will you do this?"

"I shall be proud and happy," exclaimed the viscount, "and then you will indeed admit that in renouncing my

wife I am consulting my own happiness by thus obtaining the opportunity of giving myself up wholly and solely to her who has enthralled my heart. To-morrow at midday I will call for you at the hotel where you reside."

"Be it so," said the marquis. "But perhaps it would be better, under all circumstances, that you should introduce me with some assumed name. There are considerations —"

"I understand full well," interrupted the viscount. "You occupy a prominent position in the world, and, moreover, you would not wish it to reach the ears of the marchioness that you had visited a lady in such a false position as Mrs. Chesterfield, for that is the name of my mistress. Well then, you shall go under an *incognito*, and to-morrow at midday I will come for you."

"And in the meantime," said the marquis, "you promise me, Jules, that you will not sign any paper, you will not breathe a word to the viscountess of your intentions of separation, you will not compromise yourself in any way?"

"I faithfully promise," rejoined Chateauneuf. "Indeed the documents themselves will not be in readiness for several days. Oh, I understand full well the friendly purpose you have in view. You intend to judge for yourself whether Mrs. Chesterfield —"

"She is an English lady, then?" interjected the marquis.

"Yes. But, as I was observing, you intend to judge whether she is worthy of being preferred to Stephanie. Now, I am quite content to constitute you the tribunal of taste in this matter, and I will abide by your decision, on condition that you promise it shall be strictly impartial, justly and righteously deciding between the merits of the two ladies, without the least reference to the position of one as a wife, or to that of the other as a mistress. Do you, on your side, promise me this?"

"Most faithfully I do, and on the honour of a gentleman will I give you my sentiments without bias and without prejudice. We will now continue the discourse no longer. Let us return to the ladies, and to-morrow at midday I shall expect you."

CHAPTER XI

THE EXPERIMENT

THE Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle were staying at a hotel in the fashionable quarter of the Place Vendome, for inasmuch as their residence in Paris was but temporary, they had not, of course, thought it worth their while to take a house for themselves, or go into furnished apartments. We must now look into the room where they were seated at breakfast, on the morning¹ after the party at the Viscount de Chateauneuf's mansion. Constance was in an elegant *déshabillé*, which set off her beauty to a most fascinating advantage. The marquis was in a handsome *robe-de-chambre*, confined at his waist with a silken cord, having large tassels at the ends. Despatches were lying upon the table, addressed to "His Excellency the marquis of Villèbelle, Minister-Plenipotentiary to the Court of his Majesty the King of Naples," but these were merely to furnish him with some instructions which he was to send off to the *chargé d'affaires* in the Neapolitan capital, and not to abridge the leave of absence which he had obtained on his appointment to his new post.

"And so, my dear Constance," said the marquis, "you are pleased with the Viscountess de Chateauneuf?"

"I like her much," was the young lady's response, "but I am afraid that she is not altogether happy, for there are moments when she wears a transient expression of sadness. And the viscount, too — there is decidedly something upon his mind —"

"I know it all, my dear Constance," interrupted the marquis. "But do not question me now. I will tell you everything in the course of the afternoon, for I am going to try an experiment, which will probably result — or, at least,

I sincerely hope so — in the restoration of the happiness of this young couple.”

“ And I also sincerely hope, Etienne, that you will succeed. I had my misgivings, last night, that they live not comfortably together. The courtesy which the viscount displayed toward his wife was somewhat forced, while, on the other hand, she frequently threw timid glances at him, as if fearful that she might be committing herself in some way or another, by an unguarded word or even a gesture or a movement. Ah, when I think of all the happiness which you and I enjoy, my beloved Etienne, I can deeply feel for other married couples who do not experience a similar amount of felicity. Stephanie de Chateauneuf is a very sweet creature. I have formed quite an affection for her, and should be so rejoiced if you are enabled to report the success of the experiment to which you have alluded. Ah, when I bethink me, I yesterday sketched from memory the portrait of Stephanie.”

“ And you had never seen her before the other day, and then only for ten minutes,” exclaimed the marquis, laughing good-humouredly.

“ Judge for yourself whether the outline is so very inaccurate. Of course, having been so many hours in her society last evening, I shall now be enabled to make my sketch more perfect. But meanwhile, tell me what you think of it.”

Thus speaking, the beautiful Constance rose from her seat, and flitting across the room, raised a large portfolio from the sofa where it lay. She was bearing it to the breakfast table, when the marquis, with all the gallantry of a lover, sped after her, and took the burden from her hands, for which he received an affectionate look.

“ Now, let us see the sketch,” he said, turning over the drawings in the portfolio. “ I know you are a proficient in this beautiful art, my sweet Constance — But really,” he ejaculated, as he took up the portrait alluded to, and which was only just commenced, “ this is indeed striking. You have caught the expression to a nicety; all the outlines are perfect. There is not a single correction to make. You have nothing to do but to put in your shading, and the work will be admirable.”

The countenance of the marchioness showed how delight-

ful were her husband's praises, and he threw upon her a glance of fondest affection. Oh, how different was this breakfast-table scene from that which took place on the previous day at the Viscount de Chateauneuf's mansion, and which we have described in another chapter.

"Why, what have we here?" ejaculated the marquis, as he turned over the drawings. "Something that I never saw before. You naughty creature, how was it that you did not show me this?"

"I intended," replied Constance, blushing and smiling, "but I did not like to do so. The truth is, I thought that I had made myself too coy and sentimental —"

"No, dearest, this was indeed the way you often looked," exclaimed the enraptured marquis, "when we were wont to meet in the garden of Saxondale House. Ah, often and often, too, has there been such a scene as this, — Mary Anne rushing toward us to give us due warning that your mother had just returned home from an airing in the carriage. It is lifelike, the whole scene is perfection — No, there is a fault. You have flattered me too much."

"Say rather, my dear Etienne, that I have flattered myself."

"That is impossible, Constance," exclaimed the marquis, "you could not do so. Ah, though I am your husband, I am still your lover likewise, and more inclined than ever, perhaps, to be so, now that I am reminded by this picture of the days of our courtship. Oh, that was a period of pleasing pain, hope mingled with fear, delicious interviews enjoyed by stealth, and with the constant apprehension that they would be interrupted."

A few words will suffice to afford an idea of the pencil-sketch which Constance had thus made, and which the Marquis of Villebelle had so unexpectedly lighted upon in the portfolio. It represented herself and him seated together in a garden, she looking somewhat coy and sentimental, as she had observed, he evidently in the attitude of one who was breathing the language of love in the ear of his adored one. At a little distance Mary Anne, the faithful lady's-maid, — who, by the bye, was still in the service of Constance, — appeared in the background, hastening forward with alarm depicted on her countenance, to warn the lovers that their stolen interview must not be prolonged.

“ Yes, those were indeed days of pleasing pain,” said Constance; and she hastily passed her kerchief across her countenance, for the retrospect had conjured up certain associations with regard to her mother, her brother, and her sister.

“ Do not weep, my beloved wife,” said the marquis, drawing his chair closer to that in which she was seated; and taking her hand, he pressed it warmly, while he gazed with tender devotion upon the countenance over which the shade of sadness had come. “ No happiness can be perfect, Constance, in this world. There are always some drawbacks, and we must accept with gratitude the amount of felicity which we do experience. Only conceive how infinitely superior is our condition to that of a wedded couple who enjoy not each other’s love, and know not therefore the charms of sweetest domesticity.”

“ Yes, I am not unmindful of all that,” answered Constance, thanking her husband with an affectionate look for the attempt which he thus made to console and cheer her. “ Nevertheless, you must admit, Etienne, that it would indicate hardness of heart if I did not feel the calamities which have overtaken my family. My mother disgraced, her name become a byword in the society which she once adorned, convicted of having propagated a serious calumny in respect to Mr. Deveril; Edmund having made such a shocking match; Juliana I know not where, but she, alas! disgraced likewise — Oh, Etienne, promise me, promise me, my beloved husband, that if ever you obtain the slightest hint as to where my unhappy sister has secreted herself, you will tell me, that I may fly to her, that I may console her. For I am sure that, whatever her faults may have been, you would not debar me from the performance of such a duty? ”

“ No, dearest Constance, not for a moment would I,” exclaimed the marquis; “ and you will not even require my solemn promise that if accident should render me acquainted with the seclusion to which your unfortunate sister has fled, I would not lose a moment in revealing it to you.”

“ A word from your lips, dearest Etienne,” responded Constance. “ has ever the sanctity of the most solemn vow. Yes, I know that you would not for an instant hesitate to let me see my sister, if you by any chance obtained tidings

concerning her. But we will now talk on other subjects. I must not be sad and gloomy when in your society."

"No," rejoined the marquis, "because my happiness depends upon yours. And now, Constance, I have to inform you that at twelve o'clock I am going somewhere with the Viscount de Chateaufort. It is to carry out that experiment to which I have alluded. I shall tell you nothing more now. Have patience, my beloved one, until my return. You need not fear that I shall be very long absent."

But in the meanwhile, let us see what the Viscount de Chateaufort was doing elsewhere. This young nobleman was much struck by the remarks and remonstrances of his friend Villebelle at the time the discourse was taking place in the conservatory, but when he awoke in the morning, the effect thereof was much deadened. We cannot say that it had altogether passed away, because Jules de Chateaufort was too intelligent and likewise possessed of feelings naturally too good not to have experienced, even after the lapse of some hours, the lingering influence of Villebelle's impressive language. But he was still as much infatuated as ever with Augusta Chesterfield. Her image, which was uppermost in his mind, was full of a ravishing beauty, and he said to himself that such a woman was worth making any sacrifice for. Nevertheless, he preserved a certain degree of kindness of manner toward Stephanie at the breakfast-table, and he studiously avoided taking offence at anything which she said. He moreover faithfully kept the promise which he had given to the Marquis of Villebelle, and hinted not a single syllable of the intention which he harboured in respect to a separation. The viscountess, finding him more gentle toward her, more lenient, more tolerant, secretly flattered herself that a favourable change had taken place within him, and she lost no opportunity of lavishing upon him the evidences of her sincere love. Even during the ordinary routine of the breakfast-table and the accompanying conversation, there are a myriad little ways by which a fond and adoring woman can display her tenderness for the beloved one: looks and words and attentions all may be rendered available for this purpose. And so it was with the viscountess on the present occasion, and more than once Jules de Chateaufort was compelled to admit to him-

self that the affection his wife cherished for him was deep, tender, and sincere.

It was about half-past ten o'clock when he issued forth from his mansion to pay the accustomed visit to Augusta, and he set out thus early, according to the promise made her on the preceding day. On reaching the little villa, he found Mrs. Chesterfield expecting his arrival, and she welcomed him with the usual amount of blandishments, caresses, and smiles, all lavishly given and rapturously received. Again did he seek in his own mind to contrast the fervid endearments of Augusta with the more ingenuous and unsophisticated evidences of his wife's affection, but the comparison he drew was favourable to the former. He sought to persuade himself that there was something insipid and mawkishly sentimental in the love of Stephanie, while the ardent caresses of his mistress filled his soul with an almost frenzied passion. It was a complete infatuation under which he laboured in respect to Mrs. Chesterfield; it was a devouring, furious stormlike whirl of passion through which, by her blandishments and the gorgeous splendour of her voluptuous beauty, she had the power to hurry him.

"Dearest Augusta," he said, in the course of conversation, "I have a great favour to ask you."

"There is no favour, beloved Jules, that you can demand at my hands," responded the siren, "which I am not prepared to grant. Name it. Is it some new proof of my devoted love which you require?"

"No, scarcely that," answered the viscount. "I will explain myself in a few words. Yesterday I met a friend, a certain Monsieur Meurice, who was a schoolfellow of mine, a gentleman of wealth and standing, and he dined with me last evening. Remember, Augusta, he is one of my oldest acquaintances, and we entertain a very sincere friendship for each other. I sought an opportunity to speak to him alone, of old reminiscences, — those schoolboy days which it is sometimes so pleasant to look back upon; and the discourse, by a natural transition, turned upon the present circumstances of each of us. Your image was uppermost in my mind; I longed to eulogize you to my friend. I could not resist the opportunity; my heart was so full of love and devotion for you that it needed a vent for its feelings. Besides, it is so sweet to confide to the ear of friendship all

that one experiences in respect to so strong a passion. Monsieur Meurice was rejoiced to hear that I am so blessed in your love; he is no strait-laced, sanctimonious individual who would take the wife's part and chide the faithless husband. In short, he entered into all my feelings, for he likewise has loved passionately and fondly, and he could appreciate the gushing enthusiasm with which I spoke. Now, dearest Augusta, the favour I ask at your hands is that you will permit me to introduce my friend to you presently."

"I cannot," she answered, "have the slightest objection after the arrangements which were solemnly entered into between us yesterday. Had not those arrangements been made, I should chide you, Jules, for the proposal to present any one who might hereafter meet me with my husband and make me blush at the recognition. But inasmuch as it is agreed that I am to renounce my husband —"

"Yes, for my sake," quickly responded the enamoured viscount. "In a few days all will be settled, and there can consequently be no harm in your receiving this bosom friend of mine."

"Assuredly not," rejoined Mrs. Chesterfield. "Any friend of yours, Jules, will ever be most welcome to me."

"And you will apparel yourself, dearest," whispered the viscount, tenderly and coaxingly, "in your most becoming dress, for though you are lovely and adorable in any garb, yet would I have you set off your splendid charms to the utmost advantage, that you may in every way shine so as to justify my taste in the eyes of my friend."

"Fear not, Jules," answered Augusta. "My appearance will be worthy of your love."

"I must now leave you, therefore," added the viscount, "for I have promised to fetch Monsieur Meurice at midday. He is staying at a hotel in Paris, and by one o'clock, at latest, we shall be with you."

Jules de Chateaufneuf embraced his mistress tenderly, and issued forth from the villa. In order to keep his amour hitherto as secret as possible, he had never used his own carriage, nor been attended on horseback by any one of his grooms, on the occasion of his visits to the villa, and therefore he was now compelled to take a public vehicle to proceed to Paris, which, however, was only about a couple or three

miles distant. He reached the hotel where the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle were staying, precisely at midday, and having paid his respects to Constance, he took her husband, who was in readiness, away with him. He could not help noticing that when the marquis left his wife, — though it was only for a few hours, — he embraced her, and the spectacle of this connubial bliss caused a pang of remorse to shoot through the heart of the young viscount. He even sighed, and the sound fell not unnoticed upon the ear of his friend, who was secretly rejoiced at this proof that all the better feelings of the viscount's soul were not completely deadened within him.

"You doubtless consider me uxorious to a degree," observed the marquis, as he took his seat by the side of the viscount in the hackney-coach, which immediately rolled away from the hotel. "But I assured you last night that I regard my wife with the tenderest and sincerest affection."

"And may you always be happy in this love of yours," observed Jules, but afraid that his friend would seize the opportunity to lecture him on his conduct in respect to Stephanie, he hastened to give the conversation a dexterous turn, by observing, "If I mistake not, you told me last night that the marchioness is the daughter of an English peeress named Lady Saxondale? I was not struck by the name at the time, but after you were gone, I bethought myself that it was not altogether unfamiliar to me. Is there not a nobleman of that name?"

"There is," answered Villebelle, in a very serious manner. "He is my wife's brother, and I regret to say that he has contracted a most foolish alliance."

"Ah, I remember," ejaculated the viscount, "the Baroness de Charlemont. Pardon me for having touched upon a topic which can be by no means agreeable —"

"There is no need for apology, my dear friend," interrupted the marquis. "It is a circumstance which I deplore on the part of one so nearly connected with my beloved wife, but it is not a topic to be avoided in shame on my own account."

"Assuredly not," responded Chateauneuf. "How was it possible that Lord Saxondale could have made such a match?"

"Doubtless he became infatuated with that artful and

designing woman," responded Villebelle. "Ah, Jules, there are women of this kind in the world, women who insidiously weave their chains of silk and gold around the too susceptible heart."

"True, there are such women," exclaimed the viscount, again solicitous to divert the conversation into another channel, for he more than half-suspected that Villebelle was applying these remarks to his case in respect to Augusta. "And are this Lord Saxondale and the marchioness your wife the only children of her ladyship?"

"No, there is another, an elder sister," replied Villebelle.

"Is she too married?" asked the viscount, merely for the purpose of keeping the conversation away from topics which were disagreeable to himself, although he felt convinced that when once Villebelle should have seen his Augusta he would no longer give utterance to covert innuendoes relative to artful and designing women.

"No, Juliana Farefield — for that is the name of my wife's sister — is unmarried," returned Villebelle. "But, by the bye, have you devised some *incognito* for me to adopt?"

"Yes. You are to pass as Monsieur Meurice, and furthermore, I have given Augusta," continued Jules, "a most excellent character in respect to the liberality of your sentiments. I have assured her that in you she will find no strait-laced, demure, sanctimonious individual, and therefore, my dear Villebelle, you will be upon your guard accordingly."

"Fear not, Jules," rejoined the marquis, "that I shall in any way deport myself so as to make you regret having assented to my caprice in presenting me to Mrs. Chesterfield. Whatever opinion I may form, will be in no way shadowed forth until you and I are alone together again."

The vehicle rolled onward, and in due course stopped at the gate of the grounds in which that little villa stood. In her sitting-apartment within the walls of that villa, Mrs. Chesterfield was placed in a half-reclining attitude upon the sofa. She had apparelled herself in her handsomest morning dress, and it was one which admirably became the style of her dark beauty. She had taken immense pains with her toilet. She knew that the passion of the viscount would be sustained and enhanced by any encomia which his friend might pass upon her beauty, and she therefore

had not failed to render herself as captivating as possible. The dress, fitting tight to the bust, developed its rich contours, though the high corsage of a morning garb concealed them. She wore her hair in bands, and a rich, natural gloss rested upon those luxuriant masses. Her very attitude upon the sofa was studied, — a mirror opposite showing her that the position she had thus chosen was well suited to her purpose. When, therefore, she heard the vehicle stop and the gate-bell ring, she did not rise from that sofa, nor, as the sounds of footsteps approaching the front door from the gate reached her ears, did she so far gratify her curiosity as to jump up and peep from the window to see what sort of a person her lover's friend might be. No, she retained her half-reclining position upon the sofa, one well-shaped foot resting upon the hassock, and her face ready to be turned toward the door when it opened, so that the light from the casement might fall upon her features and display the aquiline beauty of her profile. She was resolved to please the viscount's friend; and as this endeavour on the part of a woman is always attended with more or less excitement, it brought up a richer carnation tint to the delicate olive of Augusta's complexion. Another glance at the mirror was completely satisfactory, and now footsteps were ascending the stairs.

The door opened; the viscount entered first, and he began with the proper formula for such occasions: "Permit me to introduce —"

But he was suddenly cut short, for as the Marquis of Villebelle, immediately following, crossed the threshold, he exclaimed, "Juliana!" and then stopped short in utter amazement.

Jules de Chateauneuf started on hearing that name, the name of the Marchioness of Villebelle's sister, the name of one, too, who the marquis himself had during the ride assured him was unmarried.

CHAPTER XII

THE EXPERIMENT'S RESULT

YES, Augusta Chesterfield was none other than Juliana, Lady Saxondale's elder daughter. As the reader may suppose, she was seized with a perfect consternation on beholding her brother-in-law, and the thought flashed to her mind that in introducing him to her it was a premeditated stratagem on the part of the viscount to have her thoroughly unmasked and exposed. And this supposition was natural enough, inasmuch as Jules had assured her that the individual about to be presented bore the name of Meurice. The carnation tint was in a moment heightened into the deepest red on Juliana's countenance, but not a syllable, not even the slightest ejaculation, escaped her lips. She was stricken dumb by the overpowering sense of shame, astonishment, confusion, and even rage.

"Juliana!" cried the Viscount de Chateaufneuf, repeating the name which had burst from the lips of the marquis. "What is the meaning of this? Tell me, Villebelle, is it your sister-in-law?"

Then the Honourable Miss Farefield instantaneously perceived that it was no trick on her lover's part, — merely some coincidence which she could not, however, fathom, nor had leisure to reflect upon. Starting up from the sofa, she advanced toward the viscount, at the same time flinging a swift but significant glance upon Villebelle, as much as to enjoin him to betray her no further than he had already done.

"Yes, dearest Jules," she said, taking his hand, and gazing up into his countenance with all her power of fondest cajolery, "my name is indeed Juliana, and not Augusta, but in no other circumstances am I changed. The adoption

of that other name was a whim and a caprice — But why do you withdraw your hand? Why do you look thus coldly upon me?"

Jules de Chateaufneuf, however, made no answer. An expression of anguish passed over his countenance, and turning abruptly aside, he pressed his hand to his brow, as if to steady his thoughts. The horrible idea was agitating in his mind that he was the victim and the dupe of a designing woman, and that Villebelle's ominously uttered words had become justified in their predictive reality. For all in a moment the thought had occurred to the young viscount that if this were Juliana Farefield, and she unmarried, the child that she bore in her bosom was the fruit of an illicit amour. She must therefore be a wanton, and she had sought the retirement of this villa to conceal her shame. If she had been another's, with the sanctified title of a wife, it was nothing in his estimation; but if she had been another's without that title, then was she instantaneously converted into a licentious profligate, a being of gross impurity.

"For Heaven's sake ruin me not with him!" were the hastily whispered words which Juliana breathed aside to the Marquis of Villebelle, the instant that the viscount so abruptly turned away from her.

"Juliana," responded her brother-in-law, but also speaking in a subdued and rapid manner, "I dare not mislead my friend on any account. It would be the death of his wife."

"Etienne, I implore you," murmured Juliana, ready to sink with shame and anguish, "save me from exposure. Remember that I always favoured your suit with my sister."

"It cuts me to the very soul to harm a hair of your head, for Constance's sake," rejoined the marquis. "But what am I to do?"

"Villebelle," exclaimed the Viscount de Chateaufneuf, suddenly turning around at this juncture and clutching his friend by the arm, for it was evident that the young nobleman was labouring under the most painful excitement, "tell me, wherefore has your sister-in-law sought this retirement? She is in a way to become a mother. Has she a husband? Does he hold an Indian appointment? Tell me everything, I conjure you."

The Marquis of Villebelle's countenance became so overshadowed with gloom, and he looked so deeply afflicted, that the Viscount de Chateaufort had no need to have his questions answered in words. He read the responses on his friend's features, and they were damnatory of the woman who until within the last few minutes had exercised such a fascinating power and spell-like influence over him.

"Juliana," he said, in a low and profoundly mournful voice, "I will not reproach you. I awake from a dream, but it was a dream which was delightful while it lasted, and I have to thank you for so much bliss. Happy is he who enjoys the fragrance of a flower in the ignorance that its leaves may distil poison. No, I will not reproach you. But all is at an end between us."

"No, no!" shrieked Juliana. "Speak not these harsh words. It is a death-blow which you are dealing. I love you, Jules. On my soul I love you, — Heavens, he deserts me!"

The Viscount de Chateaufort rushed precipitately from the room, in so excited a manner that he waited not even to speak another word to his friend Villebelle; nor did he pause upon the stairs to see whether this nobleman was following him. Juliana flew to the window. The viscount was speeding toward the gate. Oh, for one look, that she might catch his eyes, that she might passionately wave him back! But no, he turned not his regards upon her, even for a single moment. The gate opened, he rushed through it, it closed behind him; she beheld him no more.

But let not the reader fancy that Juliana really loved the viscount with a true sincerity of passion. No such thing. She had merely been playing a deep game, in order to secure to herself a lover and a fortune, inasmuch as she was disgraced beyond the hope of obtaining a husband, and was, moreover, dependent in a pecuniary sense upon her mother's purse. If she exhibited so much anguish, it was not altogether feigned. On the contrary, it was almost entirely genuine, but not an anguish on account of a lost love; it was the anguish of disappointment and rage at finding all the fabric of her hopes thus dissipated in a single instant. Such an anguish as this lasted only so long as there was the slightest chance of bringing her victim back and regaining her empire over him; but when the garden gate

shut him out from her view, and she saw that all was lost, she grew suddenly calm.

"Etienne," she said, turning abruptly around and flinging her flashing glances at her brother-in-law, "it is you that have done this."

"Not intentionally, Juliana, — on my soul, not intentionally," he answered, while his looks still continued to indicate the deepest commiseration and sorrow. "Listen for a few moments while I explain —"

"There is nothing to explain," cried Juliana, petulantly. "The mischief is done, you have ruined me."

"There must be explanation," said the marquis, "because there is accusation. I tell you, Juliana, that all this has been perfectly unintentional on my part, and that when I came hither, I had not the slightest notion of encountering you. I could not have foreseen it."

"But wherefore," demanded Miss Farefield, "that feigned name of Meurice?"

"That feigned name of Meurice — I will explain the incident," responded the marquis, serious and mournful alike in his tone and looks. "But be patient, Juliana; give not way to these impetuous gestures, these angry looks. The Viscount de Chateauneuf spoke to me, last night, in enthusiastic terms of a lady who had won his heart, and after some discourse it was agreed that I should be presented to her this day. Now, you can well understand that, holding a high official appointment, and for the sake of Constance likewise —"

"Oh, I comprehend," interrupted Juliana, with bitterness, "you did not choose to come under your own name to pay a visit to a kept mistress. Well," she continued, in a somewhat milder manner, "it is at all events satisfactory to know that this was not a vile trick nor a detestable stratagem, planned for my exposure."

"No," ejaculated Villebelle, "I would not for the world aggravate whatsoever sorrows and afflictions you may have already endured. But wherefore have you kept your dwelling a secret from Constance? You must have known she was in Paris; you must have known likewise that she loves you, that she has yearned after you —"

"Etienne," interrupted Juliana, vehemently, "is it not but too evident that my pathway and that of my sister lie

in different directions on the broad arena of the world? You must not think that I am altogether so changed, so altered — so degraded,” she added, her voice suddenly sinking as she spoke the word and the word itself being spoken with a painful effort, “as to be indifferent to what may be thought of me, or to be enabled to look those who know and love me in the face without a blush. Etienne, I am unhappy; my fortunes, too, are desperate. You know what has happened in England, Constance likewise knows it, and could you think I should voluntarily seek you out? No, I should only be bringing disgrace upon my sister, and I am not bad enough to do that. Being compelled to renounce the idea of obtaining a husband — But no matter. Let this interview end. Leave me.”

“But you will see Constance?” urged the marquis. “It was only a few hours back that she was speaking of you, with tears in her eyes, and she made me promise that if by any accident I should discover the place of your abode — ”

“Then let Constance come to me this evening,” said Juliana. “A few hours must elapse before we meet, that I may have leisure to compose my troubled thoughts. Do not let her come until the evening. And now leave me, Etienne.”

“I go, Juliana,” said the marquis; but, still lingering, he added, in a hesitating manner, as if fearful of offending one whose temper was naturally vehement, and now particularly ruffled, “Is there nothing I can do for you? Tell me, Juliana; my purse is at your service.”

“Thank you, I have sufficient means for the present. My mother supplies me with funds. Ah, Etienne,” she added, bitterly, “with what a family have you connected yourself! — my mother’s reputation itself damaged, my brother married to a murderess, myself — ”

“Juliana, give not way to these reflections — at least not in such a spirit,” interrupted the marquis, deeply pained. “It is not impossible for you to experience happiness in this world. In some agreeable seclusion, and under a feigned name — ”

“Enough. Leave me to chalk out my own career, to follow my own destinies. And now go, Etienne; I must be alone.”

Villebelle extended his hand, which Juliana took for a moment, and as she turned abruptly away, he slowly quitted

the room. On issuing forth from the villa, he found the hackney-coach still waiting in the road.

"Where is the gentleman who accompanied me?" he asked of the driver.

"Gone, sir," was the response. "He came out and rushed away like one demented."

Villebelle reflected for a few moments. He thought to himself that Jules de Chateauneuf, in a thoroughly altered state of mind, must have sped homeward to make his peace fully with his amiable and loving wife, but he longed to proceed to the mansion to assure himself that such was the fact. On the other hand, he was anxious to inform Constance that he had discovered the abode of her sister, whom she was to see in the evening; but then he reasoned that as some hours must yet elapse ere this interview could take place, Constance in the meantime would be full of anxiety and suspense, and would be asking him a thousand questions, to which he might not be able to give very satisfactory replies, for he was resolved to screen Juliana's most recent faults and frailties — those in respect to Chateauneuf — as much as possible from the marchioness. He therefore came to the conclusion that it would be better to remain some little time absent from the hotel, and in the interval he could visit the chateau. He accordingly entered the hackney-coach, and ordered the driver to take him to the viscount's mansion.

In a short time the Marquis of Villebelle alighted at that palatial residence, and, on inquiring of the hall porter for the viscount, was informed that he was in the drawing-room with the viscountess. Villebelle's heart warmed at this intelligence, which served to confirm his previously conceived hope that the husband would now do his duty toward the tender and affectionate Stephanie. He ascended to the apartment, to which a handsomely dressed lackey led the way, and the instant the door was thrown open, he observed the viscount and viscountess seated together upon the sofa. The glance that Jules immediately flung upon him was expressive of mingled gratitude and firmly taken resolve, — gratitude for the part which the Marquis of Villebelle had so generously borne in the transaction, and a resolve that thenceforth he would profit by recent experiences. As a matter of course, Villebelle assumed the air of

one who was merely paying an ordinary visit, and came for no special purpose, because he naturally concluded that the viscount had not explained to his wife a single detail of the circumstances which had thus induced him to seek her presence at a time when he was wont to be absent from her. The marquis saw that Stephanie was completely happy, and during half an hour's conversation, he likewise perceived that the viscount treated her with a kindness which was truly affectionate, without being so overstrained as to excite her suspicion that it was the result of no ordinary occurrences. When Villebelle rose to take his departure, Jules de Chateaufort accompanied him from the room, and leading him into another, embraced him with the most grateful warmth.

"Through you, Villebelle," exclaimed Jules, "I have been awakened from the most delusive of dreams. Yours indeed is the hand which has snatched me back from the brink of a precipice. You have saved me from consummating toward my wife an outrage which I should full soon have been compelled bitterly to repent. Ah, when I ere now broke away from the presence of that guileful siren, it was with a sudden springing up of the tenderest yearning toward Stephanie. All her good qualities seemed to crowd in upon my convictions in a moment; they blazed, as it were, upon my mental view; they made me comprehend what a treasure I possessed in her, and how infamously I had been about to sacrifice her."

"My dear friend," answered Villebelle, "you know not the pleasure it affords me in hearing you thus speak. Ah, Jules, it would have indeed been something to be deeply deplored if a noble heart such as yours naturally is had been ruined by an infatuation."

"I am an altered man," replied the count. "A veil has fallen from my eyes, and in the same moment that the character of one woman was exposed in its darkness, that of another was revealed in its brightness. Yes, I am an altered man, and perhaps it is fortunate that all this should have taken place. Hitherto I had not loved Stephanie, now I feel that I can adore her; hitherto her demonstrations of tenderness had appeared to me insipid and of schoolgirl mawkishness, henceforth they will constitute the greatest charms of my existence. Oh, I feel, my dear friend, that there are moments in a man's life when it requires some startling inci-

dent to arouse him into a due appreciation of what is good, and what is virtuous, and what is beautiful, at the same time that he is snatched from the midst of delusions, falsities, and artificialities. To you am I indebted for all that has occurred, and rest assured, Villebelle, that whensoever you set forth within these walls, you will henceforth be enabled to contemplate a scene of connubial bliss as perfect as that which you yourself enjoy."

The two noblemen were melted to tears. They grasped each other's hands, Jules with the fervour of gratitude, Etienne in the warmth of congratulation, and thus for the present did they separate. The Marquis of Villebelle, re-entering the hackney-coach, was driven back to Paris, and on ascending to his apartments in the hotel, he found Constance awaiting his return. She was employing her leisure in finishing the portrait of Stephanie, and her husband, immediately perceiving in what work she had been engaged, as she threw down her pencil on his appearance, embraced her, saying, "When that portrait is finished, Constance, you shall send it to my friend Jules, who will appreciate it as that of a wife whom he has at last been brought to understand and to love."

"Then your experiment has succeeded, Etienne," exclaimed the delighted young lady, "and I am rejoiced on Stephanie's account, yes, and on that of her husband likewise. But sit down, and give me the promised explanations."

"A few words will suffice," responded the marquis. "Last evening, Jules made certain confessions to me, by which I found that he had become infatuated by the siren charms of another. From all that he said, I felt convinced he was in the power of a designing woman; and you will not be angry with me, Constance, when I state that, in order to save my friend, I was resolved to see this female, inasmuch as I knew that I could judge of her without the bias which sat like a spell on the mind of the viscount. It was arranged that he should introduce me to her to-day. It has been done, and the result is the complete severance of the two, the breaking off of a connection which so nearly proved fatal to his happiness, and the opening of his eyes to the full understanding of his wife's affectionate disposition. You are not angry, dearest Constance?"

"Angry, Etienne," she exclaimed, eagerly and half-

reproachfully, "how can I be angry with you? You have acted as a friend to a friend; and by this do I signify my approval," at the same time imprinting a kiss upon his cheek.

"And now, dearest Constance," said the marquis, "I have to speak to you on a matter altogether different — and — and — totally unconnected with the other topic. You remember the solemn promise —"

"Juliana!" exclaimed Constance. "You have met her?"

"Accident has revealed to me her abode."

"And you have seen her?" cried the younger sister, vehemently.

"Yes, I have seen her, and I have promised that you also shall see her."

"At once!" cried the marchioness, starting up from her seat by her husband's side. "Let me hasten at once to embrace Juliana."

"Calm yourself," said the marquis. "It is not until the evening that you are to call upon her."

"And why not? Wherefore this delay?" exclaimed Constance, cruelly disappointed.

"It is her wish. She was overpowered at the thought of meeting you again, under altered circumstances."

"And tell me, Etienne, is she happy? But no, she cannot be, it is impossible. Alas, my poor sister!"

Constance burst into tears, and Villebelle did all he could to console her. He had dreaded lest it should strike her that Juliana was the siren of whom he had spoken as the beguiler of Jules de Chateauneuf, and he was happy to perceive that his wife entertained not this suspicion. No, for Constance would have thought, if the idea had struck her at all, that her husband could scarcely have been so guarded, and that by some look or word he would have betrayed the fact of that identity. Her impression therefore was that it was a mere coincidence, his having fallen in with Juliana at the same time he was bent on his generous purpose on behalf of Chateauneuf.

It was about six o'clock in the evening that the marquis and marchioness proceeded in a carriage to the village of Auteuil. It was not Villebelle's intention to accompany Constance into Juliana's presence; he thought that the two sisters would rather be alone at such an interview. He

therefore intimated to his wife that he purposed to remain for her in the carriage, at the same time giving her to understand that she need not abridge her visit to Juliana on that account.

The vehicle stopped at the gate of the villa; the bell was rung, and Madame Durand herself came forth. She had evidently received her instructions from Juliana, for in answer to the inquiry of the marquis, she immediately said, "The lady is gone; she departed two or three hours back."

"Gone!" ejaculated Constance, in a tone of anguish. "But she has left some letter, some message?"

"Yes, this letter," answered Madame Durand, presenting a sealed note at the same time.

Constance tore it open, and by the light of the lamp at the gateway, she read the following lines:

"Do not be angry with me, dearest sister, that I have resolved not to meet you at present. The circumstances under which we should thus encounter each other would be too painful for me. Mistrust not, however, the love that I bear for you, and may you be happy. I go into some other seclusion, afar from Paris, and whence in a short time I will write to you. By the date at which you will reach Naples, — as I see by the newspapers when you are likely to be there, — you shall find a letter awaiting you. Farewell, dearest sister, and remember me kindly to the marquis.

"JULIANA."

It was with sad and mournful feelings that Constance accompanied her husband back to the hotel at Paris, but probably his impression was that under all circumstances it was better Juliana should have adopted such a course.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PURSUER AND THE FUGITIVES

THREE weeks had now elapsed since the liberation of Lord Saxondale from Doctor Ferney's house in Conduit Street, Hanover Square. The physician, on discovering the flight of the young nobleman at an early hour on the ensuing morning, had sped off to Saxondale House to acquaint her ladyship with the circumstance, and to assure her that he himself was perfectly innocent of any connivance in the matter. Lady Saxondale was at first stupefied, for she saw at a glance what an immense advantage the incident would give her daughter-in-law Adelaide, in case Edmund should return to his wife and in all things make common cause with her. Her ladyship did not reproach Doctor Ferney. She knew his character too well not to be at once convinced that he gave her the right version of Edmund's escape, — the evidence being that it was effected by some person or persons entering the house in the night. But even without such evidence, Lady Saxondale was well aware that the physician would not deceive her, and that if even altering his mind, and refusing any longer to keep Edmund a prisoner, he would deal candidly with her.

That the Count de St. Gerard had by some means succeeded in tracing out the place to which Edmund was removed, and that through this young nobleman's intervention her son had been rescued from confinement, Lady Saxondale did not doubt. But little it mattered by whom or by what means the release was effected, since the mischief was done; and Lady Saxondale was not the woman to lose valuable time in speculations on that point, nor in vain regrets when some positive mode of action was required. For if the reader will bear in mind those expla-

nations which were given at the time when Lady Saxondale and her daughter-in-law were first brought together, it will speedily become evident that the fact of Edmund being at liberty materially altered all her ladyship's plans, and placed her in a more perilous position than ever. She could not now constitute a suit in the ecclesiastical courts for the annulment of her son's marriage with the Baroness de Charlemont, inasmuch as by obtaining from the guardians a written guarantee to allow Adelaide two thousand a year, and by assigning to her the castle in Lincolnshire as her abiding-place, a virtual recognition of that alliance had been given. What, therefore, was Lady Saxondale's position? Just this: that in about a year and a half Edmund would come of age; she would be reduced to a mere cipher, having no further control over the immense revenues of the house of Saxondale, having no right even, unless with his permission, to set foot across the threshold of either the mansion in Park Lane or the Lincolnshire country-seat; reduced to a jointure of some three thousand a year, and, what would be worse than all, compelled to behold her daughter-in-law Adelaide, whom she hated, occupying the high place which she herself had so long enjoyed. This was the position to which Lady Saxondale would find herself reduced, unless by fresh machinations she could contrive to get her son Edmund completely into her power, and obtain the fullest and completest influence over him.

All these matters were duly weighed and considered by Lady Saxondale immediately on receiving the intelligence of her son's escape; or, rather, we should say, so soon afterward as she could compose herself for such serious and painful meditation. But it was not very long ere her ladyship became sufficiently tranquillized to envisage her position calmly, and her resolves were speedily taken.

She sent at once for Lord Harold Staunton, and addressed him in the following manner:

"Edmund has escaped. It is of the utmost consequence that he should be again got into my power. For this purpose I am about to leave London. Do you on your part lose no time in getting that woman Madge Somers away from Deveril's house. You and I, Harold, have now each to play a part upon which much depends; you must not sleep over your work, as I assuredly shall not be caught slumbering at

mine. My belief is that Edmund has gone to rejoin his wife, who is in Lincolnshire. Thither shall I proceed under circumstances of becoming caution, but if it be necessary, I will write to you. At all events lose no time in carrying out that which you have undertaken to perform; and if it should transpire that Edmund has remained in London, and accident should throw him in your way, do your best to renew all your former intimacy with him, worm yourself into his confidence, make yourself necessary to him, — you know how to do it, — and then we shall determine what future measures to adopt.”

Lord Harold Staunton — who was once again entirely enmeshed in the trammels which his own self-interest as well as his passion for Lady Saxondale wove around him — promised full compliance with her injunctions and assured her that so soon as his arrangements could be accomplished, he would make the attempt to get Madge Somers away from Deveril's house. Lady Saxondale then set off privately into Lincolnshire, travelling by a post-chaise without any attendants, and under an assumed name. On her arrival in the county where the castle was situated, she would not go to Gainsborough, as she was too well known there; and she calculated that if Edmund had really rejoined his wife at the castle, they would both be upon the alert and would not fail to take measures for obtaining prompt information in case new dangers should threaten. Therefore Lady Saxondale went to Lincoln, and thence she despatched a person to make inquiries privately and cautiously in the neighbourhood of the castle to ascertain whether Edmund and Adelaide were resident there. The emissary returned to Lincoln with the intelligence that Lord Saxondale had been to the castle, that he only stayed there an hour or two, and then departed with his wife. They were attended only by Adelaide's own maid, and no one at the castle knew whither they had gone.

Lady Saxondale was much annoyed at these tidings, for she had no great difficulty in fathoming the plans of her son and her daughter-in-law, and she knew that, however silly and thoughtless he might be, his wife was an astute and cunning creature, who would give him the best counsel and adopt the most fitting measures to enable him to baffle any fresh designs against his liberty.

“Doubtless,” said Lady Saxondale to herself, “they will seek some profound seclusion, where they hope to remain undiscovered and unmolested until Edmund shall be of age and then become his own master. Perhaps they may go upon the Continent, and that will render matters all the more difficult for me to disentangle. But I am not to be beaten; and now the first thing to be done is to get, if possible, upon the track which they took when so stealthily and hurriedly leaving the castle.”

As they were no longer at the castellated mansion, there was nothing to prevent Lady Saxondale herself from proceeding thither; and accordingly the domestics were much astonished when she suddenly arrived in a post-chaise, unattended and alone. It was not, however, Lady Saxondale's purpose to tarry for any length of time at the castle; she immediately instituted inquiries amongst the servants in respect to the mode of Lord Saxondale's departure with his wife. She learned that it was about one in the afternoon, three days previously, that he had arrived there in a post-chaise, which was immediately dismissed, that having been closeted for about an hour with Adelaide, he had given instructions for the carriage to be got in readiness, and that the equipage had borne him, his wife, and the maid to Gainsborough, whence it had been sent back from the hotel at which they had halted in that town.

Armed with this information, to Gainsborough did Lady Saxondale forthwith repair, and continuing her inquiries, she ascertained that the fugitives had departed in a post-chaise for Chesterfield. Once upon the track, Lady Saxondale was determined not to abandon it, and she accordingly continued her travels. For several days did she thus journey, tracing the fugitives from Chester to Derby, from Derby to Shrewsbury, from Shrewsbury into Montgomeryshire, and there the trail was lost. Notwithstanding the minuteness and the unwearied perseverance with which her inquiries were followed up, she was thrown completely off the scent. But inasmuch as she had reached a point where the clue suddenly ceased, she came to the conclusion that those whom she sought were not very far distant. Perhaps they had settled somewhere in that part of Wales? At all events, she ceased to fear that they had gone abroad; for if such had been their intention, they would not have

come in a direction diametrically opposite to the seaports whence the Continent was to be attained, unless indeed, fearing pursuit, they had thus come out of their way to throw the pursuers completely out. But despite the probability of such a proceeding, especially as Edmund was now advised by one so shrewd and cunning as Adelaide, Lady Saxondale clung to the belief that they had located themselves somewhere in Wales.

Altogether three weeks had elapsed since the escape of the young nobleman from Doctor Ferney's house, and it was the commencement of the dark, gloomy month of December. Wearied with her fruitless inquiries, well-nigh worn out and exhausted by her travels and wanderings, Lady Saxondale resolved to return to London. The erratic life which for these three weeks she led had only enabled her to write once to Lord Harold, and to receive one letter in reply. This letter informed her that he had not as yet found an opportunity of carrying into execution his scheme with regard to Madge Somers; for that William Deveril was almost always at the villa, and it was next to impossible to attempt anything while he was there to protect the invalid. Harold however assured Lady Saxondale that he had spies constantly watching the house, that he himself had taken a lodging in the neighbourhood, so as to be on the alert at any moment when an opportunity for action should present itself, and that an old gardener employed on Deveril's premises was secretly in his pay and would give whatsoever information was requisite. In respect to Madge Somers herself, Lord Harold's letter informed Lady Saxondale that the woman had experienced a relapse, that she had been again at death's door, that she was but slowly recovering, that the faculty of speech was still absent, and that she had not strength sufficient to renew her former endeavours to write anything upon a slate. Thus no positive injury had been sustained by Lady Saxondale's interests on account of this delay in getting the woman surreptitiously spirited off from Deveril's villa.

The receipt of this letter, while she was yet in Montgomeryshire, put an end to her ladyship's suspense as to what might be doing in London; and thinking it just possible that some fresh intelligence might have been received at the castle of her son's movements with his wife and the maid,

she resolved to take Lincolnshire on her way back to London. But in the meanwhile, what had Edmund and Adelaide been really doing? The reader has seen that immediately on his arrival at Saxondale Castle after his escape from the physician's house in London, he had held a consultation with his wife; and, as Lady Saxondale had foreseen, Adelaide counselled him to go into some strict retirement until he should come of age. While the horrors of incarceration were still fresh in Edmund's mind, he needed no large amount of persuasion to induce him to adopt this course. Adelaide was not anxious to return to France; Edmund disliked travelling on the Continent, and therefore it was resolved to settle themselves in Wales. They travelled post, until they reached a certain town in Montgomeryshire, where they dismissed the chaise. At the same time they removed to another hotel in this same town, adopted another name than the fictitious one which they had borne on their arrival, and from this second hotel they proceeded by a public conveyance to another town. Thus was it that they successfully broke off the clue which, until that point, Lady Saxondale had skilfully followed up.

They settled in a small but comfortable house in the neighbourhood of that town at which they definitely halted; and for the first fortnight the change of scene, although it was the drear winter season, was sufficient to amuse Edmund's mind, especially as his wife lavished upon him all those blandishing cajoleries which she was so well enabled to exercise, and which she used for the purpose of riveting the chains which her beauty had from the very first cast around him. But at the expiration of that fortnight Edmund was suddenly seized with a deep disgust for the monotony of the life he was leading. A capricious change of this kind was quite consistent with his shallow intellect and frivolous ideas. He could not bear living under the plain name of Mr. Jones, being no longer "my-lord," having no servants to wait deferentially upon him, forced by the circumstances of the place to drink wines and partake of fare which were sorry enough for one accustomed to have his appetite pampered, no carriage nor horses, and the scenery not merely wearing the aspect of sameness, but likewise a bleak wintry dreariness, around him. Even the very local circulating library itself was deficient in attractions for one of his ca-

capacity, and the only source of cheering thoughts was to be found in the blandishments of his wife. But even in respect to her, certain cold shuddering alarms would again steal upon him, — the same as those he had experienced when they were at Saxondale House; and as his mind became more and more desponding, those vague apprehensions grew more potent. Thus, by the time two short weeks had elapsed, Edmund felt that he could endure this monotony of existence no longer. It had already become insupportable.

Adelaide, who watched him constantly, failed not to comprehend what was passing within him, and she saw that it would be useless for her to endeavour to keep him in that seclusion any longer. Another consultation was accordingly held, and Edmund vowed that he would dare all dangers and go up to London. Adelaide suggested that it would perhaps be more prudent to return to the castle. There they could not possibly be taken by surprise, if a good look-out were kept. The domestics of the household were numerous, and the emissaries of a mad doctor, instead of accomplishing their purpose, might be plunged for their plans into the Trent. Besides, Edmund might find amongst the gentry around some little society, for Adelaide thought that, in the country, persons would be less particular than in London, and that the zeal with which English people pay homage to a lord would induce them to turn a deaf ear to any flying rumours which might be in circulation with regard to the said lord's wife. Moreover, now that the first impressions of alarm in respect to the madhouse had passed away, neither Edmund nor Adelaide much fancied that Lady Saxondale would revert to the same proceeding. At all events, they could be upon their guard, as before said, and one of the first steps to be taken on their return to the castle might be to write a letter to her ladyship, advising her for her own sake to abstain from hostilities in future, unless she wished an open warfare to arise and certain unpleasant revelations to be made in respect to herself.

Under all these circumstances, therefore, the result of the consultation was a resolve to retrace their way to Saxondale Castle. They set out, they travelled by easy stages, and it was on a dark December evening that they once more crossed the threshold of the castellated mansion. When Edmund again found himself seated in the spacious, hand-

somely furnished, and well-lighted dining-room, at a board served with a succulent repast, and the choicest wines sparkling upon the table, he felt as blithe and happy as a schoolboy on his first day at home for the holidays. Nor was Adelaide herself sorry to be once more in that palatial residence, with troops of servants at her command, equipages ready at her bidding, and the treatment she experienced being that of a lady of title.

On the second day after their return, — and at about eleven in the forenoon, — as Edmund and Adelaide were deliberating together how they should while away the time till dinner, a post-chaise rolled up to the gate of the castle. In a few minutes one of the domestics, who had received special instructions to be on the lookout, hurried up to the room where Edmund and his wife were seated. The man rushed in somewhat unceremoniously, to announce that Lady Saxondale had just arrived.

“I will not see her,” exclaimed Edmund, starting to his feet from the sofa on which he was lounging by Adelaide’s side.

“Is her ladyship alone?” inquired his wife, and on receiving an answer in the affirmative, she said, in a hurried whisper to her husband, “Yes, let us see her. Perhaps she comes to propose some terms? At all events if she be alone, she is harmless.”

“Well, then, we will see her,” cried Edmund, aloud, and the domestic hastened away.

In a few minutes the door was thrown open, and Lady Saxondale made her appearance. She looked somewhat pale and haggard from excitement of mind and body, but yet not so much altered nor worn as most other women under such circumstances would have been, for she was of great physical capacity of endurance, as well as being endowed with strong mental power. She entered with a composed but severe look, and Adelaide, who was deeply skilled in reading the human heart through the medium of the countenance, at once saw that she had some sternly settled purpose in view. Edmund was not enabled thus deeply to fathom the state of his mother’s mind, and he surveyed her with an air of mingled mockery and supercilious contempt. Slowly and deliberately she put off her bonnet and shawl, and took a seat. More than a minute thus elapsed from the

moment she entered the room, and not a word was spoken by either one of the three.

"I have been seeking you both," at length said Lady Saxondale, in a voice that was coldly calm and as severe as her looks, "and it was only at an early hour this morning I learned that you had returned two days ago to the castle."

"Well, mother," ejaculated Edmund, with a tone and manner which under any other circumstances might be described as flippantly insolent, but which was really nothing more than what such a parent deserved, and indeed might expect on the part of such a son, "what business is it of yours when we come or when we go? Now, I just tell you my mind. Your conduct toward me has been shameful, and if I were to lock you up for the next six months on bread and water, in one of the tapestry chambers, or even in the chapel itself, I should be only serving you right. However, you had better take care what tricks you play me in future, for I vow and protest that I will pay you off in a coin you won't like."

"Cease this impertinence," said Lady Saxondale, in a peremptory tone.

"But you, madam," exclaimed Adelaide, now firing up, "must fully comprehend that you are not permitted to give yourself these airs in our presence."

"And you, madam, understand," returned Lady Saxondale, drawing herself up with the haughtiest dignity, "that you are both of you only in this castle by sufferance, that for the present it is mine, or at least under my control, and that the domestics will obey whatsoever order I choose to give them."

"There may be two words to that," exclaimed Edmund. "If you like to try it on, mother, we will just ring the bell, and when I order the first footman who comes to turn you out, we will see whether I am obeyed or not."

"I was fully prepared for some such insolence as this from you, young viper that you are!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, for an instant losing the command of her temper.

"Viper, eh?" echoed Edmund. "If you want to see who can best call each other hard names, I don't mind giving you a specimen of my ability, by telling you that you are nothing better than a demirep, and you might as well take yourself

off to William Deveril or Lord Harold, and perhaps a dozen others, for anything I know."

Lady Saxondale's countenance became scarlet, and her lips moved as if she were about to give vent to some strong ejaculation; but catching back, as it were, the word ere uttered, and at the same time exerting the strongest power of control over her feelings, she said, "I have but a very few words to say: you will both do well to listen, and perhaps the communication I purpose to make will convince you that I am not to be insulted with impunity. Now let us bandy not these idle taunts. I can assure you that the syllables I am about to utter are fraught with more importance than you may possibly imagine."

"We are all attention," said Adelaide, glancing with rapid significancy at Edmund, as much as to make him understand that it were better to allow his mother to have her say.

"Yes," continued Lady Saxondale, "matters have come to such a point that I am resolved to bring them to a settlement in one way or another, without an hour's delay. You two, no doubt, hug the belief that in a short time — in less than a year and a half from the present date — I shall suddenly become altogether powerless; that I shall sink into a mere cipher, and ye will be dominant. Now, that is a position which I am not at all prepared to accept; and sooner than look forward to such ignominy, I would bring the whole fabric of grandeur, wealth, and titles crashing and crumbling in ruins upon the heads of us all."

Edmund gave a supercilious toss of his head, but Adelaide, laying her hand on his knee, said, "Hush!" for she saw plainly enough that Lady Saxondale was speaking with too solemn a seriousness, and likewise with too much cold desperation in her resolve, not to have the inward consciousness of being enabled to perform that which she threatened. Lord Saxondale accordingly held his peace, and his mother went on in the following manner:

"There is a secret which my soul has hitherto treasured up as a criminal would hold fast the tale of his guilt. It is a secret which —"

At this moment the sounds of numerous voices talking beneath the windows reached the ears of the three persons in the apartment where this scene was taking place; and so loud, with so much apparent excitement, too, were

those voices discoursing, that Edmund started up, exclaiming, "What is that?"

Going to the window, he looked forth, and beheld a number of the servants, male and female, gathered beneath the casement; and in the midst of them was a man in the dress of a peasant, displaying some kind of garment which he held up, so that it floated out at full length.

"What on earth can this mean?" ejaculated Edmund, who, in his silly curiosity, had for the moment lost sight of the very grave and serious manner in which his mother had just been speaking.

"Return to your seat, dear Edmund," said Adelaide; "never mind what is taking place elsewhere."

"But here is something very odd going on," he exclaimed. "The servants all gathered together — a labouring man amongst them — What the deuce is it? He is holding up a woman's gown, I declare. Ah, what is it they say? 'Found in the river?'"

Lady Saxondale now hurried to the window, as if she had more curiosity than her daughter-in-law Adelaide, who only proceeded thither more leisurely, doubtless thinking that whatsoever might be going on was of very trivial importance indeed. Lady Saxondale had scarcely flung forth a glance from that casement, when she turned abruptly around, saying, "Something extraordinary has occurred. I must see what it is."

"And I will go, too," cried Edmund, following close behind Lady Saxondale as she hurried forth from the room.

Adelaide remained behind, ashamed at the idea of displaying what she conceived to be a childish curiosity, and wondering that Lady Saxondale could possibly do so. Her ladyship was hurrying, indeed rushing most swiftly down the stairs, when she caught the sounds of Edmund's footsteps behind her. All in an instant she stopped short, and seizing the young nobleman by the arm with a convulsive violence of touch, she looked at him with a deadly pallor of countenance, and said, in a low, hoarse whisper, "Edmund, if you recognize anything, I charge you to remain silent. Speak not a word, betray not the fact by a look, treat it with seeming indifference, and I swear to you that, as a recompense, I will do all that you wish, — all that you ask. I will attempt to coerce you no more."

Edmund gazed upon his mother with a sort of stupid astonishment. He really and truly thought for a moment she was suddenly going mad. The pallor of her countenance was absolutely ghastly, her eyes had a fixed and sinister stare, her ashy lips were quivering, she seemed as if she trembled all over with a glacial chill. In this fearful aspect which she wore, there was something too terribly real, too awfully genuine, not to smite him with the conviction that so far from being mad, she was keenly and poignantly intelligent to the imminence of some dreadful danger; and catching the infection of her own dire alarm, losing for the moment, in the bewilderment of his senses, the full meaning of the words which she had just addressed to him, he said, "Good God! mother, what is it?"

"Be calm, Edmund, be calm — be composed," was the quick response she gave in a deep, hollow voice, while her fingers closed rigidly upon his arm, as if that arm were grasped with claws of iron. "Be calm, I say. Not a word to Adelaide. Not a word, I conjure you! Listen, Edmund, dear Edmund! do me this service, and I will never molest you more. Pray, pray forgive me for the past. And now come, let us go down together. You will recognize something, — for God's sake appear not to recognize it!"

Lord Saxondale could not give utterance to a syllable. He was still half-bewildered and half-astounded by this awful change which had suddenly come over her ladyship, and by those words to which she had given such rapid and excited utterance, though in so hollow and subdued a tone. He proceeded down the stairs mechanically. At the bottom she caught him by the arm again, and said, hurriedly, "Adelaide is coming. Not a word. Remember my promise. I swear to fulfil it!"

Edmund's wife, on a second thought, had conceived that there must be something more in all this than she had at first imagined, and she accordingly decided upon following her husband and mother-in-law down the stairs. The sounds of her footsteps had thus reached Lady Saxondale's ears, and made her breathe this last adjuration, full of vehement entreaty, though low in utterance, in the ear of her son. Almost immediately afterward they were overtaken by Adelaide, who exclaimed, "Wherefore all this excitement?"

"We do not know. We are going to see," responded

Lady Saxondale, without turning her head around toward Adelaide, but now speaking in her natural voice once more.

"Yes, we are going to see," added Edmund, still so much bewildered as scarcely to know what he did say.

The three traversed the great hall, and emerged forth from the front door which was standing open. A little way on the right of the entrance steps, stood the group of domestics, male and female, with the peasant in the midst; and this last-mentioned individual was displaying the long garment, which indeed was nothing more nor less than a lady's gown. But that dress — Ah! it was instantaneously recognized by Lord Saxondale, stained, soiled, and dripping with water though it were. It was the masquerade costume which he knew that his mother had once worn!

Edmund, now all in a moment comprehending the meaning of Lady Saxondale's words, threw upon her a look of quick significancy, and thus met her appealing eyes as they were turned upon him.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MASQUERADE DRESS

THE servants and the peasants were all talking at the moment Edmund, his mother, and his wife issued from the entrance-hall, but on beholding them, their voices suddenly ceased, through a feeling of respectful deference. Edmund said nothing, Adelaide gazed with curiosity, and Lady Saxondale, with her usual air of perfect composure, inquired, "What is all this excitement about?"

"Please your ladyship," answered the peasant, "I just now dragged this out of the river. I was going along the bank at a very little distance from the castle t'other side," — and he pointed in the Gainsborough direction, — "when I saw something that looked like a woman's dress, and I was at first afraid it was a female drowned. So I waded in, and drew out this gown. It had some string around it, and what seemed to be some little bits of thick paper just sticking to the string. Leastways I took it to be paper, but it all came off in my hand — However, here's the dress, and a very fine one it must have been, though the mud has soiled it and the water has taken out the colour."

"One would think it had been a masquerading dress," observed Lucilla the lady's maid, but the remark was thrown forth without any sinister intent, as she was perfectly ignorant that her mistress had ever worn such a costume.

"But I tell your ladyship what," continued the peasant, "as I have been already telling your ladyship's servants. I recollect perfectly well that one of those poor young women —"

"Edmund, it is very cold out here," said Lady Saxondale, turning quickly to her son, but darting upon him a significant

look at the same time. "Let us go into the hall, and hear what the man has to say."

With these words she took the young nobleman's arm, and as they ascended the entrance-steps together, she breathed, in a hurried and scarcely audible whisper, "For Heaven's sake, Edmund, as little emotion as possible!"

"Don't be afraid," was Lord Saxondale's immediate response, also quickly whispered; for now that the first access of excitement had gone by, he comprehended that by some means or another his mother was completely in his power, and though he could not at the moment precisely settle his thoughts as to the full meaning of her alarm, he was nevertheless already smitten with some dark and dreadful suspicion.

Adelaide was too keen not to observe something peculiar on the part of her husband and her mother-in-law, especially as she had noticed that rapid exchange of significant glances which had taken place the instant Edmund's eyes had encountered the saturated garment. And then Lucilla's observation, that it looked like a masquerade costume, had brought, like a lightning-flash, a recollection to Adelaide's mind. For she had heard from Edmund's lips the whole story of the masquerade at the Duke and Duchess of Harcourt's, — how Lady Saxondale had met Lord Harold Staunton there, and how she had incited him to provoke William Deveril to a duel. She had likewise learned how Edmund had ransacked his mother's boxes to discover that dress, and how he had succeeded; but she never knew that it had fallen into the hands of the unfortunate Emily Archer, *alias* Mademoiselle d'Alembert, for the simple reason that Lord Saxondale had thought fit to conceal from his wife the fact that he had possessed such a charming mistress. However, Adelaide saw, as we have already said, that there was something very peculiar in the present affair, but she made no observation, — neither by her looks did she betray what was passing in her mind.

Lady Saxondale, leaning upon Edmund's arm, passed into the hall, Adelaide following close, the peasant, with the dripping garment, and the domestics crowding in the rear.

"Yes, assuredly it is a masquerade dress," said the butler, as the peasant now stretched the costume on the marble pavement.

“I was about to tell your ladyship,” said this labouring man, “what my opinion is. It was at the cottage where I live with my mother and sister that those two unfortunate women stopped for a little while that night when they were murdered—”

Here Adelaide could scarcely repress a sudden start, for all that had hitherto struck her as extraordinary in Lady Saxondale’s behaviour in a moment associated itself with the tragedy thus revealed by the last few words the labouring man had spoken. From beneath her long lashes she darted a quick glance at her mother-in-law, and her power of penetration showed her at once that the cold outward composure which her ladyship wore was merely a mask concealing poignant feelings of trouble and agitation that were working within. But Adelaide still remained silent, and instantaneously regaining complete command over herself, she continued to listen with merely an appearance of such curiosity as one might naturally feel under such circumstances.

“And I noticed,” continued the peasant, “that the one who seemed the servant-girl carried a large parcel done up in brown paper, and tied around with string. Now when the bodies were discovered murdered on the bank of the river, the parcel had disappeared, and this was proved on the inquest. I really do believe the dress that lies there was what the parcel contained. It seems that the servant’s mistress was a theatre dancer, or something of that sort, and so perhaps she was accustomed to wear this very identical dress. Depend upon it, my lady, that my opinion isn’t far wrong.”

“Perhaps not,” said Lady Saxondale, with the appearance of her wonted calmness. “But the incident is of no consequence now: it cannot assist in the discovery—”

But here she stopped short, and, stooping down, affected to examine the texture of the wet garment.

“Please your ladyship, with due deference,” suggested the butler, “I think this incident ought to be made known to a magistrate.”

“And please your ladyship,” added the steward, “such is my idea. The murder was as mysterious as it was horrible, and everything at all connected with it must of necessity be made public.”

"Besides," continued the butler, "there are instances where police officers are so uncommon sharp that the slightest clue puts them on the right scent, and a new link in a chain serves as a guide to the detection of the guilty ones."

"Yes," said the peasant, "I am determined to go to some justice of the peace, and tell him what I have found. It can do no harm if it does no good. Besides it would seem as if the thing sat heavy on my conscience, if I didn't do so. Let me see — who's the nearest justice, Mr. Denison or Mr. Hawkshaw? By the bye, I have got a call to make in the direction of Hawkshaw Hall and so I'll go straight off there at once."

An expression of trouble, which she could not possibly subdue, passed over the features of Lady Saxondale, as the labouring man thus spoke. The servants all heheld that look on the part of their mistress, but they every one attributed it to a feeling of mingled annoyance and shame at the mention of the name Hawkshaw, which they naturally supposed must vividly bring back to her mind the dread exposure of that day when the intended twofold wedding was interrupted and cut short. Edmund likewise observed that look, and it strengthened the dark suspicion which had already arisen in his mind; while Adelaide, more prompt to jump at an extreme conclusion, felt her own suspicion fully confirmed.

"Well, my good fellow," said Lord Saxondale, thinking it better to put a stop to this matter, if possible, "I don't know that you need trouble Squire Hawkshaw. Just leave the dress here, and I'll deliberate what is to be done with it."

"Beg your lordship's pardon," replied the peasant, "but this is a matter for a justice to sift. I should have gone straight off with it at once, only just as I dragged it out of the river, the steward was passing along, and as we got talking on the subject, I came as far as the castle. No offence, my lord, for not taking your lordship's advice, but where murder has been done, no good ever comes of keeping a thing in one's own hands, and I sha'n't feel easy in my mind till I have delivered this dress up to a justice."

"Well, my good man, have you own way," interrupted Lady Saxondale. "I see that you are very wet. You have been in the water. Go to the servants' hall, and get some refreshments before you set out on your walk."

Having thus spoken, Lady Saxondale turned away, beckoning Edmund and Adelaide to follow her, and she began ascending the staircase. Her son did at once accompany her; but his wife lingered in the hall, and as the domestics were moving away in company with the peasant, who had rolled up the dress, and whom they were conducting to their own premises to give him some refreshments, Adelaide beckoned Lucilla toward her.

"What dreadful murder was this, my girl," she inquired, "to which allusion has been made? I never heard of it before, and I know that my lord and her ladyship will give me no particulars, for fear of frightening me."

"Ah, my lady," responded Lucilla, naturally supposing that she was thus questioned through mere ordinary curiosity on the part of Adelaide, "it was indeed a shocking thing. Let me see? It happened four or five months back — To be sure! Lady Macdonald and Lady Florina Staunton were staying at the castle — Yes, and Lord Harold, too —"

"Ah! Lord Harold Staunton was staying here at the time, was he?"

"Yes, my lady. I recollect he was ill in bed; he had been thrown from one of Mr. Hawkshaw's horses, which he would persist in riding. It was very mad of his lordship, you know, when he was implored not to do it, for the horse was a very spirited one —"

"Well, but about this dreadful tragedy?" said Adelaide.

"Dreadful indeed, my lady! The victims were an opera dancer and her servant. The dancer's name was Mademoiselle d'Alembert, but if I recollect right, her real one was Emily Archer, and she was a splendid creature, as I have heard say. Well, my lady, they were both found shot dead on the bank of the river, — one through the brain, the other through the heart."

"And was this in the middle of the night?" inquired Adelaide.

"Oh, no, not in the middle of the night. About ten o'clock, as near as I can recollect."

"And where were they going?"

"Ah, that nobody knows," responded Lucilla. "It was thought at the time —"

But here she stopped short, perceiving the immense error

she was about to commit, and into which she had almost been inadvertently betrayed in the somewhat excited state of her thoughts under the influence of those horrible recollections which had been so forcibly brought back to her mind.

"What were you going to say, Lucilla?" inquired Adelaide.

"Oh! nothing, my lady —"

"Nonsense! you were about to say something. Speak candidly; there is nought to which you can give utterance in respect to the present topic that will offend me."

"I would rather not, my lady. I was foolish — very foolish," responded Lucilla, becoming every instant more and more confused.

"Now I beg that you will speak candidly," said Adelaide. "Nay, I command you. Proceed; do not be afraid of giving me offence."

"Well, my lady, since you order, but pray don't mention to his lordship — I would not for the world make mischief — indeed, I would rather not say any more —"

"Lucilla, this is foolish. Proceed."

"Well, to be sure, it was before my lord was acquainted with your ladyship, and so there's no harm done."

"What is it?" demanded Adelaide, impatiently. "Do not trifle with me thus."

"I was only going to observe, my lady, that if his lordship did really know something of Emily Archer — I suppose young noblemen will be gay now and then."

"To be sure! I comprehend you. Of course it has nothing to do with me. This unfortunate Emily Archer was intimate, you mean, with Lord Saxondale? Don't be frightened, Lucilla; you have not offended me, and I shall not mention that I have learned anything from you. But I suppose his lordship was not here at the castle when the murder took place?"

"Oh, no, my lady; he was in London, and had not been here for some time. His lordship never liked the castle; it was too dull —"

"But where was it thought that the two women were going at the time?" inquired Adelaide.

"Well, my lady, it was whispered that Miss Emily Archer and her maid were coming to the castle for some purpose or another."

“ Why was it thought so? ”

“ Oh, for several reasons. In the first place,” continued Lucilla, “ what could they have possibly been doing in the neighbourhood between nine and ten at night, unless they were coming to the castle? They were stopping at a hotel at Gainsborough at the time. Then again, what could they have come into Lincolnshire at all for, except to see her ladyship, or else in the hope of finding Lord Saxondale down here? Perhaps, my lady, his lordship may have turned neglectful in London — But there is yet another reason why I think they were coming to the castle.”

“ And that reason? ” said Adelaide.

“ Why, my lady, the very day before the one in the evening of which the murder took place, a post-chaise drove up to the castle, a lady got out, and her maid remained in the vehicle. The lady gave no name, and said it was useless, as she was not known to Lady Saxondale, but she had a long interview with her ladyship, and then went away. It never struck any of us at the time that this lady and her maid who were murdered might have been the very same that came to the castle; but some days after the inquest, when we read in the county papers full particulars and descriptions, we thought they must be the same. Of course you know it was not for her ladyship to go to the inquest and say anything about the matter, because it was rather a delicate subject in respect to my lord; and whether or not the females were the same who called at the castle, and whether or not they were again coming here in the evening when they were killed, had nothing to do with the circumstance of the murder. Poor things! they were no doubt waylaid by some ruffians.”

“ No doubt of it,” observed Adelaide.

“ I hope your ladyship will not mention that I have been talking so much on the subject,” said Lucilla, who dearly loved a gossip, but who now began to reflect that she had been speaking very frankly and familiarly indeed to Lord Saxondale’s wife upon a topic which was rather of a delicate nature.

“ Fear not, Lucilla,” responded Adelaide; “ it is entirely my own fault that you have been led into these explanations.”

Having thus spoken, Adelaide slowly ascended the stair-

case toward the apartment where she expected to find her mother-in-law and her husband.

But in the meanwhile let us see what had been taking place betwixt these two. It will be remembered that when Lady Saxondale directed the servants to take the peasant along with them and give him some refreshments, she had beckoned her son and her daughter-in-law to follow her up-stairs. Those stairs she ascended mechanically, scarcely knowing what she was doing, for, as Adelaide had but too truthfully suspected, her air of cold outward composure was only a mask which the natural strength of her mind and a sort of desperate courage enabled her to assume in order to conceal the horrible feelings and terrific apprehensions that were agitating in her soul. It was not until Lady Saxondale reached the apartment that she observed her son only was following her, and that Adelaide had remained below.

"Where is your wife?" she said, with nervous quickness, as she turned and threw a strange look upon Edmund.

"I don't know — I thought she was with us," he replied. "I scarcely know what I am thinking or doing — Upon my word, it seems as if I was in the midst of some curious dream! But now, mother, what means all this? Tell me at once —"

"Question me not, Edmund," she interrupted him, her entire form visibly shaken with a cold tremor, which she could neither repress nor conceal. "Think what you will, but I conjure you keep a seal upon your lips; breathe not a word to a soul, answer no questions which your wife may put, and it will be all to your advantage. I cannot leave the castle immediately. It would look too strange; but in three or four days I will depart, and never more shall you be molested by me. This I solemnly swear."

"Well, at all events it is something gained," observed Edmund, and then, as he felt all his horrible suspicions in respect to his mother fully confirmed, he could not help adding, "But, my God! what made you do that?"

"Question me not, I say!" she responded, half in a tone of entreaty, half in one of excited impatience. "Spare me, Edmund! show yourself above wreaking upon me any anger or malice that you may feel on account of the past."

"Just now you called me a viper," said the young noble-

man, unable to resist the opportunity of giving vent to that vindictive spitefulness which was natural to him, "and that is a name you have on more than one occasion flung at me. But, look you, mother, whatever I may be, I am not so bad —"

"Silence, Edmund, for Heaven's sake silence!" ejaculated her ladyship, her countenance once more becoming absolutely ghastly, and an expression of indescribable horror, mingled with anguish, sweeping over her features. "I am in your power. Have mercy upon me. What more can I do than fulfil the promise I have already made you?"

"Well, keep to it, and I will say no more," rejoined the young nobleman; but even as he gazed upon Lady Saxondale, he could not help feeling an ineffable aversion, a strong loathing, a deep sense of horror, at the thought of what she was, for as he himself had said, or had meant to say, he was not so bad as to be enabled to contemplate the darkest criminality unmoved or undismayed.

"Edmund," said Lady Saxondale, suddenly recollecting something, and recoiling in affright from the idea which thus struck her, "have you ever mentioned to Adelaide anything about that dress? But, yes! I feel convinced you have — I am sure of it. From all she said when first I met her in London, she knew everything, — far, far too much."

"Of course," responded the young nobleman, with a sort of brutal roughness, "I told Adelaide all I knew, and it was natural enough, as you have been at war with me for some time past."

"Where is Adelaide? What can she be doing? Wherefore does she not rejoin us?" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, sinking upon a seat, and feeling as if all the courage which had hitherto supported her must now give way. "Go, Edmund, tell her to come hither at once —"

But at this moment the door opened, and Adelaide entered the room, — she having just come up from her conversation with Lucilla in the hall. The instant the handle of the door moved, Lady Saxondale with a mighty effort regained her outward composure, for she knew not whether it might be one of the servants who was about to enter. But when Adelaide made her appearance, her ladyship's eyes were quickly flung upon her countenance, as if to glean from thence how much her daughter-in-law knew, how much she

suspected, and how she intended to bear herself in the matter. Adelaide closed the door, and advancing straight up to Lady Saxondale, said, in a voice of firm severity, "Now will you have the kindness to take up the thread of the discourse where it was just now interrupted?"

"It is unnecessary," answered Lady Saxondale.

"Unnecessary?" ejaculated Adelaide, a smile of scornful triumph for a moment appearing upon her lips. "Why has it become unnecessary? On the contrary, it is more necessary than ever that you should reveal that secret to which you so solemnly and seriously alluded, inasmuch as, under existing circumstances, it behoves us all to be made aware of the position in which we stand with regard to one another."

"It is needless, I repeat," rejoined Lady Saxondale. "Ask Edmund. He will tell you that he is satisfied with the arrangements entered into between us."

"Madam," resumed Adelaide, fixing a determined look upon Lady Saxondale, "your son cannot trust you, nor can I, as his wife, trust you. You spoke of a secret the revelation of which might, if you chose, in a moment bring down the whole fabric of wealth, titles, and honours crashing and tumbling about our ears."

"It was a menace, and I recall it," said Lady Saxondale, quivering from head to foot. Then, in a sort of desperation, she exclaimed, "I am beaten, Adelaide, I renounce the warfare. Henceforth I leave you both unmolested — I will go hence. What more can you demand?"

"We demand nothing more; it is precisely what we want. But," continued Adelaide, "we have no guarantee that your present demeanour is not assumed for the purpose of throwing us off our guard, the better to carry out fresh perfidies. Now, look you, Lady Saxondale! Between you and me it is diamond cut diamond; and for the interests of your son, which are identical with mine own, we must come to a thorough understanding. Have you forgotten all the revelations which Lord Harold Staunton so unconsciously made to me on that evening when in the dusk of the apartment at Saxondale House he mistook me for yourself?"

"I have forgotten nothing, Adelaide," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, again quivering all over, "and there is no need

for you to refresh my memory in a single particular. Edmund, tell her that you are satisfied, and let this cease."

"Edmund will permit me," continued Adelaide, "to place matters on such a footing that henceforth he need not fear you. Listen, Lady Saxondale, do not interrupt me. On that evening to which I have alluded, when Lord Harold Staunton addressed me under the impression that he was speaking to you, he made reference to some deed which had mysteriously but terribly knitted your destinies together, and that deed which I comprehended not then, I understand now. Lord Harold Staunton was an inmate of this castle at the time when —"

"Adelaide," murmured the unhappy Lady Saxondale, the very picture of abject humiliation and despairing wretchedness, "I have already besought Edmund to spare me: to you do I address the same prayer."

"You understand, then," said Adelaide, coldly implacable, "that you are in my power. Attempt but a renewal of hostilities against us, make but a sign which shall raise a suspicion that you are still full of perfidy, and —"

"No more!" almost shrieked forth the miserable woman, as she started from her chair. "I understand you and I will henceforth be your slave, if you will."

With these words she quitted the room, and repairing to the bedchamber which she was wont to occupy when at the castle, gave way to thoughts and feelings which may perhaps be better understood than described.

CHAPTER XV

THE RAMBLE

MR. HAWKSHAW was seated with a friend at lunch, in one of the handsome apartments of his residence, and at about two o'clock on the day of which we are writing. This friend was Mr. Denison, and they were conversing together upon a variety of topics, amongst which the presence of Edmund and his wife in Lincolnshire was included.

"I suppose you have heard," said Denison, "that Lord Saxondale and his bride came back to the castle a day or two ago?"

"Yes," answered Hawkshaw, "and by the bye, have you caught the rumour which is afloat, that Saxondale had been confined in a madhouse?"

"I know that is true," responded Denison. "A friend of mine, writing to me from London two or three weeks back, mentioned the circumstance, but it appears that he was not many days in confinement, and how he got liberated I have not learned."

"Ah, it is a strange family — a strange family altogether!" said Mr. Hawkshaw, shaking his head gloomily, as his thoughts at the moment specially reverted to the treacherous attempt of Juliana to inveigle him into a marriage, polluted and unchaste as she was.

"Yes, it is singular," observed Mr Denison, "that everything unpleasant in connection with that family should have come out all at the same time. Here, within a few months, we have had extraordinary evidences of their profligacy or their folly. The mother exposed in respect to Mr. Deveril, and it being likewise tolerably certain that Lord Harold Staunton was her paramour; the deplorable affair in respect to Juliana, in which you, my dear friend,

had so lucky an escape; Lord Harold's mysterious, and I might almost say, burglarious entry, with some common ruffian, into the castle; Lord Saxondale's monstrous marriage — ”

“ Monstrous indeed! ” ejaculated Hawkshaw. “ The epithet is the very best you could have applied to it. But does his wife possibly entertain the hope that she will be received into society by the good families in Lincolnshire? ”

“ It is very certain, ” rejoined the squire's friend, “ that neither Mrs. Denison nor any other members of my family purpose to call at the castle. It may seem hard that a woman who has been acquitted by a jury should be thus punished by society; it may even savour of unjustifiable vindictiveness on the part of the world, but it is impossible to read the trial without coming to the conclusion that she was really guilty. ”

“ Ah! you have read it then? ” said Hawkshaw. “ So have I. It has been published in a work of celebrated criminal trials — ”

“ The very book in which I myself found the account, ” observed Denison. “ But come, squire, let us turn the conversation on a more agreeable topic. Tell me candidly, ” continued the old gentleman, with a smile, “ have you not so far recovered your passion for Juliana as to think of committing matrimony in some other quarter? ”

“ Recovered? ” exclaimed Hawkshaw, almost indignantly. “ You ought to know, my dear friend, that I was startled up from that dream in the very hour that I obtained the conviction of her tremendous perfidy. ”

At this moment a footman entered to inform Mr. Hawkshaw that a peasant requested an audience of him in his capacity of a magistrate. The squire directed that the man should be shown to the library, and luncheon being now over, he said to Mr. Denison, “ You may as well come with me, and hear whatsoever the applicant may have to say. ”

To the library the two gentlemen accordingly repaired, and Hawkshaw immediately recognized the peasant as one of the witnesses who had given evidence at the inquest held upon the two murdered women, — at which inquest, be it remembered, he was present as a spectator. The man now carried a large parcel done up in paper, for we should observe that before quitting Saxondale Castle he had dried the dress

at the fire in the servants' hall, and had then enveloped it in the manner in which he now bore it.

"Well, my good fellow," said Squire Hawkshaw, as he and Mr. Denison took their seats at the table, "what do you want with me?"

The peasant's explanations were speedily given, and as they were the same which have been already recorded, we need not reiterate them. Suffice it to say, he concluded by observing that he did not know whether the incident would in any way assist the course of justice, or enable its officials to resume the clue of the investigations they had made at the time, but that he considered it to be his duty to bring the case under the cognizance of a magistrate. The parcel was opened, the dress produced, and minutely inspected by Mr. Hawkshaw and Mr. Denison.

"And you say," observed the former, "that you have shown it at Saxondale Castle, and that Lady Saxondale herself is there?"

The peasant replied in the affirmative.

"Then I suppose," continued the squire, addressing the remark to Denison, "that her ladyship is reconciled to her son and her daughter-in-law? However, in respect to the present business, I do not see that the discovery of this dress will in any way enable the constables at Gainsborough to resume their inquiry. It may, or it may not be, that the dress was contained in the parcel which was proved to have been in the hands of the maid on the fatal evening; but granting it is the same, there are two inferences to be drawn: either that it accidentally rolled into the river when the deed was committed, or that it was flung there by the murderer or murderers as something not worth carrying off."

"This latter inference, Hawkshaw, is scarcely to be deduced," observed Mr. Denison, "for why should the assassin thus seek to dispose of the dress? Would he not have merely tossed it down on the bank, if he did not choose to take it away with him?"

"But in any case I cannot see," remarked Hawkshaw, "that the discovery of this masquerading gear — for such it evidently is — can be turned to any account in furtherance of the cause of justice."

"Do you recollect," asked Mr. Denison, who was a shrewd and thoughtful man, "whether the bed of the river itself

was searched for the weapon or weapons with which the double murder was accomplished? ”

“ I don't think it was,” answered Hawkshaw, “ and indeed I should have fancied that it would have been useless.”

“ Not so useless as you would imagine,” said Mr. Denison. “ An assassin frequently flings away the weapon with which his foul deed has been perpetrated, and your own memory must furnish you with several instances of crimes having been thus brought home to their authors.”

“ I have heard of knives, when stained with blood, being thrown away in the manner you describe,” responded the squire, “ but pistols — ”

“ And why not pistols? ” asked Mr. Denison. “ Is not one weapon as often gifted with a telltale tongue as another? I mean in respect to its identification as belonging to some particular individual. A murderer throws away his weapon under several influences: first, in order that nothing criminatory may be found upon him, if he be stopped, suspected, and searched; secondly, in the sudden horror which supervenes after the commission of the deed; thirdly, on being alarmed by the sounds of voices or of footsteps. And now that I bethink me, in the case of which we are talking, the murderer or murderers were thus alarmed, for our friend the Marquis of Eagledean and Mr. Deveril were almost instantaneously on the spot. Assuredly it was a great fault if the river was not thoroughly searched at the time.”

“ Well, I am almost sure that it was not,” replied Mr. Hawkshaw, “ for I was present at the inquest, and I heard the head constable of Gainsborough give his evidence, stating all the measures he had adopted to discover some clue. The rain, you recollect, fell in torrents that night, and all footmarks were obliterated on the soft soil. He looked about for string or brown paper, to discover if possible a clue to the direction which had been taken by the author or authors of the crime after its perpetration, and he found nothing. All these details do I recollect.”

“ Well, then, it will perhaps be useful,” observed Mr. Denison, “ to give the head constable a hint, and he may yet have the bed of the river searched for the purpose I have described. You, my good man,” added the old gentleman, now addressing himself to the peasant, “ can tell him so from me; because the best thing you can do is to take this

dress to the head constable at once. You have acted judiciously and prudently in consulting magisterial authority, and here is a guinea for you."

Mr. Hawkshaw added another, and the peasant took his departure, infinitely delighted with the presents he had thus received. He carried the dress away with him, and, returning to his own home, communicated to his mother and sister all that had taken place. Although he had walked many miles, he nevertheless set out again in the evening for Gainsborough, and repaired at once to the residence of the head constable, to whom he gave every explanation, likewise delivering the message from Mr. Denison to the effect that it would perhaps be as well if the bed of the river were searched in the neighbourhood of the spot where the crime was committed. The constable promised compliance with this suggestion, and assured the peasant that he would consider whether the possession of the masquerade apparel would in any way further the ends of justice.

On the following morning the constable sent for the female who had been charged at the time of the tragedy to disapparel the corpses of the murdered women, and he desired her to examine the dress minutely, and inform him, to the best of her recollection, whether it would have fitted either the dancer or her servant. In respect to the latter, the woman at once gave a negative response, — the unfortunate abigail having been too slender in figure and too short in stature for such a costume, nor indeed was it probable that she could have had such a dress for her own wearing. The woman examined it for some time, and ultimately pronounced her opinion to the following effect:

"I perfectly well remember the form and stature of the unfortunate ballet-dancer. She was tall enough to wear this dress, but not sufficiently stout. The costume was evidently made for a woman of considerable development of contours, although the figure must have been of perfect symmetry. The wearer of such a garb would be what is termed a very fine woman."

The next step which the head constable at Gainsborough took was to summon to his counsels the most experienced milliner in the town; and he desired her to give her opinion in respect to the raiment, mentioning certain details on which he sought to be enlightened. The milliner, after

minutely examining the dress, and likewise consulting a book of costumes which she possessed, delivered herself in the ensuing manner:

“This is intended to represent a Spanish costume, belonging to the court of that country of about three hundred years ago. Soiled, faded, and ruined as it is, there is no difficulty in ascertaining that it was of the richest materials, and that its trimmings and its embellishments were of the very costliest description. I have no hesitation in pronouncing that such a dress could only have been intended for a lady of rank, or at least of great wealth, and furthermore my opinion is that it was made in London. I do not think that any provincial milliner could have turned out such an exquisite piece of workmanship as this must undoubtedly have been. The person for whom it was intended must have possessed a superb figure, of well-developed proportions, but yet of a just and admirable symmetry.”

Having obtained this information, the head constable necessarily came to the conclusion that the dress belonged neither to the opera-dancer nor to her servant. It must therefore have been brought into that neighbourhood with the intention of being delivered into the hands of some lady for whom it was made. The constable remembered how it had been intimated at the inquest that the unfortunate deceased Emily Archer had boasted at the peasant's cottage of her acquaintance with Lord Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton. He likewise reflected that the idea had all along existed that the two women were on their way to the castle when they met their untimely and dreadful fate. Thus was it natural that he should now ask himself the question, whether that masquerade dress had been intended for Lady Saxondale, or for any guest who might happen to be staying with her at the time. If it were so, the fact might at the first glance appear to be of but the most trivial importance, inasmuch as no matter whither the women were bound at the time, or what their errand might be, the constable considered it to be perfectly clear that they had been intercepted by a miscreant or miscreants, who, for purposes of plunder, had assassinated them. But still he deemed it important to ascertain every possible particular in respect to the victims. He knew full well that the most insignificant facts, and those which at first may appear to be most

irrelevant, are oftentimes found to enter as important links into a chain of evidence. Not, be it understood, that the head constable fancied for a single moment there was any one at Saxondale Castle, either at the time of the tragedy or on the present occasion, who could throw the faintest light upon the authorship of the foul deed; he was merely now reflecting that it was important to arrive at the knowledge of any fresh particular concerning which such information could be procured.

We should add that the head constable of Gainsborough had been much blamed at the time — as indeed is always the case with police authorities in such cases — for not having discovered the murderers. It had been said that he was inefficient, and an attempt was even made to remove him from his situation. He had thus an important incentive to make him display fresh activity in respect to any new particulars which transpired.

The head constable, having learned from the peasant on the preceding evening that Lady Saxondale was at the castle, made up his mind to call upon her for the purpose of soliciting any information which she might be able to give on the two specific points, — whether the murdered women were expected to call upon her on the night of the tragedy, and whether the dress was for herself or any guest staying with her at the time. But then it occurred to the official, that if the dress had really been for her ladyship, she could not have failed to recognize it as being such a one as she had ordered to be made, when the peasant took it to the castle and displayed it as already described. On the other hand, the constable argued that if her son Lord Saxondale had really been unduly intimate with Emily Archer, her ladyship would have naturally avoided any unnecessary allusion on the point, and might have chosen to keep to herself whatsoever she knew in respect to that dress. Then again he reflected how improbable it was that the son's mistress — if such she were — should have been employed as the bearer of a parcel for the mother. Thus, altogether, the constable grew more and more bewildered the longer he meditated on the matter; the day was passing away, and he could decide upon nothing. Finally, however, in the evening, he consulted a friend, and by his advice adopted his original resolution of proceeding to the castle.

We must however go back to an earlier part of this same day, in order to describe an incident which occurred, and which must be necessarily interwoven in our narrative.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, as the dusk at the wintry season of December was approaching, that Lady Saxondale was returning from a long and lonely walk which she had been taking. As the reader may suppose, her mind was in a wretchedly unsettled state. She could not bear to be indoors, she could not endure the presence of her son and daughter-in-law, to whom she had completely succumbed; neither could she keep her own chamber altogether, as this would appear strange in the eyes of the domestics. She had therefore rambled abroad soon after midday. She had roamed about, pondering upon an infinite variety of circumstances, not one of which wore an agreeable aspect; she had likewise revolved a thousand new plots and plans, not one of which could she determine on as practicable or safe, and she was now returning, at about three o'clock, to the castle, well-nigh broken in spirit, deeply, miserably, wretchedly desponding. Looking back through the vista of years she remembered, when, as the proud and envied bride of the old lord of the castle, she had first trodden with elastic step upon that soil as its mistress; and when, though her bridegroom was sufficiently aged to be her grandfather, she nevertheless gloried in the marriage as one that had raised her from the humble grade of a country clergyman's daughter to the lofty rank of a patrician of the land. Ah! at that time, little, little did she suspect what her future years were destined to evolve. Little, little did she foresee what poignant anxieties, what manifold chicaneries, — ay, and what dark crimes, too, were to make up the component parts of her as yet untrodden career. But the present — the present. What was she to do now? Was she to abandon herself, without a single effort, to the loss of power, of influence, and of authority? Was she to succumb without a struggle to Edmund whom she abhorred, and Adelaide whom she detested? Was she to endure, unavenged, the young lord's insolent superciliousness and his bride's triumphant arrogance? Was she likewise to fulfil her pledge, and in a day or two depart from the castle, never to return? Was she to fly to the Continent, bury herself in some seclusion, and pass the remainder of her days in a

wretched obscurity? For wretched such obscurity would indeed prove to the proud, the active, and the domineering disposition of the ambitious Lady Saxondale.

Ah! but how to avoid all this? That was the question. That she could still coerce Edmund if he were alone, she had no doubt. She would practise with him a new game: instead of tyrannizing over him, she would flatter, cajole, and coax him, she would immerse him in pleasures, she would surround him with the luxuries which he loved, she would adopt every means to enervate and emasculate him, and thus would she acquire the fullest ascendancy over his mind, so as virtually to keep him imprisoned within the scope of her influence. All this she might do if he were alone, but he was not. He had continually by his side a woman as astute, as artful, as designing, and as penetrating as herself, a woman who could doubtless prove equally unscrupulous, a woman who, Lady Saxondale doubted not, was but too surely guilty of the crime of husband-murder of which she had been accused. This woman, then, it was who now stood as an impassable barrier in Lady Saxondale's pathway. But could not this barrier be removed? Could not that woman be stricken down in the midst of that path where her presence was so formidable? Yes, doubtless, by a crime, and only by a crime.

Oh! but a crime. Heavens! had not Lady Saxondale supped full of the horrors of crime already? Crime! crime! was it to be ever crime? Alas, when once the road of iniquity is entered upon, crime after crime must mark the advance of those who tread it; blood-stained milestones do they become, indicating distances passed in safety, and pointing intervals of a still guiltier progress. Did her ladyship shudder as the thought of another crime,—one more crime,—a crime that was to be the last and the crowning one, thus gradually arose in her imagination as she approached the castle on returning from her half-distracted ramble? Or did she begin to envisage it as the only possible alternative that was to save from utter ruin the fabric of that power which she had hitherto taken so much pains to build up? Were her warrings by day and her long agonies of toil by night, her schemings and her plottings, her manœuvres and her chicaneries, to have been passed through

for nought? Was all the catalogue of her crimes to become useless for the want of one more crime to crown everything with success?

It was while the thought of this new but last deed of turpitude was expanding and acquiring consistency in her mind that Satan appeared greedily on the watch to help her onward to its consummation. There was a bridge across the river, at a spot where she halted for a few moments the better to commune with her thoughts, and as the arch had a much wider span than was requisite for the actual bed of the stream, — the earth having accumulated on either bank, — a portion of each of those banks was left dry beneath the bridge. We say that Lady Saxondale halted at this spot for a few moments, and while she stood there gazing upon the castle which was about a quarter of a mile distant, the countenance of a man was stealthily thrust forth from under the bridge. The eyes which thus peered out recognized Lady Saxondale's form in a moment, though the face was unseen, her back being turned toward the individual. Then an ejaculation of satisfaction, uttered in a course tone, reached the ears of Lady Saxondale; and as she glanced around with a sudden start, she perceived a man emerge from the dry part of the bank beneath the bridge. She, too, gave vent to an ejaculation, as she at once recognized Chiffin the Cannibal.

"Well, my lady," said the fellow, "this is indeed an unexpected pleasure, though, to tell you the truth, your ladyship is just the very identical person I was wanting to see; and in a fit of desperation I meant to make my way into the castle this blessed night that is coming, for I learned that you were staying there."

"And what would you with me?" demanded Lady Saxondale, sweeping her rapid looks around, to assure herself that she was not observed while thus discoursing with that dreadful-looking man. "Money, doubtless, always money. For no other purpose could you seek me."

"Now pray, your ladyship," said Chiffin, with a grim smile, "don't set me down as so uncommon selfish. In the first place, it's a blessing to enjoy the acquaintance of a noble lady like you; and in the second place, how should I know but what you might have some little business in hand that I could give a help to?"

"What are your circumstances?" asked her ladyship, quickly. "Desperate, I presume. I thought you were going to America, — that you had gone indeed —"

"Well, I told Lord Harold I should go, and I told his uncle, too, — that's the Marquis of Eagledean, — I should go, but meaning to go and going is two very different things. Don't you see, when I make up my mind one way, Fate orders another. Lord bless you! adventures crowd upon me as thick as bees did upon the bear when he upset the hive, and that's the long and short of it. You see, my lady, it's no easy matter for a genelman of such a high and mighty reputation as I am to get out of the country. The folks won't part with me; they watch the seaports to prevent me getting away from them."

"I suppose that you have been committing fresh deeds of horror," said Lady Saxondale, who only thus prolonged the discourse to gain the requisite leisure for reflection upon the idea which was now uppermost in her mind.

"Well, ma'am, I have done a little more work in that way," answered Chiffin, quite coolly and unconcernedly. "There was a feller, you see, which had played me some tricks, so I took the liberty of pitching him down a well, and such a lazy vagabond he was, he wouldn't come out again. That was a matter of three or four weeks ago. The consequence was a row took place in the house, and I had to cut and run. I have been wandering and hiding, hiding and wandering, till I was nearly worn out; and then to crown it all, I fell in with a parcel of scamps at a little wayside public-house, and, getting drunk, was ass enough to show what money I had about me, upon which, when I fell asleep, they robbed me of every sktarick. Then thought I to myself, there is nothing left for it but to go to the castle in the hope that her ladyship may be there. I learned from a labouring man just now that sure enough your ladyship was there; and so I came and crept under the bridge here, to lay quiet till night-time, when I meant to get to my old quarters. Now, that's the blessed truth, my lady. If you have got anything I can do for you, tell me what it is, and it shall be done: but if you have not, lend me a hundred or so — and when I am a rich man and got a large estate in North America, I will send you over a remittance."

Lady Saxondale would not have suffered the Cannibal to

continue thus long in his free-and-easy, familiar discourse, were it not that she was reflecting the while in a half-abstracted manner upon that idea which, as we have already said, was acquiring a greater consistency in her mind. She looked at him: his condition fully corroborated his tale, and denoted the desperation of his circumstances. His clothes were torn in several places and soiled with mud; his hat was more than ever battered; his beard was of nearly a week's growth; and yet the fellow, though in this miserable plight, had not lost the half-dogged, half devil-me-care kind of brutal recklessness which was wont to characterize him. His hand grasped a club:—seldom indeed was it that Chiffin the Cannibal had ever been seen without his murderous bludgeon.

As Lady Saxondale thus gazed upon the ruffian, she could not help saying to herself, "It is destined that this one last crime is to be perpetrated! Scarcely had the idea taken birth in my mind, when Satan sent me the instrument to accomplish it. Ah, is it, then, indeed no fable that human beings may sell their souls to the Evil One? They can, they can; and the method of doing so by the formal means of a written compact, signed by one's own blood, is the only part of the proceeding which is a fiction. Ah, if I have thus sold myself to Satan, of a verity he leaves me not long in a dilemma, without sending me the means of self-extrication; and if ever he had upon earth an agent in human shape, the incarnate demon stands before me now."

Some such reflections as these swept through the mind of Lady Saxondale as she surveyed Chiffin the Cannibal, and at length breaking silence, she said, "So your circumstances are desperate, and it would be an object to you to earn five hundred pounds?"

"Five hundred pounds!" echoed the Cannibal, whirling his bludgeon up in the air, and catching it with a full sounding grasp of his huge, muscular hand, as it fell, "five hundred pounds! Lord bless your ladyship, only a quarter of an hour back, if anybody had told me there was such a sum in the world, I should really have doubted it, and fancied that I could only have dreamed of such things. But to be serious, for five hundred pounds I am the man ready to cut a dozen throats."

"Talk not thus!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, a strong

shudder passing through her entire form. "Yes, there is a deed to be done, and there are five hundred pounds to be gained by the doing of it. But we must not remain here any longer now. We might be seen together, it were dangerous. Besides, after your last adventure at the castle —"

"When that gal of yours was so horribly frightened," interjected Chiffin, with a chuckling laugh. "Well, but where shall I see your ladyship again? I suppose the rooms are still shut up, as they always used to be?"

"Yes," replied Lady Saxondale, "and, everything considered, it will perhaps be better for you to take up your quarters there. If seen prowling about, or observed hiding under bridges or haystacks —"

"Well, it would look rayther suspicious," observed Chiffin, "partickler as I'm not exactly in a court dress. Depend upon it, my lady, it's the best plan; and then perhaps you might come and hold a confab with me at the usual hour, and give me full instructions. But pray don't forget the blunt at the same time; and if your ladyship could manage to put a flask of brandy in your pocket, or rum, or gin, — I'm not very partickler, — it would be as well, for that chapel in the winter time must be as cold as ice."

"Well, then," observed Lady Saxondale, after having again reflected for a few moments, "get presently into your old quarters, and I will seek you there punctually at midnight."

Having thus spoken, she continued her way toward the castle; while Chiffin crept under the bridge again, there to rest concealed for another hour or so, until it should be sufficiently dark to enable him to effect his entry into the shut-up apartments.

"Yes, one more crime," said Lady Saxondale to herself, as she approached the gate of the castellated mansion, "one more crime, and then may I hope for security and triumph."

CHAPTER XVI

THE HEAD CONSTABLE

It was about half-past eight o'clock in the evening that the head constable of Gainsborough alighted from a gig at the gate of Saxondale Castle, and proffered a request to the porter answering his summons that he might be allowed to speak a few words with the dowager Lady Saxondale, adding that if it were in any way inconvenient to her ladyship, he would call again on the morrow, and that in any case he should not detain her many minutes.

Lady Saxondale had shortly after dinner retired to the library, under the pretence of writing letters, but in reality to separate herself from the company of Edmund and Adelaide; for, as the reader may suppose, they did not feel themselves very comfortable in each other's presence, while anything in the shape of pleasant and agreeable conversation was altogether out of the question. The young lord and his wife were by no means sorry to be thus rid of the restraint and awkwardness created by her ladyship's society, and they cared but little what she did or whither she went, for they now felt assured that she was utterly disarmed and completely in their power.

Lady Saxondale, we said, was in the library, when a footman entered and delivered in precise terms the message which the head constable of Gainsborough had sent in. At the first mention of his name, Lady Saxondale was stricken with a cold terror, a glacial chill which went quivering through her even unto her very heart's core; but nevertheless, at the distance which the footman was standing from her in the spacious library, he did not perceive that she was thus swayed by any unusual emotion. As he went on speaking, Lady Saxondale's presence of mind came

back partially, for she thought to herself that the message was too civil, and that proposal of returning again on the morrow, if more convenient, was too unlike a hostile proceeding for the head constable to have any such intention. She therefore at once bade the footman introduce the official, and during the few minutes that elapsed ere the door again opened, Lady Saxondale said to herself, "It is doubtless relative to this discovery of yesterday, but how can that dress be in any way associated with me? What clue can have been obtained? Edmund and Adelaide can have done nothing; no, I am sure not. And then, too, the courtesy which marks the man's approach — no I have nothing to fear."

Nevertheless, as Lady Saxondale possessed a guilty conscience, she was far from being entirely free from misgivings as the constable entered the room, and her large, dark eyes bent upon him the penetrating look of eagles' glances as he bowed obsequiously in her presence. Her courage rose, for she saw that the man was himself somewhat awkward and embarrassed, and the thought flashed to her that it was probably altogether upon quite a different business he had come.

"I hope," he said, "that your ladyship will pardon this intrusion, perhaps a most unwarrantable one; but in consequence of something that has transpired, I feel it my duty to solicit a little information at your ladyship's hands."

"Upon what subject?" she inquired, with such an outward display of calmness that not for a single moment could he fancy her to be inwardly ruffled.

"It is relative to that unfortunate occurrence, that dreadful deed, which was perpetrated so mysteriously a few months back, and as there is not as yet the slightest clue —"

These last words were productive of an infinite relief to Lady Saxondale, and, resuming her own seat, she motioned the constable to take a chair.

"I suppose you allude to the assassination of the two women on the bank of the river?" she observed.

"It is so, my lady. That dress which your ladyship saw yesterday has been placed in my hands. I am afraid that the subject may be a delicate one."

"In what respect?" asked Lady Saxondale, somewhat hastily.

“My lady, rumour did at the time whisper that Lord Saxondale was somewhat intimately acquainted with Miss Archer, and therefore it is natural to understand how your ladyship may dislike having the topic brought to your attention.”

“But if it be necessary for the purposes of justice,” was the response, given with a perfect maintenance of outward composure, “you must not hesitate to speak, nor I to answer. You say that no clue has been obtained to the discovery.”

“Not the slightest, my lady, and that is the reason I am anxious to glean as many particulars as I can, no matter how trivial they may be. If, therefore, I could learn for what purpose those unfortunate women came into Lincolnshire at all, and also —”

“I will tell you candidly,” interrupted Lady Saxondale, assuming the merit of a frankness which she felt convinced she might display with all possible safety. “Yes, it is true that the unfortunate Miss Archer was my son’s mistress. There was a desperate quarrel between them in London. She felt aggrieved, she considered that she had claims upon him, she addressed herself to me. Indeed I saw her within these walls the very day before that on which she and her servant lost their lives. I could not then make up my mind what to do in the matter. I had guests staying in the castle, Lady Macdonald, Lady Florina Staunton, her brother, Lord Harold, while Mr. Hawkshaw and other neighbours were constant visitors. I was fearful that a character so well known by sight as a somewhat conspicuous dancer at the opera might be recognized by my guests or my visitors. Moreover, my son at the time was engaged to be married to Lady Florina Staunton, and it would have been shocking for that amiable and excellent girl to discover by any means that his lordship’s cast-off mistress — for this, in plain terms, she was — was applying to me for pecuniary redress.”

“Naturally enough, my lady,” observed the head constable, gratified and proud at the mingled courtesy and frankness with which he felt himself to be treated.

“You can appreciate, therefore, my motives,” continued her ladyship, “when I begged Miss Archer to give me time to think over the matter, and not to seek my presence again save and except under circumstances of the strictest secrecy.”

In justice to myself, — though reluctant indeed to say a word against the dead, — I must observe that Miss Archer was very violent. Availing herself of her knowledge of my son's engagement with Lady Florina, she threatened an exposure; and she herself, in a very peremptory manner, made an appointment to call upon me again at the castle between nine and ten o'clock in the evening of the ensuing day, to know my decision. I confess that I was angry, and I declared that if she came in a public manner, — as, for instance, in any vehicle to excite attention, — I would not see her. She became more humble, and of her own accord volunteered her readiness to come on foot, of course being accompanied by her maid. To this I had no objection, but little did I foresee what a terrific peril the two fated women were destined to encounter, and how dread was to be the catastrophe."

"I thank your ladyship for these explanations," said the constable, making a low bow.

"Of course," continued her ladyship, "when the inquest was held, I saw no necessity for going forward, or sending to communicate all these facts. Consider, sir, a mother's feelings."

"I can understand them fully," exclaimed the constable, "and it was most natural that your ladyship should study to save your son from what might have been a little exposure, and, at all events, would have had the effect of breaking off a marriage which your ladyship at the time was anxious he should contract. And now, my lady, I have but one more word to say."

"I can anticipate what it is," exclaimed Lady Saxondale. "You would ask me relative to the dress, and with the same frankness I have hitherto shown, will I reply. The dress was mine, but therewith was connected a certain infamous piece of scandal regarding me. You will not ask me to repeat it. Suffice it to say, it was false, but Miss Archer had been led to believe it was true. By certain means — no matter what — she obtained possession of that dress, and she purposed to use it as a means of extortion in respect to my purse. When she called upon me, I reproached her bitterly for having adopted such vile, base means, and assured her that when she again sought my presence, if she restored me not that very costly costume

which had been stolen from me, — yes, stolen from me, — I would not listen to another word she might have to say. And now, my dear sir, with your good sense, and with your delicate appreciation of circumstances, you can understand how it was that I did not choose to recognize that dress, even when inspecting it closely, on its being displayed by the labouring man yesterday.”

“To be sure not,” exclaimed the constable. “Your ladyship was not to place yourself in the position of giving explanations to a peasant, and before all the members of your household.”

The official was indeed completely satisfied of the truth of every word which Lady Saxondale had spoken, for such was the seeming frankness of her manner and the candid openness of her look, that it was impossible to doubt her sincerity.

“And now,” she asked, “are there any other particulars which I can give you?”

“None, my lady,” responded the constable, after a few moments’ reflection.

“Of course,” she went on to say, “you will keep to yourself all that I have been telling you, for my daughter-in-law is dotingly attached to Lord Saxondale, and I do not mind confessing to you she is exceedingly jealous. Therefore, if she heard that my son had ever been engaged in such a liaison with an opera-dancer, she would be very unhappy; and inasmuch as these circumstances cannot really have the slightest connection with any clue to the discovery of the assassins of those unfortunate women, it would be a mere wanton infliction of pain upon certain members of my family, indeed, upon us all, if the particulars were flung abroad to be caught up by the greedy tongue of scandal.”

“Your ladyship may depend upon my discretion,” responded the constable, as he rose to take his departure.

At this moment strange sounds reached the ears of Lady Saxondale and the constable, ejaculations loud and vehement, hurried and excited cries, as if the castle were on fire, or as if an attack were being made by banditti and the household were being summoned to resistance. Her ladyship started up with some suspicion of a new calamity; the constable listened with all his ears, as if thinking that

such a disturbance must more or less regard his own official functions.

Suddenly the door of the library burst open, and Lucilla, rushing in, exclaimed, "Oh, my lady, thieves — robbers — burglars — murderers — in the tapestry rooms!"

Lady Saxondale's vague suspicion was thus confirmed in a moment, and she grew pale as death. That she should do so, appeared by no means unnatural either to Lucilla or the constable, considering the announcement which was thus abruptly made; but little did they comprehend the real reason which she had for being so affrighted.

"Thieves?" ejaculated the officer, and he sprang to the door.

Lady Saxondale, quickly recovering her self-possession, or, rather, startled into it by the sudden consciousness of some new and frightful danger, sprang after the constable. They hurried up the staircase. On the landing and in one of the diverging corridors some of the servants were speeding along. Edmund and Adelaide, previously alarmed by the cries, had issued forth from the drawing-room.

"What is it? What is it?" they demanded, as if speaking in one breath, and in a very excited manner, though perhaps the young nobleman was far more alarmed than his wife.

"Thieves!" cried Lucilla, who had followed Lady Saxondale and the constable.

"In the tapestry rooms, my lord! In the tapestry rooms, my lady!" ejaculated one of the footmen. "The steward, the butler, and several others have shouted for assistance from the passage windows on the western side."

Edmund rushed back into the drawing-room, snatched up a poker, and coming forth again, followed the rest toward the tapestry rooms, taking good care, however, to be as much in the rear as possible, for, as the reader is already aware, he was very far from being the bravest person in existence. As for Adelaide, she, much more courageous, had fallen into the stream, keeping pace with the constable and her mother-in-law.

From this hurried description, an idea may be formed of the confusion and excitement which prevailed; and when we add that several of the servants carried lights in their hands, which flamed and oscillated as they were borne rapidly along, it may be well conceived that the spectacle

was altogether calculated to sustain that sensation of wild interest and alarm. The constable, rushing onward, soon outstripped most of the domestics; Lady Saxondale kept close behind him, and Adelaide was not far distant. In this manner the corridors and passages were soon threaded, and as they entered the western side of the castle, the sounds of loud voices, speaking in an excited manner, and emanating from the chapel, guided them all thither.

On entering that place, the spectacle which burst on the view of Lady Saxondale was Chiffin the Cannibal struggling desperately with the steward, the butler, and two of the footmen. These four, however, had got too strong a hold upon him, and were maintaining their grasp too tenaciously, either to allow the ruffian to escape or to do them much harm. His heavy boots certainly inflicted a few severe kicks upon their shins, but his arms were held fast, and when he endeavoured to butt at them, and even to bite, with all the ferocity of a savage beast, they were perfectly strong enough as well as sufficiently brave and resolute to retain him in their clutch. The head constable, now darting forward, put an end to the fellow's desperate struggles, by seizing his legs and thus causing him to fall heavily on the pavement of the chapel, a proceeding which well-nigh brought down with equal force those who held him.

No sooner was Chiffin the Cannibal thus prostrate, when handkerchiefs were promptly put in requisition to bind his limbs, and the ruffian was now overcome and powerless. As he lay flat on his back, he cast his grim savage looks around. His eyes encountered those of Lady Saxondale, and not quicker is the lightning-flash athwart the sky than was the glance which she flung upon him, significantly bidding him to remain quiet and hold his peace. There was promise in that look, and the thought darted into Chiffin's mind that it would be much better for him to keep silent, and not proclaim to those present his acquaintance with her ladyship, as by so doing he would only convert her into an enemy, whereas she might possibly serve him as a friend.

"Now, make the fellow sit up," exclaimed the constable, "while we determine how he is to be disposed of, for I presume he was found as an intruder here, and is but little likely to give a good account of himself."

The domestics lifted the Cannibal up, and placed him on

a stone bench against one of the walls. At this instant Lord Saxondale entered the chapel, and the moment his eyes lighted upon the Cannibal, an ejaculation of astonishment escaped his lips, for he at once recognized the man who had delivered him from imprisonment at Doctor Ferney's house. The looks of all present instantaneously settled upon the young nobleman, his mother being as much astonished as the rest, for she knew not that Chiffin was the author of his release, neither was she aware that her son and that ruffian could have ever met before.

"Now, then," growled the Cannibal, as an idea suddenly struck him, "you will perhaps let me go, when his lordship tells you that I have done him a service in my time; and it was natural enow that I should come here to ask for a recompense."

"Ah, that voice!" cried Lucilla, who at the moment entered the chapel, she having kept completely in the rear of the living stream. "That voice! Yes, it is the same!"

The domestics at once understood what Lucilla meant, and the head constable glanced toward her ladyship for instructions, or at least for some suggestion what course was now to be adopted, inasmuch as her son did not deny Chiffin's assertion that he lay under an obligation to him.

"You hold your tongue, young 'ooman," said the Cannibal, addressing himself to Lucilla. "You never saw or heard me before, I know. And his lordship will very soon tell you all that I am a highly respectable genelman, although somewhat under a cloud at present."

"Yes, it is perfectly true," exclaimed Edmund, "that this man did me a great service." Then thinking that it would seem very odd if he did not specifically mention what it was, he added, "When I was shut up in a certain place the other day, he helped me out of it."

"All this appears so very extraordinary," observed the head constable of Gainsborough, "that it must be calmly and deliberately looked into. In the first place, I should like to know under what circumstances the man was discovered within these walls?"

"I will explain," said the steward. "In consequence of something which took place a few weeks back, I have considered it to be my duty to visit the shut-up apartments on this side of the building every evening; and as there are a

great many rooms to inspect, and, moreover, as one does not exactly like to come here alone, I have usually been accompanied by three or four of the other domestics. Well, on coming into the chapel just now, I thought I heard the sounds of footsteps retreating into the cloister. I cried out for my comrades to hasten hither. They came, and we discovered this fellow crouching behind one of the monuments. Three of us tried to drag him out, while another hastened to the passage window, threw it open, and shouted for assistance, for we did not know but what there might be more of them concealed in the place. The fellow struggled desperately, as you may have seen — ”

“ But tell me,” said the constable, “ to what circumstances you allude as having induced you to visit these rooms? And what did the young woman mean by her ejaculation which seemed to imply that she recognized this individual’s voice? ”

“ One word, sir,” exclaimed Lady Saxondale, now thinking it high time to interfere. “ It appears that his lordship, my son, has received a service at this person’s hands, and as he himself has observed, it was natural he should come to ask for a reward. Perhaps he did not like to present himself in the usual manner at the castle gate, and therefore obtained stealthy entrance in the hope of finding an opportunity to speak to his lordship.”

“ Yes, that’s exactly what it is,” growled Chiffin. “ I was afraid that if I rang at the bell some of these powdered flunkeys would order me off, just because I don’t happen to have my Sunday clothes on, and so I thought — ”

“ You had better hold your tongue,” said the constable, sternly. “ I can assure you that although her ladyship, in the goodness of her heart, may be inclined to put the most favourable construction on your proceeding, I am not to be equally misled. Young woman,” he added, turning to Lucilla, “ how is it that this man’s voice was at once familiar to you? ”

“ Lucilla, do you hear the constable speak to you? ” cried Lady Saxondale. But she only thus addressed the maid in order to have an opportunity and an excuse for accosting her, and hastening up to the spot where she was standing, she added, in a hurried whisper, “ Not a word of the real truth! Say it was a mistake! ”

"Now, young woman," exclaimed the constable, "don't you hear that your mistress orders you to speak out? You need not be afraid; this man can do you no harm now."

"I think I can tell the story for her," observed the steward, naturally fancying that Lucilla was cowed and overawed by the terror of the Cannibal's presence. "The fact is, sir," he went on to say, addressing the head constable, "there was a sort of burglarious entrance effected here a few weeks back. The maid there was alarmed by the entrance of persons into the room where she slept, and now, as you perceive, she has recognized the voice of one of them."

The steward did not at the time remember the injunction which he himself, as well as all the other servants, had received from Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw not to give publicity to the incident which he had been explaining. In the excitement of the present circumstance he utterly lost sight of that injunction.

"This grows very serious," observed the head constable, and now he surveyed Chiffin more attentively than he had previously done. "Either I have seen you before," he went on to say, in a sort of musing tone, "or else I have read a very accurate description of you."

"No, not of me, sir," responded the Cannibal; "it's quite a mistake. I am an honest, hard-working man."

"What is your name, where do you live, and can you get anybody to speak to your character?" demanded the constable.

"My name is Brown, sir, I live in London when I'm at home. Ask his lordship there whether I ain't a very respectable man."

"Faith, I know nothing at all about you," ejaculated Saxondale, with a supercilious hauteur. "All I know is that you delivered me out of a certain place; and if I had met you, and you had asked for a reward, I should certainly have given it."

Meanwhile the head constable had been scrutinizing Chiffin with still more minuteness, until his original suspicion was confirmed, that in some way or another the fellow, both by his features and his dress, was not altogether unfamiliar to him. Recollecting that he had a bundle of certain papers in his possession, he drew them forth, and stepping somewhat aside, began turning them over, one after the other, by the aid

of a candle which he beckoned to one of the footmen to hold close for the purpose.

“Come, my lord,” said Chiffin, now getting very uneasy, “do speak a good word in my favour. Don’t be ungrateful on account of what I did for your lordship.”

But at this moment an ejaculation burst from the lips of the head constable, an ejaculation of mingled horror and astonishment; and then, as suddenly resuming his wonted official composure, he said, “There is not the slightest necessity for carrying this investigation any further. The man is my prisoner on a far more serious charge than any which might at first be brought against him. His name is Chiffin, and he is a murderer!”

Cries of horror burst from the lips of many present. The Cannibal, perceiving that he was recognized from a printed description which the head constable had in his possession, said not another word, but reflected gloomily within himself upon the chances of Lady Saxondale endeavouring to do anything to save him.

“It now remains for consideration,” the constable went on to say, “how we can best dispose of the fellow until the morning, for I should not like the risk of taking him away while it is dark; he would endeavour to escape.”

“Her ladyship,” observed the steward, “will permit me and some of the others to help you convey him over to Gainsborough.”

“No, let the constable have his own way,” Lady Saxondale hastened to observe. “He knows best, and he is responsible for the safe custody of his prisoner.”

The official reflected for a few moments. He thought to himself that as Chiffin was such a desperate character, it might be perilous to venture his removal in the care of the servants of her ladyship’s household, and that it would be much better to wait until daylight, and then convey him in the charge of his own police officers before the nearest magistrate for identification, so that with proper authority he might be removed up to London. Besides, the head constable had an eye to the reward for Chiffin’s apprehension, and it would not at all answer his purpose to afford the fellow the slightest opportunity to escape under the cover of darkness. He looked around, and he thought to himself that the chapel where this scene took place would serve

as a secure prison until the morning. But in order to make sure, he took a light in his hand, and was about to investigate the chapel more narrowly, when Lady Saxondale, as if divining his intention, said, "You are perfectly welcome to leave him here if you choose. The door has strong bolts and bars, the windows of the chapel and the cloister have iron gratings, and there is no possible means of egress."

"Besides," added the constable, "I will myself keep watch upon him throughout the night, and I shall take the liberty of asking one of your ladyship's servants to go over to Gainsborough early in the morning, and bring half a dozen of my men, so that we will take good care to keep him secure. I thank your ladyship for your offer, which I therefore accept."

Lady Saxondale darted, unperceived by any one else, a quick glance of intelligence upon the Cannibal, who fully comprehended that she had some friendly purpose in view in thus interfering to procure his stay there. He wore an appearance of gloomy and savage sullenness, but yet hope was in the ruffian's breast, for he knew that her ladyship was too astute and clever to be easily baffled in any project on which she had set her mind, and that she would devise some plan of outwitting the vigilance of the chief constable. This official now requested those present to withdraw, he himself issuing forth from the chapel last of all. As her ladyship had observed, the door had massive bars and bolts, and these were all secured. There was, moreover, a key fastening a padlock. This key the head constable secured about his own person. He then inquired if there were any pistols in the castle. The steward at once volunteered the loan of a pair which he had recently purchased, and these were placed in the constable's possession. A sofa was brought out into the passage from one of the tapestry-rooms, and was stationed against the chapel door. A lamp was placed in a window recess, and Lady Saxondale gave instructions that food and wine should be supplied for the constable's use.

These arrangements being completed, and it being now late, her ladyship directed the domestics to seek their respective chambers, at the same time observing that none of them need labour under any apprehension of being disturbed in the night, as it was evident the prisoner was too

well guarded to have the slightest chance of effecting his escape. It was, however, some time before the servants separated, the incidents of the evening and the presence of a murderer beneath those walls being sufficient to excite them, and afford ample scope for their garrulous comments. Lucilla was particularly questioned as to whether she was certain that Chiffin's voice was the same she had heard on the memorable night when her repose was intruded upon, and as she confidently persisted in an affirmative response, the wonder of the domestics was more than ever excited at the circumstance that Lord Harold Staunton could have connected himself with such a dreadful character. But that Lady Saxondale had any previous knowledge of Chiffin was not for a moment suspected. Throughout the scene in the chapel she had maintained an admirable show of external composure, and the significant glances she had flung upon Chiffin had passed entirely unperceived by all save him to whom they were directed.

On quitting the chapel, her ladyship did not join Edmund and Adelaide in the drawing-room. She did not choose to converse with them on this new incident which had occurred, but at once sought her own chamber, and having dispensed with Lucilla's attendance, sat down to reflect upon the best course which was now to be adopted.

The reader will full well understand that Lady Saxondale had purposed to employ the Cannibal as an agent for ridding her of the one great obstacle that was now in her pathway: namely, Adelaide. That she could still succeed in making Chiffin's services thus horribly and terribly available, she did not imagine, but having once brought herself to look the idea of this new crime fixedly in the face, she resolved that it should be perpetrated by some means or another. Therefore she did not renounce her intention of making one more desperate effort to consolidate her own power, and pursue the career from which for a moment the incident of the masquerading dress had threatened to divert her altogether. If she had suddenly purposed to fly from England, now that Chiffin was taken captive, she would have abandoned him to his fate, desperately reckless of whatsoever he might choose to say of her; but as she had made up her mind to remain, and prosecute her schemes to the end, it was absolutely necessary to bear a friendly part toward that man, and aid

him to escape, so that he should not be led into any disagreeable revelations with regard to antecedent circumstances.

Lady Saxondale therefore decided that Chiffin the Cannibal should be enabled to effect his escape; but how was this to be done? The windows of the chapel and the cloister were all protected by massive iron bars, as her ladyship had intimated when directing the constable's attention to the fact, and the constable himself was keeping watch outside the chapel door, which was barred, bolted, and locked. Nevertheless, Lady Saxondale could afford to smile at these circumstances, inasmuch as there was a secret connected with the cloister known to no living soul except herself. Many long years back her husband had communicated it to her, and as it was a sort of hereditary mystery preserved in the family, she had never revealed it to other ears.

She sat in her chamber till midnight, and then, having ascertained, by listening, that the castle was all quiet, and that the servants had at length separated to their respective chambers, she prepared for the enterprise which she had in hand. First she took from her writing-desk a sum of money, amounting to a couple of hundred pounds in notes and gold, and this she wrapped up in a small parcel. Then, with the lamp in her hand, she descended to the library, and opening a small cupboard underneath one of the bookcases, she took from that recess a moderate-sized key. This, through long disuse, had become encrusted with rust. Lady Saxondale accordingly returned to her own chamber, and provided herself with a small bottle of hair-oil from her toilet-table. She likewise took some lucifer matches and a penknife, and again descended the stairs. On reaching the great entrance-hall, she extinguished the lamp, but still carrying it in her hand, passed out into the quadrangular court on which the buildings looked. The night was dark as pitch; there was consequently no danger of her being observed by any one who might not as yet have retired to rest. But as she glanced up at the windows on every side, she saw that one light was alone burning, and this was at the casement of the passage where the head constable of Gainsborough was keeping watch.

Lady Saxondale crossed the quadrangle, and stopped at a small low door in the northwestern angle. She tried the

key, but, as she had anticipated, it was too rusty to turn in the lock. She oiled it, and another essay proved successful, the door opened, and she crossed the threshold. When inside she closed the door, and then, by the aid of the lucifer matches with which she was provided, relighted her lamp. She found herself at the entrance of a narrow stone passage, which led forward into utter darkness, and where the chill struck like myriads of ice-shafts penetrating through her brain and to her very heart's core. She shuddered, her teeth chattered, and she was seized with a racking pain in the head through the intensity of the cold; it seemed as if ice had been suddenly applied to her temples. But the air was pure, or at least free from mephitic vapours, and thus it was evident that the premises which she was entering had apertures for the currents of the atmosphere to pass through.

She proceeded along the narrow stone passage, advancing cautiously lest any of the masonry should have fallen in, and thus create a stumbling-block in her way. But such was not the case. The mass of stonework forming the walls on either side and the arching ceiling was as solid and compact as if this corridor had been hollowed out of a granite rock itself, for the old castle appeared not to belong to time but unto eternity. The passage was about twenty yards in length, and it terminated with a spiral ascent of steps, all of the hardest stone. Up these did Lady Saxondale mount, and in a few minutes she entered a long, narrow apartment, or, rather, an enclosure of solid masonry, in which were the stone *mausolea* enclosing the coffins of those long-dead ancestors of the Saxondale family whose monuments were in the cloister above. For this vault — if such it could be termed, which was not underground — was precisely beneath the cloister itself, and exactly corresponding with it in dimensions. Several loopholes on the western side, namely, the one overlooking the river, admitted the currents of fresh air. Awful was the silence and deadly the chill which prevailed in this place, — a silence fitted for the place of tombs, a chill such as that which sweeps from the sounding sea-lashed shores of Labrador. Lady Saxondale shuddered again, but it was more with the cold than with fear, for this woman of the most powerful mind feared her crimes far more on account of what the living might do to her as the

consequences thereof than for any superstitious terrors which their memory might conjure up.

The stone *mausolea* enclosing the coffins of the long-dead ancestors of the house of Saxondale stood in due order along the walls, and in the middle of the place was an ascent of stone steps reaching up to the ceiling, a height of about seven feet. In that stone ceiling, or roof, they appeared to terminate. Lady Saxondale ascended a few of these steps, until her head nearly touched the masonry above, and then, with the lamp, she carefully examined the stonework which was thus overhead. An iron knob set in a slight hollow of one of the stones soon arrested her gaze, and against this knob did she press her hand firmly. It yielded somewhat to her touch; the stonework began slowly to move overhead, until at length an aperture was formed large enough for her to pass through. She ascended, and in a few moments stood in the cloister leading out of the chapel. The huge colossal figure of the armed warrior had turned almost completely around, for it moved upon a vertical pivot, and the base of its pedestal had thus been contrived to form that secret means of communication between the cloister and the place of tombs.

Lady Saxondale passed on toward the chapel, but slowly and cautiously, for she was fearful lest the Cannibal, on perceiving a light approaching, might in an access of superstitious alarm give vent to an ejaculation that would reach the ear of the constable keeping watch on the other side of the chapel door. But the man whom she came thus to succour was as little prone to superstitious fears as herself; and, moreover, he had all along been expecting some assistance on the part of her ladyship, though he had been bewildering himself in conjectures how it could be possibly afforded, or from what quarter it would come. Nevertheless, being to a certain extent prepared, Chiffin no sooner caught a glimpse of the first glimmering rays which the lamp threw into the chapel, as Lady Saxondale approached from the cloister, than he knew full well who was nigh at hand.

We should observe that the villain had been so firmly and effectually bound with the handkerchiefs which had been fastened on his arms and legs that all his endeavours to rid himself of those bonds had proved ineffectual, and he had therefore remained on the stone bench where the con-

stable and the domestics had deposited him. As Lady Saxondale emerged from the cloister and came into his presence, his features expanded into a look of grim satisfaction, and really, if Chiffin were ever capable of a grateful sentiment, he experienced it now toward one who did not desert him in the hour of his most bitter need. She placed her finger upon her lips to enjoin silence, and then, with the knife which she had brought, proceeded to cut the handkerchiefs which so firmly bound him. In a few moments he was thus far free.

Motioning him to gather up the severed kerchiefs and take them with him, so that his disappearance from the chapel might in the morning seem all the more mysterious, and be all the more incomprehensible, she led the way back toward the statue; and the Cannibal stared in astonishment on perceiving that this colossal figure had turned almost completely around, and in thus moving away from the spot it was wont to occupy had disclosed a small square aperture. Lady Saxondale descended first, and, on reaching the bottom of the steps in the place of tombs, held the lamp in such a manner as to aid the Cannibal in following her. She then ascended a few of the steps again, and by once more pressing the knob, made the image turn around into its proper place, the pedestal again hermetically sealing the secret aperture.

"Follow me," she said to the Cannibal, and these were the first words that were spoken from the instant she had appeared in his presence on this occasion.

"I am uncommon obliged to your ladyship for thus thinking of an old pal," responded Chiffin, whose heart was exultant, for he already felt as if he breathed the fresh air of freedom. "But about that there little business you was coming to speak to me of —"

"Enough! it cannot be done now," interrupted Lady Saxondale, in a peremptory manner, and not without a feeling of intense disgust at the familiarity with which the coarse ruffian addressed her. "You have not a moment to lose; you must make the best of your way hence. Without halting must you speed so long as the darkness favours you, for there will be a loud hue and cry, and doubtless a fierce pursuit in the morning."

"All right, my lady," responded Chiffin. "Depend upon

it I will show 'em a clean pair of heels. There isn't no manner of mistake about that."

"Ah, one word, by the bye!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, as if struck by a sudden recollection. "It appears, then, that you were the person who liberated my son, Lord Saxondale, from Doctor Ferney's house?"

"Yes, ma'am, I had that honour, and uncommon neat it was done, too, I can tell you. I suppose he was locked up unbeknown to you?"

"Silence, and speak not save in answer to my questions," interrupted Lady Saxondale, imperiously. "Now, tell me, by whom were you engaged to accomplish this achievement?"

"Two gentlemen, one of whom was a foreigner, — a mounseer, I should say, by the cut of him."

"Ah, and his name?" cried Lady Saxondale.

"I don't know it. His friend's name was Lawson, and lives in Clifford Street, Bond Street."

"But this Frenchman, was he a young and handsome man?" inquired Lady Saxondale.

"Yes, a matter of five or six and twenty, I should say; tall, slender, but uncommon well made. He wore a black mustachio. I hadn't an idea that a Frenchman could be such a tidy-looking feller."

"It is the same, there can be no doubt of it — the Count de St. Gerard," thought Lady Saxondale to herself. Then speaking aloud, she added, "And these two gentlemen, you say, employed you to liberate my son? Tell me the circumstances."

Chiffin accordingly explained how he encountered the two gentlemen at the Three Cadgers, how they engaged him to proceed to the neighbourhood of Doctor Burdett's to reconnoitre, how he discovered that Lord Saxondale had been removed to Doctor Ferney's, and how it was arranged that he should accomplish the young nobleman's liberation. Chiffin went on to explain by what means he had effected the purpose, how a post-chaise was in readiness in Hanover Square, how Mr. Lawson and the French gentleman, both muffled in cloaks, were on the spot, and how Lawson exchanged a few words with Lord Saxondale.

"And the Frenchman," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, "did he speak to my son?"

"No, not a word," responded Chiffin. "I remember he

kept himself altogether apart, standing on one side and merely looking on."

"Recollect, if you can, what Mr. Lawson said to my son."

"He merely told him that he didn't want no thanks, and it wasn't necessary to give any explanations. Ah, I remember, Mr. Lawson also told his lordship that he was to get off into Lincolnshire as quick as possible, to join his wife there, and she would give him all explanations. Yes, and something else too," continued the Cannibal, as the circumstances came back by degrees to his memory. "Mr. Lawson said that you was in London, that your son's wife had had a conversation with you, and that it was absolutely necessary for him to reach Saxondale Castle as quick as possible. And this was all that took place on the occasion."

"Enough!" muttered Lady Saxondale; and then, after a few moments' reflection, she added, aloud, "Come, we must move onward. Follow me."

She again led the way, holding the lamp in her hand. Down the spiral staircase they went, the stone passage was threaded, and the little low door gave them egress into the quadrangle. But we should observe that ere this door was again opened, her ladyship extinguished the lamp. The threshold being crossed, she relocked the door, and with her handkerchief carefully wiped over the spot where the keyhole was set, so that in case any of the oil should have oozed forth, the traces thereof might be effectually made to disappear.

And now she guided the Cannibal across the courtyard, and they entered the castle. Again was the lamp lighted; for a few moments they halted in the entrance-hall, and there Lady Saxondale placed the money parcel in the Cannibal's hand, intimating how much it contained.

"For Heaven's sake," she continued, in a low whisper, "get out of the country as quick as you can. Remember if you be recaptured, I can do nothing more for you. And should it happen that you are thus unfortunate, should you, in a word, be retaken, let me hope that, whatever may ensue, you will have a sufficient sense of becoming gratitude to maintain the strictest silence as to all that has at any time passed between you and me."

"Don't be alarmed, my lady," replied Chiffin, as he eagerly clutched the money thus given to him. "If I do come to

dance upon nothing at Tuck-up Fair, I will be mum as a mouse about your ladyship."

Lady Saxondale made no observation in reply to this assurance, which was given in terms so horribly ludicrous and revoltingly jocular, but she proceeded at once to afford the man egress from the castle. He disappeared from her view in the darkness of the night, and she now breathed freely as she retraced her way to her own apartment.

At an early hour in the morning, long before it was light, a groom, mounted on horseback, set off for Gainsborough; and by about nine o'clock he returned, accompanied by a post-chaise containing four constables. They came well armed and provided with handcuffs, for the groom had failed not to tell them what a desperate character was to be dealt with.

The head constable had remained all night at his post in the passage where the sofa was placed against the chapel door. He had not slept a wink; and if every now and then he felt a sensation of drowsiness coming over him, he had risen to pace to and fro and shake it off. He had scarcely touched the wine which was furnished him, and he had chiefly employed the long, weary hours in thinking of the manner in which he might best lay out the reward he was to obtain for handing over the formidable and ferocious murderer to the authorities in London. He did not choose to run the slightest risk of losing him by opening the chapel door until the arrival of his subordinates from Gainsborough. When they came, they were at once conducted to the passage where their principal awaited them, and three or four of the men servants of the household accompanied them, not merely from motives of curiosity to have another glimpse of the terrible miscreant, but likewise as an additional guarantee against any possible demonstration of violence on his part.

The sofa was drawn away, the door was opened, the head constable, with loaded pistols in his hands, advanced into the chapel, but Chiffin was not on the seat where he had been deposited. This circumstance excited no suspicion; bound though he were, he might have managed to drag himself away to some other spot. Into the cloister did the head constable and his followers accordingly pass, but no Chiffin was to be seen. They looked behind the monuments;

the prisoner was not there. Consternation and dismay appeared upon the countenances of the head constable and his subordinates, but one of the footmen suggested that there could be no doubt the object of their search would be found in the vestiary. The door was thrown open, but still no Chiffin. That he could have descended into the vaults was not possible, inasmuch as the huge bolt of the door leading thither from the vestiary was firm in its socket. Every nook and corner was searched, but still no Chiffin. The constables and the footmen surveyed each other in downright dismay, mingled with bewilderment. How could he have escaped? Not even the handkerchiefs with which he had been bound were to be seen. The windows were examined; not a pane of glass was broken, not an iron bar was wrenched out.

Well indeed might those present at this fruitless search be confounded. That a man whose limbs were so firmly fastened should have thus disappeared without leaving behind the slightest trace of the mode and manner of his flight, seemed to be invested with a preternatural mystery. Had he evaporated into thin air or had Satan come to claim his due, thereby anticipating the hangman's work? Not for a moment was it suspected that the head constable had connived at his escape, for his subordinates knew him too well to entertain such an idea; and, moreover, they, as well as the footmen, at once perceived that if he had done so he would have been literally flinging away the reward offered for the fellow's apprehension, as it could not be for an instant supposed that Chiffin had, concealed about his person, a larger sum than the amount thus offered, so as to have been enabled to tempt the head constable with such a superior bribe.

The mystery was, indeed, as Lady Saxondale had foreseen, perfectly beyond the most extravagant and the wildest of conjecture. The news spread through the castle, and the utmost excitement prevailed. Her ladyship, as a matter of course, affected the supremest astonishment, and she accompanied the constables in a fresh search throughout the chapel and the cloister. But all was in vain, as she very well knew it would be, and the discomfited myrmidons of justice took their way back to Gainsborough, not without the idea that the Evil One must indeed have had a hand in so mysterious a business.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LAST PLOT

Two days after the incidents which we have just related, Lady Saxondale said to Edmund and Adelaide after breakfast, "To-morrow morning I purpose to leave you. The warfare is at an end between us. That we can part with very friendly feelings is not to be supposed, but at least let us separate in peace, and with a resolve to think on either side as little of the unpleasant past as possible."

"Well, mother," answered Edmund, "I don't want to vex or annoy you, although there are many things which might induce me to do so."

"No," observed Adelaide, "we will not have more angry words," but she could not repress a look of exultation at the thought that she was now completely triumphant, and that Lady Saxondale was utterly humiliated.

"Yes, to-morrow," said the latter, "immediately after breakfast, I shall leave Saxondale Castle, most likely for ever. It is my intention to repair to the Continent, and to live in tranquil seclusion for the remainder of my days. Again therefore do I beseech that the last few hours we are to spend in each other's society may be embittered as little as possible by allusions to the past."

Her ladyship thus spoke in order to throw Edmund and Adelaide completely off their guard, and for the purpose of still more convincing them of her sincerity, she wore a desponding, a dejected, and a humiliated look, as if feeling herself completely vanquished and prostrated. But all the while she had a certain plan agitating in her thoughts, — a plan which, if successfully carried out, would not merely rid her of Adelaide, but would place Edmund completely in her power. It was a hideous and a diabolical plan, the

most fiendlike which had ever yet entered the mind of this desperate and unscrupulous woman. If there be degrees in guilt, if there be shades and hues, some deeper and darker than others, in the sphere of criminality, then assuredly had Lady Saxondale prepared to stain her soul with the blackest and the deadliest of all.

After having spoken at the breakfast-table in the manner already described, she wandered about from room to room, collecting such of her trinkets as she fancied to take with her, or might seem to fancy for such a purpose, and, in short, she appeared occupied with her preparations for departure. But all the while she was watching for an opportunity to speak to Edmund alone; and this opportunity was somewhat difficult to be obtained, inasmuch as Adelaide kept almost incessantly with her husband. But just before luncheon-time, Adelaide ascended to her chamber to make some little change in her toilet, and Lady Saxondale, anticipating this movement, watched her from her own room as she passed along the passage. She then glided to the apartment where she hoped to encounter Edmund; nor was she disappointed, for she found him there alone.

"Edmund, dearest Edmund," she hastily said, adopting a tone and manner of affectionate kindness, "it is absolutely necessary I should have half an hour's conversation with you. You know not the importance of the matter on which I thus seek to enlighten you — yes, terribly enlighten you. You are in danger, you stand upon a precipice, and I alone can save you."

When Lady Saxondale first began speaking with that air of seeming kindness, Edmund gave one of his insolently supercilious smiles, and was about to tell her "not to bother him;" but the concluding words that thus met his ears, and the awfully impressive tone and look of warning which accompanied them, struck terror to his heart.

"What do you mean, mother?" he said. "Pray don't keep me in suspense."

"I cannot tell you now. Adelaide will return in a few minutes; she must not see us speaking together."

"Then is it about her?" demanded Edmund, nervously.

"Do not question me now. I will tell you all presently; you shall then judge whether what I have to say is important or not. But I charge you not to breathe a syllable to your

wife. Do not let her perceive there is any new secret between us. You must give me an opportunity —”

“I know how,” quickly interrupted Edmund, who was most seriously frightened. “When I go up to dress for dinner, I will steal out of my toilet-room and come to your chamber.”

“I will be there,” answered Lady Saxondale. “And now compose yourself; be as usual toward Adelaide. You know not how much depends upon your behaviour in this respect.”

Having thus spoken, Lady Saxondale hurried from the room, and flitted back to her own chamber. There she remained about ten minutes, until the bell rang for luncheon, when she proceeded to the apartment where it was served. Edmund and Adelaide were already there, and a glance showed her that the former was maintaining his wonted demeanour toward his wife, so that her ladyship felt assured she had succeeded in thoroughly frightening the young nobleman into silence. When the repast was over, Lady Saxondale retired altogether to her own chamber, and remained there, occupied with her thoughts, until about half-past six o'clock, when the door opened, and Edmund made his appearance.

“Now, mother, for Heaven's sake what is it?” he exclaimed, his looks showing how strong was the impression which her words had made upon him in the middle of the day.

“You must be calm, Edmund, you must summon all your courage and all your self-possession to your aid. Indeed, you never in all your life required the exercise of the strongest power of self-control so much as you do at present.”

“Go on, mother. I will do as you tell me. See, I am composed. Now what is it?”

“Did you ever hear, Edmund, of a certain Count de St. Gerard?” and as Lady Saxondale thus spoke, she fixed her large, dark eyes penetratingly upon the young man's mean and ignoble countenance, to ascertain the impression which the mention of that name would create.

“St. Gerard? Yes, to be sure,” he answered, a strong feeling of jealousy at once springing up within him.

“And you have read, or you have heard,” continued her

ladyship, "the full particulars of Adelaide's trial in Paris, upwards of two years ago."

"Yes, I have read it, every syllable."

"And the name of the Count de St. Gerard figured therein?"

"It did, mother. But what then? Was it not shown —"

"Never mind what seemed to be shown," interrupted Lady Saxondale, impressively. "I tell you that the Count de St. Gerard was Adelaide's paramour."

"If I thought it!" muttered Edmund, becoming pale as death.

"If you thought it?" echoed Lady Saxondale. "I tell you it is true. And what is more, that same Count de St. Gerard has followed Adelaide to England, and he has written to her."

"Mother, this is some tale of yours to answer some new purpose," and Edmund stopped short, for his teeth were suddenly set with a cold paroxysm of concentrated rage.

"Foolish boy, what object have I now to gain in deceiving you? Am I not to leave Lincolnshire to-morrow, and to quit the country in a few days? It is your very life which is at stake. I tell you the Count de St. Gerard is in England, and she who murdered one husband for the sake of her paramour will not scruple to do the same by another. Edmund, are you aware who was the author of your release from Doctor Ferney's house?"

"I don't know," quickly responded the young nobleman. "That man Chiffin —"

"Yes, but by whom, think you, he was employed?" interrupted Lady Saxondale. "The Count de St. Gerard. He was one of the two gentlemen whom you met in Hanover Square, where the post-chaise was in readiness."

"Ah!" ejaculated Edmund, quivering from head to foot with a cold terror. "Those two gentlemen were muffled in cloaks. One was evidently an Englishman; the other, I recollect, never spoke a syllable during the few moments we were together —"

"And that other who spoke not, and who stood a little aside," added Lady Saxondale, "was the Count de St. Gerard. Was he not a tall, slender young man, about six and twenty; of very genteel appearance, and wearing a black moustache?"

"True," ejaculated Edmund, full of excitement. "But how know you all this?"

"What matter how it came to my knowledge?" demanded his mother. "You perceive that what I tell you is the truth. Nay, more, to speak candidly, I intercepted a letter from the count to Adelaide —"

"Show it me!" cried Edmund, vehemently, and still was he quivering with the excitement of his jealous feelings.

"Nay, I have it not," responded her ladyship. "I resealed it, and suffered it to reach Adelaide's hands. It suited my purpose to do this."

"But what said the note?" inquired Edmund.

"It was such as a paramour would write to his mistress; it was couched in the most endearing terms. It left no doubt in my mind as to Adelaide's guilt in many respects, — guilt as to the murder of her first husband, guilt as to her intercourse with St. Gerard, guilt as to her utter selfishness in inveigling you into a marriage, and guilt as to her intentions toward you."

"And those intentions?" demanded the young nobleman, trembling more than he had ever heretofore done.

Lady Saxondale bent upon him a fearfully ominous look, and in a low but impressive manner replied, "Her intentions are to treat you as she treated her first husband — to take you off by poison."

"My God!" muttered Edmund, staggering back, with indescribable horror upon his ghastly pale countenance.

"Yes, and the vile woman," continued Lady Saxondale, inwardly chuckling as she saw how effectively her words struck the unfortunate Edmund blow upon blow, "the vile woman has all along laughed at you. She has ridiculed, she has mocked you, she despises and hates you. Her paramour's letter to her proved this much."

"But wherefore did she not marry the Count de St. Gerard?" demanded Edmund, quickly.

"Because he was not rich enough to support her in the extravagant style in which she is accustomed to live. She married you in order to obtain an income settled upon herself, and this she has got. Now, her purpose being fully served, she will make away with you, Edmund, that she may in due course become the wife of him whom she has all along loved."

“But, mother, what you tell me is horrible, horrible!” and Edmund literally shivered in the excruciation of his agonized feelings. “Oh, I will fly from her! — no, I will order the lackeys to turn her out —”

“Madman that you are!” exclaimed Lady Saxondale, catching him by the arm as he was springing to the chamber door, “do you think that a wily woman, such as she is, will not find means to accomplish her purpose, even though you eject her? Yes, rest assured that, sooner or later, you would be taken off by some means or another.”

“My God, what am I to do?” and Edmund sank upon a chair, a prey to mingled feelings of jealous rage and horrible apprehensions. “But why,” he suddenly exclaimed, “did she have me rescued from Doctor Ferney’s? Would it not have suited her purpose to leave me there?”

“Must I explain everything, even to the minutest details?” demanded Lady Saxondale, impatiently. “Can you not fathom anything for yourself? Can you not penetrate a single one of her purposes? How could she make away with you while you were at Doctor Ferney’s? Was it not absolutely necessary for her to have you with her? And does not the fact of St. Gerard being the real author of your liberation prove the concert which exists between him and Adelaide? Nay, I will tell you more. It was in consequence of reading the intercepted letter that I discovered the plan which was contemplated for your deliverance, and therefore did I have you hastily removed from Doctor Burdett’s to Doctor Ferney’s.”

“Oh, what am I to do? What am I to do?” ejaculated the miserable Edmund, wringing his hands. Then, in the abject wretchedness of his feelings, he threw himself at Lady Saxondale’s feet, saying, “Save me, mother! You told me just now that you alone can save me. Pray do it, and I will never go against your wishes any more.”

“When I said I would save you, Edmund,” she answered, compelling him to rise up from his suppliant posture, “I meant that I would counsel you how to save yourself.”

“I will go to a magistrate, I will hurry off to Hawkshaw or to Denison, I will go to the constable at Gainsborough, — anything to get rid of this dreadful woman!” and he was fearfully excited.

“Insensate boy, will you be tranquillized?” exclaimed

her ladyship, sternly, though in her heart rejoicing with a fiendish satisfaction at these violent gusts of passion, which showed how effectually she had instilled the poison of jealousy and infused the influence of terror into his soul. "What would you say to a magistrate? It would be a mere vague and unsupported accusation. I could not stand forward as a witness — Alas! now you perceive the consequences of having done your best to place me in that woman's power. But is it possible, Edmund, you have been all along so infatuated as never to entertain the slightest misgiving as to her intentions toward you?"

"Misgiving?" echoed Edmund, "I have seldom been free from it. I have been haunted by vague terrors; my fears have followed me in my dreams. I have fancied that I was encircled in the coils of a monstrous serpent —"

"And as you live," cried Lady Saxondale, "it is a serpent in whose power you have placed yourself. Know you not that the most venomous of snakes have the fairest and loveliest of skins? Oh, my poor boy," she added, pretending to be affected unto tears, and to be seized with a sudden revival of love toward one whom she in reality hated with the most cordial detestation, "you must be guided by my counsel. It is for me to save you."

"Speak, mother, speak!" exclaimed Edmund, completely beguiled by the tone, the look, and the manner she had assumed.

"You see the position in which you are placed," continued her ladyship. "Adelaide menaces your life; if she should fail, St. Gerard will take it. They have vowed between them that you shall perish by poison, or fall beneath the assassin's knife. Adelaide, who murdered one husband, is familiar with crime and all its means and resources, and will not scruple to attempt the life of a second husband. But if she fail, her paramour is ready to take up the enterprise; and he who so well knew how and where to find a ready agent to deliver you from the madhouse will know how and where to find the same or another to have you waylaid and assassinated."

"Mother, speak, what am I to do?" asked Edmund, in a deep, hollow voice.

"What are you to do? Are you a man, and do you not in the first place pant for revenge against the woman who

has beguiled you with her treachery, who has dishonoured you with her profligacy, and who now meditates your death?"

"Yes, revenge! revenge!" muttered Edmund, whose fiendish malignity of disposition was terribly excited.

"Well, then, revenge!" resumed her ladyship, "and at the same instant you consummate your revenge, you may rid yourself for ever of this demones in human shape who seeks your life."

"Ah!" ejaculated Edmund, but again he quivered all over as he said, "You mean, mother, that I must take her life?"

"And wherefore not?" demanded Lady Saxondale. "Is it not in self-defence? If she attacked you with a sword, would you not snatch it from her grasp, if you could, and slay her therewith? And is she not now meditating by insidious means to take your life? Are not all the blandishments she lavishes upon you so many subtleties to lull you into a false security? Shall you not therefore be justified in tearing the weapons from her grasp, turning around upon her suddenly, and dealing her the death which she purposes to overtake you?"

"Would you have me poison her?" inquired Edmund, with a look of unfeigned horror.

"Ay, poison her! Why not? - But no," added Lady Saxondale, more slowly, as she reflected that after the tragedy of Mabel Stewart a recurrence of a sudden death in the family might seem suspicious. "Some other plan must be adopted. But first of all, Edmund, tell me, are you resolved?"

"I am, mother," was the response. "It is my only alternative, the only means by which I can possibly save myself."

"You never spoke anything more truly. Now, look you, Edmund: the river Trent rolls deep near the bridge, and the banks are high. A female, if plunged into those waters, and encumbered by her apparel, could not scramble up the shore, if he who thrust her in was prompt and resolute in driving her back. She must drown, she must die. Nothing could save a woman in such a case. Well, even now you scarcely seem to understand me; you gaze upon me with a sort of vacancy, as if I must be explicit in every detail, even the minutest. Then be it so."

"Proceed, mother," said the young nobleman, now quivering nervously again.

"To-morrow," resumed Lady Saxondale, — "yes, to-morrow, I say, for delay is dangerous, and you know not how soon after I am gone the drop of poison may be poured into your coffee or your wine, or how, when you are sleeping, the phial of venom may be placed to your lips —"

"Horror!" groaned the miserable young man, whose feelings were worked up to just the very pitch which Lady Saxondale desired.

"Yes, to-morrow, I say," she continued, "when I have taken my departure, you and Adelaide can walk out together. She will be all endearing blandishments, you must be all apparent confidence; and you will chuckle and rejoice and laugh together, at having got rid of me. You will lead Adelaide along the bank of the river; there is a beaten pathway, and it is pleasant walking there on these fine frosty days. When at a sufficient distance from the castle, and beyond the bridge, — where the water runs so deep, the stream is so wide, and the banks are so high, — you will sweep your eyes around to assure yourself that no observer is near, and you will suddenly thrust her into the river. Need I say any more? Her cries will echo around; you may raise shouts of seeming horror and vociferate for help. If those shouts are heard, so much the better; the more effective gloss will be thrown over the deed. In any case, when you see that she has sunk the third time, — remember, Edmund, the third time, — you may rush away, you may hasten back with all the appearance of frenzy and frantic grief to the castle, you may proclaim that a terrible accident has deprived you of your beloved wife. Now, have you the courage of a man — Yes, you must have when you think of all your wrongs. And I warn you to be deluded not by her blandishments. The more endearing they may become, rest assured the nearer is the hour when the fatal poison is to be administered. It is for you to anticipate it; it is for you to save yourself by making away with her — ay, and avenge yourself at the same time. Will you do it?"

"I will, mother!" and Lady Saxondale saw that Edmund was resolved.

"But, in the meanwhile, everything depends upon the demeanour you assume. Remember, she is keen and penetrating; a word or a look will betray you, and if so, your life, even before my departure, is not worth a single hour's

purchase. Now go, return to your dressing-room, and when we meet at the dinner-table, let me see that you for once in your life can model yourself to the exigencies of the occasion, and maintain the strictest control over your feelings."

Lady Saxondale and Edmund separated for the present, he returning to his toilet-chamber, she remaining in her own apartment; he to compose his feelings as well as he was able, she to chuckle over the detestable scheme which she had devised and which appeared to have every prospect of terminating as terribly and as tragically as she could wish. The reader cannot have failed to perceive how artfully and how skilfully this designing woman had seized upon certain incidents, had given a different complexion to them, had tortured and twisted them, so as to suit her own purpose, and had accumulated a terrific mass of evidence against Adelaide. Bad though Edmund's wife herself was, yet was Lady Saxondale's story utterly devoid of foundation, for the Count de St. Gerard was not, nor ever had been, Adelaide's paramour. He was incapable of conniving at a murderous intent, much less of entertaining one to be executed by himself, and Adelaide harboured not the slightest idea inimical to her husband's life.

Lady Saxondale, Edmund, and Adelaide met at the dinner-table, and the first rapid, searching glance which her ladyship threw upon them both convinced her that Edmund was exercising more presence of mind than he had ever before displayed, and that his wife suspected nothing wrong. In the same manner did the evening pass away; and when they sought their chambers, Lady Saxondale said to herself, "I shall triumph yet."

But it cost Edmund a tremendous effort thus to cast a veil over his real feelings, and maintain his wonted demeanour toward his wife. He however succeeded in doing so. Firmly believing every syllable his mother had told him, because her statement appeared to be so fully borne out by a variety of facts within his own knowledge, he regarded Adelaide as an intending murderess in respect to himself, and therefore felt that his life depended wholly and solely on his own conduct and bearing toward her. Thus did the very desperation of his position, as he believed it to be, arm him with a kind of courage which he had never experienced before. But when he went to sleep the horrors

of his waking thoughts followed him in his dreams, and once again did he fancy that he was writhing in the immense coils of a fearful serpent tightening around him. So powerful were his convulsive movements, his spasmodic throes, his heavings and tossings and strugglings in his sleep, that his wife was awakened by them; and when, believing him to be labouring under the influence of some terrible nightmare, she kissed him, — for it was her policy now to enchain him to her by the tenderest blandishments, — his fevered imagination made him fancy that the reptile which encircled him was licking him with its forked tongue, to cover him with its loathsome saliva previous to the process of deglutition. He awoke with a strong start and a wild cry, but fortunately, ere his wildering senses became collected, he gave utterance to no word which betrayed what was uppermost in his mind. Adelaide therefore still retained the belief that he had been labouring under the influence of a nightmare, and when he composed himself to slumber again, it was far less disturbed.

The morning came. Lady Saxondale, Edmund, and Adelaide met at the breakfast-table, and still was the first-mentioned of the three satisfied that the other two were in the same relative position as on the previous evening, namely, that Edmund had said nothing to excite Adelaide's suspicions, and that she herself remained without the slightest misgiving. The travelling-carriage was ordered to be ready for Lady Saxondale at ten o'clock, and the moment for departure arrived.

"I am about to leave you, according to my promise," said her ladyship, addressing Edmund and Adelaide. "Farewell."

She extended her hand to her daughter-in-law, who held it for an instant with a look of cold reserve. She then proffered it to Edmund, who pressed it far more warmly, as if in gratitude for the warning and the counsel she had given him on the preceding day, as well as a significant assurance that her advice should not be disregarded. She descended to the carriage, Edmund and Adelaide accompanying her to the threshold of the castle, for the sake of appearances. She found an opportunity to dart one rapid look of deep meaning upon Edmund, and stepped into the vehicle.

It rolled away, and Adelaide whispered to her husband,

as she accompanied him back to the drawing-room, "Your lady-mother has a fine day for her journey," the words being uttered with a smile of mingled irony and triumph.

"Yes, dearest Adelaide," answered Edmund, "so fine that, if you please, you and I will enjoy it likewise for ourselves. We will ramble forth together, and while exchanging congratulations at having got rid of my mother, will discuss our plans for the future."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RIVER

LORD SAXONDALE and his wife rambled forth from the castle, the latter leaning on the arm of the former. Adelaide was now completely happy. She was entirely without a suspicion that her mother-in-law, ere taking her departure, had instilled such venom into Edmund's veins, or that a mine had been prepared above which she was unconsciously to tread. She considered that the desperate warfare of plots and counterplots, duplicities and machinations, which had been waged between Edmund's mother and herself, was now altogether at an end, that the former had been worsted, and that she therefore remained triumphant.

We have already said that the very desperation of Edmund's position, as he himself believed it to be, had served to endow him with a degree of fortitude which astonished even himself; that is to say, a particular kind of fortitude, — the fortitude which enabled him to wear a mask upon his countenance in the presence of his wife, without betraying the secret thoughts and intents which were agitating within. Indeed, in this respect, his hypocrisy was now consummate; and as those who harbour treacherous intents invariably assume some extreme feeling in order to veil them, so was Edmund's manner kinder and more affectionate than ever toward Adelaide. She perceived this as they walked forth together, and naturally attributed it to satisfaction at his mother's departure.

"Now, my dear Edmund," said Adelaide, as she leaned upon his arm, and gazed up with her wonted blandishment of look, "at length we are rid of that woman who sought to be such a terrible domestic tyrant. I hope you will not be angry that I speak thus of your mother —"

“Angry? — no!” ejaculated Edmund. “How can I be angry, when for some time past I have looked upon her as my bitterest enemy?”

“Well, she is gone at length,” observed Adelaide. “In a few days she will quit England, let us hope never to return. So long as she was here, I trembled for your safety, although I did my best to conceal my fears. You know not, dearest Edmund, how much I love you, and the heart which loves as fondly as mine is naturally full of apprehensions at the slightest chance of danger to the object of such affection.”

“And you do indeed love me as much as you say, my adored Adelaide?” asked Edmund, gazing upon her countenance, which never looked more beautiful than it did at this moment, for the fresh frosty air had heightened the colour upon her cheeks, and the sunny light of satisfaction and triumph was dancing in her eyes.

“Love you, Edmund? You know that I love you,” she murmured, modulating her tones so that the music of her voice, of the melody of which she was fully conscious, might sink down with rapturous sensations into the depths of his soul. “Did I not love you from the very first moment we met?”

“Yes, yes, even as I loved you,” he answered; but all the while he felt convinced in his own heart that every syllable she uttered, though glossed with honey, was nevertheless fraught with an envenomed hypocrisy.

On issuing forth from the castle, he had not immediately conducted her near the river, but through the park, into the fields, and with an air as if it were a matter of indifference which way he went; so that in nothing should his conduct encourage the slightest suspicion in her mind. As they were proceeding along a narrow lane, they heard the sounds of a horse’s feet approaching, and as a turn in the road almost immediately revealed the rider to their view, Edmund recognized Mr. Hawkshaw. It was a long time since the young nobleman had seen the squire, — never since he had last inhabited the castle, some two or three years back, and when he might be described as a mere lad. He had not, however, sufficiently altered — and Heaven knows had not so much improved in personal appearance — that Mr. Hawkshaw could fail to recognize him also. The recognition was therefore mutual; but while, on the one hand, Edmund saluted

the squire with a cordiality which might be regarded as an overture of friendship, the other returned his salutation with a frigid reserve. If Lord Saxondale had possessed the least degree of proper spirit, he would himself have demonstrated a studied coldness toward the individual who had so signally exposed his sister Juliana, notwithstanding that his sister was flagrantly and foully in the wrong. But Lord Saxondale had no such spirit. He had vanity and conceit, but no real pride, in its loftiest and noblest sense; and thus was it that, heedless of antecedent circumstances in respect to Hawkshaw and Juliana, he was now anxious enough to avail himself of the present opportunity to renew his acquaintance with a leading gentleman of Lincolnshire.

Mr. Hawkshaw instantaneously comprehended how Lord Saxondale ought to have treated him in revenge for his conduct toward Juliana, and therefore despised him for acting otherwise. He was urging his steed past, when Saxondale, determined not to be thus almost "cut" by the squire without an effort to amend matters, advanced a pace or two, stretched forth his hand, and exclaimed, "Well, Mr. Hawkshaw, it is some time since you and I met. I shall be very glad to see you at the castle — But perhaps you were going there to call?"

"No, my lord, I was not," was the squire's response, given with a marked emphasis; although at the same time he suffered Edmund to grasp the tips of two of his fingers, as he did not wish to be too pointed in his conduct.

"If you had been, we would have turned back with you," said the young nobleman. "Permit me to introduce you to Lady Saxondale —"

But at that moment the squire gave another cold and distant bow, colder and more distant than even the first, and galloped onward.

"The unmannerly country bumpkin!" ejaculated Edmund, as Mr. Hawkshaw thus darted away upon his high-spirited steed.

"Do not vex yourself, my dearest husband," said Adelaide, again resuming all her most fascinating wiles, and putting forth the most seductive witcheries which her charms were so well calculated to display. "What care we for the society of the world, when we are all in all to each other?"

"True, dearest Adelaide," returned Edmund, scarcely able to keep back an expression of bitterness from his countenance, for he thought that Hawkshaw's coldness was altogether on account of his wife, and not at all on account of himself, nor of the family to which he belonged.

The lane now led into a wider road, and Edmund knew that a little farther on there was another diverging lane, conducting toward the river. In this direction did he resolve to proceed. But scarcely had they entered the broader road when the sounds of an approaching equipage reached their ears, and as it came in sight, Edmund, at once recognizing the servants' liveries, hastily said, "The Denisons' carriage!"

It was advancing at only a moderate pace, as Mr. and Mrs. Denison, with their eldest son and his wife, their daughter-in-law, were taking an airing. There was consequently a sufficient opportunity for the Saxondales to observe them, and for them to observe Edmund and his wife in return. But what pen can describe the bitter mortification of the young nobleman when he saw the occupants of that vehicle avert their heads in so marked and pointed a manner that there was no possibility of mistaking their intention to give him and Adelaide the cut direct? The equipage passed on its way, and Edmund, utterly humiliated, and quivering with rage, gave vent to some low-muttered imprecation. Again was his wife ready with cajoling blandishments, and he, fearful of exciting in her mind any suspicion of how hateful in every sense she had become to him, appeared to be soothed, and even affected to talk disdainfully and scornfully of "the wretched unmannerly beings who lived in that part of the country."

But if the terrible purpose with which Lady Saxondale had so skilfully imbued her son had required strengthening, the malevolent intervention of Satan himself could not have conjured up incidents better calculated to achieve that end than these which had just arisen from accident. Too vain and conceited to be willing to admit that it could be in any way on his own account he was thus cut, Edmund attributed his humiliation and discomfiture entirely to the presence of this woman to whom he had allied himself. In every way, therefore, had she become hateful to him, — hateful as one whom he regarded as being the wanton para-

mour of another, hateful as the murderess of her first husband, hateful as entertaining murderous intentions toward himself, hateful as the source of disgrace, opprobrium, and infamy, all of which were falling upon his own head. Nevertheless, he still maintained an outward appearance of kindness, affection, and love, forcing himself even to chat the more gaily the nearer he drew his wife toward the river.

They entered upon the beaten pathway which ran along the bank. In their ramble they had made a partial circuit, which thus brought them back to within a mile of the castle, for it was at no great distance below the bridge that they entered upon the pathway which followed the course of the stream. Adelaide, as she leaned upon his arm, was nearest to the river; and as Edmund threw his eyes forward, he perceived a point about fifty yards ahead at which he well recollected that the bank was higher than elsewhere, and that the path skirted its very edge. He knew likewise that the water was there exceedingly deep, and not a cottage nor a hut was nigh. That was the spot he fixed upon to become the theatre of the terrific crime which his mother had suggested, and in the dread purpose of which so many circumstances had combined to strengthen him.

"Excellent fishing at this part of the river, in the season," he observed to Adelaide, thus suddenly breaking a brief interval of silence.

"And are you fond of angling?" she inquired. "If so, when the spring returns, we will ramble forth together, we will seek the most refreshing shades; you shall take your rod, I will bring a book, and thus will we while away the time."

"Yes, and it will be truly delightful," observed Edmund, who experienced such curious and almost horrible sensations, as he neared the particular spot, that he could not altogether conceal the excitement and agitation which possessed him.

"I am afraid, dearest Edmund," said his wife, perceiving the glitter of uneasiness in his eyes, "that you are still troubled by these incidents which have just now occurred. Pray think of them no more. You have rightly described the authors of those insults as persons of uncouth manners."

"Yes, yes, they are so," responded Edmund, quickly; and he slackened the pace at which they were walking, as

if to postpone as long as possible the fatal instant when the foul deed was to be done.

“Then, wherefore vex yourself on their account?” asked Adelaide, gazing up, with all the power of her assumed fondness, into his face.

“It is not so much on that account, it is not so much for them that I am annoyed —”

“On account of whom, dearest Edmund?”

“My own infernal folly!” he replied, bitterly, and with startling suddenness.

“Your folly?”

“Yes, wretch!” and he hurled her into the stream.

A moment before, his looks had been swept around quick as if it were a lightning-flash that was thus circling the wintry landscape. No observer met his view, and thus at the instant the marked-out spot was reached was his purpose executed. A wild shriek thrilled forth from Adelaide’s lips, swiftly followed by a splash and heavy plunge, and for a few moments she disappeared from the view of the wretched murderer, who stood dismayed and horrified on the bank. The circling and gurgling and agitation of the water showed where the unfortunate woman was battling and struggling in the depths below. Suddenly she reappeared on the surface, and wild cries again rang forth.

“Edmund — murderer! Help! help! for God’s sake, help!” and her countenance, distorted and absolutely hideous with the wild anguish and the dread horror depicted upon it, presented to his dismayed view a spectacle full well calculated to haunt him ever more.

Struggling and battling against the engulfing waters, carried downward by the stream, vainly did the miserable woman endeavour to reach the bank, and a second time did she disappear from the gaze of her murderer. The sudden sinking of that hideous ghastly countenance — a countenance which but a minute before was full of exquisite beauty — smote him, as it were, with a sense of relief; yes, smote him, for the revulsion of feeling was marvellously abrupt from consternation and horror to comparative presence of mind. Then did Edmund recollect another portion of his mother’s instructions, and rushing to and fro along the bank with every appearance of the most frenzied terror, he shouted for help. All of a sudden his foot slipped, and in he fell.

Fortunately for him, however, his hand instantaneously encountered the root of a tree, spreading out beneath the water, from the bank, and he was enabled to scramble safely back to a sure footing upon the land.

“ Help, help! in mercy’s sake, help! Edmund — villain — murderer — My God, help! ” were again the wild cries which rang thrillingly forth in a voice of piercing agony, as for the second time Adelaide rose to the surface.

Edmund, full of horror at the fearful peril which he himself had but that instant escaped from, leaned against the tree for support; his brain whirled, he appeared as if in the midst of an appalling dream. Again did the cries of his wife cease, again had she disappeared in the depths of the Trent. More than a minute now elapsed ere she rose again. Then it was but for a moment; nought but a gurgling sound, faint, low, and dismal, came from her lips, but her limbs were convulsing and battling desperately. It was a last effort, like the last flutter of a dying bird, and she sank to rise no more alive. Ere she went down, however, this third time, the murderer caught a glimpse of her countenance, the expression of which was far more hideous with the agonies of death upon it than it had seemed before.

Again did he recollect his mother’s words; he had seen her go down a third time, and giving vent to cries and yells, which indeed seemed full of frenzied horror, he rushed in the direction of the castle. But not many yards had he thus sped when he beheld a horseman galloping like the wind toward him, and in a few moments Squire Hawkshaw was upon the spot.

“ Good heavens! what is the matter? ” he exclaimed, perceiving Edmund alone, without his hat, and dripping with water.

“ My wife! my wife! my beloved Adelaide! There! there! ” and with gestures apparently frantic he pointed to the river.

Then flinging himself upon the bank, he moaned and howled horribly; but it was not altogether acting, for his feelings were indeed worked up to a fearful pitch, and the remorse as well as the terror he experienced were immense.

Hawkshaw sprang from his steed, and hurried rapidly to and fro on the bank, ready to plunge in at the slightest indication which the waters might afford in any particular spot

of the victim being immersed beneath. But the surface had become completely calm once more, and perceiving that all must be over, the squire hastened to lift Saxondale up and say whatsoever he could to fortify and console him. Not for an instant did Hawkshaw suspect the terrific crime which had just been perpetrated there. How could he? Edmund's last wild cries were those which had reached his ears as he was riding at a distance, and he had only come within view of the scene in time to behold the young nobleman flying as if in frenzy along the bank, and giving vent to lamentations the genuineness of which it was impossible to doubt. Then, too, that accident which befell Lord Saxondale, and which had for a moment threatened his own life, told immensely in his favour; for was it not evident to the mind of the squire that the distracted husband had boldly plunged in to rescue his wife?

"My lord, my lord," he said, much moved on the young nobleman's behalf, "for Heaven's sake, compose yourself. I know the calamity is a dreadful one, but it must be endured with fortitude."

"Oh, but it is shocking, it is terrible!" cried Edmund; and his accents, his looks, and his whole manner indicated the wildness and the horror of the most genuine affliction.

"It is shocking," said the squire, who indeed felt what he thus expressed. "Come, my lord, I will see you to the castle; and we must procure assistance to recover the —"

He stopped short; he would not say "corpse," for fear of exciting fresh paroxysms of bitter woe on the part of him whom he took to be a miserably bereaved husband. And now the squire, naturally generous hearted, beheld not in young Saxondale a being who merited his contempt, beheld not in him a member of the family which he had so much reason to detest, beheld not in him the husband of a woman who was all but a branded murderess, but only a fellow creature whom a dire misfortune had suddenly overtaken. Nor in the hurry and whirl of his own feelings had Hawkshaw leisure to reflect (believing the tragedy to be entirely the result of an accident in one sense) that it might be a providential retribution for the crime which Adelaide was but too deeply suspected of having perpetrated in respect to her first husband.

"Come, my lord, let me help you to reach the castle,"

he said; and sustaining the young nobleman with one arm, he held his horse's bridle in the other, in which manner they proceeded in the direction of the castellated mansion.

"Oh, Adelaide! Adelaide!" murmured Edmund, thus forcing himself to continue his lamentations, "who could have foreseen this?"

"How did it happen?" asked the squire, gently and hesitatingly, and displaying all that delicacy with which one fears to probe a deep wound just inflicted.

"Her foot slipped, — she was walking a few paces in front of me, — and in a moment the water hid her from my view. I plunged in — alas, it was vain! I could not swim — my own life was nearly lost. Would to Heaven I had died with her!"

"My lord," answered Hawkshaw, gravely, "there are calamities which are sent to try us in this world, and which, though deep and terrible, must nevertheless be borne."

Edmund stopped short, covered his face with his hands, and appeared to sob violently, so that the squire had the utmost difficulty in persuading him to resume his way to the castle; or at least it seemed as if there were all this difficulty, and so far as Hawkshaw was concerned, it was precisely the same thing. At length, after several halts and fresh outbursts of grief, more than half-simulated, but still partially arising from remorse, the castellated mansion was reached, when horror and dismay were quickly diffused throughout the household on hearing what had happened. Hawkshaw told the tale, and thus here again, as with himself in the first instance, not the slightest suspicion of foul play was entertained. Edmund was hurried up to his own chamber, disapparelled by his valets, and put to bed, while Hawkshaw, accompanied by several of the servants, provided with materials for dragging the river, returned to the spot where the tragedy had taken place. A groom, mounted on a fleet horse, sped to Gainsborough to procure medical assistance for Lord Saxondale, whom Hawkshaw reported to have been himself half-drowned, and whose condition seemed deplorable indeed.

In about a couple of hours a physician was in attendance. He administered what he considered necessary, and reported to the domestics that though their master's system had sustained a terrific shock, there was no danger of fatal results. After remaining some time with Edmund, he took his leave,

intimating that it would not be necessary for him to call again until the morrow. In the course of the afternoon the corpse of the drowned lady was fished up from the depths of the Trent, and was conveyed to the castle. Hawkshaw undertook to break to Edmund the intelligence that the body had been recovered, and that it was then lying beneath that roof. As a matter of course, there was a fresh scene of apparent grief and anguish on the part of the young nobleman, and Hawkshaw again said and did all he could to strengthen and console him. When Edmund thought fit to suffer himself to be somewhat tranquillized, the squire delicately hinted that it would be as well if his mother were communicated with by that day's post; and the steward was instructed to write at once to her ladyship at Saxondale House in London, Edmund stating that although it was his mother's original intention to proceed to the Continent forthwith, in order to pass the remainder of the winter in Italy, he had no doubt she purposed to tarry a day in the metropolis, and would thus receive the letter. It was accordingly despatched, and Mr. Hawkshaw, after generously remaining with Edmund until a late hour in the evening, took his departure for his own abode.

Night came, — the first night which this youthful murderer had to pass alone after the perpetration of his stupendous crime. It was a night which he indeed dreaded, a night which he foresaw would be fraught with ineffable horrors for himself. At first he thought of accepting the proposal which his valet made to sit up with him, but then he feared lest in his sleep — if he could sleep — he might give utterance to words that would betray the enormity of his guilt; and the scaffold had never ceased to loom, dark and ominous, before his eyes from the moment that the voice of conscience rang the word "Murderer" in his ears. So the valet's presence was dispensed with, and at eleven o'clock on this night, the first succeeding his crime, Edmund was alone. Alone in that chamber which he had occupied in company with his wife, — the wife who was no more, the wife whom he himself had done to death! Ah, it was a loneliness in one sense, an awful loneliness, but in another it was no loneliness at all. He had the companionship of his thoughts, a horrible companionship. His mind had the companionship of the dread images which peopled it, a frightful companionship. And

the room, too, was peopled with grisly, ghastly shapes, again a dread companionship.

The wax lights burned upon the toilet-table. Oh, not for worlds could the wretched, guilty young man suffer himself now to be in the dark! A fire was blazing in the grate, and the play of its lurid flames on the opposite wall seemed like spectral shapes gliding past. Edmund tried to sleep, but he dared not keep his eyes closed. Every half-minute did he open them and wildly stare around, in the dread expectation of beholding something horrible standing by his bedside. His nervous startings made the bed-curtains shake, and his blood ran cold with apprehension that a spectre was standing behind those heavy draperies. Often and often, as he thus opened his eyes, did he fancy that he caught a glimpse of some disappearing shape, in any corner of the room to which his looks were at the moment turned. No, he dared not keep his eyes closed. And yet to remain awake the whole night, to lie tossing and heaving and convulsing on his pillow, at one instant with the blood stagnating and congealing into ice in his veins, at another instant tortured with a thrill of fiery agony as if those veins ran with a lightning-fluid, oh, this was horrible, horrible! Ah, wherefore had he listened to his mother's counsel? Wherefore had he done this deed? Vainly did he seek to satisfy his own conscience; vainly did he endeavour to muster, combine, and aggregate every possible argument in order to appease that conscience. He could not. Was he not a murderer? No sophistry could repel this tremendous conviction. And then, what too if Adelaide had been innocent, after all? What if she had never harmed a hair of her first husband's head? What if the tale in respect to St. Gerard had been a hideous calumny? What if Edmund had really been beloved by her, and she would sooner have perished than harbour a hostile thought in respect to him? Oh, if it were all so, then of a still deeper shade was the intensity of his guilt, of a more hideous blackness was the enormity of his crime.

Yet no, she must have been guilty of everything imputed to her, murderous deeds as well as murderous intents, — guilty of wanton profligacy, guilty of everything that could render her character abominable, hateful, detestable. Well, but still was he justified in taking her life? No, no, ten thousand times no!

Thus was he racked by varied and conflicting thoughts, sometimes imagining that Adelaide had been innocent, at others feeling convinced that she was really guilty; but yet with the latter hypothesis being no more able to justify his own deep criminality unto himself than he could with the former belief. For as in the case of that former belief, such attempt at self-justification was impossible, equally impracticable did it seem in the other. Whichever way he turned, to whatsoever point of view his mental vision was directed, there was only the one stupendous, harrowing, agonizing conviction — he was a murderer!

Hours passed; the wretched young man could not get to sleep. But as the night advanced, he occasionally began to doze off, and would thus be sinking into semislumber for a few minutes at a time, when he would start up into complete wakefulness, wild and horrible, with the idea that the cold hand of a corpse was laid upon his cheek, or that the countenance of his murdered wife, ghastly and distorted as he had seen it on the surface of the water, was looking in upon him through the curtains. Or else it would appear to him that those wild cries of distress which had thrilled agonizingly over the Trent were still ringing in his ear; and as he started up, he found himself bathed in his own agony, covered with the cold perspiration that burst forth in large drops all over.

But at length he did sleep awhile without such startling interruption, yet it was to dream as horribly. Yes, it was to dream that he stood in a court of justice which was crowded from floor to roof. He beheld the jury, stern and resolute in the performance of their duty, the judge, grave and inflexible, an advocate pleading against him, telling the whole tale as the incident had really happened, and the crowd gazing on him with looks of horror and aversion. He saw the black cap produced, he heard the sentence of death pronounced. He fancied that he threw himself on his feet to implore mercy with a wild cry, — and this wild cry was real enough, for therewith he awoke.

He went to sleep again, and also to dream again. This time it was to behold a scaffold erected, a living ocean of people gathered around the dark and sinister object, the halter pendent to the cross-beam, the hangman ready to do his dreadful work. He fancied himself pinioned, walking by the side of the chaplain, ascending the steps leading to the

platform of death. He mounted, he stood upon the drop, the noose was placed around his neck, the white nightcap was drawn over his countenance, the knell was tolling deep and ominous upon his ear. Then from his lips rang forth a pealing cry of agony. He started into fullest wakefulness; the cry which again in reality he had sent forth was still ringing through the room, but the horrible phantasmagoria of the scaffold and the crowd had passed away. It was morning; the light was glimmering in at the casement. Thank Heaven, it was morning!

Thus passed Edmund's first night after he had become a murderer. Oh, how was he to endure the approach of a second? How to look forward through the vista of coming years, and to know that they must have as many nights as days?

CHAPTER XIX

THE INQUEST

THE haggard ghastliness which a night full of horrors had left upon Lord Saxondale's countenance was even more than sufficient to impress the domestics generally with the notion that he profoundly felt his bereavement, and thus was it quite unnecessary for him to simulate any show of grief. Squire Hawkshaw — with the most generous consideration for the young nobleman whom, before his supposed calamity, he had well nigh "cut" — called soon after the breakfast-hour at Saxondale Castle, and felt really shocked on beholding the aspect which Edmund's countenance presented. As far as ever from entertaining the slightest suspicion that there was guilt at the bottom, the kind-hearted squire shared in the opinion of the domestics, that the young nobleman was profoundly afflicted, and that he felt his loss with a greater keenness than might have been conceived on the part of one by no means conspicuous for amiable or generous sensibilities.

This was a day of considerable bustle, even in a house of death. Tailors and milliners arrived from Gainsborough to receive orders for the mourning apparel of the household generally; the undertaker likewise made his appearance, and in the afternoon an inquest was to be holden. The hours passed, and Mr. Hawkshaw remained with Edmund, not merely from friendly motives, but likewise because he was to be a principal witness at the inquest. During these hours Edmund paced to and fro in the drawing-room, or else threw himself for a few minutes at a time upon a sofa, all his conduct and proceedings, however, being full well calculated to sustain the impression of his immense woe. Nor were his excitement and agitation altogether feigned. They

arose from the horrors of the preceding night, as the ocean retains the trouble of its waves for some time after the storm has swept by; they arose too from remorse, as well as from apprehension of the coming night; they arose also from a vague dread of the inquest, for though he saw not how the real truth could be suspected, yet conscience made him a coward; and they arose likewise from the idea of having to meet his mother, because that she would very probably, for appearance' sake, hasten back into Lincolnshire on receiving the letter, he now began to surmise.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon, the coroner arrived at Saxondale Castle, and was speedily followed by the persons who had been summoned to serve as the jury, and who consisted chiefly of gentlemen or tenant-farmers dwelling in the neighbourhood. It was in the dining-room that the conclave assembled, and after the usual preliminaries, the coroner and the jury proceeded to view the body. This was merely a formal matter,—those persons contenting themselves with looking into the room where the corpse lay, and then retiring. All this while Edmund remained with Mr. Hawkshaw in the drawing-room. He had not as yet seen the body since it was taken forth from the water; and when once, for the sake of appearances, in the earlier part of the day, he had cried out, in a suddenly feigned paroxysm of despair, “that he would speed to embrace the remains of his beloved Adelaide,” the well-meaning squire had held him back.

The proceedings of the inquest occupied no great length of time. The physician who attended upon Edmund proved that death in respect to Adelaide had arisen from drowning; and when asked, as a mere matter of form, whether there were indications of violence having been used, he emphatically, and indeed most truthfully, responded in the negative. Edmund was compelled to attend, and give an explanation of how the tragedy had occurred. The mortal terror which seized upon him when he found himself in the presence of the coroner and the jury took the semblance of an overpowering grief, and thus was all suspicion of foul play still effectually warded off. The account that he rendered was the same as that which he had given to Mr. Hawkshaw, though a little more detailed; but he was soon suffered to quit the room, the coroner feeling deeply for him. Mr.

Hawkshaw, when examined as a witness, gave his evidence according to his knowledge of the circumstances; and after a brief charge from the coroner, the jury delivered a verdict of "Accidental death."

While Hawkshaw remained below, Edmund paced the drawing-room in considerable agitation. He was there alone; he could give unrestrained vent to his tortured feelings. Myriads of apprehensions crowded in upon his mind. What if, after all, there had been some witness of the deed, — a witness unseen by him? What if such witness should suddenly come forward? Edmund had read of such things in books recording the annals of crime; he knew that by inscrutable means did Providence often bring home guilt to its perpetrator. Yet in spite of these terrors which were haunting him, Edmund's mind had a horrible clearness, an illimitable sense of the necessity of keeping the strictest guard over his looks, his words, and his actions. Thus, as he heard footsteps approaching the room door, and knew them to be Hawkshaw's, he said to himself, "If I show an anxiety to learn the result of the inquest, I am lost."

Accordingly, as the squire entered the apartment, Edmund appeared to be again absorbed in the deepest woe, as if unmindful even that an inquest was being held at all. Yet from Hawkshaw's lips were about to come forth the words that must either confirm all his horrible terrors, or afford a sudden relief to his mind. The words were spoken, the verdict was made known, and Edmund remained with his countenance buried in his kerchief, for fear lest any change of the expression of his features should raise a suspicion where evidently none existed as yet.

The coroner and the jury, having partaken of refreshments which were served up to them, departed to their respective homes, and Mr. Hawkshaw remained with Edmund. He stayed to dinner, being unwilling to leave the unfortunate young nobleman (as he considered him to be) until the last moment; but conceiving it probable that Lady Saxondale might make her appearance that evening, and being naturally disinclined to meet her, he departed at about nine o'clock. Again was Edmund alone, but the least thing in a better frame of mind than he was a few hours back. The grand ordeal had been passed through, the inquest was over, and it had terminated in a way which had relieved his mind

from torturing apprehensions. But he had yet two terrors to look in the face. His mother was coming, and the night was coming. At least, the longer he reflected upon the course which Lady Saxondale was likely to pursue, the more convinced was he that she would come. And why did he dread to meet her? Because he shrank from the thought of looking in the face any one who could say to him, "Thou art a murderer!"

But his mother — was not she also stained with crime, and did he not know it? Ah, yes, but the knowledge thereof mitigated little, if at all, the dread feeling which he himself must experience of having put it in the power of any living soul to say, "Thou art a murderer!"

An hour passed; it was ten o'clock. Lady Saxondale must have received the letter at about nine in the morning. If she set off immediately, she might be at the castle now. Ah, no sooner had the young nobleman made this reflection, when the sounds of an equipage dashing up to the gateway reached his ears. No doubt it was his mother. In a few minutes he would know; and during those few minutes he experienced the acutest suspense, for, as above stated, it was with him a horrible dread to look in the face of any one who even by a glance seemed to say, "Thou art a murderer!"

Footsteps were ascending the stairs; the door opened, and Lady Saxondale made her appearance. For the sake of show in the presence of the domestic who had attended her thither, she threw her arms about Edmund's neck, and from her lips sent forth sounds which passed well enough for sobs. The door closed, the domestic had retired, there was no longer need for hypocrisy; and therefore, abruptly withdrawing herself from Edmund, she flung her gaze upon him. Their eyes met, and the conscience-stricken young man thought that as plain as eyes could speak those of his mother said to him, "Thou art a murderer!"

He staggered back, and sank on a chair as if annihilated. His feelings were at that moment horrible. Crime had looked crime in the face, and crime had seemed to make crime its own self-reproach. Lady Saxondale, comprehending tolerably well what was passing in Edmund's soul, smiled scornfully for an instant, as if to be thus overcome by the sense of crime was a weakness deserving contempt. But as that

expression quickly vanished from her features, she recollected the necessity of fortifying Edmund's mind as much as possible, so that he should not be led into a betrayal of his guilt. She forced herself to speak kindly to him, and this perhaps she was the better enabled to do inasmuch as since he had become criminal she could hate him a trifle less than she had done before. For if virtue has its affections, so has crime; affinities of positions sometimes engender affinities of feelings. Besides, Lady Saxondale had resolved on pursuing a different course from that which she had heretofore adopted toward Edmund. Sternly resolved to wield the iron sceptre of domestic domination, she nevertheless purposed to treat him with a sufficient amount of kindness and indulgence, after a certain fashion, as would make him insensible of the tyranny of her rule. He was to be her slave without precisely knowing it. Through him would she continue the head of the house of Saxondale, even after his majority should be attained. Nominally he would be the owner of the wide domains and the lordly revenues, but she would virtually exercise supreme control over both. Such was the policy she intended to adopt; such were the prospects which were spread out before her.

Edmund was in that frame of mind when the soothing words of kindness could not be lost upon him, ill-conditioned mortal though he were. Besides, it was a relief for him to reflect that his mother, after all, did not mean to make a reproach of the black guilt which he had perpetrated, and into which she had persuaded him. He accordingly looked up, and he acquired courage from her own firm and resolute demeanour. In less than half an hour from the moment of her arrival, she got him to talk upon the incidents of the tragedy. He described the details, stated how generously Hawkshaw had behaved to him, how accident had positively and literally helped him in his tale by sending the squire at the moment to the scene of the crime, and how the inquest had passed off favourably. This intelligence, which her ladyship had not previously heard, was most welcome to her, and she was also rejoiced that circumstances should thus have partially smitten down the barriers which had lately existed between Hawkshaw and the Saxondale family. Not that it was to be supposed the squire would repeat his visits, now that she was once more at the castle; but, at all events,

in him she felt assured, from what she now heard, that they possessed a vindicator, should suspicion venture to breathe the surmise that perhaps, after all, Edmund's wife had not come fairly by her death.

The hour for retiring arrived, and Lady Saxondale saw, by the ghastly look which Edmund's countenance now wore, that he was afraid of the horrors of the coming night. She said all she could to strengthen his mind: she bade him remember that no human tongue save his and hers could proclaim the secret, and that if he had nothing to fear at the hands of living beings, it was pure idiotic imbecility to give way to superstitious apprehensions. Edmund was encouraged; but when he again found himself alone in his chamber, when his valet was dismissed, and he, disapparelled, was about to enter his couch, he was seized with such a sudden consternation that he could not have been more terrified if a veritable spectre had sprung up before him. Even as he hastened to leap into his bed, he dreaded lest his foot should be caught by the cold hand of death protruded from beneath it. And now did he indeed enter on another frightful ordeal, — an ordeal of hours of mental anguish and hideous imaginings, frightful waking fancies alternating with the dreams of fitful and broken slumbers, wherein the wild cries of dying agony thrilling over the Trent, the ghastly countenance which had been upturned from the cold waters toward him, and all the circumstances of the horrible tragedy were painfully, poignantly, vividly revived. And there was that young nobleman, bearing a proud title, possessed of wealth, couched upon down, environed by velvet and satin draperies, in a magnificently furnished room, — there he was, in a state of mind to be envied only by any wretch whose guilt was discovered and who was about to expiate it on the scaffold. But if this were not the reality of Edmund's position, he at least experienced all its horrors in his dreams, for again did he behold the tribunal of justice engaged in a trial for murder, where he figured as the principal; again did he behold the dark and ominous scaffold, with all the appalling paraphernalia of death, and himself the criminal about to die.

When the cold winter morning sent its dull glimmering light in at the casements, it found the young man more ghastly, more haggard than before; and as he looked at him-

self in the mirror, he recoiled with dismay and affright, so changed had he become. When his valet entered to assist in the morning toilet, the man could not prevent himself from showing how much he was shocked at his master's appearance, but still he suspected not that it was guilty horror, instead of the immensity of woe, which had thus stamped its terrific traces on Edmund's countenance. On descending to the breakfast-parlour, he found his mother already there, and the instant they were alone, Lady Saxondale said, "You have passed a bad night, Edmund."

"Mother," he answered, "a few more such nights as these will either send me to a madhouse or else hurry me to the grave. Ah, I can understand how it is that people's hair has turned white in a single night,—a statement at which I have often been wont to laugh."

"Edmund, I will not reproach you," answered Lady Saxondale, "I will not tell you that this is an unmanly cowardice, but I will conjure you to exercise greater control over your feelings. You must do it. At present, those about us give you credit for a natural grief; but grief, the sincerest and the severest, becomes toned down, and if you assume not such a demeanour, suspicions will arise. Bear this in your mind, and let it serve to arm you with courage."

"It must, it must," murmured Edmund. "Yes, I see that you are right."

Several days passed, and it appeared as if the counsel given by Lady Saxondale was not entirely thrown away upon Edmund. But then he had discovered the means of defying the horrors of the night, or, rather, of rendering himself unconscious of them. He drank deeply. Lady Saxondale saw it, permitted it, even encouraged it; and when, more than half-intoxicated, he went to his bed at night, she attended him to the door of his chamber, whispering to the valet "that grief had made sad havoc with his unfortunate master."

We should observe that before the lid of the coffin containing Adelaide's remains was screwed down, Lady Saxondale and Edmund proceeded together to the chamber where the corpse lay, ostensibly for the purpose of bestowing a last look on those remains. But this was a piece of mockery in perfect keeping with all the other horrible proceedings that were known only unto their own hearts. When alone

together in that room, they did not so much as approach the coffin; Edmund could not even bring himself to throw a single glance at it. But when they came forth again, it was with their kerchiefs to their eyes, as if they were both deeply moved.

The funeral took place with considerable pomp, all the domestics following as mourners, and Edmund at their head. The ceremony was over, and Lady Saxondale thought that now the tomb had closed above the one object who was so great a barrier to her complete domination, she had effectually ensured her triumph. But yet she felt and she knew that her power was not consolidated. Madge Somers had not yet been disposed of. Lord Harold Staunton had hitherto found no opportunity of carrying out her instructions. This circumstance caused her much uneasiness, for that woman was possessed of a secret which, if once told, would bring utter ruin down upon the head of this patrician lady who had already consummated so many crimes in order to attain her ends. She must go to London to see Lord Harold again, — to devise with him some plan to be immediately executed, if that which he had already suggested should prove impossible.

She was uneasy, as we have said, but only uneasy. She was not dispirited, much less did she despair. The blow so recently struck had inspired her with renewed confidence in herself and her resources. By that blow she had gained two grand ends at once: she had removed Adelaide from her path, and she had got Edmund completely into her power. One more achievement to get Madge Somers out of the way, and she would be entirely safe.

The day after the funeral she and Edmund set out for London. The young nobleman was far from sorry to leave a spot which was associated with the black crime that he had been induced to commit, and during the journey he recovered as much of his wonted cheerfulness as he dared put on under existing circumstances. His mother continued to preserve her kindness of manner toward him, yet at the same time acting as the supreme authority in all things, and with just a sufficient display of her will as to prove that she meant to be dominant. Edmund rebelled not. It was not that he exactly said to himself he was in his mother's power, because, after all, crime could not betray crime

without drawing down destruction on its own head as well as on that of the one denounced. But the real weakness of Edmund's nature now showed itself in yielding voluntarily to a state of more or less dependence. The fact was, Lady Saxondale, with a consummate art, was making herself necessary to him, — anticipating his wants and wishes, studying his comforts, and in a thousand ways suffering him to perceive that hers was, after all, a master spirit to which he had better trust as the means of helping him on through that career which, so to speak, had begun anew from the starting-post of a crime.

They arrived in London, — arrived there dressed in deep mourning; but beyond the Petersfields, Marlow and Malton, and a few, a very few other individuals, whom selfish motives rendered the hangers-on of wealthy personages, they had no friends to come and condole with them on the loss sustained, — assuming such condolence to be acceptable under the circumstances. But for all this Lady Saxondale cared little, and she did her best to prevent Edmund from feeling annoyed at their comparatively isolated position. Indeed, his experience had recently been of this sort; and as his chief sources of enjoyment were now centred in the champagne bottle and the pleasures of the dinner-table, he was not very difficult to be made contented.

Immediately on their arrival in London, Lady Saxondale sent an intimation of the circumstance to the obscure lodging which, under a feigned name, Lord Harold Staunton was occupying in the vicinage of the Regent's Park, and he delayed not to hasten to the mansion in Park Lane. It was in the evening of the day after her ladyship's return to town with Edmund, that Staunton thus called upon her, and they were at once closeted together to deliberate upon their affairs.

"You look charming, dearest Harriet," said the young nobleman, "in this mourning garb. It becomes you wonderfully; it sets off your grandly handsome figure to the fullest advantage," and he threw his arm around her waist as they sat together upon the sofa. "I love you, Harriet — yes, I love you more than ever. And you?"

"I love you also, Harold," she responded, not merely suffering his caresses, but returning them.

For now that Lady Saxondale had no longer a reputa-

tion to lose, she had made up her mind to gratify her passions without restraint. Moreover, she had an interest in keeping the young nobleman enchained to her, for she did not intend to fulfil her previously given promise of marrying him. She would never divide with another that power which she had toiled through crimes and waded through iniquities to consolidate; but she would retain him as her paramour, and she knew that by lavishing gold she could not fail to preserve her influence over him.

"And this mourning, too," continued Lord Harold, looking significantly in that face upon which he just been imprinting kisses, "you are not sorry to wear it under such circumstances?"

"The worst and bitterest enemy I ever encountered," responded Lady Saxondale, "far worse and far more bitter than even your uncle has proved himself, is now no longer an obstacle in my path. She is gone, and Edmund is completely in my power. He who for a time succeeded in emancipating himself from my shackles has got them now more closely riven upon his limbs than he had when as a child he dared not attempt to thwart me."

"I understand," observed Harold. "I read in the newspapers the account of how Edmund's wife met her death, and it struck me at the time —"

"Enough! breathe not your thoughts aloud, Harold," interrupted her ladyship. "Yes, it is so; you have rightly conjectured. There need be no secrets between you and me. Is not Edmund, with his weak and frivolous mind, with his superstitious terrors, and his addiction to the grossest sensualities, is he not completely in my power? But ah! you know not what else occurred at Saxondale Castle. I dared not write to you upon the subject; and no sooner had I arrived in London the other day, when the letter announcing Adelaide's death summoned me back again, and therefore I had no time to communicate with you."

"But what happened?" inquired Harold, to a certain degree excited by feverish suspense.

"That dress —"

"Ah!" he ejaculated, with a quick start, and his countenance became ashy pale.

"Do not be alarmed," his patrician paramour hastened to observe. "Fortunately nothing came of the incident,

but at one moment it appeared so frightfully threatening that I was almost dispossessed of every particle of courage. For, you perceive, as Adelaide knew everything, as Edmund in his weakness and his folly had made her a confidante of all past circumstances, the discovery of that masquerade-dress set her reflecting upon other things, and so astute, so cunning was she — ”

“ I comprehend,” said Lord Harold, with a shudder. “ She penetrated the mystery of that deed — ”

“ Yes, she fathomed it, and I fell all of a sudden completely into her power. Ah, there was a moment,” continued Lady Saxondale, “ when I abandoned myself to despair, — until gradually in my imagination expanded the idea that she must be removed. But I ought to observe that the dress fell into the hands of the constable of Gainsborough — ”

“ The constable? ” echoed Harold, with another quick start, and flinging his affrighted glances around, as if he apprehended lest the door should burst open and the officers of justice rush in to seize upon him.

“ Harold, this is foolish on your part,” said Lady Saxondale. “ I tell you the danger is past,” and then she explained the particulars of her interview with the head-constable of Gainsborough.

This led her on to describe the adventures of Chiffin in the chapel, — how he was discovered and made prisoner, and how she had effected his release.

“ You have passed through a trying ordeal, Harriet,” observed Staunton, pressing her toward him.

“ Yes, but my power is once again all but consolidated,” she answered, with a look of triumph. “ There is nothing now to be a source of terror save and except the one secret which that woman may reveal.”

“ And this secret,” said Lord Harold, “ how is it of such paramount importance? You have never yet informed me, but you have just given me the assurance that henceforth there shall be no concealment of any kind between us.”

“ Ah, I had forgotten,” responded her ladyship. “ This one secret must remain my own, — at least for the present. Do not press me, Harold, upon that point.”

“ I will not, I will not,” he answered, so completely en-

snared by her beauty as he strained her in his arms that he was entirely submissive to her will.

"And now, relative to this woman," she continued. "What is the latest intelligence you have obtained concerning her?"

"That she still lies completely prostrate, unable to speak, unable even to move her limbs; but the medical attendant confidently predicts her recovery."

"Then, Harold," immediately added Lady Saxondale, "she must be dealt with speedily. While in this state, the opportunity is most favourable for her removal in pursuance of the plan which I myself suggested to you some time since."

"You know, Harriet, the difficulties with which I have had to contend. Ah, if we had only that man Chiffin to aid us!"

"If we had," replied Lady Saxondale, in a musing manner, "it would be settled in one way or another offhand. Idiot that I was when aiding him to effect his escape, that I did not bid him come up to London and succour you in the business. However, you must carry out the operations immediately. You know not, indeed you know not, how much depends upon it. Even a risk must be run. Surely, surely you can by some means get William Deveril out of the way for a few hours? A forged letter will do this. Ah, the idea is a good one. Know you if your uncle the marquis is still at Edenbridge?"

"Yes, I have every reason to believe so," replied Harold.

"And can you not imitate his lordship's hand?" asked Lady Saxondale. "Can you not write a pressing letter, as if coming from your uncle, and urging Mr. Deveril to go to him at once? Then, your assistants being in readiness to act —"

"I understand; it shall be done," ejaculated Staunton. "Yes, it shall be done without delay."

After a little more conversation, Lady Saxondale and her paramour separated, the latter issuing forth from the mansion.

He was proceeding along Park Lane, in order to reach Oxford Street, whence he purposed to take a cab home, when by the light of a lamp he perceived the form of a man walking rapidly a little way ahead, and keeping as much

in the shade as possible, — in short, evidently striving to escape the notice of passers-by.

“ Ah ! ” ejaculated Lord Harold to himself, “ the very man who is so needful to me now ! ” and quickening his pace he found that his suspicion was correct, and that the individual thus proceeding stealthily along was none other than Chiffin the Cannibal.

“ My good fellow, ” said the young nobleman, “ it is fortunate I have thus fallen in with you. ”

“ Ah, is it you, my lord ? ” observed Chiffin, who was at first somewhat alarmed by hearing such quick footsteps, as if they were in pursuit. “ And pray what is there in hand ? Some little business to be done ? No good, though, I’ll be bound, or else you wouldn’t want my assistance. ”

“ There is money to be earned, ” answered Harold ; “ and, what is more, there is a deed for you to finish which you once commenced but clumsily left undone. ”

“ And what may that be ? ” inquired the Cannibal.

“ If I mention the name of Madge Somers, you will understand me ? ”

“ Nothing can be plainer, my lord ; and when money is to be got and an old spite to be gratified, I’m your man. ”

“ We cannot remain talking here, ” observed Harold. “ Where can we go ? ”

“ Come to my lodging, my lord, ” responded Chiffin. “ It’s all safe there ; the people are right enough, and there’s no danger. Follow me at a distance, and don’t lose sight of me. ”

“ Lead on, ” said Harold. “ I shall not miss you. ”

The Cannibal accordingly proceeded along Park Lane in the direction of Oxford Street. This he rapidly crossed, and soon plunged into Duke Street, turning thence into a narrow, dark alley, where he stopped at the door of a house which, so far as could be judged amidst the obscurity, was of poverty-stricken appearance. Lord Harold speedily joined him, and the Cannibal, letting himself in with a latch-key, conducted the young nobleman up a couple of flights of stairs, into a small back room, where he speedily struck a light. The den was poorly furnished, with a bed, a table, two or three chairs, and some other necessaries, but it seemed a sufficiently secure hiding-place for a person who was so much “ wanted ” as Mr. Chiffin.

“ Sit down, my lord, and make yourself at home,” said the Cannibal. “ Here’s brandy and water. If you’ve got a cigar you can light it. I don’t mind smoke, or more does my landlady, as long as she gets the ready. You see I’m going to blow a cloud,” and he lighted his pipe accordingly.

“ You have had some strange adventures lately,” observed Harold, looking rather suspiciously around the room, and not feeling overcomfortable in the Cannibal’s quarters, despite the kind invitation to make himself at home.

“ Adventures — ah!” growled Chiffin, “ rum ’uns enough, too. But as you was in Park Lane, I suppose you have been to see my very particlular and intimate friend her ladyship, and so she has no doubt told you all about it. But adventures are always tumbling down upon me, and a precious one I had this morning, too, I can tell you. You see, my lord, I thought this toggery of mine had better be changed, but as I didn’t like to walk right bang into a Regent Street tailor’s and order a fashionable suit, it struck me as how I would go down to the quarters where those honest folks of Jews deal in second-hand articles. They are not such impudent fellers as to ask any questions, if so be they only get their price. So having made up my mind to rig myself out afresh, and convert myself into a real genelman, — all the better to get out of the country, which I mean to do as soon as possible, — I toddled off toward Houndsditch. I needn’t tell your lordship that I don’t patronize the great thoroughfares, but keep as much as possible in the back lanes and alleys. That’s the way I take my walks. Well, at length I found myself in Houndsditch, and just past Phil’s Buildings stands the new Exchange — ”

“ The Exchange? ” ejaculated Lord Harold. “ I always thought it was on Cornhill, close by the Bank of England.”

“ Lord bless your lordship’s ignorance!” exclaimed Chiffin. “ I didn’t mean the Exchange where such tip-top fellers as Rothschild and them sort of coves go. I mean the Jews’ Exchange in Houndsditch. It was only built a year or two ago, by a Mr. Isaac, and so you may take your salvation oath he was a Jew by the name. Well, there’s a toll at the entrance, and I had to fork out a halfpenny for going in as a buyer. And when I did get in — for I had never been there before in my life — I was astonished.”

“The magnificence of the place, I suppose?” observed Harold.

“Magnificence of fiddlesticks,” exclaimed Chiffin. “No, not that. I mean I was astonished at the rum figures I saw, and the lots of toggery spread out on every side. I really fancied the whole twelve tribes of Israel — there was twelve, wasn’t there? Ah, I thought so. Well, the whole of the twelve tribes seemed to be there. Men, and women, and children, all Jews, and no mistake, save and except a few Christians like me, that came as buyers. Your lordship smiles, but I suppose you call yourself a Christian, and why shouldn’t I? Howsumever, there I was in the middle of that Exchange, surrounded by such quantities of clothes of all shapes, sizes, and colours that there was enough to suit and fit a whole tribe of naked Indians, if any of them missionary societies should be at a loss for toggery to send out to clothe them with. And such a clatter of voices, too; it was as stunning as Babel. Presently I saw one venerable old Jew in a gabardine, with a long beard, a pair of top-boots in one hand, and his bag over his shoulder; and he looked uncommon suspicious at me, as if he thought I meant to take an advantage of him. The idea of an innocent say-nothing-to-nobody sort of a genelman like me fancying he could take in a Jew! But I presently recollected that I had seen this identical old file at the Billy Goat, — that’s a public-house in Agar Town, — and I got rather funky. For thinks I to myself, the old file might go and peach for the sake of the reward. So, as he was looking at me askance from under his battered old hat, I turned toward a stall, and snatching up a pair of unmentionables, asked the price. A shambling, lanky feller of a Jew, with a long frock coat on that was never made for him, — and he too was carrying a pair of boots in his hand, — asks me thirty shillings, swearing they was dirt cheap and that he would lose by the bargain. I was just telling him, in no very complimentary terms, that I thought it a dead take-in, when a voice whispered over my shoulder, ‘They’ll be very cheap, Mr. Chiffin, at a hundred pounds.’ Now, my lord, I’m no coward, I scarce know what cowardice is, but, ’pon my soul, any one might have knocked me down with a straw, for without turning my head I knew uncommon well it was that old rascal of a Jew with the long beard and greasy gabardine. So then

he fronts me, and, fixing his piercing eyes upon me, says, says he, 'I know Mr. Chiffin is a genelman which always has plenty of money about him,' and then he winked in a knowing manner, so that I couldn't be off guessing what he meant. The fact is, my lord, I did a certain little business at that public-house where I had seen the old Jew — "

"Yes, yes, I know it," interrupted Lord Harold, somewhat impatiently, for he liked as little as might be to have to listen to the Cannibal's story, but at the same time it did not answer his purpose to offend the man. "So I suppose you had to give a large sum of money?"

"Well, my lord," continued Chiffin, "the short and the long of it was that this old Jew whispered to the long, lanky feller which was showing me the unmentionables, and they asked me to step along with them to the nearest public-house, where we might talk certain little matters over. I did not dare refuse; they might have raised a hue and cry and I should have been done for. So we went away together. The old Jew asked for a private room, and when we were all three closeted there, he told me, as cool as possible, that if I didn't give him every farthing I had about me, he would shout out for the constables. There was a pretty plight for a genelman like me to be in, and as a matter of course I was as powerless as a child in their hands. I could not even prevent them from searching me as they choose, 'cos why, though I was strong enough to knock 'em both into the middle of next week, or smash 'em up into little bits, yet I didn't dare raise a finger or even look savage, for fear lest they should give the alarm. Well, my lord, as I am telling you, I was just like a child in their hands; and as I've lately made it a rule to carry about with me all I possess, — 'cos why, I was some time ago robbed by a pal of mine named Tony Wilkins, when I left my money locked up in a cupboard — "

"Then I suppose these Jews plundered you of every farthing?" observed Lord Harold, with an increasing impatience, which he could no longer conceal.

"All except a little loose silver and a few halfpence," replied Chiffin, with a horribly savage expression of countenance, "and they would not even give me them inexpressibles that I had been bargaining for. So I made the best of my way off from that public-house, and went down to

another that I knowed of in Wapping. There I stayed till about a couple of hours back, when I thought to myself I would just go and call at Saxondale House, and see whether her ladyship was at home; for if so I knew she wouldn't leave an old friend in trouble and danger. So I tramped all the way from Wapping to Park Lane; but just as I was going to knock at the door, I twigged a couple of constables standing talking close by a lamp-post, and I therefore thought I had better move on a bit. Then your lordship soon after overtook me; and so, as the tale-writers say, I've brought down my history and adventures to the present moment."

"It therefore appears," observed Lord Harold, "that your finances are in no very flourishing condition?"

"As low as they well can be," answered Chiffin. "A many times I have wanted to get clear out of the country, and take my gentility and good looks to America, but somehow or another things have always turned up to keep me in England, and prevent me from affording the Yankees the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with such a celebrated character as I am. This time, however, if I can only get the wherewith, — and which your lordship seems to promise, — it won't be very long before I take my departure."

"Then listen," said Lord Harold Staunton, "and I will explain the object which I have in view. That woman of whom I spoke, Madge Somers, still lies an invalid at Mr. Deveril's house. It suits my purpose — no matter why — that she should be removed thence — ultimately to be made away with," added the young nobleman, lowering his voice almost to a whisper.

"Well, my lord, nothing is easier than this," answered Chiffin. "But why not have her made away with on the spot?"

"No, such a deed as that would create too tremendous a sensation," rejoined Harold; "whereas, if she be simply borne away in the first instance, those from whose care she is taken will remain in the dark as to her fate, and a letter may be written to them a day or two afterward, to assure them that the woman is comfortable and in good quarters, but that there are circumstances which render it necessary she should thus be retained in a seclusion which it will be useless for them to make any endeavour to penetrate."

"Have your own way, my lord," responded Chiffin. "It's your concern, not mine; and if you pay, I am bound to follow your lordship's directions. Where is she to be taken to?"

"To some great distance," answered Lord Harold, "and under circumstances the best calculated to break off all clue to the route thus taken. But," he added, with an ominous expression of countenance, "she is to be made away with. Need I say more on this point?"

"Not a syllable, my lord," responded Chiffin, with a grim look of intelligence.

"But there are other matters with which you must be made acquainted," resumed Harold. "I have already engaged some men to act, when opportunity shall serve, in this business."

"Who are they?" demanded the Cannibal, quickly.

"They bear the euphonious names of Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill," returned Lord Harold.

"I know 'em well," said Chiffin. "How came your lordship to be acquainted with such pleasant and agreeable individuals?"

"Some months ago I was led by curiosity to some horrible den in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane, kept by a certain Widow Burley and her two daughters —"

"Enough!" interrupted the Cannibal. "I understand. Biddy Burley is the mistress of Mat the Cadger, and Polly Burley of Spider Bill. So I suppose you got at these chaps by means of them Burleys?"

"Exactly so," answered Lord Harold. "I presume you will not refuse to act with them? They want a man of your energy to lead them in the matter."

"To be sure they do!" ejaculated Chiffin, with a smile of satisfaction, as if he knew full well that his astuteness and courage must invariably place him at the head of any villainous expedition or iniquitous venture with which he might become connected. "All your lordship has got to do is to tell them to come to me. I know they are to be trusted, and we'll lay our heads together."

Some further conversation took place between the young nobleman and Chiffin the Cannibal, and the former, having given the latter some money for his present purposes, took his departure.

CHAPTER XX

THE VILLA

WE must now return to the villa near the Regent's Park, — that villa which was the home of William and Angela Deveril, and at which Madge Somers still lay upon the bed of illness. The reader has already learned how she experienced a most serious relapse in consequence of her endeavour to commit to a slate those words which she could not speak with the tongue, but to which she was so impatient to give utterance. Some weeks had now elapsed since that period when she did succeed in committing to the slate this brief and unfinished sentence: "William Deveril is the s—" During that interval her position had been most dangerous, and were it not for the assiduous ministrations of the beautiful Angela, she must have succumbed. The medical man who was in attendance upon her frequently declared that to Miss Deveril's kind attentions — even more than to his own skill — was the invalid indebted for the prolongation of her life, and that to the same cause she would chiefly owe her recovery, should it eventually take place.

Within the last few days previous to the date to which our narrative has been brought, the medical attendant had been enabled to predict with confidence that she would recover; but still, as Lord Harold had ascertained, she lay prostrate and powerless, speechless, and so weak as scarcely to be able to acknowledge by signs the attentions she received from Miss Deveril. This young lady had not absented herself from the villa, save for an hour's daily walk with her brother, ever since that brief visit which they paid together to Edenbridge Park, and when Francis Paton avowed his love. But on several occasions Frank had journeyed up from Kent to see his betrothed; and frequent was the

epistolary correspondence between them. William Deveril still continued to call regularly upon his charming and well-beloved Florina in Cavendish Square; and thus stood matters at the time when Lord Harold Staunton encountered Chiffin, as described in the preceding chapter.

It was in the morning of the second day after this encounter that a letter bearing the Edenbridge postmark was delivered at the villa. It was addressed to William Deveril, and its contents were found to be as follows:

“ EDENBRIDGE PARK, December 22, 1844.

“ MY DEAR DEVERIL: — Something has transpired which renders it necessary that I should see you to-morrow evening (the 23d) at the Park. You had better leave London so as to be with us at the dinner-hour. Of course you will stay the night; but if you be anxious to return home soon, I will let you depart on the following day. Do not alarm yourself unnecessarily as to the nature of the business to which I have so distantly alluded, for though of importance, and requiring prompt attention, it need nevertheless excite no apprehension.

“ We all join in kindest regards to your amiable sister and yourself, and believe me to remain,

“ Your sincere friend,

“ EAGLEDEAN.”

This letter was received at the villa while the brother and sister were seated at the breakfast-table. William had at once exclaimed that it was from the Marquis of Eagledean, — not merely because he perceived the Edenbridge postmark, but likewise because he fancied that it was his lordship's handwriting. But as he read the letter, his countenance gradually expressed a look of suspicion and mistrust, so that Angela observed him with an increasing degree of anxiety.

“ I hope, dear brother, there is nothing wrong? ” she said.

“ Read for yourself, Angela,” he answered, giving her the letter. “ And now what do you think? ” he inquired, when she had perused it.

“ There certainly appears something strange in the wording of the contents,” replied Angela, also mystified and

suspicious, "and yet it is his lordship's handwriting; here too is the Edenbridge postmark —"

"But observe, my dear sister," interrupted our young hero. "This letter addresses me as 'My dear Deveril,' whereas the marquis invariably writes to me as 'My dear William.' It speaks of 'kindest regards,' whereas the term is wont to be either 'most affectionate regards' or 'kindest love,' and instead of 'Your sincere friend,' his lordship is accustomed to subscribe himself 'Yours affectionately,' or 'Your affectionate friend.' Trivial as the variations in this letter may seem from his lordship's habitual manner of communicating with me, they are nevertheless important when a suspicion is excited."

"True," observed Angela, thoughtfully as well as anxiously. "But what do you suspect?"

"I know not, dear sister, and yet I am afraid that some treachery is at the bottom of this note. Indeed," he continued, having taken up the letter again and considered it attentively, "I am now all but convinced that this is not even the handwriting of the marquis, excellent though the imitation be. Angela, it is a forgery — I feel convinced of it, and there is a treacherous intent in some quarter."

The young maiden grew very much alarmed, but her brother hastened to reassure her by observing, "It would be much worse, Angela, if our suspicions had not been thus excited, and if in blind confidence I were to plunge headlong into the snare, whatsoever it may be, that is set for me. The object evidently is to get me away from home during the ensuing night; hence the recommendation to be at Edenbridge by the dinner-hour, so that it is doubtless calculated I could not get back again, on discovering the deceit, until long past midnight."

"And what will you do, William?" asked Angela, still with a trepidation of anxiety, though considerably reassured by what her brother had just said.

"What shall I do?" said William, thoughtfully repeating the question thus put to him, and then for a few moments he reflected deeply. "I tell you what I will do, Angela: I will start off at once for Edenbridge, and clear up all uncertainty as to the genuineness or fabrication of the letter. If it be a forgery — as we have so much reason to suspect — I will return home at once. I can easily come back by three

or four o'clock; and then, aided by the advice which the marquis will in the meantime have given me, I shall know how to act. You need be under no apprehension during my absence. Whatsoever treachery may be in contemplation is to be reserved for the night-time. That is evident. Therefore fear not, my sweet sister. Not for an instant would I leave you unprotected if I thought there was any danger."

Having embraced Angela, William Deveril issued forth from the villa. As he traversed the little garden in front, the old gardener, who appeared to be busy at work, stopped him with the accustomed touch of the hat, and asked him a question of a trivial nature in connection with some shrub. William was about to hurry past, telling him that he had not time to attend to the matter at that moment, when it struck him that the gardener surveyed him in a somewhat singular manner; and as this was not the first time that the same suspicion had occurred to our hero, he did stop and answered his questions.

"I see you are in a hurry now, sir," said the man, "or else I had several other things I wanted to speak to you about in connection with the garden. But as I suppose you won't be more than an hour or two absent, as usual, I will wait till your return."

"You had better tell me now what you have to say," answered Deveril, "for I have some business which may detain me in town; and when I come home in the afternoon, I must be off at once to Edenbridge. I have received a letter from the Marquis of Eagledean, inviting me to dine with him this evening."

While affecting to have his eyes fixed upon the particular shrubs to which the gardener had alluded, William was all the time scrutinizing, from beneath his long, dark lashes, the countenance of the old man, and his original suspicion was confirmed, that this individual was in some way or another connected with the treachery which was being secretly plotted, — that is to say, supposing his surmise to be correct that the letter from Edenbridge was a forgery. He remained conversing with the gardener for a few minutes, and then, pretending to have forgotten something, he re-entered the villa.

"My dear Angela," he said, "I feel convinced that there is something wrong about that gardener. I have frequently

told you that he has for some weeks past come much oftener than he was bound to do according to the terms of our contract for keeping the garden in order, — much oftener, too, than the garden itself requires at this season of the year. He has lingered and loitered about at times in a manner that struck me to be strange; and with an air of good-humoured familiarity he has frequently endeavoured to get me into conversation when I have been going out, as if he sought to learn whither I was proceeding and how long I should be absent. Just now his manner struck me as more than usually peculiar. In a word, I believe him to be a spy — But fear not, Angela. Whoever our enemies may be, we will outwit them, and whatsoever may be their design, we will frustrate it.”

“Do not think, William, that my fortitude will fail,” responded his sister. “It is for you to adopt the course that you may think fit. I will remain here tranquilly until your return.”

“You would do well, dearest Angela, not to breathe a word to the maid servants that anything unusual has occurred. Go about your avocations with the same demeanour as heretofore. On the part of neither of us must the least evidence be shown that we suspect anything, so that the gardener, if he be really a spy, may go and inform his employers that this morning’s letter has thrown us completely off our guard.”

Angela promised compliance with her brother’s instructions, and he then departed. Proceeding at once to the railway station, he took the first train to Edenbridge, reaching the Park soon after midday. The marquis at once pronounced the letter to be a forgery, thus confirming Deveril’s preconceived suspicion.

“But who can have done this?” asked our young hero. “Who can my enemies be, and what object can they have in view?”

“These are questions,” replied the Marquis of Eagledean, gravely, and after nearly a minute’s consideration, “which naturally lead us to retrospect over past occurrences, and bring events to our minds, showing us who have acted in a hostile spirit on former occasions. Alas, I fear that my graceless nephew Harold has not abandoned the career of wickedness, for I have recently received letters from Stock-

holm which acquaint me that he is not in that city, — a piece of intelligence which seems to be confirmed by the fact that he has neither written to me nor drawn for any pecuniary supplies. Yet it is difficult to conceive how he can entertain any perfidious intent with regard to your affairs."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated William, "if he were infamous enough to harbour the intent of carrying off Angela! He has seen her at the opera: who knows but that he may have conceived a passion for her?"

"Or it may be," suggested the marquis, "that there is something connected with that woman who has for so long a time been harboured at your abode. We know that she has some secret of the deepest importance to reveal, — a secret intimately concerning yourself; but may not this secret likewise regard others, and even threaten to compromise them? If so, whatsoever hostile designs are in contemplation may be levelled against her. It is, however, useless for us to waste time in conjecture. We must determine how to act."

It is not, however, necessary to record in this place the nature of the measures which were promptly resolved upon. Suffice it to say that a little past three o'clock in the afternoon William Deveril reached his villa near the Regent's Park. It was now verging toward the dusk, which sets in early at that season of the year; but the old gardener was still occupied with the shrubs and the plants, which certainly needed not so much care as he seemed intent on lavishing upon them. William was, however, careful, as he passed him by, not to show, by any change of demeanour toward the old man, that he suspected him of treachery; neither did he exhibit the haste and excitement of one who had just come from a journey. He entered the villa, and was speedily closeted with Angela. From her he learned that scarcely had he taken his departure in the morning, when the gardener went away and did not return for an hour, but that ever since he had remained about the premises, to all appearance busily engaged. Deveril then informed his sister of all that had taken place at Edenbridge Park, — how he had received the confirmation that the letter was a forgery, and how the marquis had suggested certain measures which were to be adopted, not merely for the frustration of whatsoever

treachery was being plotted, but likewise for the capture of its perpetrators.

It was now close upon four o'clock, and Deveril prepared to leave the house, as if he were on the point of proceeding to Edenbridge according to the intimation he had given to the old gardener. Angela learned from one of the maids — who accidentally mentioned the circumstance — that the gardener was seated in the kitchen, to warm himself, as he said, after a hard and cold day's work. Angela lost no time in reporting this to her brother, who remarked, "Yes, everything confirms my belief that he is a spy; and the circumstance of his remaining in the house is a mere pretext to enable him to watch whether I really take my departure or not. I will, however, do something that shall lull him still more deeply into such a belief."

Thereupon our hero descended to the kitchen premises, on some pretence or another; and when the old gardener saw him, he said, with that air of good-humoured familiarity which for some time past he had adopted, and which a person of his years might assume, "You will be late for the dinner, sir, at Edenbridge Park."

"Not so," responded William. "It is now only four; a cab will take me to the station in an hour, the train starts at five, and I shall reach my destination at half-past six. His lordship's dinner hour is seven."

Deveril then ascended to the hall, whispered a few hasty words to his sister, bidding her be of good cheer, and issued forth from the house, having a brace of pistols secured about his person.

We must now pass over a few hours, and suppose it to be about ten o'clock at night. In an up-stairs room, in a low public-house, situated in one of the worst streets in the worst part of Camden Town, four persons were assembled. These were Chiffin the Cannibal, Mat the Cadger, Spider Bill, and the old gardener. Of the first-mentioned of these worthies it is by no means necessary to give the reader the slightest description, but of the second something may be said, inasmuch as he was a peculiar-looking person in his way. He was accustomed to dress in a sort of sporting style, but always in such shabby, greasy, sordid garments, that he might have been taken for a broken-down horse-chanter. Sometimes he wore top-boots, sometimes gaiters, but always

corduroy breeches, very loose and baggy. A fustian shooting-jacket, or else a cutaway green coat, with tarnished metal buttons, constituted the varieties of this portion of his costume; his waistcoat, which was generally of that green and yellow striped material worn by stablemen, came very far below his waist. A blue kerchief spotted with white, better known as a "bird's-eye," was loosely folded several times around his neck, the ends being crossed over the front of a shirt which did not bear too narrow a scrutiny in respect to cleanliness. This neckerchief came nearly up to his mouth, so that his chin was usually buried in it altogether; and this was not merely the case in winter when it was cold, but likewise in the summer, even in the dog-days. His hat was a sort of chimney-pot shape, but having seen such good service that the crown bulged upward, thus giving a conical appearance to the article. He was of middle height, strongly built, of muscular development and compact proportions. The expression of his countenance was that of thorough determination; indeed, a more daring, resolute-looking kind of a person it would be difficult to meet, and in this respect he quite equalled Chiffin the Cannibal. His eyes were dark and piercing; he had a snub nose, a very wide mouth, short, ragged whiskers, and his hair was so uneven that it appeared to have been hacked about by a pair of blunt scissors wielded by some drunken barber, the last time it was cut. He had a habit of resting his right hand upon his hip and assuming an attitude of boldest decision when engaged in conversation; and he likewise looked fixedly up with an insolent stare of defiance in the countenance of whomsoever he might wish to make an impression upon. In his earlier years he had been connected with the turf, expending thereon the few hundreds of pounds which he inherited at the death of his father, who was a tradesman. He had then hung on, for some time, to the skirts, so to speak, of those individuals with whom his sporting proceedings had thrown him in contact, so that he was said to have "cadged" for his living; hence the surname he had acquired. Of late years, however, he had sunk down very low, and had turned his hand to anything desperate, had fallen amongst the vilest of associates, had become the flash man of such a disgusting woman as one of Widow Burley's daughters, and might therefore be classed amongst the foul refuse and most loathsome

sweepings to be found in the great moral sewer which constitutes more than half of the modern Babylon.

As the above is no imaginary character, we have taken some little pains to describe him. In respect to Spider Bill, we need say no more than that he was so called from his peculiar shape and an extreme length of limb. He also was as desperate a character as Chiffin the Cannibal or Mat the Cadger, and therefore well fitted to be their associate in any criminal undertaking.

We say it was ten o'clock; and those three villains, together with the old gardener, were drinking and smoking in the private room at the public-house where we find them thus grouped together.

"Well," said Mat the Cadger, appealing to Chiffin, "I should think it is pretty near time for us to be off. The clock down-stairs has just struck ten, and it's a good twenty minutes' walk toward the villa. Besides which, we must separate and go different ways."

"We will be off directly," answered Chiffin, "but don't you dictate, old feller, 'cos why, I'm in command now."

"I suppose there isn't no doubt of its all being square and straightfor'ard this time," observed Spider Bill, "for there's been so many puts-off during I don't know how many weeks past —"

"To be sure," growled Chiffin, "'cos why, Lord Harold is a muff in these things, and you chaps ain't much better. But here, you see, I have only been in the business two or three days, and it's going to be done as nice as possible. But I say, you feller," he added, turning to the gardener, "you're certain sure that it's all right at the villa, eh?"

"I've told you so a dozen times," was the old man's response. "I'm certain that Deveril suspects nothing."

"But what do you think Mr. Deveril could have been about, all that while absent from home from ten in the morning till three in the afternoon?" inquired Chiffin.

"Why, courting, to be sure, down in Cavendish Square," replied the gardener, "and perhaps attending to business of some kind or another. But I'll answer for it that there's nothing wrong, because I waited in the garden, as I've told you, till he came back at three o'clock, and he spoke as friendly and looked as happy as ever. Besides, didn't I tell you that I went into the kitchen and stopped till he set off to go to

Edenbridge? He came down to get his upper coat brushed, and told me he was just about to start. In a word, when I went and told Lord Harold in the forenoon that all was right, I made sure it was, and so you will find it to be."

"Well, we'll take it for granted it is so," said Chiffin. "It isn't that I'm afraid, you know," he added, with a grim look as he glanced slowly around upon his companions, "but I don't like such a thing as a failure, and as we've only got half our reward paid down, and are to have t'other half when the job's done, I want to make as sure of the last as I am of the first," and here he significantly tapped his pocket.

"Of course," observed Mat the Cadger, with an assenting nod.

"Then let's be off," said the Cannibal. "We don't want your services any more, old chap," he added, turning to the gardener, "so to you we say good-bye."

The villains then issued forth one by one and at intervals of a few minutes, from the public-house, the three who were to be actively employed in the enterprise taking different directions to gain the point of meeting, which had been already settled. This was a narrow and dark lane at no great distance from Deveril's house and there a covered spring-cart was waiting. The horse attached to it was a strongly built as well as fleet animal and a man in Lord Harold's pay was in charge of this equipage. Close by, too, Lord Harold himself was waiting. Enveloped in a rough pea-coat, and with a glazed hat, the large brims of which slouched over his countenance, he was pacing to and fro with some degree of impatience, the time for the appearance of his agents having elapsed by some minutes. At length they came, one by one, and Chiffin, who was the first upon the spot, assured his lordship that it was all right, for he had been closely questioning the gardener upon the subject.

"Then let us to work at once," said the young nobleman; "because when Deveril got to Edenbridge and found out that the letter was all a trick, he would naturally take the marquis's carriage-and-four and return home. But that would make it past eleven o'clock, and so there is plenty of time, if we are expeditious."

"But about the up-trains, my lord?" said Chiffin, inquiringly.

"I took good care to ascertain," responded Harold, "that

there are none which could serve his purpose so as to bring him up in time to interfere with us. Now, then, you fellows, go on together. We will follow with the vehicle exactly five minutes after you leave, so that it won't have to stand long at the gate of the premises."

"Five minutes in advance will be ample," responded Chiffin. "If the inmates are in bed, we'll break into the house in a jiffy; but if they're still up it will be easier work still."

Having thus spoken, Chiffin led the way from the spot, closely followed by Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill, and in three minutes they were at the villa. The hall lamp was still alight, and a candle was also burning in an up-stairs room, so that it was evident the inmates had not yet retired to rest. Chiffin's dispositions were speedily made: he was to enter by the front door, while his two companions were to effect their entry by the back part of the premises, and thus, as it were, take the place by storm. They were provided with black masks, which they put upon their countenances previous to commencing operations.

We will first follow Chiffin. He traversed the front garden and rang the house-bell, having done which he turned his back toward the door, so that the instant it should be opened the servant answering the summons might not at the first glimpse catch sight of his mask. He was not kept long waiting; the door was opened, he made one step backward, caught the female by the throat, and kicked the door to with marvellous rapidity.

"Not a word! not a struggle!" he said, in the low, hoarse whisper of his terrible voice, "or I'll throttle you!"

There was scarcely any need for this injunction, inasmuch as the young woman at once swooned with the awful terror which seized upon her.

Meanwhile Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill had leaped over the wall at the back of the premises, and stealing into the kitchen, they found the other two female servants (for the Deverils kept three) seated at work. Mat sprang upon one, his companion on the other. The first who was thus assailed gave vent to a slight scream, but only a slight one, for it was instantaneously stifled by the rude hand that gagged her lips; while the other female was seized with too profound a dismay to cry out at all. They both received the

hurried assurance that if they remained quiet no harm would befall them. Almost immediately afterward footsteps were heard descending the stairs, and Chiffin appeared, bearing the inanimate form of the housemaid who had answered the door.

"Now, then," he said, with growling hastiness of tone, "let us put these women into some secure nook — and then for the rest of the business. Ah, there's the coal-cellar quite handy!" and forthwith the door of that place was opened.

The two women who had not fainted, but over whose mouths rough hands were forcibly held, showed by their looks how wild was their terror. The villains repeated their assurances that no harm would befall them if they remained quiet, but they likewise vowed that the slightest scream would be instantaneously followed by the murder of all three. They were accordingly thrust into the coal-cellar, and the bolt was drawn upon them.

"Now, then, for up-stairs," said Chiffin, and he led the way, followed by his two accomplices.

As there had been no light perceived in the ground floor rooms, they did not think it worth while to enter them; but they crept up toward that where the Cannibal had seen a candle burning. Angela, who was seated there, by the bedside of Madge Somers, heard the footsteps, and though a tremor shot through her form, she was not so much frightened as might have been expected. Perhaps she knew that succour was near. She rose up from her chair, and the next instant the three ruffians with the black masks rushed into the room.

"Not a word, or you're dead!" ejaculated Mat the Cadger, as he caught hold of the young lady with one hand, and with the other produced a pistol from his pocket.

The sight of that weapon did strike a horrible alarm to the soul of Angela. Mat the Cadger forced her down into the chair, whipped out a cord from his pocket, and in a moment bound her arms to the back of the seat, at the same time renewing his horrible threats. While this was doing, Chiffin and Spider Bill seized upon Madge Somers and tore her from the bed. All this was the work of a few instants; and as a shriek did now vibrate from Angela's lips, Mat the Cadger placed the muzzle of his pistol close to her fair polished brow,

declaring, with a horrible imprecation, that he would blow her brains out if she did not hold her tongue.

But at this instant there was a hasty rush of footsteps up the stairs, and the next moment William Deveril, Don Diego Christoval, the young Lord Everton, and the Marquis of Eagledean made their appearance, each presenting pistols and bidding the villains surrender. Chiffin the Cannibal and Spider Bill dropped Madge Somers upon the carpet, but at the same instant the former was seized upon by the powerful arms of Count Christoval and hurled upon the floor, while Spider Bill was simultaneously overpowered by William Deveril. Mat the Cadger, dropping his weapon, made one rush to the casement, tore it open, and precipitated himself forth, just as Lord Everton clutched him by the skirts of his coat, so that it was a miracle the young nobleman was not dragged forth after him. The villain alighted upon a border under the window, and instantaneously picking himself up, rushed madly away. Almost immediately afterward a vehicle might have been heard driving quickly off, for Lord Harold, who was so stationed below that he could command a view of that window, on perceiving this sudden descent and flight of Mat the Cadger, comprehended in a moment that the project had failed. He therefore hurried off the vehicle, while he himself fled precipitately in another direction, and in the wildest excitement, lest the officers of justice should be upon his heels.

We must now for a few instants descend to the lower part of the premises, to announce that the captivity of the female servants was not of long duration, for the door of the cellar was quickly opened by Francis Paton, who besought the terrified women not to give way to their alarms, nor do anything to raise the neighbourhood, as there were others in the house who would prevent any further ruffianism on the part of the intruders. Leaving the lady's-maid and cook to recover the housemaid from her swoon, Francis sped up-stairs, where the following spectacle at once met his eyes. While young Lord Everton had quickly closed the casement again, the Marquis of Eagledean cut the cords which bound Angela to the chair, and he then hastened to assist her in lifting Madge Somers back into the bed from which she had been so rudely torn. Just outside the threshold, Don Diego Christoval had one knee upon Chiffin's chest, a hand

at his throat, and a pistol at his head; the mask had fallen from the ruffian's countenance, which wore a horrible expression of mingled rage, hate, and doggedness. Just inside that same threshold, Spider Bill was likewise upon the floor; his mask had also come off, and he looked terribly crestfallen and frightened, as William Deveril kept him down in a similar manner to that adopted by the Spanish nobleman in respect to Chiffin.

"Search this fellow, Frank," said Don Diego, "and take from him whatsoever weapons he may have about him."

The Cannibal's pistols and clasp-knife were speedily drawn forth from his pockets by Francis Paton, while Adolphus (Lord Everton) also disarmed Spider Bill.

"Now," said the Marquis of Eagledean, who had assisted Angela to replace Madge Somers in the couch, "let these two men be conducted down-stairs; and let them understand well that at the slightest attempt at resistance they will be shot through the head. Remorseless ruffians that they are, we may not hesitate to treat them as dogs if they thus provoke us."

Don Diego Christoval and William Deveril accordingly suffered their prisoners to rise; and the room being soon cleared, Angela remained with Madge Somers, who, having swooned off at first, was now rapidly recovering. In dogged sullenness did Chiffin descend the stairs, while Spider Bill appealed for mercy as he was made to follow.

"Silence!" exclaimed the Marquis of Eagledean, in answer to the latter's entreaties. "You will hear what we have to say, and according as you respond to our queries, shall we deal with you."

The parlour on the ground floor was reached, the lamp was lighted, and the prisoners were placed in such a position that they could not possibly escape from the guardianship of those who now had them in custody. We should not, however, forget to observe that ere descending from the chamber above, Francis Paton had lingered behind the rest for a single moment, to exchange a warm pressure of the hand and a fond look with Angela, in congratulation of the issue of this perilous adventure.

Perhaps also, ere resuming the thread of the narrative, it may be as well to pause for a few moments and describe how it was that such speedy succour was at hand. As the

reader will have seen, the marquis entertained the suspicion that his nephew Lord Harold had some connection with the impending treachery, for he thought he could discover traces of the young nobleman's writing in the imitation of his own hand in the forged letter. Judging from antecedent circumstances, he had come to the conclusion that if his nephew were really so connected with the plot, whatever it might be, Lady Saxondale was also sure to be in it. It was therefore necessary to fathom the whole proceeding to the very bottom; and, still anxious to save his nephew from the ignominy of figuring in a criminal tribunal, the Marquis of Eagledean had decided upon adopting the measure of watching inside the villa, so as to not merely frustrate the intended treachery, but also capture whomsoever might be found entering the premises. That there would not be many persons whose arrival might be thus expected, was naturally judged from the circumstance that means had been taken to get William Deveril out of the way, so that only a few women would have to be dealt with. The nature of the arrangement devised by the marquis had been duly communicated to Angela by her brother, when he returned from Edenbridge. Indeed, he came up to London from the Park with the marquis, Lord Everton, Francis Paton, and Count Christoval, this last-mentioned personage being on a visit there at the time. Nothing, however, was said to the female servants at the villa, for fear lest at the very first alarm they should be led to call out for succour notwithstanding any injunctions to the contrary, and thus prompt the expected intruders to take to a precipitate flight, thereby frustrating the hope of the marquis to make them prisoners and fathom the entire proceeding to the bottom. It was regarded as a matter of certainty that blood would not be shed uselessly by the agents of the dark and mysterious treachery which was impending, and that whosoever came would be contented with binding the female servants and intimidating them by threats into silence.

Such were the calculations, the motives, and the plans of the Marquis of Eagledean. We should further observe that, at about ten o'clock, Angela, who was on the watch, descended gently from the sick woman's room, while the servants were in the kitchen, and noiselessly opening the front door, she gave admittance to her brother, the marquis,

the count, Adolphus, and Francis Paton, who all five forthwith ensconced themselves in the breakfast-parlour leading out of the hall, and there they remained in the dark until the time for action arrived. Of what followed, the reader is already aware. The whole scheme, as arranged by the marquis, ended in success, and without the intervention of the police, — an alternative which he had been so anxious to avoid. But he did not anticipate to encounter in one of the ruffians Chiffin the Cannibal, whom he presumed to be at the time far away across the sea, on the American soil.

We may now resume the thread of our narrative, and describe what took place between the prisoners and their captors in the parlour.

“You have been taken,” said the Marquis of Eagledean, addressing the two prisoners, “in an attempt to carry off an unfortunate invalid woman, whom your knife” — and here he fixed his eyes upon the Cannibal — “nearly devoted to death. This is a proceeding of so extraordinary as well as outrageous a nature that it must have had no unimportant instigation. As I have already observed, we shall deal with you according to your answers to my questions.”

“And what if we confess everything?” demanded Spider Bill, eagerly.

The Marquis of Eagledean did not immediately reply. His soul revolted from the idea of again letting loose the Cannibal upon society; and yet when he reflected upon all the reasons which his daughter Elizabeth Paton had advanced against making an enemy of Chiffin at that time when he was entrapped by her stratagem at Edenbridge Park, he felt that he could not do otherwise than let the man go. But while reduced to this alternative, he made up his mind on the present occasion to adopt some measure to ensure the ruffian's departure from England.

“If you confess everything,” he accordingly said, in answer to Spider Bill's question, “no harm shall befall you.”

“And does that apply to me, my lord?” asked Chiffin, in a sullen, growling voice.

“Yes,” was the response.

“Well, then, here goes for confession,” exclaimed the Cannibal, with a savage exultation. “It was your lordship's own nephew, Lord Harold Staunton, which got up all this business.”

“ Yes, that it was ! ” cried Spider Bill, “ and what’s more, me and that man which bolted just now have been upon the watch for I don’t know how many weeks to do the job. But you, sir,” turning to William Deveril, “ was always in the way.”

“ Ah, while I bethink me,” observed our hero, “ was not that gardener of mine privy to what was going on ? ”

“ He was, sir,” rejoined Spider Bill.

At this moment the door opened, and Angela made her appearance, with a singularly excited expression of countenance. She beckoned William Deveril to follow her, and the Marquis of Eagledean, thinking that something of importance had occurred, accompanied his young friend from the room, but not before he had made a sign to Count Christoval, Lord Everton, and Frank to keep a strict guard over the prisoners.

The marquis and William Deveril accompanied Angela into the breakfast-parlour, whither she led them, and where a light was now burning. They both noticed that she still continued to manifest a considerable degree of excitement; there was a visible tremor throughout her charming form, and she flung quick as well as singular glances upon Deveril, — glances in which a certain degree of timidity and bashfulness was blended with that excitement which was inspiring her.

“ What has happened, Angela ? ” inquired the marquis, quickly.

“ Hasten to tell us, dear sister,” exclaimed Deveril, also in acute suspense.

“ Sister ! ” and she echoed the word in a strange and involuntary manner. Then, with considerable rapidity of utterance, she went on to say, “ The woman has recovered the faculty of speech. Doubtless the shock which she has sustained produced a strong revulsion in her entire being — But no matter what may be the cause, the effect is as I tell you, and it is indeed of stupendous importance to you, William. It however seems to me like a dream. I am afraid my thoughts are bewildered — perhaps I heard not aright, and yet she spoke plainly; I made her repeat the words. But come you both, and hear them with your own ears, and from her own lips, that you may judge for yourselves.”

Having thus spoken, Angela issued quickly from the room,

while the Marquis of Eagledean and William Deveril, exchanging rapid glances of wonderment and suspense, hastened to follow her. They both felt that they were upon the threshold of the knowledge of some grand and important secret, but neither of them could form the slightest conjecture what it might be. Still under the influence of a strange and wild excitement, Angela tripped up the stairs, and conducted William and the marquis into the invalid's chamber. Madge Somers was now propped up with several pillows, and there was a faint hectic tinge of excitement upon the haggard, hollow cheeks, or, rather, upon the sallow skin where the cheek-bones were prominent. Her eyes lighted up with an expression of joyous satisfaction as she encountered the looks of William Deveril, whom she beckoned to approach close to the couch.

"Now," said Angela, her voice losing somewhat of its excitement in the gentle kindness with which she habitually spoke to the invalid, "repeat those words which you ere now breathed twice in my ears."

"I will," responded the woman, in a faint, feeble, and almost dying tone, but still one that was clearly audible, as well as unmistakable in the syllables to which it gave utterance. Then, fixing her eyes steadfastly upon our young hero, she said, "Prepare yourself to hear that solemn truth which I am about to proclaim, and which I see that Miss Deveril has not ventured to communicate. Prepare yourself, I say, for it is a truth that will startle you with the wildest amazement. You are not the brother of this amiable and excellent young lady, you are not the child of the poor wandering players, — you are the son of Lady Saxondale!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE RIGHTFUL HEIR OF SAXONDALE

WILD indeed was the amazement experienced by our hero at this intelligence, — an amazement which was to an equal extent felt by the Marquis of Eagledean. So powerful a sensation of faintness almost immediately seized upon our hero that he staggered back, and was compelled to lean against the wall for support. Angela, perceiving how great was the effect which the announcement had produced upon him, hastened to bear him a tumbler of water, but it was with a sort of timid bashfulness that she presented it. He drained its contents; then, observing the expression of her countenance, and instantaneously comprehending what was passing in her mind, he caught her in his arms, exclaiming, “Oh, dearest Angela, even if all this be not a dream, if it be not a fevered fancy on the part of that poor woman, if, in a word, it be a stern and solemn truth, you are not the less my sister. For think you that any circumstances could possibly diminish the brotherly love which I bear toward you? No, never, never, my darling Angela.”

The young lady wept profusely as she received these assurances, and the Marquis of Eagledean was likewise much affected.

“If it be a dream?” exclaimed Madge Somers, speaking in a much stronger and more excited tone than at first. “No, no, it is not a dream! Have you not the mark of a strawberry upon your shoulder?”

“Yes!” ejaculated our hero. “Here!” and he placed his hand upon the spot.

“To be sure,” continued Madge. “I saw it when you were at that cottage in Lincolnshire, at the time you so generously saved my life from the waters of the Trent.”

“But that young man, then,” said the Marquis of Eagledean, scarcely yet recovered from the bewilderment into which he had been thrown, “that young man, I say, who passes before the world as Lord Saxondale?”

“That young man,” answered Madge Somers, in a solemn voice and with a corresponding expression of the countenance, “is my own son!”

Here was another subject for ineffable astonishment, and for some moments not another word was spoken; but those who were present in that room surveyed each other with a sort of solemn awe, as if they deeply felt how mysteriously and inscrutably the ways of Providence are worked out. But at length the Marquis of Eagledean, breaking that silence, began to question Madge Somers further. A faintness had, however, now come over the woman; a reaction set in from the excitement which for the last few minutes she had undergone, and she only shook her head to indicate that she was no longer able to exercise the faculty of speech.

“She must be kept quiet,” suggested Angela. “I know full well how to treat her; leave her in my hands. But perhaps, dear William,” continued the young lady, drawing our hero aside, and speaking in a whispering voice, — “for after the kind and considerate assurances you have given me, I shall still call you by that name, I shall still address you as a brother.”

“Oh, Angela, infinite would be my affliction,” responded our hero, “if you were to treat me otherwise,” and taking her hand, he pressed it with the most affectionate warmth. “Now continue, my dear sister, — for as such you must ever be regarded by me; continue, I say, the suggestions you were about to offer.”

“It is but too evident,” proceeded Angela, “that this poor woman has for long years been privy to a foul wrong committed toward yourself; but she is penitent, she is anxious to make all possible amends, and it will doubtless contribute toward her mental peace, and therefore to her physical recovery, if you give her some assurance —”

“I comprehend you, dearest Angela, and I admire more than ever the noble generosity of your heart.” Then approaching the bed, our hero took the emaciated hand of the invalid, and said, in a solemn voice, “Here, in the presence of her whom I love as a very dear sister, in the presence of

that nobleman who has been to us both the most generous of friends, and likewise with an attesting Heaven to listen to my words, do I declare that I forgive you, my poor woman, for whatsoever wrong you may have done me. Yes, I forgive you, and may God forgive you likewise."

"My lord," murmured Madge Somers, now again for a few moments recovering the faculty of speech, "this generosity on your part is more than I could have expected. But as through me you have for many years been deprived of your rights, it is a satisfaction amounting to a bliss that I should be the first at length to salute you by that title which is properly and truly yours, and which the law will recognize. For as I have a soul to be saved, you are the rightful heir of Saxondale, and may Heaven give you long life to bear that proud name which, though desecrated in others, will be honoured in you."

Madge Somers was again overcome by the transitory paroxysm of excitement which had enabled her to give utterance to that speech, and Angela made a sign of entreaty that our hero and the Marquis of Eagledean would now withdraw. They did so, and on descending the stairs, the former drew the marquis into the breakfast-parlour, closing the door, so that they were alone there together.

"Now, my dear young friend," said Lord Eagledean, embracing our hero with an affection truly paternal, "let me congratulate you upon the knowledge of a momentous secret which gives you that title and that wealth from which you have been so long and so iniquitously debarred."

"My dear lord," was the young nobleman's response, "accept my fervent gratitude for these congratulations which you proffer me, but my mind is made up to one thing," and he spoke in a tone expressive of the firmest resolve, while his countenance corroborated his words.

"You do not mean to tell me," cried the marquis, more than half-suspecting what he was about to hear, "that you reject —"

"I mean, my generous friend," interrupted our hero, "that I shall continue plain and simple William Deveril. By that name, therefore, I beseech you to address me as heretofore; nor to those in the other room, no, not even to your own son, must be revealed that secret which we have just learned."

"This is madness, this is impossible," ejaculated the marquis, vehemently; and he even spoke in anger, — the first time that ever he had been angry with our hero.

"Do not reproach me, my best of friends," said the young man, entreatingly, but still with an expression of firmest resolve upon his countenance. "Give me your attention. I will explain my motives for that course on which I am inflexibly determined, and your own kind heart will sympathize with my feelings."

"Proceed," said the marquis, but with a voice and manner which showed that it would be difficult indeed to bring him over to his young friend's views.

"Has it not occurred to you," resumed the latter, "that if I profit by the information which we have just received from that woman's lips, I bring down utter ruin upon my own mother? Is it not but too evident that she, the authoress of my being, has perpetrated — I cannot speak the word."

"The foulest of crimes," ejaculated the marquis, almost fiercely. "She has brought up a stranger to supplant her own offspring. Yes, there can be no doubt that you will involve her in ruin; but really, my young friend, this is a case in which you cannot stand upon such punctilios. There breathes not a man who would more earnestly inculcate the necessity of filial love and duty and forbearance toward a mother — but such a mother!"

"Nevertheless," added our hero, "she is still my mother, and not for worlds would I adopt measures which must hold her up to the scorn and the execration of the whole world, — nay, more, measures that would compel the law to take cognizance of her misdeed and visit her with some terrible punishment."

"Admirable young man!" exclaimed the Marquis of Eagledean, his better feelings bursting forth with a gush of enthusiasm that absorbed his transitory resentment and impatience, and sent forth tears from his eyes.

"Oh, I am rejoiced," exclaimed William Deveril, — for such we must continue to call him, inasmuch as it was his own will to be so denominated, — "I rejoice to perceive that you at last yield to the strength of my reasoning, and that you no longer oppose the course which I am resolved to adopt."

"But will you not make your mother aware," inquired

the marquis, "that you are acquainted with the secret of your birth?"

"Yes, assuredly," answered Deveril, "because it is evident that she fears the revelation which the invalid woman has made to us."

"And perhaps, in her desperation," added the marquis, "when she finds that to-night's plot has so signally failed, — a plot to the carrying out of which there can be no doubt she instigated my wretched nephew, — she will adopt some extreme measure to take the very life of Madge Somers. Have I not now expressed the motives which influence you, when you say that you will see your mother and inform her that you are acquainted with the mystery of your birth?"

"Yes, those are the paramount motives," responded our hero. "But I am likewise desirous to relieve her mind from the terrible anxiety into which it must be plunged on account of this tremendous secret which she knows full well the woman Somers would sooner or later reveal. Moreover, you can full well comprehend, my dear marquis, that it will be to me a source of satisfaction to tell my mother that I forgive her for all the past, to endeavour to move her to at least some little display of parental affection —"

But here Deveril suddenly stopped short and became pale as death, for the remembrance flashed to his mind, accompanied by a sickening sensation, that his own mother had at one time made to him overtures of love, a love which, had he yielded to the temptation, would have been horrible to think of.

"Let not that circumstance trouble you, my young friend," said the marquis, in a kind and soothing manner, for he full easily penetrated what was passing in William's mind. "No, let it not trouble you more than it has heretofore done; for your mother of course knew not at the time that you were her own son. Indeed, there is no reason to believe that she knows it now, inasmuch as her measures have been taken to prevent Madge Somers from revealing to any one the secret which she — your mother — deems and hopes to be still a secret locked up in that woman's heart. But we must hasten back to the other room, where our prolonged absence has doubtless already created much astonishment, perhaps uneasiness."

"And your lordship," said Deveril, "will suffer those two

men to depart? You will not, by invoking the aid of the law, create an inevitable exposure of all that has occurred?"

"I will suffer them to depart," answered Lord Eagledean. "Think you, William, that I would do aught inimical to your wishes? No, not for worlds."

"And you will likewise, my generous friend," said our hero, "keep the secret —"

"From everybody!" responded the marquis, emphatically. "Yes, I will do so, because there is in my mind the deeply seated conviction that Heaven itself, in spite of your own noble forbearance, will sooner or later bring all these mysterious transactions to light, and I shall yet have to welcome you as Lord Saxondale in the presence of the world."

William shook his head slowly and solemnly, in deprecation of this prophecy, and he followed the marquis from the room. On reëntering the opposite apartment, all eyes were at once turned upon them both, but Lord Eagledean hastened to observe that it was only in connection with the critical position of the invalid woman they had been summoned forth by Angela, adding that the poor creature was much better and past all danger.

"I have now to decide," he went on to observe, "upon the measures which are to be adopted in respect to you two," fixing his eyes upon the prisoners. "First, in regard to you," he said, now addressing himself specially to Spider Bill, "you are at liberty to depart hence. Should you encounter your accomplice who ere now saved himself by a precipitous flight, or that traitorous gardener who has been playing the part of a vile spy, you may tell them both that for certain reasons a merciful course has been resolved upon, and that they have nothing to fear, but that it will be well for them to forbear from lightly mentioning the name of Lord Harold Staunton, their employer in the misdeed. Go — begone!"

The reader need scarcely be informed that Spider Bill lost not a moment in availing himself of the permission thus accorded, and muttering a few words of thanks, he precipitately left the house.

"With regard to you, infamous villain that you are, most unscrupulous, daring, and iniquitous of evil-doers," continued the marquis, now addressing himself to the Cannibal, "if you had your merits, the transition would be from

this apartment to a cell in Newgate. But mercy shall again be extended toward you, yet under certain conditions which I will explain in as few words as possible. I happen to have the means of ensuring your safe exit out of the country. Within the hour that is passing, a post-chaise will be ordered, and two of my companions here will take you with them to Dover, whence you will at once be embarked for France. There, at least, you will be in safety, and if you choose to seek Havre de Grace, you may embark thence for America, where you will find the remittance which some time back I made to New York on your account. Christoval, one word with you."

The marquis drew Don Diego into a corner of the room, and said to him, in a whispering voice, "You must accompany this man to Dover. Lord Everton shall likewise go with you. Through the assistance of the Marshalls and of Edward Russell, his safe passage to the Continent can doubtless be ensured. Let measures be taken to the effect that not one farthing of money shall the wretch receive until he sets foot on the French coast. Deveril will lend him a cloak, and whatsoever other articles of apparel may help to render him a more decent object than he now is, and Frank shall issue forth at once and order a post-chaise."

The arrangements thus suggested by the marquis were duly carried out; and Chiffin the Cannibal took his departure in the custody — for such it really was — of Don Diego Christoval and Adolphus. We may as well observe here that the entire plan, as laid down in respect to Chiffin, was executed; and through the agency of Ned Russell he was safely landed at Calais. But whether he eventually got so far as the United States will be seen ere this narrative, which now draws toward a conclusion, is brought to a complete close.

Don Diego Christoval and Lord Everton having taken their departure with Chiffin the Cannibal, the Marquis of England and Francis Paton stayed at the villa to pass the night, or, rather, the remainder of it, for it was close upon one o'clock in the morning ere the inmates of that dwelling could think of retiring to rest. But even then Angela Deveril would not seek her own couch. The servants had been too much alarmed and excited by the incidents of the night to render it prudent to allow either of them to sit up and attend upon Madge Somers. It should be observed that

the nurse who was at first engaged to watch the invalid had within the last few days been herself very ill, and had returned to her own residence, which was at a little distance; but Angela having entertained the hope that the woman would return shortly and resume her duties, had not considered it necessary to put another in her place. Thus the absence of the nurse — which was duly reported by the old gardener — had been deemed by the conspirators one of the favourable circumstances for the execution of their plot at that particular time. Now, however, Angela missed the nurse much, for she herself was exhausted by the mental and physical excitement she had undergone; yet neither the fortitude nor the generous spirit of the young lady failed, and believing herself better capable than the servants of keeping the requisite vigil by the couch of Madge Somers, she resolved to adopt this course. It had been with considerable reluctance that William Deveril consented to her thus wearying herself by sitting up with the invalid, and he only desisted from remonstrance on receiving the assurance that another nurse should be procured early in the morning, in case the one who was formerly engaged continued too much indisposed to resume her duties.

But our hero, the Marquis of Eagledean, and Francis Paton had not been many minutes in their respective chambers when Angela called forth to them, in an affrighted voice, from the invalid's room, and they quickly hurried thither. A terrible change had suddenly taken place in Madge Somers; it was evident that she was dying. Francis sped off to fetch the medical attendant. One of the female domestics was summoned to assist Angela in doing all that possibly could be done for the unfortunate woman in the extremity to which she was brought, but human succour was unavailing, consciousness had abandoned her, the glaze of death came over her eyes, the ominous rattle in the throat commenced, and a few minutes after the return of Francis Paton with the medical man, she breathed her last.

Thus did she perish. Not another syllable beyond the few explanations already recorded fell from her lips, and the circumstances so nearly and intimately relating to William Deveril's earliest years of existence were left still involved in a mystery which seemed to be impenetrable.

CHAPTER XXII

MOTHER AND SON

LADY SAXONDALE knew that the scheme for the carrying off of Madge Somers was to be put into execution on the particular night the incidents of which we have been describing; she also knew that Lord Harold Staunton purposed to accompany Chiffin the Cannibal in the hired van, in order to bear away the woman to some distant spot where she might be disposed of in a manner that would silence her for ever. Her ladyship did not, therefore, expect any communication from Lord Harold during that night, nor perhaps for a day or two, until all should be over in respect to Madge Somers. His silence and his non-appearance would be to her a sufficient indication that the plot had thoroughly succeeded, and that the woman who was so much dreaded by her need no longer be regarded as an object of terror. Therefore her ladyship had gone to rest at her usual hour, having seen Edmund reel off to his own room in a state of complete intoxication.

But Lady Saxondale had not been half an hour in her own chamber, and her night toilet was scarcely completed, — indeed her maid was still combing out the masses of that luxuriant raven hair which neither time nor the influence of strong passions and the powerful workings of her mind had streaked with a single thread of silver, — when a loud knock and ring resounded through the dwelling. Her ladyship started up with dismay, for it instantaneously struck her that the plot had failed, and then there was a perfect gush of horrifying apprehensions through her tortured brain. But quickly recovering her presence of mind, when she saw that the maid was gazing upon her in a perfect consternation, she bade her hasten down-stairs and see who the visitor

might be. We should observe that this maid was not Lucilla, the one who had been so frightened by the incursion of Chiffin and Lord Harold Staunton into the room which she had appropriated to herself at Saxondale Castle during the absence of her mistress, for her ladyship had left Lucilla behind in Lincolnshire, inasmuch as she had foreseen that on returning to London she would have to receive visits from Lord Harold, and she of course did not wish the young nobleman to stand the chance of encountering that maid, in whose presence he could not do otherwise than look particularly foolish.

When left alone in her dressing-room, while her dependent hastened down to ascertain who had knocked and rung in so peremptory a manner, Lady Saxondale said to herself, "Some new crisis is now at hand," and as she glanced at the mirror opposite to which she was standing, she saw that her countenance was of a dead pallor. Then, clasping her hands in a paroxysm of mental anguish, she bitterly, bitterly repented having ever entered upon a career of crime. In that dread moment she would have given worlds to recall the past. But she was not a woman to remain long thus overpowered by her terrors; she felt the necessity of exerting all her strength of mind to meet whatsoever danger might now be menacing her, and to encounter with fortitude whatsoever new emergency might have arisen. Feeling convinced that the visitor must be either Lord Harold, or else some messenger from him, she threw on a morning wrapper, and scarcely had she done this when the maid returned to the room with the expected intimation. For it was as she had foreseen: Lord Harold Staunton craved an immediate audience of her ladyship on most particular business.

"You need not wait up for me," said Lady Saxondale to the maid; and having given this injunction, she descended to the parlour into which the footman who answered the front door had conducted Lord Harold.

The moment her ladyship entered, she perceived by the young nobleman's countenance that the plot had failed, for he was very much excited and had a bewildered look.

"You have not succeeded, Harold?" said her ladyship, in a quick, trembling voice.

"No, everything has miscarried, and yet I know not how," he replied, as he threw himself upon a sofa, much exhausted,

for he had run all the way from the Regent's Park to Saxondale House.

"You know not how?" ejaculated her ladyship. "But what are the circumstances? Tell me all you do know. Leave me not in suspense."

"Everything was carried out in the manner previously settled, up to a certain point. The vehicle was in readiness, the fellows entered the house, they remained there for two or three minutes. I thought it was all right, when all of a sudden the bedroom window was flung open, and out sprang one of them, a gentleman, whom I could not recognize, making a clutch at him as he thus precipitated himself from the casement."

"But the man — was he captured? Was he killed? Or did he escape, and tell you what had happened?" and as Lady Saxondale put these questions in a hurried tone, her countenance exhibited all the tortures of suspense.

"He told me nothing; he sped wildly away," answered Harold, "and I, seeing that all was lost, took my own departure from the spot."

"And the other men, what became of them?"

"I cannot tell. One thing is certain, it was not Chiffin who thus made his escape. I fear, therefore, that he and the other agent whom we employed were made prisoners."

"Good heavens! what is to be done?" ejaculated Lady Saxondale. "If those men have been taken captive, — perhaps by the police lying in wait, — they will reveal everything. They will say that they were engaged by you —"

But all in a moment Lady Saxondale experienced a relief, arising from the selfish reflection which suddenly struck her, that her name could not possibly have been mentioned in the business. At least Harold had all along promised that this secrecy should be observed, and had assured her that he had faithfully kept his pledge.

"You, at all events, have nothing to fear," he hastened to say, "so far as the night's work is concerned. Of course you know best how far and in what way the woman Madge Somers can compromise you, should she recover the faculty of speech. But I — what am I to do? I dare not return to my lodging. Those fellows know where I lived, and if they confess who was their employer —"

“ True,” observed Lady Saxondale, “ it will be serious for you. You had better leave London at once — ”

“ To-night I can do nothing,” answered Harold, with a sort of dogged determination. “ I am tired to death, and unfit for any energetic proceeding. Besides, Harriet, I am not going to separate again from you. Our destinies are linked — ”

“ But I cannot harbour you here, Harold,” interrupted her ladyship. “ It is impossible. The servants will know it — Edmund will know it — ”

“ They already more than suspect that you and I are not very great strangers to each other,” interrupted Harold. “ You would not have me go wandering forth to-night. Look at this costume, this glazed hat, this great rough coat. Do I not seem like a ruffian? How can I present myself at any hotel to ask for a bed? I may be arrested in the streets. Who knows what hue and cry may be already raised after me? ”

There was a mingling of entreaty and dogged determination in Staunton's looks and accents as he thus spoke in a hurried manner. Lady Saxondale saw that it would be dangerous to provoke a quarrel with him, and she herself was getting so desperately reckless as to her own reputation that she came to the conclusion it would be better to let him have his own way.

“ Well,” she accordingly said, “ I must secrete you in the house as cautiously as I can. Fortunately I have dismissed my maid for the night. To-morrow we shall doubtless learn from some source or another the extent of the exposure which has taken place, and of the peril which menaces you. Then our measures can be taken. Perhaps the vortex of ruin — But no matter, it is too late to retrograde a single step. Come.”

They issued forth together from the parlour, and Lady Saxondale, opening and closing the front door, said, in a loud voice, “ Good night, Lord Harold,” which words were uttered in order to deceive any of the domestics who might possibly be listening to what was going on.

Staunton did not, however, leave the house, but with the utmost caution he followed Lady Saxondale up to her own chamber, and in the embraces of illicit passion they both forgot for awhile the perils which, jointly or separately, they

might have to apprehend. In the morning her ladyship told her maid, when the latter knocked at the door, that she could dispense with her services for the occasion, and thus Lord Harold's presence there remained unsuspected. His pea-coat and glazed hat were carefully locked up in a cupboard, and Lady Saxondale, watching an opportunity when no one was upon the stairs, conducted him down to the breakfast-parlour, so that when a servant entered it might appear as if he had just arrived to pay this early visit. She was compelled to leave to chance any suspicions which might be entertained as to the real truth of the proceeding, and any inquiries which the footman might put to the hall porter as to whether the young nobleman had indeed come that morning, or whether he had been several hours concealed beneath that roof.

Edmund remained in bed until a late hour, and it was not until Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold had finished their breakfast that he made his appearance in the parlour. He was glad to see the young nobleman. He wanted society, and the presence of Staunton there seemed to promise a renewal of their former intimacy. He could not, however, prevent himself from smiling significantly at her ladyship, as much as to intimate that he understood very well upon what terms she was with Staunton; but the depraved and unprincipled young man — so deeply criminal, too — was inspired by no loathing or disgust at the thought of sitting down to table with his mother's paramour, for that she was really his mother, he of course believed, though the reader is now aware of the contrary.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon that a footman entered the parlour where they were all three seated, and informed Lady Saxondale that Mr. Deveril requested an immediate audience.

"Let him be shown to the drawing-room," replied her ladyship, without losing her self-possession, but she glanced significantly at Lord Harold, as much as to say that now the worst was likely to be known.

"Ah, William Deveril!" ejaculated Edmund, as the footman retired. "I wonder at his impudence in coming to the house."

"Trouble yourself not with him or his concerns," said Lady Saxondale, in a severe tone; and as she had regained

all her empire over the ill-conditioned mind of the guilty young man, he at once held his peace.

Lord Harold followed her ladyship out into the hall, and said, in a low, hurried, anxious whisper, "What do you think of Deveril's presence here?"

"I know not," she responded, her own eyes glittering with uneasiness, "but still I hope that no public exposure of last night's proceedings has taken place. If so, William Deveril would scarcely call upon me. His presence here seems indicative of a desire to save that exposure, but it is evident my name has been disagreeably mixed up in the transaction. Remain you quiet until I rejoin you."

Lord Harold returned into the parlour, while Lady Saxondale ascended to the drawing-room. She was filled with a nervous anxiety, which not all the natural strength of her mind could repress. She had not told Lord Harold the full extent of what she apprehended from Deveril's visit. Her guilty soul was smitten with the horrible thought that Madge Somers had possibly revealed her secret, but if so, the reader may still understand that she was utterly unaware that William Deveril was her own son.

She proceeded to the drawing-room, assuming as well as she was able that dignified hauteur and calm stateliness of demeanour which she was wont to wear, and beneath which she was so often enabled to conceal the agitation of her soul. The moment she opened the door, she perceived Deveril standing near a window, and with his back toward her. Not that our young hero was gazing forth upon any particular object; he was looking on vacancy, for all his powers of vision were, so to speak, turned inwardly, to the contemplation of the varied emotions and thoughts that were excited in his breast. He was about to stand once more in the presence of her who had been a bitter and a remorseless enemy to him, but whom he now knew to be the authoress of his being. No marvel, then, if his soul were thus agitated; he felt that the interview about to take place was one of no ordinary character. He did not hear the door open, so absorbed was he in his meditations, and it was not until the sounds of footsteps close behind him fell upon his ear that he turned abruptly, thus finding himself face to face with Lady Saxondale.

His countenance was exceeding pale, but inscrutable in its

expression, though the dark eyes of her ladyship were instantaneously bent keenly and piercingly upon him, in order to ascertain, if possible, whether he came with an intent of resolute hostility, or whether his visit might be otherwise construed. He could not immediately speak; he knew not how to commence the explanations he had to give. At one moment he felt inclined to fling himself into the arms of Lady Saxondale, claiming her as his parent, but the next instant the harrowing reflection swept through his brain that it was possible she might repudiate him, she might disown him, she might refuse to acknowledge that claim which he had to assert. On her side, she was equally at a loss how to address him, not knowing what his object might be, or to what extent she was once more in his power. Thus did they stand for nearly a minute, gazing upon each other in silence, a silence that was painful enough for William Deveril, and full of suspense for Lady Saxondale.

At length William Deveril felt so completely overpowered by the emotions which were working so strongly within, though their outward expression was comparatively so slight, that he was compelled to take a seat. Indeed, it was with an air of utter mental and physical exhaustion that he sank down upon a chair. Then Lady Saxondale perceived that he was under the influence of feelings which could not be altogether of a vindictive or hostile character, and she took courage, for wherever she saw an opportunity of playing upon the sensibilities of individuals, she knew that a strong weapon was in her own hand, and that her powers of consummate dissimulation and hypocrisy would enable her to derive immense advantages from the weakness of those with whom she had to deal. She did not break the silence which prevailed, but she also took a seat, and appeared to be patiently awaiting whatsoever explanation was about to be given; while in reality she was suffering her visitor to abandon himself more and more to the influence of the sentiments which had possession of him.

"I know not how to address you," he at length said, in a voice which was tremulous and half-suffocated with his emotions. "Bear with me a few minutes. Think not my conduct intentionally rude, however strange it may appear."

"Take your own time, Mr. Deveril," said Lady Saxondale, forcing herself to assume even a degree of affability. "I

am well pleased that you thus seem enabled to throw aside old rancours and animosities."

"Rancours and animosities!" echoed Deveril, with almost a wild start, as a thousand reminiscences of the past swept through his mind. "Would to Heaven that they had never existed! Would to Heaven that no angry word had ever been breathed from either of us toward each other!"

"What mean you?" asked Lady Saxondale, for a moment smitten with the idea that possibly he had repented of having rejected the overture of her love at the time that it was made, and had now come to fling himself at her feet.

"What do I mean?" he cried, trembling all over with the effect of his emotions, and now the tears likewise trickled down his cheeks. "How can I make the revelation? How will you receive it? Is it possible that nature has no voice on these occasions? No, no, it has not," he quickly ejaculated, "or else —"

But he stopped suddenly short, shocked at that occurrence the recollection of which thus flashed vividly back to his mind; for he meant to have said that if nature had really such a voice, it would have spoken out at the time when that very overture of love itself was made. Lady Saxondale was bewildered by his words and his manner, and yet every fresh step which he advanced along the troubled pathway of his agitated feelings and excited emotions gave additional relief to her soul, for she saw that he came not for the purpose of injuring her.

"Last night," he said, suddenly forcing himself to be calm, "a strange scene took place at my abode. The house was invaded by ruffians. Fortunately the plot in some of its details was too clumsily managed to succeed, and precautions were taken to frustrate it."

"A plot?" said Lady Saxondale, assuming a look of surprise and interest.

"Oh, do not tell me that you were a stranger to it," cried Deveril. "Let there henceforth be no deception on your part toward me. If all the past can be forgotten, — as, on my soul, it is forgiven on my side, — we should look each other in face with the frank confidence of other and better feelings."

"If you wish us to be friends, Mr. Deveril," said her lady-

ship, now smiling with the utmost amiability, "it shall be so with all my heart."

"Friends?" he ejaculated, with passionate vehemence. Then suddenly resuming a degree of calmness again, he went on to observe, "But I had not finished the tale I have to tell. The plot was as I have informed you, frustrated: it was to carry off that woman who was beneath my roof —"

"Ah, and the plotters, what became of them?" inquired Lady Saxondale, eagerly.

"They were suffered to depart," responded Deveril. "Let me assure you at once that you have nothing to fear. No public exposure ensued, no authority of the law was invoked on the occasion. Neither do I come hither to distress you. Would to Heaven that nothing had ever occurred to compel me at one time to take a hostile attitude toward you! But that woman of whom I have spoken, and who died last night —"

"Died?" ejaculated her ladyship, starting as a galvanic thrill of joy swept through her entire frame.

"Yes, she is no more," answered Deveril, solemnly. "The shock killed her, but while existence still remained, she revealed a secret —"

"A secret? Ah, what did she reveal? Tell me," and Lady Saxondale now surveyed Deveril with breathless suspense.

"She told me," he answered, slowly and solemnly, and fixing upon her ladyship a look of so much commiseration and earnest entreaty, as well as deprecating softness, that she was more and more bewildered what to think, "she told me that he who passes before the world as Lord Saxondale is not your offspring, but was her own son."

"She told you this?" murmured her ladyship, in a low, hoarse voice, as her countenance became deadly white. "And what else said she?"

"That your own son, — he who is indebted to you for his being, he who alone has the right to be regarded as your lawful male offspring, — that he still lives, that he carries about with him the proof of his identity — Mother!" cried Deveril, with a sudden gush of uncontrollable feelings, "your son kneels at your feet!"

He sank upon his knees as he thus spoke, and Lady Saxondale, with a wild start, but a subdued shriek, fell back

in her chair, a prey to feelings which it would be impossible to describe. The next moment, however, she exclaimed, "But the proof! the proof!"

"It is here," answered Deveril, indicating the place where the mark was upon his shoulder, close up by his neck. "A strawberry, scarcely the size of sixpence —"

"Ah!" ejaculated her ladyship, and a faintness came over her. It seemed as if a tremendous consternation had suddenly fastened itself upon her soul.

"Mother," murmured Deveril, "will you not speak to me as your son?"

"My son!" she exclaimed, springing up from her seat. "What else did the woman tell you?"

"She said no more; she gave nought beyond those simple revealings, yet revealings so astounding to my ears."

"And she furnished no other proofs? She named no one else?" demanded her ladyship, with impetuous vehemence.

"None! none!" responded Deveril, immensely excited.

"And she is dead?"

"She is dead."

"But who heard those confessions? Speak, tell me everything," and there was the swiftness of the hurricane in her ladyship's language, and all its excitement in her manner.

"The Marquis of Eagledean and Angela, — she who had until that moment thought herself to be my sister, and was so regarded by me."

"Oh, then," cried Lady Saxondale, with bitterness, "the marquis, who is my sworn enemy, has sent you hither to demand your rights."

"By Heaven, no!" exclaimed Deveril, now springing up from his knees. "Think you that I am capable of exposing you to the world?"

"If you mean to spare me," said Lady Saxondale, "come to my arms, my dearest son!"

Deveril threw himself upon his mother's bosom, and embraced her with all the joyous, gushing, enthusiastic fervour of his noble and affectionate nature. The tears which streamed from his eyes bedewed her cheeks, and he sobbed audibly, exclaiming, in broken sentences, "Oh, my mother, you do not disown me, you do not discard me, you acknowledge me! It is all I require!"

"Sit down by me," she said, having the appearance of

being deeply affected. "Sit down by me, and tell me how you purpose to behave toward me, what you demand, what you expect me to do."

"I came only to demand of you a parent's recognition of her child," responded Deveril. "You have given it, and I have no more to ask."

"And is it possible," she said, a thrill of ecstatic joy once more sweeping through her, and animating her countenance with such a light that it might well be mistaken by her son for the glow of maternal joy and pleasure in having him at length restored to her, "and is it possible that you will consent to remain in obscurity? Is it possible that the Marquis of Eagledean will not urge you to enforce your claims?"

"The Marquis of Eagledean is a generous-hearted man," interrupted Deveril, "and he has yielded to my persuasion, he has consented that I shall follow my own inclinations. Oh, my dearest mother, I feel too grateful that you have received me to your arms to think for a moment of injuring a single hair of your head. No, not for worlds would I do it. It is hard, no doubt, that I should behold another usurping my place, but that is preferable to the exposure which must ensue if I assert my claims, and which would involve you in ruin."

"Do I indeed hear aright?" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, almost wild with joy. "In the same moment that I embrace a son, do I receive from his lips the most affectionate assurances!"

"I call Heaven to witness the sincerity of what I say," cried Deveril. "No, no, much as my soul may shrink from the bare idea of living privy to an imposture, yet is it better so than to involve you in disgrace. I envy not my supplanter the proud title which he wears and the riches which must be his. My views are modest, my aspirations humble. I have more than sufficient for my wants. I am to become the husband of a charming creature whom I love, and in all this will my happiness consist. To plunge you into disgrace and ruin, in order that I myself should assume a lofty rank and become possessed of vast estates, would only constitute for me a gilded wretchedness, in the midst of which I should pine and languish away. Suffer me sometimes to see you, suffer me occasionally, when the eye of Heaven is alone upon us, to embrace you as my mother, and I shall ask no more."

"Dearest boy!" murmured Lady Saxondale, flinging her arms about his neck. "Instead of being grieved at the revelation of that woman's secret, I am rejoiced at it, since it has given so dutiful, affectionate, and loving a son to my arms. But are you sure there will not come a moment when you will repent of this forbearance, when you will long to become possessed of your own?"

"No, never! never!" ejaculated Deveril energetically. "I would not, I could not build up the fabric of my own worldly prosperity upon your ruin and disgrace."

"Say my death," added Lady Saxondale, emphatically, "for I could not possibly survive exposure. But tell me all the incidents of your past life, tell me everything. You must be aware that I have now the deepest interest in whatsoever concerns you."

Our hero thereupon proceeded to narrate to his mother that history which he detailed to Lady Florina Staunton, and which has been given at greater length in earlier chapters of this narrative. He told her how he had been brought up by the wandering players, how he had been taught to regard them as his parents, and how he had looked upon Angela as his sister. He described how she whom he had believed to be his mother perished prematurely, how Mr. Deveril took him and Angela to Italy, how he died there, and how on his death-bed he uttered that incomplete sentence which had subsequently led to a search for the manager Thompson. Then he described how the Marquis of Eagledean, under the name of Mr. Gunthorpe, had proved so kind a friend to himself and Angela, how he was engaged to be married to Lady Florina, and how Angela was the betrothed of Francis Paton.

Lady Saxondale listened with the deepest interest, and throughout the narrative she frequently bestowed upon her son caressing indications of commiseration and sympathy. But when he had terminated, not one syllable of explanation did she volunteer on her own side, not a word to clear up those mysteries which Madge Somers had by her death left still unrevealed. Not the slightest detail did she give of the circumstances under which she had procured possession of that woman's child, to pass it off as her own and frustrate the hopes and aims of Ralph Farefield. Not a whisper did she breathe to account how it was that the supposititious

individual should bear upon the neck a mark precisely similar to that which her real offspring himself bore. Nor did William Deveril consider it at the moment to be at all strange that Lady Saxondale should thus continue so closely reserved, so extremely guarded, on these points. His mind was too full of a variety of conflicting emotions to enable him to settle his mental gaze, from the midst of that excitement, on any one particular subject. She had embraced him as her son, she had treated him with sympathy, she lavished upon him the evidences of maternal affection, and he claimed no more at her hands.

“ You must leave me now, dearest boy,” she at length said, “ or those who are in the house will consider it singular that your visit lasts so long. Come to me again when you choose, and I will always contrive to see you alone, that I may fold you in my arms. But do not write to me, on any consideration. Letters may miscarry — ”

“ Mother,” interrupted Deveril, “ rest assured that I will do nothing to compromise you.”

“ Dearest boy!” she murmured, as she once more strained him in her arms and in a few instants he took his departure.

The door closed behind him, and then Lady Saxondale’s countenance became suddenly radiant with triumphant satisfaction. But it is necessary that we should afford our readers some little insight into the feelings and the motives which inspired her ladyship throughout the preceding interview, inasmuch as there was indeed but little sincerity in her demeanour toward him whom she had thus discovered to be her own real and lawful offspring. When the announcement of this fact was so suddenly made to her, and her son fell upon his knees at her feet, she was stricken with the wildest terror lest the next phase in the startling drama should be the fullest exposure of the tremendous cheat which she had palmed upon society; but in an instant it occurred to her that if her salvation were possible, it could only be by means of a hypocritical cajolery, and therefore was it that she strained her son to her bosom. The discourse which ensued was rapid, and each successive sentence spoken by our hero was full of hope and encouragement for that vile, bad woman. She learned that Madge Somers was dead, and that she had revealed nothing beyond the bare fact of the fraud itself in respect to her own son who passed as

Edmund Saxondale, but who was really the supplanter of him who was known to the world as William Deveril. Moreover, her ladyship received the welcome intelligence that the stupendous secret was to be kept, that nothing was to be made known, that the lips of Angela and the Marquis of Eagledean were sealed, and that William himself preferred his comparative obscurity to the attainment of rank and riches by the ruin of his mother. It was not, therefore, difficult for Lady Saxondale to bring herself to lavish caresses upon our hero, to press him to her bosom, to acknowledge him as her offspring, to welcome him as her son, to speak kindly and to look tenderly.

But her heart was in reality unmoved toward him. Those maternal yearnings which are so natural on the part of woman, and almost so invariable, were in this instance stifled, subdued, and crushed beneath the weight of selfish considerations. Had he proclaimed an intention of demanding his rights and appealing to the tribunals, she would have ignored him as her son, she would have repudiated his claim to be considered her offspring, she would have dared him to the proof, and she would have risked everything in the desperate struggle of one last fight for the maintenance of all that she had committed so many crimes to consolidate. But he had acted otherwise, her conduct was shaped accordingly, and when he went forth from her presence, she felt herself in reality more safe and secure than for many months past she had been. No wonder, therefore, that a smile of satisfaction and exulting triumph appeared upon her features, for in this brief interview she had comprehended all that was grand, noble, and magnanimous on the part of her son, and she felt confident that whatsoever he had promised he would faithfully perform.

The glance which she threw over her present position was in every way reassuring and comforting for the bad heart of this unscrupulous lady. Madge Somers was dead, and she need trouble herself concerning that woman no longer. Lord Harold Staunton, being irreconcilably at variance with his uncle the Marquis of Eagledean, was altogether dependent upon her, and therefore in her power. She needed not his services to forward her aims, and she could consequently dictate to him her own terms. In this respect her resolution was taken: she would retain him as her paramour, for having

become excluded from the society in which she was once wont to move, she did not intend to stand upon any scruples in the gratification of her passions. Over Edmund her dominion was likewise completely established; the crime which he had committed and the vices to which he was addicted rendered him pliant and ductile in her hands. She had no further fear of the Marquis of Eagledean's animosity on account of past occurrences; her son would prove her friend in that quarter. As to Doctor Ferney, she flattered herself that a little cajolery or the simulation of intensest anguish would at any time override his scruples and prove more potent than his qualms of conscience. Thus altogether, as she contemplated her present position, Lady Saxondale felt satisfied, elate, and triumphant.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE COUNT AND COUNTESS OF TOLEDO

UPWARDS of eight months had elapsed from the date of those incidents which we have been relating, and it was now the autumn of 1845. A glorious autumn it was, too, but nowhere more glowing or richer in nature's produce of fruits and flowers than in the southern districts of France.

In the neighbourhood of a beautiful little village, on the French side of the Eastern Pyrenees, a delightful cottage residence was situated in the midst of a spacious and well-kept garden. There were likewise pleasure-grounds and shrubberies, an orchard, and a piece of water, on which the swans floated in graceful stateliness. In the stables attached to this dwelling there were three or four horses, and in the coach-house a close carriage and an elegant phaeton. The occupants of this charming villa were a gentleman and lady, two male domestics, and two females. The house and premises had been to let for some time until within about a couple of months of the period of which we are now writing, when they were suddenly taken by the Count and Countess of Toledo, the gentleman and lady already alluded to. They arrived one evening with a couple of attendants, one male and one female, in a post-chaise from a northerly direction, it was believed from Paris, and they halted for a day or two at the village inn. During their walks in the neighbourhood they perceived the villa residence so charmingly situated in the midst of its grounds, and taking a fancy to the spot, they decided upon settling there, at least for awhile. The house was to be let furnished, and belonged to the old notary of the village. A bargain was soon struck. The Count de Toledo needed to give no references, for he had something much better in the shape of a well-filled purse, and hiring the house

and premises for a year certain, he paid the entire rent in advance.

It was under auspices which thus seemed particularly favourable in the eyes of the villagers that the count and countess took possession of the cottage. Their domestic establishment was increased by the hire of two more servants, one male and the other female, from the village, and at some adjacent town the count purchased the horses and carriages. They lived in good style, paid their bills regularly, and were therefore well spoken of throughout the neighbourhood. They were speedily visited by the few good families resident in that district, and thus seemed to have just as much society as could be wanted by persons for whom a somewhat retired and secluded mode of life evidently possessed the greatest charm.

The Count de Toledo was, as his title implies, a Spaniard, and his age appeared to be about seven or eight and twenty. He was a fine man, but of features too coarse to be styled actually handsome, and there was a certain roughness in his manner, as well as in his appearance, which, though neither positively rude nor uncouth, yet showed a deficiency of that polish which is to be acquired in the drawing-rooms of the fashionable world. But it was understood that he had served in the Spanish army, and for several years had passed his time in camps or barracks, during the civil wars between the Christinos and the Carlists. It was therefore supposed that this partial roughness of manner which characterized him had been derived from his military life; and as his conversation was interesting, varied, and full of anecdotes, — moreover, as he was proficient in all manly sports, was exceedingly hospitable in his entertainment of the few friends who visited at the cottage, and was liberal in his dealings with the village tradesmen, — living also in good style, though in that comparative seclusion, — he soon became a favourite with all who knew him. His person, if not handsome, was of a fine, manly appearance; his dark hair, singularly luxuriant, curled naturally, his large black eyes were full of fire, and he had a magnificent set of teeth. His form was well set, muscular, and athletic, powerful without being ungainly. He was a superb horseman, and managed his spirited steed with the utmost skill and expertness. But it was said that he was vain and conceited, inasmuch as he

studied a certain affectation in his dress, as if he were fond of the display of a varied and extensive wardrobe, some of his garments being of those *outré* fashions which at that time had begun to be prevalent in the French capital.

The Countess de Toledo was an English lady, and remarkably handsome. Indeed, not to make any unnecessary mystery upon this point, we may as well at once state that she was an old acquaintance of the reader's, being none other than Juliana, Lady Saxondale's elder daughter. After her adventures with the Viscount de Chateauneuf, she had precipitately left the Durands' villa, in the manner described in an earlier chapter, and retiring to some remote and obscure French town, had there lived in seclusion, as well as under a feigned name, until the time arrived when she was to become a mother. The child perished at its birth; and when perfectly convalescent, Juliana returned to Paris. She had previously ascertained that her sister and the Marquis of Villebelle, neither of whom she had any inclination to meet, were then dwelling in Naples, and she had also learned that the Viscount and Viscountess de Chateauneuf were absent on some tour whence they were not expected to return for several months. She was therefore under no apprehension of encountering in the capital any persons whom she would rather not meet, and taking handsome apartments, she looked about her for the purpose of entrapping either a wealthy husband or a paramour.

Juliana had determined not to revisit England. She had not a sufficiency of brazen effrontery to hold her head erect and look the world in the face where her shame was well known, — as her mother had done. With Lady Saxondale she had occasionally corresponded. That very letter which she received when the reader was first introduced to her at the Durands' villa was from her ladyship, and it made her acquainted with the omnipotent sway which Edmund's wife had obtained over him, as well as of the mother's determination to consign him to a madhouse. Subsequent correspondence from the same quarter informed Juliana of Adelaide's death in Lincolnshire, but the young lady did not suspect that it was a foul murder instead of an accident. In her own letters to her mother, she mentioned nothing of her amour with the Viscount de Chateauneuf, but she gave due notice of her several changes of abode, of the death of her

child, and of her removal to Paris again. Lady Saxondale liked her daughter too little to be very pressing in her letters that she should return to England. On the contrary, she wrote her approval of Juliana's resolve to remain abroad, and was by no means niggard in remitting funds as often as they were asked for.

It was in Paris, on her return thither after her confinement, that Juliana fell in with the Count de Toledo, who was living in grand style at one of the most fashionable hotels. At first she considered him somewhat repulsive in his looks and uncouth in his manners, and no wonder, when she contrasted him with the delicate beauty of Francis Paton and the exquisite gentility of the Viscount de Chateaufort. But as their acquaintance improved, the first feelings of aversion rapidly wore off. The fine eyes and splendid teeth of the Count de Toledo were no inconsiderable saving clauses in his favour; he was good-humoured and entertaining, liberal and frank-hearted, and Juliana saw that the conquest would be a much more easy one than that of a nobleman or gentleman of a greater drawing-room refinement. Besides, the count in due course began to pay his addresses with an evidently honourable intention, and a marriage with a Spanish nobleman who seemed possessed of ample wealth was a chance by no means to be discarded by a young lady in so false a position as Juliana Fairfield.

When she perceived that the Count de Toledo was serious in his intentions toward her, she prudently instituted inquiries concerning him. She had in her service a French maid of exceeding shrewdness and quick intelligence, and through her she ascertained that the count was really, as he had often informed her, a frequent visitor at the house of the Spanish ambassador in Paris. This was sufficient to guarantee his respectability, while his mode of life evidently indicated the possession of ample means. On her side, Juliana took good care to let the Spanish nobleman become aware that she was the daughter of Lady Saxondale, and the sister of the bearer of the same proud title. She devised a story of ill health in England, and the advice of physicians, as the cause for her residing abroad; and she did not forget to mention that her younger sister was married to the Marquis of Villebelle, a Frenchman of high standing and at that time minister plenipotentiary at the court of Naples.

Being thus mutually satisfied with each other, there was nothing to prevent a matrimonial alliance; and as the Count de Toledo was a rigid Catholic, the nuptials were solemnized in a twofold manner, first in a French church, and immediately afterward in the chapel of the English Embassy. It had been arranged that after the ceremonies the count was to bear his bride into Spain, where they were to take up their abode on his ancestral estates in the principality of Catalonia. They quitted Paris in a post-chaise, the countess attended by her maid, the count by a valet who had been a considerable time in his service. But during the journey southward they saw in the newspapers that there had been one of those sudden changes of ministry which were of such frequent occurrence in Spain, and the count was overwhelmed with affliction. It was some time before Juliana could obtain from him the revelation of the cause of that sorrow which had thus so abruptly seized upon him. At length, however, by dint of caresses and entreaties, she gleaned the following explanations:

He had originally been an officer in the queen's service, but as his sympathies were always in favour of Don Carlos, he had passed over with a considerable portion of his regiment to that prince's side. For this action he had been excluded from the amnesty which took place at the termination of the civil war; but he was given to understand, after a little while, that he might in all safety return to his estates, which had not been confiscated. This circumstance of the non-confiscation of his property, together with the secret intelligence forwarded to him that he might go back to his ancestral mansion, was to be ascribed to the fact that he possessed a staunch friend in one of the ministers then in power, — though this friendship had been unavailingly exercised toward obtaining the inclusion of the count's name in the amnesty. The count did return to his estates, where for some period he lived unmolested. He then went to Paris, and fell in with Juliana, whom he married. Several successive ministries had in the meantime held the reins of power, and no measure was adopted toward his own personal molestation or the seizure of his domains. He had therefore considered himself perfectly secure, and altogether justified in espousing her who had captivated his heart. But now this sudden overthrow of the last ministry had brought into office his most

implacable enemy, at whose hands everything was to be dreaded; and hence the grief with which he was overwhelmed on reading the intelligence in the newspapers.

Such was the narrative of explanations which the Count de Toledo gave Juliana, and she was naturally much chagrined at a circumstance which threatened to render her husband a proscribed exile from his country. Besides, the count had represented his Catalan mansion and his surrounding estates in such glowing colours that the bride was naturally desirous to be introduced to the palatial residence and the wide domains of which she had become the mistress, and therefore her disappointment and her affliction were all the more bitter. But there was something consolatory in the statements which her husband, on calmer deliberation, was enabled to make. He fortunately had still a very considerable supply of ready money at his command. He knew also that the intendant of his domains had ample funds in hand, and was a strictly honourable man, so that it would only be needful to communicate with him in order to obtain the prompt handing over of these immediately available resources. Juliana was thus enabled to take a fairer view of their prospects than at the first glance they seemed to present, and as the journey was continued southward, she deliberated with her husband upon the course to be adopted. He suggested that they should push on to the very verge of the Pyrenees, and that their honeymoon should be passed in some quiet retreat within the French frontier, whence they might not only watch the progress of affairs in Spain, but the count might also communicate with his intendant in Catalonia. The proposition was agreeable to Juliana, who, if compelled to remain in France at all, much preferred a comparative seclusion, where there was all the less probability of her husband hearing anything to her disadvantage; for, as the reader may suppose, she had taken good care not to inform him that she had already been the mistress of two paramours, and had likewise been a mother. They reached the little village alluded to in the opening of this chapter. The picturesque cottage, with its attached grounds, at once appeared to them a suitable residence, and as the notary to whom it belonged would not let it for a shorter term than a year, a man of the count's resources was not likely to hesitate at the arrangement. On the contrary, as he expressed him-

self to Juliana, he would only be too glad to sacrifice some little rent by being enabled to return into Spain and bear his bride to his ancestral home at an earlier period than the term for which they hired the villa residence.

The Countess of Toledo did not love her husband in the proper meaning of the term; hers was a heart totally unfitted for a pure and virtuous affection. Whatsoever feeling she experienced at all akin to love was one of the sense and not of the sentiment. It was intertwined with the gross cravings of her temperament, and the attachment which she bore for the count was precisely the same which in her licentiousness she would have bestowed upon a paramour. Her feeling for Francis Paton had been of the same character, but more furious and frenetic in its devouring regards, because he was the first by whom her sensuousness was gratified. The Viscount de Chateauneuf she had loved much less, because her designs in respect to him were based upon a worldly-minded selfishness, and when these were disappointed, she could as readily hate and detest as ever she had liked him. The Count de Toledo was the object of her sensuous regards; she was also the more pleased with him the better she knew him on account of his good-nature and the manliness of his spirit, which qualities invariably secure the esteem of every kind and class of women. But, on the other hand, he was much attached to her. It is certain that he had espoused her not with the idea that she possessed any pecuniary means of importance, because she had not deceived him on that point; nor, indeed, when estimating their immediate resources, had he for a single instant taken into calculation or made the slightest allusion to any funds which she might in case of emergency obtain from her mother. But he liked her for herself alone. She was remarkably handsome. Since her confinement her charms had expanded into a richer exuberance than even that which they before possessed, and being a creature of luxurious temperament, she was well calculated to please the fervid Spaniard. There was something, too, in the polish of her manners and the easy elegance of her deportment which might be supposed to exercise no ordinary influence upon the rougher nature of her husband. She spoke French fluently: this was the language in which they were accustomed to converse, and, being intelligent as well as accomplished, Juliana could render her

discourse sparkling, winning, or fascinating, according to her purpose or her humour. Moreover, the count was proud of his handsome English wife, and a husband's pride of the object of his choice is in itself a degree of admiration which cannot be inseparable from love.

The first two months of their residence near the little French village was happy enough, for, as we have before observed, they had just sufficient society to prevent the time from hanging heavily on their hands, and for preventing their mode of existence from appearing monotonous. Juliana rode well on horseback, and she liked to accompany her husband amidst the beautiful scenery of the neighbourhood where they dwelt. They drove out, too, in the phaeton, and in their close carriage they visited occasionally of an evening the few families with whom they had become acquainted. Juliana had written to her mother to mention her marriage, and Lady Saxondale was but too glad to have thus got rid of a daughter whom for some time past she had ceased to love, but toward whom she had been compelled to act with a certain degree of apparent kindness, inasmuch as Juliana was acquainted with the secret of the tremendous imposture in respect to Edmund.

It was the month of September when we introduced our reader to the cottage where the Count and Countess of Toledo are now residing. Their somewhat extravagant mode of life — the purchase of horses and carriages, and the sumptuousness of the entertainments which they gave, and which, though few, were nevertheless costly in the extreme — had by this time absorbed the greater portion of the available funds which the count had brought with him from Paris. One day he mentioned to his wife that it would be needful to communicate with his intendant; and as no tidings had been received of any overt measure of a hostile character being adopted toward him, either in the form of proclaimed proscription or of property confiscation, he suggested that it would be as well if he were to pay a secret and stealthy visit to his estate in order to transact personally his business with his steward. Juliana was averse to this project, inasmuch as by the mere fact of her husband's proposing to repair with so much precaution to his domain, it was sufficiently evident he feared to be arrested. He, however, assured her that there was little danger of such a result, as he could rely upon

the fidelity of his dependents, but that being liable to hostile proceedings, he of course purposed to adopt the precautions he had named. She herself offered to undertake the journey and see the intendant, but he observed that it would look strange in the village if she were thus to absent herself while he remained at home. Then she proposed that his valet should be entrusted with the mission, but the count objected to place so strong a temptation as a considerable sum of money in the man's hands. Thus all her objections and her propositions were overruled, and the count himself set off on the expedition.

He remained absent for about ten days, during which interval Juliana experienced more or less uneasiness on his behalf. At the expiration of this period he returned home safe, at a late hour one night, bringing with him a certain amount of money, but by no means so large as she had been led to expect. This, however, he readily accounted for, by stating that the intendant had been compelled to lay out considerable sums on the repairs of the mansion when he first received the intelligence that it was to be gotten in good order for the reception of a mistress. In respect to his own peculiar position in a political sense, it remained unaltered either for the better or the worse, but it was still dangerous for him to think of returning openly to Spain, so long as his enemy continued a member of the ministry.

It was about this time that Juliana read in one of the French newspapers that the Marquis of Villebelle had been transferred from the Neapolitan Embassy to that of Madrid, thus receiving a promotion in the diplomatic hierarchy. It further appeared that the marquis and marchioness, accompanied by their suite, were about to proceed by sea from Naples to Spain, so as to avoid the circuitous route of an overland journey. As the count frequently assured Juliana that the present Spanish ministry could not possibly last long, and that as the next one would most probably consist of personages more friendly disposed toward himself, he might expect to be shortly enabled to return openly to his estates, she began to reflect that as they might possibly visit Madrid, where she would encounter her sister and brother-in-law, it was bad policy on her part to abstain from corresponding with them. She therefore wrote to Constance, acquainting her with her marriage, and highly eulogizing her

husband. It happened that the count was going into the village at the moment when Juliana had finished writing this letter, and he accordingly took it with him to put in the post. Days went by, they grew into weeks, and still no answer was returned. Nevertheless Juliana read in the newspapers that in the interval the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle had arrived in safety at Madrid, and were duly installed in the mansion of the French Embassy in that city. She fancied that her letter must have miscarried, for she thought that Constance was too generous-hearted to cherish any rancour on account of her precipitate flight from the Durands' villa after her affair with the Viscount de Chateauf. She accordingly wrote again, and the count, taking charge of the letter, promised to see that the postmaster was particular in consigning it to the mail-bag. Again did days and weeks go past, and still no response came. Then Juliana could arrive at no other conclusion than that her sister was mortally offended with her, and her pride prevented her from penning a third epistle.

Christmas was now drawing near, and again were the count's funds at a low ebb. Again therefore did he resolve upon paying another stealthy visit to his estates in Catalonia on the other side of the Pyrenean boundary. On this second occasion he remained absent for a fortnight, at the expiration of which time he returned safe and sound, and with a considerable sum of money. Juliana was rejoiced at the thought that her husband possessed such an honest intendant, and she more than ever longed to hasten and become the mistress of those estates which produced such ample revenues. It was on the morning after the Count de Toledo's return that they rode out together in the phaeton. On these occasions they seldom took a domestic with them, as they preferred to be left to their own unrestrained discourse. After making a considerable circuit, they were returning through the village, when a sudden ejaculation, as if of surprised recognition, reached their ears. Glancing simultaneously in the direction whence it came, they perceived a wretched-looking man, wrapped in the rags of beggary, but such tatters as he did wear indicating a denizen of the Catalan wilds on the other side of the Pyrenees.

"Ah," cried the Count de Toledo, "I know the poor man! He is a labourer of my own estate — or, rather, dearest

Juliana," he added, tenderly, "I ought to say of our estate." Then having made a gesture to the wretched object, as if to imply that he would come to his succour, the count gave the reins to his wife, requesting her to drive slowly on, and he leaped down from the vehicle.

This little incident occurred on the outskirts of the village, and was unnoticed by any of the inhabitants.

Juliana drove on in a leisurely manner, as she had been directed, and without thinking very much of the occurrence. In a few minutes she was rejoined by her husband, who, taking the reins from her hands, drove homeward. While proceeding thither he gave her to understand that the unfortunate labourer had wounded a soldier in a disturbance, and had been compelled to fly the country, adding that as he (the count) happened to have but a mere trifle of money about him at the time, he had bidden the poor man await him in the village, whither he purposed to return and give him more substantial assistance. Accordingly, on reaching the house, the count went to the strong-box, and having taken thence what he wanted, hastened back to the village.

A month passed after this incident, and one day, on a tradesman presenting the amount of his bill, the Count de Toledo bade him return in a fortnight, at which time he would be in receipt of ample funds. The man was perfectly satisfied with the assurance, and went away. But Juliana was astonished that her husband should have thus put him off, as she imagined that there must be a considerable remnant of the large sum which he had brought back on his second visit to his Spanish domain. The count assured her that somehow or another the money had melted away, adding, with a laugh, that he must make another journey across the Pyrenean boundary. As he treated the matter thus lightly, the countess thought but little more of it, save and except so far as it regarded the necessity for this third separation. The count however assured her that he incurred little or no risk, and after affectionately embracing her, he mounted his horse and took his departure.

In the evening of that very same day, Juliana was informed by her maid that a person was inquiring for the count, and would not be satisfied with the assurance of his lordship's absence unless he saw the countess herself. She, fancying that it might be some particular business which had brought

the individual thither, desired that he should be shown into the room where she was seated; but the moment he made his appearance, she at once recognized him as that same wretched-looking object who had been relieved a month back. He was not, however, now clad in the same ragged style, but was very decently apparelled in a suit of broad-cloth, which but ill became his uncouth and ungainly form. He had a dissipated look, and his aspect altogether was little prepossessing. He addressed the countess in his native Spanish tongue, of which she understood too little to comprehend him. She accordingly desired that her husband's valet, who was a Spaniard, should be sent for, and the moment the domestic entered the room, a mutual recognition took place between him and the visitor. This was of course natural enough, inasmuch as the latter had been represented as a labourer on the count's estate, and therefore could scarcely fail of being known to the valet, who had been for some years in his lordship's service. The valet drew the man away from the room, and leading him into the garden, conversed with him there for a considerable time, at the expiration of which he took his departure. Returning to the parlour, the valet informed the countess that the poor man, relying on his lordship's generosity, had called to solicit some further assistance, which he (the valet) had given to the extent of his means.

A fortnight elapsed from the date of the count's departure on this third visit to his estates, and he then reappeared at the cottage; but his left arm was in a sling, he looked pale, ill, and haggard. Juliana was at first much terrified on his account, but he hastened to assure her that, though he had sustained a somewhat serious injury, there was nothing to be profoundly alarmed at. A surgeon was at once sent for, and he substituted proper appliances for the clumsy bandages which had in the first instance been tied over the wound. Meantime the countess had gathered from her husband's lips that he had been attacked by banditti on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees, that he had defended himself successfully against them, until some shepherds, who were guarding their flocks, happened to come to his assistance, when the ruffians retreated precipitately. He had, however, sustained that injury in the arm, but he treated it lightly, inasmuch as he had frustrated the object of the predatory horde, and

retained in safety the considerable sum of money which he had brought with him from his intendant. Juliana now told him of the visit which the labourer had paid during his absence, at which the count at first appeared considerably annoyed; but when he learned that the countess was unable to comprehend him, and had transferred him over to the valet for explanations, his lordship became appeased, treating the matter more lightly, and passing away from the subject with the observation "that the fellow deserved some blame for imposing upon good-nature."

Several weeks passed. The count's wound was thoroughly healed, he no longer felt any bad effects from it; and as the spring, which is early in its visits in that genial clime, was now at hand, the rides and drives were regularly resumed amidst the delightful scenery of the neighbourhood. The garden began to put forth its richest floral beauties, and the trees, with their myriads of blossoms, gave promise of a luxuriant fruitage. The sun was now powerful for many hours during the day, but the evenings were delicious. Juliana, who had occasionally felt her mode of existence somewhat gloomy and monotonous in the winter time, was now all life and spirits once again, but she was nevertheless more or less impatient at the prolonged delay which was keeping her husband still an exile from his domain. He, however, was of such unvaried good-nature, so kind and affectionate toward her, so attentive, indeed, almost so uxoriously solicitous to anticipate her wants and administer to her enjoyments, that she had really learned to love him as much as it was possible for such a heart as hers to love at all. She did not regret the brilliant society in which she had been wont to move in her native land ere the exposure of her shame at Saxondale Castle, she cared nothing now for the idle pomps and splendours of fashionable life, but her chief longing was to play the part of a sort of feudal peeress at her husband's mansion in the midst of his wide domains. The count, comprehending what thus at times was occupying her thoughts, assured her that the present ministry could not possibly last much longer, that it had already endured for a greater period than could have been anticipated, and that its fall would no doubt prove in its results favourable to the wishes which they both so deeply entertained. Juliana made no reply to her husband's representations. In her

heart she feared that he only held out these hopes in order to appease her, but in which he himself was by no means sanguine.

It was one beautiful afternoon at the end of March that Juliana was seated by the open window of the cottage parlour, while her husband was smoking his cigar in the garden. At every turn he passed by the casement, and bent upon her a fond look, at the same time bestowing some kind word. Having finished his cigar, he approached the house for the purpose of entering, but again lingered in front of the window to make some passing remark. By one of those movements which have no particular meaning, he took off his hat as he stood near the casement, and so powerful was the glow of the sun that it made his hair, which was of a dark colour, seem absolutely light in the golden beams which poured their effulgence upon his head. Juliana was just on the point of admonishing him not to expose himself too much to the fervid heat of the unclouded sun, when she noticed that he dropped his hat with a sudden start, and as if all in an instant thrown into some degree of excitement or confusion. But as quickly recovering his self-possession, he said to his wife, "I will rejoin you, dearest, in a few moments," and then hastened away toward the farther extremity of the garden.

Juliana thought there was something singular in this proceeding, and she at once issued from the cottage. On emerging into the garden, she beheld her husband entering the orchard, in company with a man whom she recognized as that labourer who on two previous occasions had sought relief. A gloom came over her countenance. She liked not the aspect of these circumstances, and from the shade of some trees she watched her husband and that individual as they passed slowly along in the orchard. She saw them stop short, and both gesticulated violently, so that she now wondered that the man should have the impertinence to assume so threatening an attitude in the presence of the count. A suspicion that there was something more in the repeated visits of this person than she had hitherto been led to believe, entered her mind, and this gave rise to other reflections, which were by no means calculated to relieve her from anxiety.

Still she kept her eyes fixed upon her husband and his

companion, but as she suddenly beheld them separate, the man remaining where he was, and the count retracing his way rapidly toward the dwelling, she sped back thither before he had an opportunity of seeing that she had issued forth at all. Resuming her seat in the parlour, she awaited the count's entrance, composing her features as well as she was able, and wondering whether he would tell her what had taken place. He entered the cottage in a few minutes, but instead of rejoining her in the parlour, went straight up to the bedchamber where the cash-box was kept. She at once surmised that it was to procure fresh means of relief for the man who thus appeared to have such strong claims on her husband's bounty. He did not remain many moments up-stairs, and on descending, just looked into the parlour to inform his wife that he would be with her in a few minutes. He then sallied forth again, and Juliana, haunted by suspicions which grew stronger and stronger, though they were still utterly vague and indefinite, hastened up to the bedroom. The count, in his hurry, had forgotten to lock the strong-box, of which he was invariably accustomed to keep the key; and as Juliana happened at this time to know exactly what amount there ought to be in the casket, she was speedily enabled to estimate how much had just been taken thence. To her surprise and annoyance, as well as with a still strengthening suspicion, she discovered that a very formidable inroad indeed had been made upon their pecuniary resources, so that there was scarcely sufficient left to meet the tradesmen's bills that would be coming in at the end of the week. She descended again to the parlour, sadly troubled, but still utterly at a loss to conceive how it was possible that a mere labourer on her husband's estate could have obtained such a hold on his lordship as thus to extort from him so large a pecuniary succour. She now felt assured that on the occasion when the contents of the cash-box had so mysteriously diminished, necessitating at the time a repetition of the count's visit to his intendant, the assistance he had afforded the poor man must have been to a far greater amount than he had represented, and that thereby the exhaustion of their funds was to be accounted for. All these things agitated, bewildered, and perplexed the mind of Juliana, but in the midst of her troubled reflections the count entered the room. He at once, with his wonted frank-

ness, informed her that the man who was succoured on previous occasions had called again to implore further bounties.

“As you may easily suppose,” his lordship went on to say, “I was little gratified by this renewal of his importunities; but as he solemnly assured me that he had now a chance of benefiting himself permanently, if he had only a sum of ready money, I agreed to help him for the last time.”

“And to what amount did you thus assist him?” inquired Juliana, not suffering her husband to perceive that the incident had at all troubled her.

“I am afraid I have been rather foolish,” responded the nobleman, with a good-natured laugh, “for I have given the fellow a sum sufficient to make a gentleman of him.”

“But how is it possible,” asked Juliana, still with a perfectly ingenuous air, “that a poor labouring man should need such ample supplies, and that you should consent thus to minister to his wanton extravagances?”

It struck Juliana that the count eyed her strangely for a moment, with a keenness as if to penetrate into the depths of her soul, and ascertain whether she had any deeper motive than mere passing curiosity for putting these questions. She maintained her countenance perfectly. The reader knows she was a perfect mistress of dissimulation, and she did not choose to let her husband perceive that she had been smitten with any disagreeable impression, for if so, he would at once suspect that she had watched his movements. Therefore, when he saw nothing in her features to betray what was passing in her mind, he suddenly desisted from that keenness of gaze, and observed, in his wonted offhand, frank way, “The fellow belongs to a family that has been long located on my domain. Since he has been in France, he has fallen, I fear, into bad company, but he is now repentant, and purposes to lead a steady life. So I have given him this last chance, and, at all events, have bade him come into my presence no more.”

The discourse was then turned into another channel, and Juliana knew not what to think. She could not altogether banish the disagreeable impression made upon her mind, nor the vague suspicions that something was wrong, which had been excited in her bosom; but still her husband’s explanations had been given with a frankness which seemed perfectly

sincere, and, so far as she could perceive, he had not practised any deception toward her. But a circumstance which she had foreseen now happened in the course of a day or two: this was that the count informed her of his intention to undertake another journey across the Pyrenees.

"This time," she at once said, "you must permit me to accompany you. If there be dangers, I will share them."

"And it is for this very reason, dearest, that you must not accompany me," was his immediate response, accompanied by caressing manifestations of affection.

"I beseech you," persisted Juliana, "to let me go with you on the present occasion. Besides, I long to see the place which sooner or later will be our home. I have hitherto concealed, if not altogether subdued, my impatience —"

"And you must continue to do so for a short space longer," interrupted her husband. "You cannot accompany me now, my dearest wife; it would perhaps seriously compromise my safety. I expect to receive some tidings of a nature favourable to our hopes, and trust that in a very short time there will no longer be any necessity for stealthy visits to my ancestral home."

"Promise me, then, promise me faithfully," said Juliana, "that if circumstances should compel you to pay another stealthy visit, after this one, to your estates, you will suffer me to accompany you."

"I promise faithfully," responded her husband, and having embraced her, he once again took his departure on horseback, but unattended and alone.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MEETING

FOR the first few days after they had thus separated, Juliana continued much troubled in her mind. Sometimes she was dull and desponding, haunted by vague suspicions, a prey to indefinite fears; at other times she was excited, impatient, and angry, thinking that she had not acted with proper spirit in forbearing from questioning her husband further relative to the man whose frequent extortions compelled him to visit his intendant oftener than he otherwise would have done. And now, too, she began to reflect that these repeated absences might have been very well avoided if the intendant himself came periodically across the Pyrenean boundary to bring the requisite supplies, — which course, indeed, seemed much more natural on the part of that functionary rather than suffer his master to endanger his own safety by running after him. She wondered that this had not struck her before. Suspicion is terribly prolific; it engenders a thousand, and such was the case in the present instance. Juliana began to calculate that though they lived well, and even handsomely, yet their expenditure must be wretchedly insignificant in comparison with the lordly revenues produced by her husband's estates; that is to say, if they were of the magnitude which he had represented. The thought would steal into her head that in some way or another she had been deceived; but this was an idea too frightful to harbour willingly. She endeavoured to banish it altogether, but she could not. In her attempt to escape from it, she sought excitement in other ways. She paid a round of visits, she invited guests to the cottage, she rode out frequently, she took long walks. Still that idea haunted her, Yet, how could she have been deceived? Not in respect to

her husband's rank and station, for had not her maid ascertained in Paris that he was all he had represented himself? But perhaps it was in the extent of his pecuniary resources that he had misled her; or perhaps his estates were really confiscated, and he had not liked to reveal the distressing truth, so that the resources which he represented as coming from his intendant might be in reality furnished by the purse of private friendship. At all events, she resolved to lead him into the fullest explanations on his return, for now that her suspicions were once excited, she could not possibly endure a state of uncertainty and suspense.

A week had elapsed from the date of the Count de Toledo's departure on this last occasion, when one day, as Juliana was riding in the phaeton through the village, the groom driving her, she was struck with astonishment on beholding Monsieur Durand standing at the door of the inn. She liked this encounter as little as possible, inasmuch as the Durands knew full well, when she was staying at their villa at Auteuil, that she was in a way to become a mother, and they were likewise perfectly cognizant of her amour with the Viscount de Chateauneuf. If a word were breathed in the village of those circumstances, her reputation would be ruined, the tale would inevitably reach her husband's ears, and she would be dishonoured in his eyes. Monsieur Durand had at once recognized her, so that she was compelled to order the phaeton to stop. Hastily alighting, she ran forward as if to welcome him with enthusiasm, but in reality to prevent him from addressing her by the name of Madame Chesterfield (as she had been called at the villa) in the presence of the groom. She shook him by the hand, and inquired with much seeming friendship after his wife. Monsieur Durand led her into a parlour in the hostelry, and there she found Madame Durand herself. It appeared that a brother of the old gentleman's had recently died at Barcelona, and as he had no children, Monsieur Durand was his heir. He had been established for a long series of years as a merchant in the Catalan capital, and had amassed a considerable fortune. On the strength of this rich heritage, Monsieur and Madame Durand were travelling post from Paris, and had diverged several miles from their more direct route in order to pay a flying visit to some distant relations who dwelt in those parts. On their name being mentioned,

Juliana discovered, much to her apprehension and annoyance, that they were one of the families whom she was accustomed to visit.

She now had to give explanations on her own side, and these were to a certain extent humiliating enough. She was obliged to confess that the name of Chesterfield was a feigned one, that the story of a husband in India was altogether an invention, that she had never been married at the time she was at the Durands' villa, and that she was in reality the daughter of an English peeress named Saxondale. She went on to inform the Durands that she was now married to the Count de Toledo, a Spanish nobleman who for political reasons was unable to enter Spain; and that for some time past they had resided in the neighbourhood of that village. She begged and implored Monsieur and Madame Durand to save her reputation; and as we have before stated that this worthy couple were by no means overnice in their notions of female morality, they readily promised to follow her injunctions. She lavished upon them all possible proofs of gratitude and friendship, and insisted that they should dine with her; but they had just partaken of luncheon at the hotel, and they were in haste to continue their journey. Indeed, their post-chaise was now in readiness, and they took their leave of the Countess de Toledo, to pursue their way, their purpose being to enter Spain by way of Perpignan at the eastern extremity of the Pyrenees.

Juliana was much relieved when she saw them take their departure, but she now more than ever longed to quit France altogether, and fix her abode on her husband's domain; for she calculated that in the depths of Catalonia there was far less chance of incurring such disagreeable encounters as this one than on the northern side of the Pyrenees. She therefore looked anxiously forward for the count's return, not merely that she might have the fullest explanations with him on the various points which troubled her, but likewise because he had given her to understand he expected some favourable intelligence with regard to his own political position, on the occasion of this visit into Spain. Ten days more passed. The count had been absent above a fortnight, and his prolonged absence rendered Juliana more and more uneasy and restless. But now another incident occurred which requires special mention.

It was late one evening, and just as Juliana was about to retire for the night, that the sounds of an equipage dashing rapidly along the main road, which skirted the front of the garden, reached her ears. There was in this nothing extraordinary, inasmuch as it was one of the routes from Perpignan to Paris, and therefore the passage of vehicles was by no means unfrequent. But scarcely had this equipage reached the border of the grounds attached to the cottage when a tremendous crash was heard by all the inmates of the dwelling. They rushed forth; the horses were plunging, the postilions were shouting and swearing, and the vehicle itself, which was a handsome travelling-carriage, lay upset in the middle of the road. A valet and lady's-maid who had been riding in the rumble behind were precipitated from their places. Fortunately, however, they had fallen upon a bank of long grass by the roadside, and were therefore little hurt. But what was the astonishment — and for a moment what the dismay of Juliana — when, as she hurried forth from the cottage with her domestics, to render assistance, she recognized in that lady's-maid the faithful Mary-Anne, the dependent of her sister Constance.

It was a beautiful night, and the heavens were studded with stars. Scarcely therefore had Juliana reached the garden gate, when she made this recognition, as the valet, a smart Frenchman, was supporting Mary-Anne in his arms, and questioning her in broken English, as well as with much anxiety of mind, whether she were hurt. A glance from the lady's-maid to the carriage showed Juliana the form of the Marquis of Villebelle, who had just emerged from the upset vehicle, and was drawing Constance forth. Juliana hastened to make herself known to the marquis, and the next moment she was clasped fondly and fervently in the arms of her sister Constance, who had escaped without the slightest injury from the accident. As infinite as was the joy, so great was evidently the astonishment likewise of Constance in thus encountering her sister; and a rapid interchange of observations made the marquis and marchioness aware, on the one hand, that Juliana was married to the Count de Toledo, and informed Juliana herself, on the other hand, that the letters she had written to her sister had never reached their destination.

One of the axletrees of the carriage was broken, and

though it might be sufficiently repaired with a cord and a bar of wood to enable the horses to drag it into the village, the vehicle was totally unfit for the reception of the travellers. Juliana therefore begged that the marquis and her sister would take up their quarters at the cottage, and this invitation was gladly accepted by the fond and kind-hearted Constance, while the marquis had no objection to offer; for the intelligence that his sister-in-law was now a married woman naturally led him to believe and hope that she was at length respectably settled in life. We should here observe that when Mary-Anne perceived a lady folded in the arms of the marchioness, and in that lady quickly recognized Juliana, she was herself seized with astonishment. Juliana lost no time in saying something kind to her sister's faithful dependent, who was still more surprised on being informed of the lady's marriage. The whole scene was therefore one of considerable excitement, and of no mean interest for several of the persons who figured in it.

The marquis directed that the valet and the maid should follow the carriage to the village inn, and take up their quarters there, for a glance at the cottage showed him that its dimensions would not afford accommodation for too large a company. He and the marchioness then followed Juliana into the dwelling, and while the table was being spread with materials for supper, the two sisters again embraced each other. Indeed, Constance was overjoyed at this unexpected but most welcome meeting with one on whose account she had suffered much anxiety for a long time past, and infinite was her pleasure to learn that Juliana had made a match of which she spoke with so much pride and satisfaction. But where was her husband? In the first excitement of the encounter, Juliana had forgotten to inform her sister and brother-in-law that the Count de Toledo was absent on a visit to his estates in Catalonia. One explanation led on to another, and Juliana gave a description of the political position of her husband. The Marquis of Villebelle listened with something more than attention. His countenance gradually wore a singular aspect, and in an involuntary manner, he exclaimed, "It is remarkable that, much as I know of Spain and Spanish affairs, I never heard till now, Juliana, of the nobleman whom you have espoused."

Juliana gazed with an uncontrollable sensation of affright

and horrified dismay upon her brother-in-law as he gave utterance to those words. All her suspicions, hitherto so vague and indefinite, flamed up again in her mind, but with a brighter intelligence, so that she was smitten with the awful thought that, after all, her husband was an impostor. Constance caught her by the hand, exclaiming, "Juliana dearest, what in Heaven's name is the matter? I am sure Etienne did not purpose to wound your feelings."

"Far, very far from it," said the marquis, quickly. "It is not a reason that there should be no such nobleman because I have never heard of him. I may have even heard of him, and yet have forgotten it. My words were inconsiderate and unguarded. Titles are most plentiful in Spain, and it is impossible for any one man's head to retain the recollection of them all. Pray pardon me, Juliana."

"Say no more upon the subject," interrupted his sister-in-law, considerably relieved by all that he had just said, and angry with herself that she should so suddenly have yielded to those wild fears and terrific apprehensions.

"I have an adventure to relate to you, Juliana," said Constance, thus seeking to turn the conversation into another channel. "Yes, it was an adventure quite romantic in its way, I can assure you, though by no means agreeable, for many reasons. The fright and the loss —"

"What, then, was this adventure?" inquired Juliana, whose interest and curiosity were now excited by her sister's words.

"An adventure with banditti," resumed Constance. "It happened yesterday, in the broad daylight. We were travelling through the northeastern part of Catalonia, and in a wild, desolate district, when all of a sudden the carriage was surrounded by at least a dozen men, armed to the teeth."

"Heavens, what an adventure!" ejaculated Juliana, shuddering with affright.

"But I can assure you," said the marquis, "that your sister bore herself with the utmost fortitude. As you may suppose, resistance was entirely vain, as it would also have been perilous against such a horde of desperadoes. The consequence was that as they experienced no opposition, they behaved courteously enough."

"You have forgotten one little circumstance, dear Etienne," said Constance, "and you are not exactly representing

the facts as they positively occurred. For, the moment the carriage was stopped, you seized your pistols, and gave the men to understand that you would use them. But I besought you not to endanger your life thus madly."

"And I was compelled to submit," added the marquis, smiling. "Well, perhaps it was all for the best, for, as I have said, resistance would indeed have proved utterly vain. The captain of the band — who was certainly the most decent fellow for a bandit that ever figured otherwise than on a stage in a melodrama — came up to the carriage window, and in very excellent French assured us that not the slightest violence should be offered us if we only remained quiet. He even went so far as to say that our articles of jewelry should be left us, and that our domestics should not be despoiled at all, if we only gave up whatsoever ready money we had in our possession. Now, it unfortunately happened that there was a casket in the carriage, containing about twenty thousand francs in gold and silver —"

"Eight hundred pounds sterling," observed Constance, "and the whole of this sum did the brigands self-appropriate, leaving us, however, the little we happened to have in our purses, and faithfully fulfilling their pledge in respect to our jewelry, as well as the property of the servants. They did not even ransack our trunks and boxes, but appeared perfectly well content with the rich booty in the shape of specie that fell into their hands."

"And well they might be!" ejaculated the marquis. "But I rather think that their great forbearance was not altogether owing to good feeling on their part, but may be also ascribed to terror lest one of the flying columns which the captain-general of Catalonia has sent out to sweep the principality of the banditti who infest it should have suddenly appeared upon the spot. Hence the expeditious mode with which the scoundrels transacted their business. They decamped with their booty, and when we reached the next village, we were informed that there was little doubt our plunderers were a gang which for some years have carried on their proceedings with comparative impunity, and seem to defy all the vigilance of the authorities. Their commander is known as Ramon de Collantes, and though an immense sum is set upon his head, yet his comrades are evidently too faithful to betray him."

“This was indeed a romantic but a frightful adventure,” exclaimed Juliana, “and I congratulate you both upon having passed through it on terms so comparatively cheap.”

The conversation was continued until a late hour, when the marquis and Constance were conducted to the chamber prepared for their reception, and Juliana retired to her own. She could not, however, immediately close her eyes in sleep. The remarks which had fallen from the lips of her brother-in-law in respect to her husband continued to haunt her; and though she endeavoured to tranquillize herself herself with a review of the observations which he had subsequently made to qualify the effect of the first, she could not shake off a certain uneasy feeling. When slumber at length visited her, that feeling still pursued her and raised up all kinds of images of terror to people her dreams. The night which she thus passed was restless, troubled, and disturbed, and when she awoke in the morning, it was with an aching head and careworn looks.

The Marquis of Villebelle rose at a somewhat early hour, and descended to walk in the garden before breakfast. Juliana saw him from the window of her own bedchamber, thus sauntering along the gravel walks and amusing himself with the contemplation of the floral beauties profusely scattered about. She caught herself sighing as she envied the lot of her sister, who was married to a nobleman that lay under no political ban, who in a very short time had pushed himself up, by his own merits and talents, from a complete obscurity to a high diplomatic position, and whose personal appearance was infinitely superior to that of her own husband, the Count de Toledo.

While she was thus giving way to her reflections, and performing her toilet, she heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs approaching along the road; and again hastening to the window, she in a few moments perceived that it was her husband. She waved her kerchief in token of welcome, and he answered the salutation in a similar manner. At that instant she caught sight of Villebelle, who was in the front garden, and she noticed that he flung rapid glances from the horseman who had stopped at the gate up to the window where she was thus waving her kerchief. Then the marquis advanced hurriedly toward that gate, just as the Count de Toledo alighted; and it struck Juliana, as

well as she could judge from the distance of about twenty yards, that there was a startling recognition between her brother-in-law and her husband. Was it possible they had met before, and that the marquis could have forgotten the count's name, or had the count borne some other denomination when they had thus previously encountered each other? Juliana remained at the window gazing forth; the marquis and her husband stood conversing for a few moments, and while the groom hastened forth to take charge of the horse, they walked away together along one of the shady avenues in the garden. Assuredly, thought Juliana to herself, they must have met before, and now they were probably conversing on past occurrences familiar to them both. But she nevertheless considered it strange and unkind that her husband did not at once come up to embrace her.

In a few more minutes the marquis and the count emerged from the shady avenue, and approached the cottage. They entered together. Juliana heard them both ascend the stairs; the marquis passed into the chamber which himself and Constance had occupied, the count entering that where Juliana was dressing. He clasped her in his arms, and seemed more fervid than ever in the caresses which he bestowed upon her. When these endearments were over, and she had leisure to contemplate him, she was struck with his pallid and careworn looks; but he hastened to assure her that he had ridden throughout the whole of the past night, in order to rejoin her again as soon as possible. Then he renewed his caresses, and appeared so happy in their reunion that she could not at once begin to question him on those various points concerning which she had made up her mind to solicit the most candid as well as the completest explanations.

“And so accident has thrown your brother-in-law and sister in your way?” said the count. “The marquis and I have met before. It was some time back, in my father's lifetime, and ere I succeeded to my title.”

This explanation, given in her husband's wonted offhand manner, produced an indescribable relief in Juliana's mind. She saw at once that he was all he had represented himself to be, or else Villebelle could not ere now have recognized him as such; for that he had done so she naturally inferred from the fact of their walking and conversing together,

and, moreover, her husband would not give her an assurance which the marquis could presently disprove.

"By the bye," continued the count, "your brother-in-law has been telling me of his adventure in Catalonia."

"Ah," ejaculated Juliana, as a recollection struck her, "perhaps it was the terrible Ramon de Collantes and his formidable band who waylaid you on that occasion when you were wounded?"

"Very probable," answered the count. "But hasten and finish your toilet, dearest Juliana, for the marquis and marchioness purpose to take their leave immediately after breakfast. I myself, to speak candidly, am so exhausted with my night's travel that I shall lie down and take a little repose. If I see not his lordship again ere his departure, pray make my best excuses."

Juliana descended to the parlour where the breakfast-table was spread, and where she found the marquis and marchioness awaiting her presence. Constance at once threw herself into her sister's arms, and Juliana was for a moment surprised at the effusion of grief which convulsed the marchioness. She wept and sobbed bitterly, but Juliana thought to herself that it was quite a natural outpouring of Constance's affectionate disposition at the idea of so speedy a separation after being so brief a space together. Presently the marchioness grew more composed, but she looked very pale, and even ill, and seemed much desponding. The marquis himself had a certain air of restraint which he endeavoured to shake off, but he could not. Juliana's keen glance and wide experience of human nature convinced her that there was something on his mind, and now she likewise coupled the grief of Constance with this suspicion. She herself grew restless and uneasy, and there was a sort of vague terror hanging upon her soul.

"You knew my husband before?" she said to the marquis; and the very words she thus uttered seemed to her imagination to connect themselves with all the undefined apprehensions that were uppermost in her thoughts.

"Yes, we have met before," responded the marquis.

"And he was not then the Count of Toledo?" said Juliana.

"He was not then the Count of Toledo," answered the marquis, repeating her words in a manner which struck her

as still more singular than even his constrained air had previously done.

“There is something strange about you, Etienne,” she exclaimed, unable to control her feelings, “and something strange about you likewise, Constance.”

“Constance,” the marquis hastened to observe, “is afflicted at the idea of parting from you so soon.”

Juliana gazed very hard at her sister to see if the looks of the latter corroborated this assertion, and the marchioness murmured, “Yes, dearest Juliana, believe me, oh, believe me, it well-nigh breaks my heart to separate from you thus.”

“My husband,” Juliana went on to observe, “regrets that excessive fatigue should have so absolutely prostrated him as to prevent him doing the honours of the breakfast-table.” But as she thus delivered herself of the excuse with which she had been charged, it struck her that the very apology itself was insufficient to account for the absence of the count from his proper place when hospitality was to be shown to those who had become connected with him by marriage, for she now thought that he might have borne up at least another hour against his sense of weariness, however excessive it might be.

“Now, dearest Constance,” said the marquis, “hasten and get ready to depart. The carriage is doubtless repaired by this time, and we must pursue our journey toward Paris without delay.”

“But, ah,” ejaculated Juliana, as a sudden recollection struck her, “you are without funds — you were plundered of them. Doubtless the count has ample resources with him. I will procure you a supply.”

Constance hurried from the room, but ere the door closed behind her, Juliana’s ear caught a half-smothered convulsing sob, while the marquis, expressing his thanks for the proposal she had just made, went on to observe, “It is not necessary to avail ourselves of your kindness, for at the first large town which we reach any banker there will cash my draft upon Paris.”

“Now, tell me, Etienne,” said Juliana, looking earnestly in her brother-in-law’s countenance, “is there anything weighing upon my sister’s mind, and weighing upon yours also? But ah, methinks I understand,” she ejaculated, with

a sudden access of bitterness in her tone, as a thought smote her brain. "You know my husband to be a man of the highest honour and the strictest probity; you know likewise that in becoming his wife I must have deceived him in respect to my own antecedents. You have recognized in him a friend of former times, and you feel shocked that he should have been thus deceived. Oh, do not deny it. I now comprehend it all. And my sister, she trembles lest the count should discover my past frailties, and that he should wreak upon me a terrible Spanish vengeance. Tell me, is it not so?"

"Juliana," responded Villebelle, addressing her in a solemn tone, "it is painful, most painful thus to refer to the past. I beseech you to dwell no longer upon it. But one word more ere we separate. If, Juliana, you should ever require the succour or the consolation of friends, rest assured that you will not apply in vain to your sister or myself. Unfortunately your husband is indeed proscribed —"

"Ah, and his estates are all confiscated?" ejaculated Juliana. "I have feared so for some time past, but through kindness he has forborne from revealing the sad, sad truth."

"Believe me, Juliana," continued the marquis, gravely and earnestly, "your husband is proscribed beyond all hope of ever having the ban lifted from off his head. Every time that he crosses the Pyrenean frontier he risks his life, — I am compelled to speak plainly, — he incurs the chance of being shot summarily, or dragged ignominiously up to the scaffold's platform."

"Good heavens!" cried Juliana, clasping her hands in despair, "are his persecutors so rancorous? But," she ejaculated, catching at the slightest gleam of hope, "may not a change of ministry —"

"No change of ministry can benefit him," responded Villebelle. "It is my duty, painful though it be, to assure you that he is proscribed beyond redemption. He has solemnly promised me, during the few minutes we ere now conversed together, that he will remain altogether in France. If you wish to preserve your husband to yourself, you will add the weight of your influence to induce him to keep this pledge. I understand he has brought ample funds away with him from Catalonia on this occasion —"

“Doubtless from a friendly source?” ejaculated Juliana, inquiringly.

“Yes, from a source where reimbursement never will be demanded,” responded Villebelle. “But let him leave this neighbourhood. While on the Pyrenean frontier, there will ever be a temptation to induce him to cross it. Urge him, Juliana, to remove farther into the interior of France. Tell him that for the sake of his life you yourself voluntarily and cheerfully renounce every hope of accompanying him into Spain, and persuade him to turn his attention to some pursuit by which he may earn his livelihood in this country. Do you promise me to follow this advice? Do you pledge yourself to make sacrifices for the sake of him who has become your husband?”

“Is his position, then, really so hopeless?” inquired Juliana, with a sickening sensation at the heart, as all her fine dreams of enacting the feudal peeress in a castellated mansion on a Catalan domain seemed to dissipate like the mists of morning when the sun is up.

“It is hopeless,” answered Villebelle. “Painful — nay, even more, torturing to me though it is, to be thus compelled to speak such truths, every one of which must penetrate like a dagger into your heart, it is nevertheless my duty as your brother-in-law, and for your sister’s sake, to speak thus openly. Now, fail not, Juliana, to follow the counsel which I so earnestly and so disinterestedly give you.”

“I will, Etienne,” she answered, but it was almost in a dying tone; for though now utterly relieved from her first apprehensions that she had married an impostor, she yet had the frightful conviction forced upon her that her husband was a proscribed outlaw, and a pauper dependent upon the bounties of friendship.

At this moment the Marchioness of Villebelle returned to the room, and the marquis hastened to say to her, “Constance dearest, I have told Juliana all that it was agreed between you and me that I should tell her. She has faithfully pledged herself to follow my advice, and I therefore conjure you to control your own feelings as much as possible, so that the parting moments need not be unnecessarily embittered.”

Constance did her best to obey her beloved husband’s injunctions, but she could not altogether subdue her emo-

tions, and it was amidst bitterest tears and sobs that she murmured the last farewell.

“Remember, Juliana,” said the marquis, with a significant look, as he pressed his sister-in-law’s hand, and he then conducted his wife out of the cottage.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FLIGHT

JULIANA was now alone in the parlour, whence her brother-in-law and sister had just issued forth, and most lonely indeed did she feel. Her heart experienced a desolation such as it had scarcely ever known before, — no, not even when her exposure was effected by Mr. Hawkshaw at Saxondale Castle, nor again when she beheld all her cunningly devised plans in respect to the Viscount de Chateauneuf shattered to pieces. It was true, she thought to herself, that she had not married an impostor in rank, but she had espoused a beggar with regard to purse, and her prospects seemed gloomy indeed.

Suddenly she bethought herself that she had not ascertained from her husband how much money he had on this occasion brought back with him from Spain, and she ascended for this purpose to the chamber where he had lain down to rest. She was in one of those moods when it was little likely she would trouble herself about disturbing him in the midst of slumber, and she entered abruptly, without any precaution. He was not asleep, and rising up, sat on the bed, surveying her for a few moments with a peculiar look. He at once saw that there was a considerable change in her manner toward him, and for an instant an expression of uneasiness flitted over his features; but quickly composing them again, he said, "Have they taken their departure?"

"They have," responded Juliana. "Will you have the goodness to inform me what amount you have brought with you from the other side of the Pyrenees? For methinks that therein consists our entire fortune."

"I have some twenty-five thousand francs," replied the

Count de Toledo, the sum which he thus specified being a thousand pounds in English money.

“And when that sum is gone, how are we to live?” asked Juliana. “Of course you cannot fail to understand that I now know everything, — that your estates are confiscated, that your position is hopeless, and that you must never again think of revisiting your native land. Indeed, I fear that, so far from having received any supplies at the hands of your intendant, you must be largely indebted to the bounty of your friends, and I do not see how you will ever acquit yourself of these liabilities.”

Juliana spoke in a cold manner, but yet with a certain degree of bitterness in her accents; while her husband listened with silent attention until she had finished, and his eyes were fixed keenly and searchingly upon her.

“If my estates be in reality all confiscated,” he observed, “you do not, I presume, intend to make the circumstance a subject of reproach?”

“To speak frankly,” answered Juliana, “I do not think you acted well by concealing from me, when you offered marriage, the real position in which you were placed in respect to your government, and the possibility, nay, more, the probability of your estates being confiscated by the advent of a hostile ministry to power. You should have dealt candidly with me —”

“And pray, Juliana,” interrupted the Count de Toledo, his features assuming a sudden expression of mingled fierceness and hardihood, “did you deal with the fullest frankness toward me?”

“What mean you?” ejaculated the lady, seized with trepidation as all her antecedents swept through her mind.

“I mean,” rejoined her husband, “that when you informed me you were Lady Saxondale’s daughter, that your brother was Lord Saxondale, that your sister had married Villebelle the eminent diplomatist, you forgot to add certain little incidents in respect to yourself.”

“Ah!” murmured Juliana, becoming pale as death; but with a desperate effort to regain her effrontery, she said, in a haughty tone, “If calumniating tongues have made themselves busy with my name, you, as my husband, ought to defend me, instead of having, even for a single moment, the

appearance of attaching credibility to the whisperings of scandal."

"I am afraid, Juliana," answered the Count de Toledo, "that it would be rather a difficult thing to convince the Durands that you did not live with them under the name of Madame Chesterfield, that you were not in a way to become a mother when residing beneath their roof, and that you did not, even then and there, intrigue with the Viscount de Chateauneuf."

Juliana sank down upon a seat like one annihilated. It was utterly impossible to deny facts which had evidently come with all corroborative details to her husband's knowledge. At that instant she hated him. She felt that whatsoever degree of affection, or, rather, of liking toward him, which his own love had engendered in her mind, was now completely destroyed, for the instant that he became an accuser she viewed him in the light of an enemy.

"Now, Juliana, you perceive," he said, addressing her in a milder and more soothing voice, "that if there were any deficiency of candour on my side, there was far more on yours. Whatsoever concealment was practised by me was the veriest trifle, in comparison to that adopted by you. But I do not intend to give utterance to reproaches. I should not have made these allusions at all, were it not to convince you that you had no right to upbraid me."

"And have you all along been acquainted with those circumstances?" inquired Juliana, still covered with shame and confusion.

"No," responded the count. "But let me tell you that at the very first, when our acquaintance began, I suspected there was something peculiar attached to your history. A young lady, unmarried, living apart from her family — But no matter, it is useless to dwell upon details. Suffice it to say that I never knew the whole truth until the other day, when I met the Durands in Spain —"

"Ah, you met them?" ejaculated Juliana. "They told you that they saw me in the village, they revealed everything — vile gossips, treacherous scandalmongers that they are!" and her countenance was flushed with indignation and rage.

"You would indeed do well never to speak to them again if you should happen to encounter them," observed her

husband, quickly. "And now, Juliana, no more in respect to the past. There shall be no upbraidings on either side. Whatever you may have been, I love you; you know that I love you, and that is sufficient."

It was not, however, sufficient for Juliana. As we have already said, her own liking toward the count had suddenly been altered into a sentiment very much resembling hatred. She felt that he had deceived her in respect to his true position, and for this she experienced rancour against him. But in order to silence her upbraidings, he had suddenly taken the far higher ground of an accuser; he had conquered, he had subdued her. She had been humiliated in his presence; she had not even the satisfaction of giving additional vent to her own feelings of animosity against him. Her pride was in every way humbled, and such a position was not at all a pleasurable one for the Countess de Toledo. Moreover, she could not help fancying that she was not as yet fully acquainted with the worst in respect to her husband. The recollection of that man who was represented to have been a labourer on his estates, and who had extorted large sums from him, haunted her mind. She remembered, likewise, that the letters which she had written to her sister had been entrusted to the count to be conveyed to the post, but had never reached their destination. It was evident he had suppressed them, — doubtless, thought Juliana, because he feared the knowledge of his actual position must inevitably reach her if she corresponded with Constance. But she dared not prolong the discourse with her husband by demanding fresh explanations. He was acquainted with a portion of her past life's shame, and could thus silence her with a word. But she felt that henceforth all confidence was at an end between them. On her side there would be mistrust of all her husband's proceedings, if at all mysterious; and on his side there could be no very exalted opinion of his wife's virtue.

A few days after the departure of the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle, — who, it should be observed, were on a temporary trip to Paris, his lordship still retaining the Spanish Embassy, — the Count de Toledo drove Juliana out in the phaeton. They made, as usual, a considerable circuit of the delightful scenery of the neighbourhood, and as they were returning through the village, they perceived

some travellers just alighting from a post-chaise which had at the moment stopped at the inn. These travellers were an elderly gentleman and lady, and Juliana, recognizing them at the first glance, ejaculated, "Those vile Durands!"

"The Durands?" echoed the Count de Toledo, and at the same moment the eyes of the old gentleman and his wife were turned upon himself and Juliana.

Quick as lightning did the count toss the reins to Juliana, bidding her drive on, and springing from the vehicle, he hastened up to the Durands, from whose lips burst forth ejaculations which to Juliana's ears sounded as indicative of a most unwelcome recognition. The count said something in a low, hurried tone to the Durands, and they at once accompanied him into the hotel. Juliana was much amazed at witnessing all these proceedings, as were likewise the stable-men and postilions, who were changing the horses. She drove slowly on, utterly bewildered as to what it could all mean, — her husband's precipitate movements, the Durands' ejaculations, and that sudden entrance of the three into the village hostelry. But as Juliana's thoughts grew more collected, she concluded that her husband was very probably intent upon inducing the Durands, either by threats or persuasion, to abstain from propagating reports in that neighbourhood which would prove ruinous to her own reputation.

She drove slowly on toward the cottage, and in about ten minutes the Count de Toledo rejoined her there. She was about to question him as to what had taken place, and whether the Durands had been completely silenced, when he hurried past her, with a few words to the effect that he would tell her everything presently, and rushed up-stairs to the bedchamber. In a few moments he descended again, and sped away from the cottage. What could this mean? Had he paid a visit to the strong-box? Was some deep inroad now being made upon their funds? Had the Durands demanded a bribe as the price of their secrecy, notwithstanding that they had just become enriched by the death of their relation at Barcelona? Yet in no other way could Juliana account for her husband's hasty and excited proceedings, and she thought to herself that if their pecuniary resources were thus to be so continuously encroached upon by extortionate demands, they would soon be reduced to the most

necessitous straits. Anxiously did she await the count's return. In about half an hour he came back, but there was a visible trouble upon his features. She scarcely dared to question him, for she felt assured that in whatsoever answers he might have to give, reference to her past shame must be inevitably made.

"You are probably surprised, Juliana," he said, after three or four agitated turns to and fro in the parlour, "at what has just occurred. But no, you can scarcely be surprised; you must have comprehended full well —"

"Those vile Durands insisted on a bribe?" said the countess, hurriedly.

"Yes, and for your sake I was compelled to submit to their extortionate demands. Our funds are now reduced to a few thousand francs."

"Heavens!" ejaculated Juliana, "have those detestable people plundered you to such a fearful extent?"

"They have," rejoined the count, "and I almost regret that I submitted to their demands. I have no faith in them. I tremble lest, notwithstanding the bribe, they should be base enough to betray what they know. Juliana," he added, suddenly, "we must leave this neighbourhood."

"Yes, yes," she exclaimed, "that has been my wish for some days past, — indeed, ever since my sister and brother-in-law were here. Let us go farther into the interior of France. Let us realize, by the sale of the horses and carriages, as much money as we can get together —"

"But, Juliana, if we remain in France, how are we to live?" inquired the count. "Neither yourself nor I are accustomed to habits of frugality. We cannot all in a moment settle ourselves down to economies which would amount to absolute privations."

"I can obtain certain supplies from my mother," exclaimed Juliana.

"Not enough to enable us to live comfortably," rejoined the count, "and I am not one who can devote himself to any employment for the purpose of increasing our resources. No, things have come to a crisis, the die is cast, my resolution is taken."

"To do what?" demanded Juliana, as in sudden affright she anticipated the reply to her question.

“To return into Spain,” he said, his features becoming all in a moment sternly and fiercely resolute.

“To dare death?” ejaculated Juliana. “No, it must not be. The Marquis of Villebelle conjured me to use my influence to prevent you from adopting so mad a course.”

“But it is necessary, Juliana; it is our only alternative. There I can always command funds,” he added, with a sort of exultation; “but here, on this side of the Pyrenees, we may have to encounter poverty. Nay, more, we shall never be safe against extortions and exactions. Settle where we will, the Durands may find us out, and what then becomes of your reputation? Juliana, I am decided: we go into Spain. Trust to me to devise means for ensuring my own safety. You possess a strong mind, a fine spirit; you are equal to the emergency of danger —”

“But is it possible that you purpose to go boldly to your estate?” inquired the countess. “Will you take possession of your mansion?”

“I will go into the midst of my people,” exclaimed the Count of Toledo, once more with that tone and look of exultation which his countenance had already worn during this discourse, “and rest assured, they will not suffer me to be captured so long as life remains in them.”

“But is not this a desperate mode of existence upon which we are about to enter?” asked Juliana. “Will it not be a far more troubled and unsettled one than our life would be if we were to remain in France, even though subjected to extortions and threats of exposure?”

“Juliana, it is useless to reason against my resolve,” replied the count. “We go into Spain. To-morrow I will dispose of the carriage. Whatsoever little debts are outstanding shall be paid. The horses we will keep for our own purposes, and on the following day will we cross the frontier.”

Juliana could not urge any further remonstrance; she saw that her husband was resolute, and she endeavoured to tranquillize herself with the reflection that his position perhaps would not be so very perilous, after all, in the midst of his own dependents, or else he would scarcely be so outrageously rash as to carry his project into execution. At all events, she felt that no danger could be incurred by herself; and if the worst ensued, she would be left a widow with an honourable title, though her husband perished on the political

scaffold. She now cared too little for him to be particularly afflicted at the contemplation of this eventuality; while, on the other hand, if he should really be enabled to maintain himself in the repossession of his estates, she might yet play the part of the feudal baroness, as she had so much longed to do. She was well aware that Spain was in an unsettled condition, — that the authority of the central government at Madrid was but indifferently maintained over the spirited population of Catalonia; and the longer she reflected on the course about to be entered upon, the more did she deem it probable that her husband's views might be carried out, and that the warnings of her brother-in-law would prove to have been stretched and overstrained.

It was a little after ten o'clock in the evening of this same day that the count and Juliana retired to their chamber. But scarcely had they ascended thither when a trampling of horses' feet and sounds as if of the clatter of weapons, coming from the main road, met their ears. In an instant the count threw open the window. The moonlight flooded the atmosphere, and the figures of several mounted gendarmes were distinctly visible to himself and Juliana. They had already sprung from their steeds, and it was the din of their steel-sheathed swords clattering against their sides which had reached their ears. A wild but vague terror suddenly seized on Juliana; nor was her alarm dissipated when the count, abruptly closing the window, said, "We must fly!"

"Fly! Wherefore? Whither?" demanded his wife, in an agony of apprehension. "What have you done? Why come the officers of justice here?"

"We must fly, Juliana!" ejaculated the count. "There is not a moment to lose. I will explain everything presently. Fasten on your riding-skirt — quick! quick! Follow me."

She obeyed mechanically, and with all the haste of wild and nervous alarm; indeed, she was too much bewildered for deliberate reflection. Her husband filled his pockets with all the coin that remained in the casket. They descended the stairs precipitately, and passed out by a back door to the stable. Two horses were saddled and bridled in almost the twinkling of an eye, Juliana thus caparisoning her own steed for herself, which she well knew how to do; and she had all the ready activity of fortitude at this moment, notwithstanding the wild, vague terrors which filled her soul.

“ Now courage, Juliana,” said the count, as he lifted her on her horse, and the next moment he sprang upon his own. “ Away! ”

As he uttered this last word, the loud knocking of the gendarmes at the cottage door reached their ears; and it should be observed that all these proceedings on their part, conducted with such lightning rapidity, had been unobserved by the officers of justice, insasmuch as they took place entirely in the rear of the dwelling, while the gendarmes had approached the cottage from the front.

“ Away! ” — that word was the signal for their departure.

They dashed through the back garden; the low fence separating it from the orchard was cleared by the two steeds, but in the orchard itself a couple of gendarmes, on foot, at once sprang toward them. It was evident that the precincts of the cottage were surrounded by the officers, but a word of encouragement burst from the count's lips; with the speed of a hurricane the two animals dashed through the orchard. A carbine was fired by one of the gendarmes; the next moment the report of his companion's weapon likewise rang through the air, and the bullets whistled past the ears of the fugitives. The hedge at the extremity of the orchard was cleared; the steeds, stretching forth like greyhounds, sped over the meadows, until, in a few minutes, the road to Perpignan was reached, after the short but rapid circuit thus made. Meantime the cry of an escape had rung from the lips of the gendarmes; their horses were remounted, and a chase was quickly instituted. It was however ineffectual; the count and Juliana rode on as if upon the wings of the wind, and when they presently halted to listen, as well as to breathe their panting coursers, no sounds of pursuit reached their ears from behind.

“ You have borne yourself bravely, Juliana,” cried the count, in thrilling tones of exultation.

“ But what means all this? ” inquired his wife. “ In the name of Heaven, tell me. Wherefore came those officers? What have you done? ”

“ Away, away, Juliana! ” exclaimed her husband. “ This is no moment for explanations. ”

Once more did the steeds career along, although there were still no sounds of pursuit. The gendarmes were evidently either distanced or at fault. Ever and anon, when the

swiftness of the fugitives' pace was relaxed, Juliana wildly, vehemently, and passionately demanded what her husband had done that he should fly from the officers, but on each occasion he compelled her to urge on her courser again; and thus they proceeded for a couple of hours, until Perpignan was in sight, its buildings upreared, like dark crags, against the horizon of the sky that was flooded with the moonlight.

"This way!" exclaimed the count, and they swept into a by-road which enabled them to leave Perpignan far away on the left, while by a short cut they reached the eastern extremity of the Pyrenees. On they went, scarcely relaxing their speed until long past midnight, when the count suddenly exclaimed in an exultant voice, "The boundary is crossed. We are now in Spain!"

Juliana was much exhausted, and though they now walked their steeds, many minutes elapsed ere she could recover breath sufficiently to renew the vehement inquiries which she had already put a dozen times during the journey, but to which she had received no satisfactory answer.

"Now will you tell me," she said, in a peremptory and imperious voice, as if determined not to be put off any longer, "will you tell me wherefore the officers of justice should have sought you, and why you fled from them?"

"In a short time, Juliana," responded her husband, in a voice that still vibrated with a strange, wild exultation, "you shall know all. Interrogate me not now. It is useless; you cannot force me to answer."

"But I insist!" she cried, once more full of a vague and unknown terror. "There is something fearfully unnatural in all this."

"There will be something thrillingly exciting for you presently," rejoined the count. "Ah, I already feel a different being. It seems to me as if I had escaped from a gaol to breathe the fresh air of freedom. Come on, Juliana dearest, come on, my gloriously handsome wife, and in a brief space, soon after morning dawns, our destination will be reached."

"Go we direct to your mansion?" asked Juliana, somewhat encouraged, as well as to a certain degree dispossessed of her fears, by the exuberant spirits which the Count de Toledo now displayed.

"We go to our home, Juliana," he responded; "and again make yourself happy with the assurance that you

will find persons there who will not fail to protect your husband."

"But if your estates have been confiscated," said Juliana, bewildered with her thoughts, "were they not bestowed upon some one else? Or have they not been sold? and will you not find your mansion in the hands of a new possessor?"

"No fear of all that," cried the count. "So long as I enjoy freedom, I defy the powers or the terrors of the law to prevent me from treading at will over my domain in wild, mountainous Catalonia. And as for my mansion, I repeat, you will see none but friendly faces there. Come, Juliana, let us speed onward again. I am in haste to introduce you to your new home."

The countess longed to repeat her question, as to wherefore her husband should have fled from the gendarmes, but there was now so much authority in his manner, he had assumed an air of so much conscious superiority and power, from the first moment that the boundary was crossed, that she felt somewhat overawed, her naturally proud spirit quailed, and she dared not again venture upon peremptory or imperious interrogatory. They continued their way; the town of Figueras was passed upon the left hand. They plunged deeper and deeper into the wilds of Catalonia, and as the first glimmering of dawn appeared above the eastern hills, they came within sight of a tower the gray summit of which appeared a grove of cork-trees.

"Behold our home!" exclaimed the Count de Toledo, pointing in the direction of the structure.

Juliana's first impression was that this tower was merely a small portion of a large castellated edifice which would presently develop itself to her view; but she was surprised that if they were now on her husband's domain there should be no signs of culture,—no cottages, where his dependents dwelt, scattered about, no herds grazing, no flocks pasturing. The entire scenery, as she swept her looks around, was wild and savage,—in some instances, however, sublime and grand, with towering height and roaring waterfall. But still, if this were a sample of the estate, it struck her that no matter how vast the domain belonging to her husband, it was a miracle if it produced any revenues at all.

"Are we upon the soil that calls you lord?" she asked, with a strange and unaccountable timidity.

“ Yes, far as the eye can reach on every side,” and there was still exultation in his tone.

Juliana liked not the response, and yet she scarcely knew wherefore. She thought to herself that in compensation for this savage and unproductive portion of the domain there must be other parts well cultured and exceedingly profitable. They now entered the wood of cork-trees, and ascended a rising path toward the entrance of the tower. The dawn was brightening, and Juliana perceived, through the vista of the trees, that the edifice was half in ruins, that it was of small dimensions, and that it stood alone, utterly unconnected with the spacious array of buildings which, with casements, balconies, turrets, and pinnacles, she had expected to break upon her view. The immense lawn upon which she fancied it might look, the gravelled walk, the pieces of artificial water, the fruit and flower gardens, the outhouses for numerous dependents, the adjacent parks and pleasure-grounds, and the meadows covered with flocks and herds, — all the evidences, in short, of wealth, all the external show of luxury and comfort which she had anticipated to behold, where were they? She looked around in wild terror; there was something dismal and dispiriting in the aspect of the poverty-stricken and gaol-like old ruined tower.

“ Where is your mansion? ” she asked, hurriedly and excitedly, of her husband.

“ There — before you,” was his response, as he pointed to the tower.

“ That? ” shrieked forth Juliana, well-nigh falling from her horse. “ And those people — those wild-looking people? ” she added, as several men and women, in the picturesque mountaineer costume of Catalonia, but the former carrying guns in their hands and having swords by their sides, suddenly emerged from the tower.

“ Those are my people,” replied her husband. “ The women will be your attendants, the men will fight for me until the very death.”

“ Great God! ” said Juliana, in a dying voice. “ Who are you? — Speak! who are you? ”

“ I am Ramon de Collantes,” rejoined the false Count de Toledo, and his arm was at the same instant thrown around his wife’s form, as with a piercing shriek she was about to tumble headlong from her horse.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BANDITTI'S TOWER

WHEN Juliana came back to consciousness, she found herself stretched upon a bed in a poorly furnished apartment. Two of the women whom she had already seen were bending over her, administering restoratives; her husband, standing at the foot of the curtainless couch, was gazing upon her. She seemed to be awaking from a hideous dream. Wildly her looks were flung around, as if to acquire evidences that she dreamed no longer; then, as the sickening, horrifying conviction swept in upon her soul that everything she fancied was indeed but too terribly true, she closed her eyes again, as if to shut out whatsoever objects made her thus keenly alive to her fearful position. Slowly, however, she opened those orbs once more, and in mute consternation, under the influence of an awful numbing dismay, she looked slowly around.

The one small window was deeply set in the thick masonry of the chamber, and had no drapery. A rude table, a few chairs, a rug upon the floor, the bed she lay on, and some other trifling articles of furniture, constituted the appointments of the room in which the brilliant Juliana, who at Saxondale House had slept upon down, and beneath a canopy of velvet, with draperies of satin and muslin, now found herself. The two women who ministered unto her were exceedingly handsome, and with their picturesque apparel, and the profusion of jewelry which decorated their persons, they seemed far superior to the wretchedness of their abode. Her husband, as already stated, was standing at the foot of the bed, watching with an outward air of calmness the effect which would be produced in his wife by this awakening to the consciousness of her position. His arms were folded

across his breast; he looked like one who was resolute to meet whatsoever upbraidings might be levelled against him, and to glory in the fact that he was the famous robber-chief Ramon de Collantes.

He now made a sign for the two women to leave the chamber, and when they had departed he took a chair and sat down by the side of the couch. Juliana shuddered visibly at his approach. For an instant a look of sternest displeasure appeared upon his countenance, but as it quickly passed away, he said, in a lofty tone, as if he chose to rise high above all reproach and upbraiding which might be vented against him, "Now, Juliana, at length you are in the home to which you have so much longed to come."

"This my home?" she exclaimed, with another visible tremor, as her eyes swept around the dreary, desolate apartment. "No, no, I will not remain here. Let me go hence. I will depart alone," and she sprang up from the couch.

"Not so, Juliana," said her husband, catching her by the wrist, and compelling her to sit down by the side of the couch, though in justice it must be observed that he used no more force than was absolutely necessary. "You are my wife, and here you must remain."

"Remain here?" she ejaculated, and for an instant she was about to give vent to a violent gust of mingled rage and grief; but the demeanour of Ramon de Collantes overawed the one and compelled her to stifle the other. "Tell me," she said, suddenly growing calm, — but it was the unnatural calmness of utter despair, — "have you brought me hither to dwell amongst brigands?"

"For the last nine months you have been the wife of a brigand chief," answered Collantes, "and you must accept your destiny."

"Yes, but I knew it not. God knows how far, how very far I was from suspecting it."

"To be sure," ejaculated her husband, "how could it have been otherwise? We each had our secrets, and we kept them as long as we could. You had been the paramour of other men when you were wooed by me; I was a bandit captain when I wooed you. I have promised to reproach you not; in common justice should you abstain from upbraiding me."

“ But that false title which you assumed? ” ejaculated Juliana, half-frantic.

“ I had as much right to usurp the rank of a nobleman, Juliana, as you had to assume the position of a virtuous woman. If I were a false count when I led you to the altar, you were not a virgin-bride when you came into my arms.”

“ My God! ” murmured the unhappy lady, again shivering all over. Then suddenly she cried, “ But how was it that my own maid deceived me? How was it that she assured me you were all that you represented yourself, — that you visited at the Spanish Embassy in Paris? ”

“ Because your maid was accessible to my gold,” answered Ramon de Collantes. “ Do you suppose, Juliana, that I foresaw not that you would make inquiries? I knew that you were a thorough woman of the world, and I played as deep a game as your own.”

“ Why did you marry me? ” demanded Juliana, abruptly.

“ Because I loved you, truly and sincerely loved you. I love you now, and shall ever love you, unless you give me cause to hate you. I more than half-suspected, when I wooed you, that something had gone wrong with your antecedents. But I cared not for that. It was sufficient that you struck my fancy, and I resolved to possess you as a wife.”

“ And that tale of the change of ministry, when we were travelling southward — ”

“ An opportunity which presented itself for devising an excuse not to bear you into Spain, but to stop short on the Pyrenean frontier, whence I myself could pay periodical visits — ”

“ To your intendant? ” said Juliana, with bitter sarcasm.

“ Do not speak thus, or I shall not love you much longer,” answered Collantes, haughtily and sternly. “ Rather thank me for having from time to time reëntered Catalonia to join my brave band for a few days, and levy contributions on travellers who passed by.”

“ And that man who had been a labourer on your estates? ” said Juliana, still somewhat ironically, though not with so much bitterness as before.

“ A scoundrel who was once a member of my band, but who through very cowardice deserted. For want of a passport, he lingered just over the frontier, and my evil destiny

threw me, as you saw, in his way. I was compelled to submit to the villain's extortions."

"And that faithful valet of yours?"

"One of my band likewise, but a brave and trustworthy individual. He will join us doubtless in the course of the day, for the French gendarmes had no reason to molest him."

"Those letters of mine, which were directed to my sister?" said Juliana, continuing her queries.

"Think you that I was foolish enough to put you in correspondence with the Marchioness of Villebelle, when the marquis could tell her that there was no such person as the Count of Toledo, and she would have written you this much back in her very first answer? It was a cursed fatality that threw the Villebelles in the way of my brave band and myself, but we knew not who they were. We are not in the habit of inquiring the names of those travellers whom we politely detain for a few minutes on their road."

"What passed between you and the marquis when you encountered each other at the cottage?" asked Juliana, thus continuing her feverishly rapid questions.

"Ah, that was indeed a romantic incident," ejaculated Collantes, with a laugh, "and would tell effectively upon the stage in a melodrama where brigands figure. The marquis was walking in the garden, as you recollect. He thought he recognized me; he was astounded, he could not believe his eyes. He saw me waving my hand to some one; he looked around, he perceived you at your chamber window, agitating your kerchief. He rushed up to me, and demanded who I was. Somehow or another it instantaneously struck me who he must be, and I saw that I was safe. 'In Spain,' I answered, 'I am, as you suspect, Ramon de Collantes; here I am Count de Toledo, and your sister-in-law is my wife.' The marquis, like every shrewd diplomatist, though he is but quite a young man, — not older than myself, — recovered his self-possession in an instant. I gave the horse to a groom and we walked aside together. I offered to return him his money, but he scornfully rejected it. I asked him if he purposed to betray me. He reflected, and said that it would be better not. I told him I thought so too. But he laid down conditions, which were that I should never again cross the Pyrenees, that I should go into the interior of France, keep my feigned name, and endeavour to earn my living

honourably. Of course I pledged myself to anything, for I was resolved to hide the startling truth from your knowledge as long as possible. We had a little more conversation, and I hurried up to see you; for though it was during the interval of our separation that I had obtained an insight into your antecedents, and my suspicions of your past wantonness had been fully confirmed by the Durands, yet I loved you as much as ever, and longed to embrace you. I pretended exhaustion, — in the first place, because the marquis had stipulated I should not appear before his wife, and in the second place, because I had no inclination to appear again before him while you were present. Doubtless the marquis went and informed your sister who your husband really was.”

“Yes, yes, he did. I understand it all now,” exclaimed Juliana, wringing her hands. “Good heavens! what must have been the agony of poor Constance? What must she have thought? No wonder that she wept so bitterly, that she sobbed so convulsively, and that she embraced me so fervidly! Ah, and how delicately did the marquis himself behave, — not betraying you, nor yet on his own side having recourse to falsehoods to save you from exposure.”

“The marquis is a diplomatist,” rejoined Ramon de Collantes, with a smile, “and was not likely to be at a loss how to manage such matters.”

“But those Durands,” exclaimed Juliana, “how fell you in with them?”

“Quite in a professional way,” replied Collantes. “They were journeying toward Barcelona. I and my gallant band stopped them, and as they had no great amount of ready money about them, we examined their papers. A letter in the old gentleman’s pocketbook made me aware that he was going to Barcelona to receive an inheritance. ‘Oh! oh!’ thought I to myself, ‘we must keep you good folks prisoners for awhile, until you furnish a ransom.’ So we bore them both off to the tower here, and old Durand drew a cheque upon a banker at Barcelona, one of my men setting off to get it cashed. This caused a delay of a day or two, during which the Durands were kept close prisoners at the tower. In the course of some conversation between them, you may conceive my astonishment when I heard them talking of the Countess of Toledo whom they had recently met at a certain

village. Thereupon I questioned them, and wormed out as much of your antecedents as they themselves were acquainted with. Little did they think they were making all these revelations to your own husband! Well, the man came back from Barcelona with the ransom, a thousand pounds, calculated by your English money, and the Durands were suffered to depart."

Juliana could really have forgiven her husband for this one robbery, inasmuch as it had been perpetrated upon the individuals who betrayed their knowledge of her past career.

"You may conceive," resumed Ramon de Collantes, "how terrified I was when, a few days after my return to the cottage, we beheld the Durands alighting from the post-chaise on their way homeward. I rushed up to them, as you saw me. I was only just in time to stop the ejaculations of complete betrayal which were bursting from their lips. 'Say nothing,' I whispered, in a hurried voice, 'and your money shall be restored!' They required nothing better, and I accompanied them into the inn. They had seen you with me, and as we entered the tavern, the landlord officiously exclaimed, 'Good day, my Lord Count of Toledo!' The Durands thus discovered that your husband was none other than the famous Ramon de Collantes. Knowing therefore that we resided in the neighbourhood, they unhesitatingly agreed to wait while I hastened home to get the thousand pounds to restore to them. This made an immense hole in all my share of plunder which I had brought away from Spain a few days back, but I might have put up with that loss lightly if I could have trusted the Durands. When, however, they had received their money, and had taken their departure, I began to reflect that I was not safe with such gossips and scandal-mongers. Therefore my resolve was taken to bid farewell to France; for, as I had plundered a French subject, although in another country, yet I was well aware that the authorities, if once put on the alert, would arrest me at a venture, so that if a French tribunal declared itself incompetent to try me for a deed done in Spain, the gendarmes would nevertheless have marched me over the frontier and given me into the custody of the Spanish authorities at Figueras. Well, what I apprehended on the part of those Durands came to pass. On leaving the village, they must have given information at the very next town concern-

ing me; and if the gendarmes had only done their work a little more cleverly and without so much noise, I should at this moment be in a French gaol instead of in my own tower. However, the necessity that was felt to have such a posse of officers to effect the capture was the highest compliment that could be paid to your renowned husband, Don Ramon de Collantes. Now, I think all explanations have been given, and you have nothing to do, Juliana, but to resign yourself to your new mode of life."

"Ramon," said the lady, falling upon her knees at her bandit-husband's feet, "I beseech you to let me depart hence. You say that you love me —"

"Yes, Juliana, and too well to lose you," interrupted Collantes, forcing her to rise from her suppliant posture. "It is useless to bandy further words on a point respecting which I am fully decided. You cannot go hence; it is impossible."

"At least suffer me to write to my sister," exclaimed the wretched Juliana.

"No good purpose, my dear wife," responded the bandit, "can possibly be answered thereby. Doubtless the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle will read in the newspaper that the celebrated Ramon de Collantes had for some time past been living under a disguised name in a French village of the Eastern Pyrenees, and that when the gendarmes went to capture him he effected his escape in a characteristic manner. The same journalists will not fail to record how his wife played the heroine in the most admirable manner, and thus the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle are sure to hear all that has taken place. There is no necessity to write and tell them exactly where you are; and moreover, for certain obvious reasons, it might be inconvenient."

At this moment one of the females entered the apartment to inform Ramon de Collantes that he was wanted below. She then retired, and the bandit-captain said to Juliana, "Do your best to keep up your spirits and make yourself comfortable. I will presently despatch one of the women to Barcelona, and she shall purchase you all kinds of necessaries that you may require. You can give her a list, and we will also do something to render the rooms more suitable for your accommodation. The amount of freedom you will enjoy depends entirely on your conduct toward me, but I

warn you against any attempt at escape. It is painful for me thus to speak, but methinks it is necessary."

Don Ramon de Collantes thereupon quitted the room, leaving Juliana a prey to reflections which may be more easily imagined than described. On descending to the ground floor of the tower, the bandit-captain found that half a dozen of his men had just brought in, as prisoners, an English gentleman and his valet, — certain circumstances having led the outlaws to believe that a goodly ransom might be obtained for the liberation of the captives in this instance. It appeared that the gentleman and his valet were travelling post toward Madrid, having entered Spain by way of Figueras, that the detachment of banditti stopped the equipage, and that, after desperate but ineffectual attempts at resistance, the traveller and his domestic were overpowered. There was no considerable sum of ready money found upon the gentleman's person, no more than he might have deemed sufficient for his expenses to the Spanish capital; but, on the other hand, he had in his pocketbook letters of credit on a banker in that city for a very large amount. It was this fact which — in pursuance of their usual policy in such cases — had induced the banditti to bring the traveller and his valet as captives to the tower. The post-chaise had been left to return to Figueras, the banditti, however, allowing the gentleman to pay the postilions their due, — a course which they invariably adopted, and which led to the very natural supposition that there might be some little private understanding between the outlaws and the drivers in those districts.

The gentleman was about six or seven and twenty years of age, tall, well made, and handsome, with a frank, ingenuous expression of countenance. His hair was of a rich brown, curling naturally; his eyes were blue; his features were somewhat delicate, and classically modelled. Altogether, his appearance was most agreeable; his voice was rich and harmonious, and his manners were polished and elegant. But now he wore a haughty and indignant look. He betrayed not the slightest sentiment of fear; indeed, his courage had been well proven in his resistance to the banditti, and it was fortunate for him that in being overpowered at last he had sustained no hurt more serious than a few bruises. His valet, also an Englishman, was a middle-aged, sedate-

looking person, but one who could no doubt display a courageous resolution in the moment of emergency.

Ramon de Collantes addressed the English gentleman in the Spanish tongue first, but finding that it was little understood by the traveller, he proceeded to speak in French. In this language the captive was proficient, and the discourse therefore flowed on easily. The brigand-chief assured Mr. Forester — for such the gentleman's name appeared to be, according to his passport and letters of credit — that he need be under no apprehension in respect to his life nor of ill-treatment provided he would consent to purchase his liberty; and that during the interval which must elapse ere the ransom-money could be obtained from Madrid, he should experience as much attention and as good accommodation as under circumstances might be afforded. Mr. Forester — whom the reader will recollect as having been William Deveril's second in the duel with Lord Harold Staunton — saw no alternative but to accept the proposition. He found himself a prisoner in the midst of a wild region, at the mercy of a lawless band; and he was compelled to subdue his pride for his own personal convenience. It is true that he was only travelling for his pleasure, being of no profession and possessing a handsome independent income, but still, though his time was so completely his own, it appeared to him by no means agreeable to pass more of it than was absolutely necessary in the quarters of a bandit horde. He therefore, though not without reluctance, consented to the terms laid down by Ramon de Collantes.

But now arose some little difficulty. This was not a mere matter of presenting a cheque at a banker's in any city or town more or less remote, and which could be accomplished by any one of the men suitably apparelled in a simple citizen's garb for the purpose, but it was to obtain cash on a letter of credit which by rights should be presented at the Madrid banker's by the individual in whose favour it was drawn. It was therefore a proceeding that required tact and management, and Ramon de Collantes saw no alternative but to undertake the business himself. At the first thought he did not much relish the idea of leaving his wife, whom he really loved, alone for ten days or a fortnight at the tower, during the very first period of her residence there, and when her impatient spirit ought to be checked by all his power

of control. But his second reflection was of quite the opposite character, and he reasoned that it would perhaps be all the better to leave her thus for a short space to the monotonous kind of existence she would have to lead, so that on his return his presence would be welcomed by her as a cheering relief. Therefore Ramon de Collantes decided upon proceeding in person to Madrid, to obtain the ransom-money.

He represented to Mr. Forester that it was absolutely necessary he should write some credentials which would sufficiently account to the Madrid banker for the letter of credit being presented by another person instead of the individual in whose favour it was drawn. To this proposition Forester assented without much difficulty, for he himself saw that it was absolutely necessary, and he was too anxious to recover his freedom to throw any obstacle in the way. He accordingly wrote as if from Figueras, stating that he had been suddenly taken ill there, that his funds were exhausted, and that inasmuch as his friend Señor Escosura (the name assumed by Ramon de Collantes for his intended journey) was about to visit Madrid, he had entrusted him with the mission of obtaining a supply of ready cash.

When thus possessed of the necessary documents, Ramon de Collantes ascended to the chamber where he had left his wife, and informed her that circumstances compelled him to undertake an immediate journey, on which he might be some days absent. Juliana instantaneously perceived that this occurrence might probably furnish her, if she played her game well, with an opportunity of escape; but in order to obtain this opportunity, it was necessary she should have as much freedom as possible, — to which end it was equally requisite to throw her husband off his guard. She therefore at once simulated grief and alarm at the thought of separation. She begged him to forgive her for the first feelings of aversion which she had exhibited toward her new home, representing to him that he must make all allowances under the circumstances in which she was placed, but vowing that she was not the less interested in his safety. In short, she enacted her part so well as to lull her husband to a certain degree into security on her account, but he nevertheless resolved that until his return she should be continuously watched and have as little liberty as possible. He

bade her farewell, and she still kept up her dissimulation by much weeping and sobbing. Previous to his departure, he gave the strictest injunctions to the members of the band as to the precise amount of freedom which his wife and the two prisoners (Mr. Forester and his valet) were respectively to be allowed, having done which, he set out on his journey.

One of the females appointed to attend upon Juliana spoke French fluently, and from her lips the brigand-captain's wife accordingly understood that she would be permitted to take exercise within a circuit of a mile of the tower, and a similar communication was made to the prisoners. Juliana learned from the same source of the presence of those prisoners at the tower, and on hearing that they were fellow countrymen, she was suddenly inspired by the secret hope that if she were enabled to communicate with them they would aid in her escape. She did not, however, think it prudent to precipitate the means which might be adopted as a test to ascertain whether she should be enabled to communicate with them or not; she therefore remained in her own chamber throughout the whole of that first day of her sojourn at the tower. In the evening the valet who had been left behind at the cottage in the French village made his appearance at the robbers' stronghold, and Juliana learned that her own maid — whom she had originally engaged in Paris — had declined to accompany the valet to rejoin her mistress, now that she knew that her master, instead of being the Count de Toledo, was a famous brigand-chief. We should likewise add that Juliana despatched, according to her husband's instructions, one of the women to Barcelona, to make such purchases as were requisite; and in the meantime she managed as well as she was able with all such necessaries for the toilet as the females, whose wardrobes were by no means badly supplied, were enabled to furnish.

On the following day Juliana availed herself of her privilege to walk in the neighbourhood of the tower, and presently she beheld a gentleman, whom she at once concluded to be the English prisoner, roaming about likewise. It was beyond the limits of the grove of cork-trees that she thus descried him, but as her looks swept around with a wider range, she noticed six or seven of the banditti posted on eminences at certain intervals, so as to engirdle, as it were, with a cordon

of sentinels, the precincts of the tower. These men seemed to be lounging idly about, as if intent on no particular object, but their carbines were slung over their shoulders, their swords were by their sides, and the sunbeams glinted upon the pistols and the poniard-handles in their belts. Therefore Juliana knew full well why those men were thus dispersed around, and the hope of escape diminished somewhat in her bosom.

Mr. Forester, having maintained the haughtiest reserve toward all the members of the band, both male and female, had not exchanged any unnecessary word with even those who could speak French, and therefore he had not learned that there was an English lady at the tower, and that she was the chieftain's wife. He was consequently surprised when he beheld a female apparelled in a garb totally different from that of the other women whom he had as yet seen, and which belonged to the fashions suited for the meridian of Paris or of London. At first he took her to be a Spaniard, for such an impression might well be conveyed by Juliana's appearance, her hair being of raven darkness, her eyes black and full of fire, and her complexion a delicate olive. He thought of turning aside and passing in another direction, believing her to be a member of the band, when it struck him that, like himself, she might possibly be a captive. He therefore continued to advance, and the nearer he drew, the more forcibly did it occur to him that she could scarcely be a native of Spain, but that her splendid beauty and gorgeously developed form, together with her mien and carriage so statuesque and lady-like, denoted her as a country-woman of his own.

"Then she must be a prisoner," he thought, and taking off his hat, he made her a courteous salutation.

"Now," said Juliana to herself, "for the test whether or not I am allowed to speak to this English gentleman."

Her eyes were swept rapidly around as she also advanced. There was no unusual movement amongst the sentries posted at intervals about, no one hurried forth from the tower to forbid this meeting, and with joy as well as with rekindling hope in her heart, she accosted the captive.

"You are a prisoner, if I mistake not?" she said, in her most affable manner, but at the same time with a look of commiseration and mournfulness.

“ Yes, madam, such is my fate for the present,” responded Mr. Forester, perfectly dazzled by the beauty which, diminishing not on a nearer view, characterized the lady. “ And you? ”

“ Alas, a prisoner likewise,” returned Juliana, with a profound sigh. “ But what is worse,” she went on hurriedly to observe, anxious to get over the requisite explanations, which were as painful as they were unavoidable, with all possible despatch, “ I am the victim of the foulest treachery — But how can I confess it? And yet the tale must be told, — I am the captain’s wife.”

Mr. Forester staggered with a wild amazement. Was it possible that this lady, whose manners had evidently been formed in the most polished circles, and whose splendid beauty was fit to embellish the gilded saloons of fashion, instead of being buried in the midst of Catalonia’s wastes, — was it possible that she was the consort of Ramon de Collantes?

“ Ah, sir,” cried Juliana, “ you may well be smitten with astonishment, but the tale I have told you is only too true. The particulars — humiliating enough for me — can be concisely summed up. I was residing in France. I was thrown in the way of one who bore the name of the Count de Toledo, and whom I beheld living like a nobleman of wealth amongst the gayest circles of Paris. He offered me his hand, he was accepted, and we were married. This was eight or nine months ago — ”

“ And for nine months you have been in this man’s power?” ejaculated Forester, with an astonishment but little abating.

“ It was but yesterday that I knew everything,” replied Juliana. “ Yesterday morning was I brought hither, under the impression that I was coming to take up my abode in a splendid mansion situated in the midst of a vast domain, and you may conceive, sir, the horror and anguish of my feelings when my husband, suddenly throwing off the mask, — which indeed he could no longer wear, — proclaimed himself Ramon de Collantes.”

“ Good heavens, lady!” cried Mr. Forester, his handsome countenance colouring with indignation, and all his heart’s sympathies at once enlisted in Juliana’s favour, “ what diabolic treachery! But pardon me — I forgot at the moment I was speaking of your husband.”

"You would be justified in entertaining a very evil opinion of me indeed," quickly rejoined Juliana, "if you fancied that I could still experience the feelings of a wife toward that man. No, sir, I hate and detest the villain who has deceived me. Husband indeed! Never can I think of him as such again, nor would the law hold me bound by ties contracted under circumstances so frightfully perfidious."

"You are right, madam," answered Forester, his sympathies deepening on her behalf when he found her taking what he considered to be so proper a view of her position. "You will not deem it idle flattery if I express my belief — from your appearance, your manners, and your discourse — that you have been accustomed to move in a sphere very different from that in which you now find yourself?"

"I have indeed," rejoined Juliana, mournfully; and then she reflected for a few instants whether she should tell the English gentleman who she really was.

She feared the possibility, if not the probability, of his having heard of that dreadful exposure which took place at Saxondale Castle, and which had been rapidly circulated at the time throughout the fashionable world of England. But, on the other hand, there was the chance that the incident had never reached his ears at all; and if she were to stop short here, giving no further explanations relative to herself, and naming not the family to which she belonged, he might naturally look with suspicion upon all the rest of her tale, and would be justified in supposing that she was playing some hypocritical part.

"Yes," she went on to observe, her mind being promptly made up to the alternative of frankness at any risk, "I did indeed move in a different sphere. Perhaps the name of Saxondale is not unfamiliar to you."

"Unfamiliar!" cried Forester, with renewed amazement. "It is that of an English nobleman —"

"Whose sister I am," added Juliana. "Once the Honourable Miss Farefield — now a bandit's wife!"

"Good heavens! and you were Miss Farefield?" exclaimed Forester. "But you are Miss Farefield still, for, as you ere now rightly observed, the law cannot possibly sanction a marriage into which you were so treacherously inveigled. Madame," he continued, in a hurried tone, for he was much

excited on Juliana's behalf, — her dazzling beauty, too, having produced no trifling effect upon him, — “if I can be of any assistance to you, command my services. In a few days I myself shall be free, and I vow before Heaven to devote my liberty to the duty of effecting yours.”

Juliana warmly expressed her acknowledgments for this assurance, and a weight was lifted from her mind, for she felt convinced, by Mr. Forester's looks, words, and manner, that he was acquainted with nothing prejudicial to her character. This indeed was the fact, for immediately after the duel, Forester had gone abroad, and had remained many months on the Continent ere returning to England. When he did revisit the British metropolis, the scandal attaching itself in divers ways to the name of Saxondale was past and gone, or at least was lost sight of in the contemplation of fresh incidents occurring in the fashionable world. Then, too, his stay in London had been very short, and though he saw Deveril, yet our hero had in the meantime learned that Lady Saxondale was his mother, and he would not therefore breathe a syllable against her. Mr. Forester returned to the Continent, where he had since been residing or travelling. He therefore knew absolutely nothing prejudicial to the character of Juliana, however poor his opinion might be of her mother in consequence of the revelations made to him by Deveril at the time of the duel.

“You have promised to befriend me,” said Juliana, “and Heaven knows how much I stand in need of such friendship! To whom am I indebted for this generous offer?”

“My name is Forester,” was the English gentleman's response, “and being entirely my own master, I can have no difficulty in fulfilling the pledge I have given you. My time is my own, and my pecuniary means are ample.”

That name of Forester at once struck Juliana as not being altogether unknown to her, though she never remembered to have seen this gentleman before. Suddenly she recollected the name in connection with the duel between Deveril and Staunton; but still, as it was by no means an uncommon one, it did not follow that this should be the identical individual who acted as second on that occasion.

“I see,” he observed, with a partial smile, “that my name has struck you somewhat. But it is no reason that I should refuse to devote my services to the daughter, because

at one time I befriended a gentleman who sustained some injury from the mother."

"I understand the allusion, Mr. Forester," said Juliana, "and I thank you for the delicacy of the terms in which it is couched." At the same time she was still assured that he knew nothing to her own prejudice. "It will not be well for us to be seen too much together. Behold you those sentinels placed all around? They are as much to keep watch upon me as upon yourself, and as the first thought of captives is always how to escape, these vile outlaws may possibly suspect that our discourse has a tendency in that direction. We shall have opportunities of meeting again, but you will not be offended if in the presence of witnesses I treat you with coldness and reserve."

"Prudence dictates that course, Miss Farefield — for by that name shall I call you," and Forester, again lifting his hat, pursued his way in one direction, while Juliana moved off in another.

CHAPTER XXVII

MR. FORESTER

SEVERAL days passed, during which Juliana and Mr. Forester frequently met; and as not the slightest notice was taken of their proceedings, or, at least, as no syllable of remonstrance against these encounters was spoken to either, they felt assured that Ramon de Collantes, ere taking his departure, had left no instructions to prevent the civilities of such intercourse between them. They therefore prolonged their walks in each other's society, not merely to discuss plans for an escape, but likewise because they felt more and more pleasure in being together. We have already said that Juliana's beauty had produced an immediate effect upon Mr. Forester, and she could not help contrasting his handsome person and elegant manners with the coarser attributes of her husband. Besides, the circumstances under which they thus met were tinged with a romance full well calculated to draw them thus toward each other.

But why did they discuss plans for an immediate escape, if such were practicable? Why did they not wait until the return of Collantes should restore Forester to liberty, and thus leave him free to take whatsoever means circumstances should suggest for the liberation of Juliana? It was because she feared that when once her husband came back, she would be too completely in the thralldom of his vigilance to enable any one from a distance to ensure her flight. She trembled at the idea of being left behind by this friend whom accident had thrown in her way; and moreover, as above stated, she already experienced a tender feeling in his behalf. On his side, he was equally sensible of those difficulties, just enumerated, which would have to be encountered in liberating Juliana. He was smitten with her beauty, and he would

gladly acquire a claim upon her by the performance of some chivalrous exploit, or the carrying out of some well-laid stratagem, in order to deliver her from the power of her bandit-husband.

"The time is passing," said Juliana, one forenoon, about eight or nine days after her arrival at the tower, "and as yet nothing is decided. He may return sooner than we anticipate."

"The time has passed so agreeably, in one sense," observed Forester, "and indeed I am now in no hurry for the return of Collantes."

"But if he should return speedily," urged Juliana, bending upon her companion a tender look, for she comprehended full well the meaning of his words, "what will become of me? Oh, what shall I do if you were to leave me here alone? I should feel as if abandoned by my only friend."

"Miss Farefield," responded Forester, earnestly, "I swear to you that I am incapable of abandoning you by my own free will. Come, let us seriously, and if possible for the last time, deliberate upon some plan of flight."

"Alas!" said Juliana, "I see not how it is to be effected. Sentinels watch at the entrance of the tower by night, and in the daytime it would be utter madness to attempt escape."

"I know not that it would be such utter madness," observed Forester, as an idea gradually developed itself in his mind. "If I thought that you were able to gallop a steed fearlessly —"

"Oh, indeed I am," ejaculated Juliana, as the remembrance of her rapid flight from the cottage, in company with her husband, came back to her mind. "But what plan has suggested itself?"

"Supposing that we had two steeds ready saddled," said Mr. Forester, "and that, watching an opportunity, we sprang upon their backs and committed ourselves to chance? There would be this risk probably, — that bullets would whistle about our ears. For myself, I care not. And perhaps those sentinels posted around would hesitate to fire at their chief-tain's wife — Pardon me for reminding you of your position."

"They would fire — rest assured that they would fire," rejoined Juliana. "Wherefore are they posted on those heights?"

“To fire upon me or my domestic, if we attempted to escape, but surely not to level their deadly weapons against you.”

“And even if we agreed to run that risk,” said Juliana, “what plan have you settled in your mind as to the horses?”

“This morning, ere I joined you,” replied Mr. Forester, “I passed by the stables. The door was open, and I strolled in. I had no definite motive for so doing; it was merely to see the animals. No one was there at the moment. The saddles and bridles were ready at hand; if I had chosen, I could even then have self-appropriated one of the steeds. There is a lady’s saddle. I noticed it —”

“It is mine,” ejaculated Juliana; and as a wild thrill of hope shot through her heart, she added, “Would to Heaven that I were seated in it now! Cheerfully would I risk the volleys that might be poured down by the firearms of the banditti!”

“Then, if you have the courage to dare the venture,” exclaimed Forester, gazing with admiration upon the lady, “let our plan be thus settled. But we must fly alone together; I must abandon my domestic to the mercy of these fellows. Ah, an idea has struck me. The letter of credit upon the Madrid banker is for fifteen hundred pounds, and I have given Ramon de Collantes authority to receive eight hundred. I will leave behind me a note to the effect that if he suffers my domestic to depart in safety, he may receive the remainder of the amount as a ransom, and I will likewise pen a proper authority to that effect.”

“What generous sacrifices you are making on my behalf!” said Juliana, with another tender look at her companion.

“Were they ten thousand times greater, they should be cheerfully made,” responded Forester, who doubtless anticipated that the lady would not fail to display her gratitude to any extent which he might be bold enough to solicit.

“And the risk that you will run?” added Juliana.

“I can dare death in the hope of enjoying life in your society,” was her companion’s rejoinder.

She bent down her looks, and appeared for a few moments to be overwhelmed with confusion, for it was impossible to mistake the significancy of that avowal.

“And when,” she asked, lifting her eyes again, “shall we put the project into execution?”

“It is impossible to fix a moment,” he answered. “We must trust to the chapter of accidents. Fortunately the door of the stable is not within view of the entrance to the tower, and therefore whosoever may be lounging about in front of the edifice would not have any cause to suspect what was being done in the stable. To-morrow morning, shortly after the breakfast hour, I will stroll forth. You can be nigh at hand. It were well perhaps that you should come without your bonnet; it will have the appearance as if you merely meant to imbibe a little fresh air, without even walking beyond the precincts of the wood. I will watch the opportunity to beckon you into the stable. If fortune favour us, all may be done in a few instants; and if we be discovered, if our plan be defeated, we can only anticipate the total privation of liberty until the return of Collantes.”

“Be it all as you say,” replied Juliana, “and in order that there shall be no cause for suspicion, let us to-day remain as little together as possible.”

“Prudence compels me to submit,” rejoined Forester, “but my own inclinations prompt the reverse.”

Juliana flung upon her companion another tender look, and they separated, he rambling in one direction, and she reëntering the tower. For the rest of that day her heart was in an almost incessant flutter, with mingled apprehension and hope. How she longed to quit that gloomy, half-dilapidated tower! And what pleasure, too, to have the handsome and agreeable Forester as the companion of her flight! She felt assured that he would not be content with merely placing her in security; he would not abandon her when having rescued her from the power of the banditti. His looks and his words had alike told her that he anticipated a recompense for the tremendous risk he was about to run on her behalf. Yes, and it was by no means likely he would sue in vain at the feet of one whose temperament was so sensuous and luxurious as that of Juliana.

The hours passed, the evening came, and she retired to rest, but sleep did not soon visit her eyes. She lay revolving in her mind all the details of the plan laid down for their flight. She could not shut out from her conviction that it was fraught with danger, that it amounted almost to the actual madness of desperation, but in its very boldness existed the hope of success. At all events, it was worth while

to run the risk. She would sooner perish by one of the winged balls from a carbine than linger out her existence in that dreadful place; and even if she were captured and brought back, her position could scarcely be rendered much worse than it already was. Therefore her fortitude failed not, and even while envisaging all the perils to be incurred and the consequences of failure, she never for a moment hesitated in the adoption of the project.

On his side, Mr. Forester was equally resolute. He had become deeply enamoured of Juliana. Her magnificent beauty had produced a strong impression on his heart, and he felt assured that he would not be compelled to sigh vainly at her feet if fortunate enough to prove her deliverer. He was naturally of a brave and chivalrous disposition, and if the romantic circumstances in which he had encountered Juliana had exercised its influence over his feelings and sympathies, there was likewise something stirring and exciting, in the feat which had to be performed to crown his triumph. Not for a moment, therefore, did he shrink from the enterprise, and he was even sanguine of success.

He rose in the morning earlier than usual, and tearing out some leaves from his pocketbook, penned the documents of which he had spoken to Juliana, and which he purposed to leave behind him. He had no better writing-paper; he dared not ask for any; and as he knew full well that the Madrid banker would not be satisfied with a mere scrap written upon with a pencil, he assured Collantes in the note addressed to him that he would from the first town write by post to the banker, — pledging his honour as a gentleman that it should not be with any hostile purpose. Besides, his valet would remain in the hands of the banditti as a hostage for the faithful performance of the compact thus volunteered; and, all things considered, Forester felt that he could not possibly manage the proceeding better. His object, of course, was to ensure the safe egress of his domestic from the tower, and the means he was taking appeared to be all-sufficient for the purpose. To his valet he did not, however, breathe a word of his intentions. The man would not like the idea of being left behind; and on the other hand, as it was perilous enough for two persons to attempt an escape, it would be still more against the chances of success if three were to embark upon the enterprise,

Having partaken of the breakfast, which in due course was brought up to his apartment, Mr. Forester, securing about his person the papers which he had written, descended the staircase, and sauntered forth from the tower in a leisurely manner. A couple of the banditti were seated on a bench in front, eating their morning meal, and according to his usual habit, he passed them by without taking the slightest notice of them. They exchanged observations in their own native tongue, to the effect that "the Englishman need not be so haughtily proud," and went on devouring their rations. After making a slight circuit, Forester approached the stable, and at the same instant he saw Juliana at a little distance. She had followed his advice, by descending from her chamber without her bonnet. She walked about for a little while in front of the tower, and then, as if quite in an abstracted mood, passed around to the side.

Forester had flung his looks hastily into the stable, and felt satisfied that no one was there. He beckoned to Juliana, who at once followed him into the place. Quick as thought he took down her side-saddle from the peg on which it was placed, but at the same instant a sudden noise was heard at the farther extremity of the stable, and a bandit, who had hitherto been concealed by a pile of hay against which he was seated while discussing his morning meal, emerged to their view. The fellow instantaneously suspected Forester's designs, and drawing his poniard flew toward him.

A shriek rose up to Juliana's lips, as she thought that all was lost; but fortunately she suppressed it, for Forester, with lightning swiftness, encountered the bandit, warded off with his arm the blow which was aimed at him with the poniard, hurled the man to the ground, and placed a hand over his mouth and a knee upon his chest.

"Quick! your kerchief!" he said to Juliana. "Take the poniard,"— which had fallen from the brigand's hand, — "hold it over him. Plunge it into his heart if he dare utter a word."

Juliana was in a moment all life and activity. She gave Forester her kerchief, snatched up the poniard, and held the point so close to the brigand's chest that he felt it penetrating through his garment. In the twinkling of an eye the kerchief was thrust into his mouth; he was thus completely gagged.

“Cords — halters — anything to bind him!” said Forester, quickly, as he now snatched the dagger from the hand of Juliana; and while he still kept the villain down with his knee upon his breast, he held the poniard over him, at the same time showing by his looks that he was resolved to use it if the slightest resistance were attempted.

His proceedings were ably and expeditiously seconded by Juliana. Two or three halters were ready close by, and with these she bound the prostrate bandit hand and foot, while Forester held the menacing poniard but an inch above his countenance. Half-suffocated with the kerchief, and full of mingled rage and terror, the man presented a hideous spectacle with his convulsing features. The work was promptly done; helpless and speechless the brigand lay upon the ground, and scarcely two minutes had elapsed since the moment that Forester and Juliana entered the stable.

Now to saddle and bridle two of the steeds! Juliana's own horse was amongst them, and the quick eye of Forester showed him which was likely to be the strongest and fleetest of the rest. The process of caparisoning the two animals was speedily accomplished, and then came the most daring and difficult part of the whole transaction. Fortunately the door was just high enough for a person on horseback to pass forth by bowing the head down upon the animal's neck. This Forester's keen glance perceived in an instant, and he assisted Juliana into her saddle. Then he tossed down by the bandit's side the papers which he had written, mounted the animal which he had saddled for himself, and bade Juliana follow him close.

Stooping down so as to avoid the top of the doorway, they urged their horses forth, and with the speed of the wind they galloped down the sloping path through the vista of cork-trees. Ejaculations of rage and astonishment from the sentinels at the entrance reached their ears, as they thus careered past like lightning flashes. Those ejaculations were quickly followed by shots, and a bullet went through Forester's hat, while another whistled close by Juliana's ear.

“Courage, my heroine!” shouted Forester, and the grove echoed the cry.

In a couple of minutes they emerged from amidst the trées, and in an instant shots were fired by the sentinels

posted at a little distance in that part of the precincts of the tower.

“Courage!” again shouted Forester, as a glance showed him that Juliana was unhurt, and he felt that he himself was.

“Fear not for me, my brave deliverer!” cried Juliana, and her companion saw that she was quite equal to the enterprise.

Several more shots whistled past them, but without taking any effect. Then the sentinels who were nearest ahead were seen rushing down from the heights where they had been posted, like madmen, to intercept the progress of the fugitives, but all in vain. Crack! crack! again went the carbines; still were Forester and Juliana untouched. Their coursers sped like the wind, and in a few minutes they felt themselves in comparative safety. But still they relaxed not their speed. They knew full well there would be a chase, and it was not their purpose to throw away a single one of the many chances that were now in favour of their ultimate escape. Presently Forester, on looking back, perceived three or four horsemen dashing down an eminence; they were the banditti in pursuit, but he had little doubt of distancing them. On, on sped the fugitives, encouraging ejaculations constantly flying from Forester's lips, as the sparks from the flints beneath the horses' hoofs.

In about half an hour the fugitives looked vainly around for their pursuers, and they were now enabled to breathe their steeds for a few moments. But only for a few moments, and then their course was continued at the same whirlwind swiftness as before. Another half-hour, and they drew in the reins again. Many miles of ground had now been passed over; the countenance of each was suffused with a crimson glow. How splendidly beautiful seemed Juliana in the eyes of Forester! How handsome did he appear to the view of the lady!

It was while they were thus walking their horses for the few moments they allowed themselves as breathing-time that the quick trampling of a steed coming from ahead reached their ears; and a turning in the wild, unbeaten way which they were pursuing suddenly brought them full in the presence of Ramon de Collantes. A terrific ejaculation of rage burst from the lips of the robber-chief as he in a moment

recognized his wife and Forester. The Englishman would not have hesitated to stop and dare a conflict with the brigand, but Juliana, with a cry of alarm, urged her steed into all the swiftness of which it was capable, so that Forester was compelled to keep pace with her; and thus sweeping past Collantes with the speed of a vanishing dream, they were beyond his view in a moment.

So astounded was he at what he had thus seen that he remained motionless for a few instants where he had suddenly reined in his horse; then, with another ejaculation of fury, he wheeled the animal around and dashed in pursuit. Forester and Juliana both expected that he would adopt this course, and the former exclaimed, "If it comes to a death-struggle, my fair companion, you shall only fall back into the bandit-captain's power when I shall be no more alive to defend you!"

Juliana was far from anxious that such a scene should take place, and she therefore compelled her courser to dash on in its wild career. They now entered upon a beaten road, but neither having the slightest idea in which direction it led. They looked back. Ramon de Collantes was still in pursuit; he was about two hundred yards behind.

"Courage!" ejaculated Forester; and this was the cry he had been continuously sending forth, for he feared lest Juliana's strength and spirit should suddenly give way.

But as she still held gallantly on, in her precipitate flight, that apprehension wore off, and he experienced an exultant admiration for the heroism which she thus displayed. The luxuriant masses of her raven hair floated all dishevelled upon the gushing wind which was excited by their rapid progress through the air: the richest glow was upon her cheeks, fire burned in her eyes, her lips, apart, afforded glimpses of her brilliant teeth, and she sat like an Amazon upon the steed which bore her along.

Collantes was evidently gaining ground, and all of a sudden a pistol-bullet whistled past Forester's ear.

"Good heavens!" cried Juliana, "he has firearms!" and for an instant a dizziness came over her.

"Courage!" again shouted Forester. "Look! look!" he instantaneously added, "we are saved! You are beyond danger! Look! look!"

And as his beautiful companion quickly turned her eyes

in the direction to which he pointed, she beheld a squadron of cavalry descending an eminence. In a few minutes the soldiers, who at the spectacle of that chase put spurs to their chargers, were close upon the roadside. Forester and Juliana drew in their reins; they were now in the midst of protectors.

“Ramon de Collantes!” ejaculated Forester, pointing in the direction where the bandit-chief had a few instants back been pursuing them.

“Ramon de Collantes!” echoed every voice in the troop, and in a moment there was a headlong gallop in pursuit of the formidable brigand.

He had likewise caught sight of the soldiery; his steed was wheeled around in a moment, and he was in full retreat. But his horse was wearied by the chase after the fugitives, and in a short time he was overtaken. Like a lion at bay, he turned and faced his twenty opponents. A pistol was discharged at the foremost, and at the very instant the soldier, reeling back in his saddle with a mortal wound, was about to fall from his horse, Ramon de Collantes clutched at the sword which was dropping from his grasp. Then, with all the mad fury of desperation, did he strike right and left, ghastly wounds were inflicted, but it was only for a few instants that he thus was enabled valiantly to defend himself. A pistol bullet pierced his brain, stretching him lifeless in the road.

Some of the soldiers, who were about thirty in all, had remained to protect Forester and Juliana; for in the first instance they knew not how many persons might be in chase of them. One of the military spoke French, and thus, in a few rapidly uttered words from both the fugitives, he was given to understand that they had just escaped from the brigand's tower; but, as the reader may suppose, neither Forester nor Juliana let drop a syllable to betray the unpleasant fact that she was Ramon de Collantes' wife. It appeared from what the soldier said, it was well known to the civil and military authorities of Catalonia that the brigands had been wont to harbour in the dilapidated tower; but on the occasions when a military force had been sent into the neighbourhood, it was invariably assailed from the heights, and such murderous havoc was committed by the rifles of the banditti as to compel a retreat. Now, however, that the dreaded chief himself was no more, the squadron

seemed resolved to proceed to the tower, and, if possible, extirpate the band.

The person of the slain Collantes was searched, but very little coin was found about him, — not more than a sum equivalent to ten or twelve pounds of English money. It therefore appeared tolerably evident that he had not been enabled to receive the ransom-money at Madrid, and this suspicion was speedily confirmed when the letter of credit, on being discovered amongst his papers, was found to have no endorsement, nor notification of any payment being made on account. As a matter of course this document was at once handed over to Mr. Forester, — who, we should add, forgot not to mention the circumstance of his valet being still a captive at the tower. He expressed his intention of proceeding to Barcelona, whither he desired that his domestic might be instructed to follow.

The soldiers departed in one direction, Forester and Juliana in another. It cannot be supposed that the lady was very seriously afflicted by the death of her husband; on the contrary, she was rejoiced at a tragedy which so effectually severed the hated connection. As she rode along by the side of her companion, she reflected on the course which it would be prudent for her to pursue toward him. Should she endeavour to ensnare him into matrimony, or should she consent to become his mistress? She knew full well that this latter alternative was open to her acceptance, but the accomplishment of the former was by no means so easy. She had seen enough of Forester to know that he was a thorough man of the world, and it was by no means likely that he would take as his wife the widow of a bandit, notwithstanding her really high connections, and the treachery by which she had been inveigled into that alliance. Besides, some little time would have to elapse before he could possibly become so thoroughly infatuated as to propose matrimony, and in the interval he might learn things to her prejudice. The idea of seeking for marriage with Forester was therefore abandoned, and Juliana made up her mind to an amour with her handsome companion.

But it must be added that she now longed to return to England. Her experiences of Continental life had been none of the most pleasant. She did not wish to settle in Spain. It was impossible for her to return to Paris, where it was

known through the newspapers that her late husband, the false Count de Toledo, was none other than the celebrated Spanish bandit Ramon de Collantes, and she therefore came to the conclusion that if it were necessary for her to lead either a life of retirement, cut out from all society, or to live openly with a protector as his mistress, it might just as well be in England as elsewhere. The feelings of shame which had at first rendered her so averse to return to her native country at the same time with her mother, and which had so long kept her abroad, were by this time crushed out of her by the various circumstances through which she had passed, and she had ceased to dread a revisit to the clime of her birth. Besides, it was now close upon the period when Edmund would be of age; and knowing the tremendous secret in respect to his birth, — a secret which she had wormed out of Madge Somers on the midnight visit which she paid to her cottage, as the reader will remember, — she was curious to ascertain whether he would be suffered to take possession of the estates without the slightest whisper of the real truth, and without opposition from any quarter. Of course, Juliana was utterly ignorant that the rightful heir — her own real and actual brother — was in existence. She was not therefore aware that there could be any opposition to Edmund's complete succession; but, as above stated, she still felt curious and interested upon the point.

The result of her reflections, as she rode by Forester's side, was twofold: first, that she would abandon herself to an amour which, whether destined to prove transient or permanent, would necessarily depend upon circumstances, and, secondly, that she would return to England.

Forester did not for some time interrupt Juliana's meditations, though he was very far from penetrating into their true nature. He thought that she might possibly experience a certain shock, if not actual grief, at the sudden and violent death of a man who, no matter what his character and calling were, had nevertheless been her husband. But after awhile, Forester broke the silence which had followed their separation from the band of soldiers, and he said, " You are thinking, my fair heroine, of the catastrophe which has taken place? "

" And at which it were a wretched affectation on my part," she rejoined, " to say that I am afflicted."

“ You speak in a proper spirit,” observed Forester. “ It is impossible to deplore the death of the traitor who deceived you. But meseems that we should do well to converse upon our plans. I said ere now that I should proceed to Barcelona, — a resolve to which I came without consulting you, for the simple reason that I am penniless. All the ready money I had about me at the time of my capture by the brigands passed into their hands. At Barcelona I can stop at some hotel, while I write to Madrid and procure supplies.”

“ Fortunately,” responded Juliana, “ I have some little money in my purse which will bear our expenses on the road to Barcelona; for you see,” she added, with downcast eyes, “ I am compelled to force myself on your companionship until we reach that city.”

“ Thanks for this assurance,” exclaimed Forester, and then he observed, in a soft voice and a tender manner, “ Wherefore should this companionship, so sweet for me, terminate at Barcelona? ”

“ Wherefore? ” ejaculated Juliana, affecting to regard him with a look of extreme surprise. “ Because it is my intention to return to England with as little delay as possible.”

“ And I also shall return to England,” replied Forester, though the instant before he had not even thought of such a proceeding, much less made up his mind to it. “ Will you permit me to escort you back to our native land? Truly, my fair heroine, — for such familiar terms must you suffer me to adopt, — you have passed through too many perilous adventures to render it agreeable for you to travel alone. Ah, my dear Juliana,” he suddenly exclaimed, “ can you not understand that you have inspired me with a passion which will not permit me to leave you voluntarily? ”

Juliana gave no reply; she averted her looks, and appeared to be reflecting profoundly, but Forester felt persuaded that his meaning was understood, and that his fair companion would not prove a very difficult conquest.

We will not linger upon the details of this journey which they performed together. We must however observe that at the first town they reached Juliana purchased a bonnet and a riding-habit; for the reader will recollect in what condition she had fled from the town. It took them three days to reach the Catalan capital, the intermediate nights being passed in towns where they halted. But Juliana did

not immediately abandon herself to the arms of her companion; she did not choose him to think his conquest too cheap or that her virtue was too facile. The farther, however, they advanced on the road, the more tender grew their discourse; and when Barcelona was in sight, they came to such an understanding together that Forester was sufficiently encouraged to propose that she should pass as his wife at the hotel where they were about to take up their abode.

And now let us suppose them arrived there. Handsome apartments were at once obtained, a sumptuous repast was served up, and, inspired by exhilarating champagne, the two travellers could now look back with smiles and triumph at the perils they had passed through and the fatigues they had endured. We may even go a little farther, and depict Forester on his knees at the feet of the handsome Juliana, his arms encircling her waist, his head resting upon her bosom, while she, with her fine dark eyes swimming in a voluptuous languor, looked down upon his truly handsome countenance. He forgot that she had been a bandit's wife; he beheld only in her a woman of grandly luxurious beauty, and he was rejoiced at the conquest he had achieved.

Mr. Forester failed not to write to the banker at Madrid, to whom he explained all the circumstances under which his letter of credit had been originally presented by Ramon de Collantes. In due course he received an answer, informing him that the genuine character of the transaction had been suspected, that there had seemed something strange in the very nature of the letter which it was pretended had been written from a hotel at Figueras, and that the person representing himself as Señor Escosura was required to bring forward credible witnesses to guarantee his respectability. This was a demand with which Ramon de Collantes had evidently found it somewhat inconvenient to comply, for he did not present himself a second time to the banker, who therefore saw that he had exercised a sound discretion. To be brief, this gentleman's communication further informed Forester that the amount represented in the letter of credit was now duly remitted to a banker at Barcelona.

In the interval the valet arrived safe and sound from the tower. The intelligence he brought may be summed up in a few words. A few hours after the escape of his master and Juliana took place, an alarm was raised, to the effect that the

military were approaching. From what the valet could judge, an immediate council of war was held by the banditti, the result being a determination to make a desperate stand; for if they were to take to flight, it was but too evident they would be pursued, and in that straggling form cut to pieces. As the squadron approached, it was received with volleys of musketry, poured forth from the windows of the tower; but the soldiers bore themselves bravely, stormed the building, and succeeded in capturing those of the band who were not slain in the onslaught. The prisoners thus taken were despatched under a proper escort to Barcelona, and the valet took advantage of the circumstance to accompany the military. As for the females of the band, they were generously suffered by the officer in command of the squadron to go at large. It further appeared that, immense quantities of wood being cut down and collected for the purpose, the tower was set on fire; and though the masonry was too solid for the work of ruin to be complete, the place was nevertheless rendered unfit to harbour any of the other brigand hordes which still infested Catalonia.

The prisoners who were sent to Barcelona suffered in due time upon the scaffold; but long ere their execution took place, Forester and Juliana, attended by the valet, arrived in England. Juliana speedily ascertained that her mother and Edmund were still residing at Saxondale House in Park Lane, and she intimated to Forester her intention of passing at least a few days with them. He was quite well enough pleased with his conquest to wish to retain her as a mistress, though he had not the slightest idea of making her his wife. He therefore besought that she would not long remain absent from him; and he promised that, during the interval, he would take some agreeable residence in the neighbourhood of London, whither to bear her after her visit to Saxondale House. On her own side, Juliana was equally well pleased with Mr. Forester, and she promised to grant his request. Under these circumstances they parted; and without any previous notification of her intended visit, Juliana one fine morning made her appearance in the presence of her mother and Edmund — we may likewise add of Lord Harold Staunton; for he, though not actually domiciled at Saxondale House, nevertheless passed the greater portion of his time there.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LINKS IN THE CHAIN OF EVIDENCE

WE must now once more transport the reader into Lincolnshire. About sixteen months had elapsed since the circumstances of our story riveted attention upon Saxondale Castle and its neighbourhood. We allude to the period when Adelaide met her death, in the waters of the Trent, at the hands of her own husband. Since that era neither the guilty young man nor Lady Saxondale had revisited the castle, and the circumstance which had created so great a sensation at the time had almost ceased to be spoken of by the dwellers in that district.

It was about the time of Juliana's return to Saxondale House in London that the incidents we are about to record took place in Lincolnshire. One fine day, at the beginning of April, 1846, Mr. Hawkshaw was riding out on horseback, when he encountered his friend Mr. Denison, who was likewise taking equestrian exercise. They had not previously met for some weeks, inasmuch as the old gentleman had been on a visit to the Marquis of Eagledean at Edenbridge Park in Kent, and had only returned on the day previous to which we are writing.

"My dear friend," exclaimed Hawkshaw, when they had shaken hands and exchanged the usual compliments, "I was just thinking of you as I saw you turn the angle of the road. I was wondering when you purposed to come back. What tidings brings you from Edenbridge? All our friends well and happy, as when last I saw them, some fifteen or sixteen months back?"

"Ah, that was on the occasion of the four bridals," observed Denison, "and you remember that I also was of the party. Yes, they are all well and happy; indeed, I know not

wherefore they should be otherwise. I have been paying a perfect round of visits, and I have letters for you, Hawkshaw, pressing you to do the same. My groom has ridden over to the Hall with them, and so you will have them on your return."

"Were I not going to Gainsborough on a little business," responded the squire, "I would hasten home for the pleasure of reading them. But you can tell me from whom they come."

"Rather ask me," exclaimed Denison, with a smile, "from whom they do not come. Why, all our friends who are connected with the marquis have written. First of all, there is the marquis himself, who insists that you shall pay him a visit at Edenbridge, — where, by the bye, he dwells almost entirely; for, as you are aware, he has bestowed the Stamford Manor estate upon his son Francis and the beautiful Angela. I passed a couple of days at Stamford Manor, and was delighted with the perfect picture of domestic happiness which there prevails. You cannot fancy how young Paton has improved; he has quite a manly appearance, and has almost lost that boyish beauty which, so to speak, used to characterize him. He is now a handsome young man. His wife Angela is, if possible, more lovely than when we saw her led a bride to the altar and when I had the honour of giving her away. They have a beautiful boy, now three months old, of whom, as you may suppose, they are dotingly fond. Frank has written, inviting you to the manor."

"I shall assuredly accept the invitation," replied Hawkshaw, "and that of the marquis also. Whom else did you see?"

"Count Christoval and his splendid countess. You know that his lordship has purchased a fine estate in the neighbourhood of Edenbridge, so that the countess sees her father, the Marquis of Eagledean, nearly every day. On my honour, if it were possible for her ladyship to look handsomer than she was wont to do, she does now; matrimony has improved her. She is a splendid woman."

"They have no children, I believe?" remarked Hawkshaw.

"None," answered Denison; "but the count is not the less devoted to his wife on that score. They are all in all to

each other, and do not seem to want any addition to their family. The tenants and peasantry on their estate speak in the highest terms of them. The count is an excellent landlord, and the countess is profuse, though secret and unostentatious, with her charities. You will find amongst your letters one from that excellent-hearted Spanish nobleman inviting you to stay with him."

"Another visit that I am resolved to pay," responded Hawkshaw. "These pictures of domestic felicity quite enchant me. Pray proceed with them."

"Oh, they are not yet exhausted," exclaimed Denison. "I visited Everton Park, which is in Hertfordshire, about twenty miles from London. You know that this belongs to Lord Everton, who married Miss Leyden."

"And a sweet pretty girl I thought her on her wedding-day," cried Hawkshaw. "Four such lovely brides were never to be seen before assembled in one room, and never will be seen again. By the way, what has become of the young lord's uncle, — the old villain who kept him so long in captivity, deprived of his just rights?"

"He perished miserably of some incurable and excruciating malady, about six or eight months ago, on the Continent. From intelligence which reached the Marquis of Eagledean, it appears that two hangers-on, a man named Mark Bellamy, and a woman called Mrs. Martin, clung to him until the very last. They led him a fearful life, spending upon themselves the greater portion of the income so generously allowed by the much-injured nephew, and leaving the old man sometimes in want of the barest necessaries. However, he is gone to another world, and what has become of Bellamy and Mrs. Martin I have not heard."

"But I presume and hope that Lord Everton and his beautiful wife are as happy as the other couples whom you have mentioned?" said Hawkshaw.

"Equally so," responded Mr. Denison. "They have one child, a son whom they dote upon, and whom they contemplate with pride as the heir to the title and estates. Everton Park is one of the most beautiful spots in England. It was thither, as you are aware, that Frank and Elizabeth were conveyed in their childhood to see their then unhappy mother, the present happy Marchioness of Eagledean. Frank and the Countess of Christoval have been on a visit

to the park; and I can fancy what their feelings were when they again looked upon those scenes of which they had thus obtained a glimpse in their childhood, and which must have been associated with such mysterious memories until the secret of their birth was cleared up. Amongst your letters is one from Lord Everton, — or Adolphus, as all his friends and relatives call him. It likewise contains an invitation, and as you have decided on accepting the others, you cannot refuse this.”

“Nor should I think of doing so,” answered Hawkshaw. “And now there remains one more couple for you to speak of.”

“Mr. Deveril and Lady Florina,” observed Mr. Denison. “It is just the same story with regard to them as it was in respect to the others; and if I had said at once that all the four couples at whose weddings we were present enjoy an equal amount of felicity, I might have summed up these elaborate details in a very few words.”

“Not too elaborate, my dear friend,” replied Hawkshaw, “inasmuch as they are so deeply interesting. I suppose Deveril and his wife have long ago entered upon possession of the estate which the Marquis of Eagledean, Count Christoval, and Lord Everton jointly purchased for them? And that, I believe, is at no great distance from Edenbridge?”

“Not above a dozen miles,” answered Denison, “and it is a sweet spot. Deveril and his wife, the charming Florina, are so happy in their married state, and with their little girl, — a lovely child, by the bye, just four months old, — that, if there be a drawback, it is only on account of the life led by Florina’s brother, Lord Harold Staunton.”

“Ah,” ejaculated Hawkshaw, “I used to like that young nobleman at one time — I mean when he was staying down here at the castle, the year before last, and when he nearly got killed by being thrown off my thoroughbred. But I am afraid he is a sad fellow.”

“He is living almost openly with Lady Saxondale,” responded Denison. “Nothing could be more shameless. Her ladyship seems not merely lost to all sense of decency, but to hold up her head higher in her profligacy and disgrace than she ever did when standing on the pinnacle of a stainless reputation. I understand that Lord Harold Staunton is constantly at Saxondale House, that he almost lives there

entirely, and that, though he has a lodging somewhere in the neighbourhood, — decency's last rag, as it may be called, — yet that he more frequently sleeps at Saxondale House than at his own abode. Conceive what an example for a son, to be the constant companion of his own mother's acknowledged paramour!"

"It is shocking," observed Hawkshaw. Then, after a little hesitation, he inquired, "Has anything more been heard of Juliana?"

"Ah! by the bye," ejaculated Denison, "I have not seen you since that dreadful exposure which was recently published in the English newspapers, translated from the French — I mean the startling discovery that Juliana's husband, who passed as the Count of Toledo, was none other than a notorious Spanish bandit, Ramon de Collantes."

"I also read that statement," observed Hawkshaw, "and I must say that I somewhat pitied the unfortunate young lady, notwithstanding her vile conduct toward me. Is it known what has become of her?"

"I have not heard," responded Mr. Denison. "Heavens, what a family it is! The only one who has turned out well is Constance, the Marchioness of Villebelle; and it was altogether by flying in her mother's face and bestowing her hand where her heart was already given, that she has thus prospered. Her very disobedience has therefore been the source of her good fortune, — which almost proves that to be undutiful to such a mother was to be on the safe side."

"Did you hear anything, when in London, of Lord Saxondale himself?"

"Only that he has become so dissipated as to be well-nigh past redemption, even if he had any friend who would undertake the task of reforming him. He drinks deeply, and, it is believed, never goes to bed sober. I do not suppose that his mother would care very much if he were to drink himself to death, as I fancy that in this case, if he should have attained his majority, the great bulk of the property, if not all, would still remain with her; but I do not exactly know how this is."

"It was a shocking occurrence — the death of his wife," observed Mr. Hawkshaw. "You remember that accident took me to the spot at the time of the dreadful tragedy, and the unfortunate young man was very much afflicted.

By the bye, if I recollect aright, he will be of age in the course of a few days. I heard one of the tenants saying so yesterday morning, and the man was wondering whether there would be any festivities at the castle. But it would appear that no instructions have been received to make preparations for the reception of the family, and therefore I suppose no rejoicings are to take place."

At this point of the conversation Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw reached a spot where the road turned off toward Gainsborough in one direction, and whence there was a by-lane leading by a circuitous route to the former gentleman's residence in another direction. Here therefore they parted, and the squire continued his way toward the town. Finding that he was a little behind his time for the appointment which he had to keep, he turned out of the road, in order to take a short cut across the fields, and in so doing, he drew near to the river's bank, at no great distance from Saxondale Castle. There had recently been a flood, caused by the heavy rains, which had made the Trent overflow and inundate the adjacent fields to a very considerable extent, thereby causing much damage. The bailiff of the Saxondale estate had consequently deemed it necessary to heighten the bank in the particular place where the swollen river had poured its surplus upon the meadows, and several labourers were now busily engaged on this work.

As Mr. Hawkshaw drew near the place just alluded to, it struck him that he beheld some sensation amongst the labourers, five or six of whom were grouped in a particular spot, and appeared to be occupied in the examination of something which they were passing from one to another. The moment they saw the squire, they rushed toward him, the foremost carrying a pistol, while their ejaculations at once afforded a clue to the comprehension of the excitement which animated them.

"This is the thing that did the deed!" exclaimed one.

"There can be no doubt of it!—double-barrelled!" cried another.

"Who knows but what it will all be found out now?" remarked a third. "Poor creatures! it was a shocking murder."

"Here, sir," exclaimed the man who carried the pistol,

and who now presented it to Mr. Hawkshaw, "this has just been found in the river."

But scarcely had he thus spoken, when another labourer came rushing toward the spot, carrying in his hand something which appeared to be a bundle of clothes tied around with a cord; but the package was covered with mud, and the water was dripping out of it.

"Here," exclaimed the individual who carried it, "I have just this moment fished this out of the Trent!" and he also bounded toward Mr. Hawkshaw, who had reined in his horse to hear what the other men had to say.

He took the pistol, and examined it attentively. It was covered with rust, and the barrels were completely stopped up with mud, so that at the first glance it was not easy to ascertain any particulars as to the precise workmanship of the weapon. But as Hawkshaw turned it over and over in his hands, a strange and horrible suspicion gradually arose in his mind. He examined it still more closely; he drew forth his kerchief and cleansed away the dirt as well as he was able. The suspicion was strengthened. A deep gloom, blended with horror and dismay, appeared upon his countenance. Still he was unwilling to suffer that suspicion to arise into a positive conviction; he hoped to God that it might be all an error on his part. He essayed to decipher the maker's name, but the steel on which it was engraved was too completely encrusted with rust to enable him to make it out. He rubbed away with his handkerchief, but all to no purpose.

"There can be no doubt, my good fellows," he said, at length breaking silence, "that this is the weapon which caused the death of those two unfortunate women whose mysterious murder created such a sensation in this neighbourhood the year before last. As a magistrate, I will keep possession of the fatal weapon for the present. But what have you there?" he added, turning to the man who had brought the packet.

"It is a bundle of clothes, sir," was the response.

"Open them," said Mr. Hawkshaw, "and let us see what they are," and still his countenance expressed mingled horror and consternation.

The labouring man placed the bundle on the grass, and, kneeling down, cut the cord which held it together. First

he unrolled and shook out a large cloak, and then a pair of pantaloons. In the midst were a pair of boots, a couple of stockings, and a large stone. The cloak was evidently a man's, and the stone had no doubt been placed in the bundle in order to sink it when thrown into the river. The labouring man now explained that, having to wade into the water for the purpose of pursuing his employment in heightening the bank, his foot had come in contact with a soft object, which he at first fancied was a dead body, but putting down his hand, he drew up the bundle now produced. Neither he nor the other labourers seemed able to comprehend how this bundle could be in any way connected with the pistol, so far as links in the chain of evidence were concerned. They were therefore somewhat surprised when Mr. Hawkshaw, in a low, deep voice, which was full of painful emotion, said, "Heaven is working out its own inscrutable ways, and the river is made to give up its secrets in order to bring the foulest of crimes home to its perpetrator."

There was a solemn pause, during which the labourers stood with their eyes wandering with an expression of awful horror from the pistol to the clothes, and back again to the pistol.

"Fold up those garments again," said Mr. Hawkshaw. "I will take charge of them likewise. Here, you can envelop them in my handkerchief; it is large enough for the purpose."

His orders were executed, and, having distributed some money amongst the men, the squire rode off with the bundle and the weapon. But he did not pursue his way to Gainsborough; he turned his horse's head in another direction, and rode straight, at a brisk gallop, back to his own residence. On arriving there, he gave the bundle of clothes to one of the servants, with instructions to cleanse and dry them thoroughly. He then proceeded to his own chamber, where he set himself busily to work, with oil and a piece of leather, to remove the rust from that part of the pistol where the maker's name was engraved. In about half an hour he succeeded in deciphering that name, and it was indeed the one which he had from the very first expected to find there. He now sent off a groom with a note to Mr. Denison, requesting an immediate visit from that gentleman, on business of the utmost importance.

It was not until a late hour in the afternoon that Mr. Denison arrived at Hawkshaw Hall, and in the meantime the clothes had been thoroughly cleansed and dried. When Mr. Denison was ushered into the parlour where the squire received him, he was much astonished at the look of profound sorrow, mingled with consternation and horror, which his friend wore; and this feeling was enhanced when he beheld a pistol, a cloak, trousers, a pair of boots, and a couple of stockings lying upon the table.

"What has occurred, Hawkshaw?" asked the old gentleman, with a degree of nervous suspense.

"The murder of the ballet-dancer and her servant-maid," answered the squire, solemnly, "is no longer involved in mystery."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Denison, and he glanced toward the things on the table, suspecting that they were connected with the announcement just made to him, though, with the single exception of the pistol, he did not understand how they could possibly furnish links in the chain of evidence.

"Yes," continued Hawkshaw, "it is from those articles which you are surveying that I have gleaned the damning truth. That pistol sent the unfortunate victims to the other world, and those were the garments worn by the murderer at the time. I understand it all, Denison. But, my God! what a blow for the relatives of the wretched assassin!"

"Speak, Hawkshaw!" exclaimed Mr. Denison; "who is he? You evidently know him —"

"And you also, my dear friend," added the squire, profoundly distressed. "He is —"

"Who?"

"Lord Harold Staunton!"

Mr. Denison staggered as if smitten violently with a hammer. He became pale as death, and, sinking upon a seat, murmured, "Heavens, the poor marquis and Florina! Lady Macdonald, too — it is frightful!"

"Frightful indeed!" said Hawkshaw, and the two friends exchanged looks of indescribable horror.

"But are you sure?" exclaimed Mr. Denison, catching at the hope that the squire might possibly be deceived. "Are you certain that you may not be mistaken?"

"No, my dear friend, the truth is indeed but too apparent. Listen and I will give you all requisite explanations. I con-

prehend everything as plainly as if the murderer's confession were made, and the hideous details were still ringing in our ears. Circumstances which wore quite another complexion at the time now reveal themselves in their true light. But if — as there is every reason to suspect — that vile woman was herself an accomplice — ”

“ Who? ” demanded Mr. Denison, hurriedly.

“ Lady Saxondale,” replied Hawkshaw. “ But let me give you the promised explanations. That pistol belonged to Lord Harold Staunton. One day I went up to the room which he occupied at the castle; he was busy preparing his fishing-tackle, and I lingered a little while to converse with him. Accident led me to examine his pistol-case, which was made to contain two, but one only was there; the other was missing. I looked at the one which was left. I remember commenting upon its workmanship. I observed the maker's name, and I remarked that it was a celebrated one. This pistol which lies before you, Denison, is the exact fellow to the one which I then saw.”

“ Good heavens! then there is no doubt,” said the old gentleman, shuddering.

“ Alas, not the slightest,” rejoined Hawkshaw. “ And now I bethink me there was something very singular in Staunton's manner throughout that conversation. I remember, too, that at one moment — ah, it was when I observed that he was doubtless a good shot — he became so deadly pale, and his countenance suddenly wore so ghastly a look, that I grew terrified on his account. I however attributed those appearances to his recent accident; but that accident itself, Denison, I now feel convinced was an intentional one — Yes, I comprehend it all.”

“ Do you mean the accident with your thoroughbred? ”

“ I do. Heavens, what a deeply laid project! With what demon-like artifice was the whole plan arranged. Do you not fathom my meaning? The wretched young man threw himself from the horse, in order that he might obtain a sufficient plea and excuse for keeping his own chamber. Thus was the opportunity afforded for committing the crime, while the very fact that he was believed to be stretched upon a bed of illness was of course calculated to avert even the very possibility of suspicion from himself. On that fatal

night, therefore, he must have stolen forth from the castle — ”

“ But how? ” inquired Denison, experiencing a fearful and likewise bewildering interest in these explanations.

“ How? ” echoed Hawkshaw. “ Was it not proven to us, a short time after the very tragedy itself, that Staunton knew full well how to obtain secret ingress to the castle? That tree which grows up from the river’s bed, and the branches of which spread against the windows of the tapestry chamber — ”

“ Ah, and where his kerchief was discovered,” ejaculated Denison. “ Then you think that, on the fatal night of the murder, he must have stolen forth from his chamber, he must have passed out of the castle by that window.”

“ No doubt of it,” replied Hawkshaw. “ It is equally clear that these were the garments which he wore on the occasion. He must have waded through the stream, under the castle wall. His clothes were therefore wet and muddy; they would have served as evidences, or at least would have engendered strange suspicions, if seen in that state by any of the domestics. Is it not therefore clear enough that, in order to cause all traces of his dread crime to disappear, on his return to the castle those garments were tied up in a bundle and were doubtless thrown from one of the windows overlooking the river? The current has since carried the package higher up toward Gainsborough, notwithstanding the weight of the stone placed inside for the purpose of sinking it. As for the pistol, you yourself, Denison, suggested a long while ago, when that masquerading-dress was brought to us, that the pistol should be searched for. I remember well the words you used at the time. You described the several influences under which a murderer throws away his weapon: first, that nothing criminatory may be found upon him, if suddenly stopped and searched; secondly, in the awful feeling of horror which naturally succeeds the commission of a crime; and thirdly, on being alarmed by the sound of voices or footsteps. Now, we well know that Lord Eagledean and Mr. Deveril were upon the spot almost immediately after the shots were fired, and therefore it may have been under any one of those influences, or all combined, that the wretched assassin flung his weapon into the Trent. In a word, there can be no doubt that this

assassin was none other than Lord Harold Staunton, and it remains for us to decide what course we have to adopt."

Hawkshaw then explained the circumstances under which the pistol and the clothes came into his possession, and which are already known to the reader.

"That this foul murder was committed by Lord Harold Staunton," said Mr. Denison, "there can be no possible doubt after everything you have told me. That Lady Saxondale was his accomplice, is likewise to be presumed, though we are still totally in the dark as to the reason which could have prompted so fearful a crime. With these motives, however, we have nothing to do; it is with facts that we have to deal. What course can we take, Hawkshaw? On the one hand, if, being cognizant of a crime, we fail to give up the criminal to justice, we offend not merely against the laws, but likewise against that community of which we are members. But, on the other hand, our friendship for the Marquis of Eagledean, and for all who are connected with the miserable murderer, prompts us to take some other steps. I confess that I am at a loss, I know not what counsel to proffer."

"It may be," replied Hawkshaw, "that the Marquis of Eagledean will decide, if appealed to, that the law must take its course."

"Then let that appeal be made to him," cried Denison, "and we shall both stand acquitted of any breach of friendship or any undue severity in the matter. This is the best course to be adopted, and you, my dear friend, must set off without delay to see the Marquis of Eagledean. The evidences of the crime you can bear with you, and then you will act as circumstances shall suggest."

"Yes," responded the squire, after a few moments' reflection, "the plan you have marked out is the best."

CHAPTER XXIX

FURTHER UNRAVELMENT OF THE TANGLED SKEIN

IT was about one o'clock in the afternoon of the following day that Mr. Hawkshaw arrived at Edenbridge Park. The marquis and marchioness were at home, and both were much concerned on account of the severe illness of a domestic whom they much valued. The reader will recollect a certain Mrs. Jameson, of whom mention was made at the time the marquis went to Rhavadergwy for the purpose of presenting himself to the object of his life's love, — Lady Everton at that time, — but who had since become his wife. Mrs. Jameson had long been in her ladyship's service. She was now exceedingly old, and was stretched upon a bed of sickness from which it was feared she would never rise again. The marquis and marchioness were, however, employing all available human means to restore her. The surgeon, who had been called in from the town of Edenbridge, had advised that a consultation should take place with some eminent London physician, and the marquis had left it to the medical attendant to use his own discretion in respect to the practitioner whose aid was to be thus invoked. It happened that the Edenbridge surgeon was well acquainted with Doctor Ferney, to whom he accordingly sent a pressing letter beseeching him to come down to the Park. Ferney — though making it a general rule not to visit patients at any considerable distance from London — did not consider himself very well able to refuse compliance with so urgent an appeal, and he accordingly set off for the Park. He had not been many minutes at the mansion when Mr. Hawkshaw, arriving by the next train from London, likewise reached his destination.

The Edenbridge surgeon and Doctor Ferney were consult-

ing together upon the invalid's case. The marchioness was in the room of the invalid herself, the marquis was alone in a parlour, when Mr. Hawkshaw was announced. His lordship at once saw by the squire's manner that something of unusual importance had occurred; and Hawkshaw, with no more prefatory words than were sufficient to introduce so distressing a subject, proceeded to explain to the Marquis of Eagledean all those particulars with which the reader has been made acquainted in the previous chapter. His lordship was for some minutes overwhelmed with horror and consternation. He knew that his nephew was immersed to the very lips in all kinds of profligacies, he knew likewise that Harold had at one time plotted against his life; but he had never suspected that his miserable nephew was already a blood-stained murderer. The intelligence, therefore, though judiciously prefaced and delicately announced, filled Lord Eagledean with the most horrible feelings, and indeed it was no wonder that for some minutes he was totally unable to give utterance to a word. Profoundly did the good-hearted squire commiserate his noble friend, and he was more than ever satisfied with himself for having adopted this course of first of all communicating with his lordship ere taking any extreme measure upon his own responsibility.

“My dear Hawkshaw,” said the marquis, at length breaking silence, but speaking in a broken and tremulous voice, at the same time that he took the squire's hand, and pressed it with convulsive nervousness, “you and Denison have acted most generously. Oh, that vile young man! Good heavens! is it possible that he should be so deeply stained with guilt? Accursed be Lady Saxondale, for she it is who has thus urged him on step by step from one crime to another. Ah, my dear friend, I can now give you some explanations which will help to clear up whatsoever mystery still envelopes that horrible tragedy so far as you are acquainted with it. The masquerade-dress, of the discovery of which you told me a long time ago, was worn by Lady Saxondale on a particular night, when she had an appointment with my wretched nephew, — the object of that appointment being to incite him to a duel with William Deveril. It has all along been evident that this dress fell into the hands of Emily Archer the ballet-dancer, who was the mistress of Edmund Saxondale. We may therefore surmise that she gleaned enough

information on the point to be enabled to use that dress as a means of extortion or coercion with regard to Lady Saxondale. And now, Hawkshaw, you can understand wherefore her ladyship had so deep an interest in clearing her path of the unfortunate ballet-dancer. I confess there have been times, ever since you mentioned the discovery of that masquerade-dress some time back, — and which discovery proved that it was this particular costume which the women had with them in the parcel on the evening of the murder, — there have been times, I say, when distant suspicions have flitted through my mind that Lady Saxondale might possibly have not been altogether a stranger to the foul assassination of those victims. But still there was no positive evidence to justify such a thought; and, at all events, I never for a moment fancied that my wretched nephew could have been implicated in the tragedy. I knew that he was stretched upon his bed at the time, and never for an instant did it occur to me that his indisposition was feigned for the purpose of enabling him to commit, with all the greater ease and security, so execrable a crime. However, it is, alas, but too apparent now that such has been the real truth, and I am well-nigh broken-hearted at the thought.”

“Your lordship indeed requires all your fortitude,” said Hawkshaw, profoundly moved by the spectacle of his noble friend’s affliction. “Ah, I do indeed comprehend, from all that you have just said, how it was that Lady Saxondale might have had the strongest possible motives for the perpetration, or, rather, the instigation, of so foul a deed. But what, my lord, is to be done? As yet no exposure has taken place. The incidents which I have been relating to you are known only to Denison and myself. Rest assured that our friendship toward yourself and all connected with you shall override every other consideration, if you so will it. Should you decide upon maintaining silence in respect to this dreadful discovery, for the sake of the amiable Florina and the kind-hearted Lady Macdonald, you have but to say the word. It will be easy for me to return into Lincolnshire and say something to those labouring men which will give them to understand that the clue which I at one moment fancied to be obtained has not turned out to be the right one.”

“Hawkshaw, whatever may occur,” responded the

marquis, "I never can forget this kindness on your part and that of my friend Denison. I scarcely feel myself justified in allowing selfish considerations to outweigh the sense of duty which we all owe to the law and to society at large. But yet there are the gravest motives — yes, the gravest —"

The marquis stopped short, and walked abruptly toward the window, where he remained for some minutes wrapped up in the deepest thought. He envisaged all that must occur if justice should be allowed to take its course. That Lady Saxondale was not merely the accomplice, but the instigatrix of the crime, was beyond the possibility of doubt. If, therefore, Lord Harold Staunton were arrested for the murder, her guilt must inevitably transpire. And then, what would be the feelings of William Deveril? Should he, after having made such noble sacrifices to save his mother from exposure, shame, and ruin, should he be now compelled to see her held up to a world's execration for a crime even still more terrible than that from the consequences of which he had striven to shield her? Should he be forced to behold his mother plunged into a felon's gaol, dragged before a public tribunal, and ultimately sent out of the world by the hand of the executioner? Oh, the marquis but too well knew that all this would break the generous heart of Florina's husband, that Florina herself would sink down prematurely to the grave, and that thus the crimes of the guilty would redound with horrible effect upon the heads of the innocent. These were the reflections which passed through the mind of the Marquis of Eagledean.

But there were other considerations which he had likewise to take into account. During the fourteen or fifteen months which had now elapsed since William Deveril discovered that he was in reality the son of Lady Saxondale, he had occasionally called upon her in Park Lane. She had always received him alone; she had lavished upon him caresses which appeared the tenderest and the most affectionate, and he loved her notwithstanding all the past. He was ignorant that Lord Harold Staunton was her almost avowed paramour. Married as he was to Staunton's sister, no one whom he met — not even the most casual acquaintances — would so far outrage delicacy as to make the slightest allusion to such a circumstance. He therefore hoped and believed that his mother, Lady Saxondale, was now leading a quiet and respectable

life, and thus he had no hesitation in visiting her from time to time, as above described. Of course Florina knew not that he ever went to Saxondale House. She had continued ignorant of the tremendous secret of his birth, — a secret now known but to himself, Lady Saxondale, the Marquis of Eagledean, and Angela (Francis Paton's wife). But even supposing that the discovery which Hawkshaw had come to Edenbridge Park to announce should be hushed up and buried in silence, how was it possible that the Marquis of Eagledean could suffer the pure-minded and virtuous William Deveril to go on visiting his mother — a murderess? No; there was something terrific in such a course, something outrageous to every proper sentiment, something against which every feeling of propriety revolted. Then, what was he to do? This question kept agitating in his lordship's mind as he stood deliberating at the window. There really seemed to be only this plan: that the veil of secrecy should still be kept drawn over the tremendous guilt of Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton, so far as exposure to the world was concerned; but that measures must be adopted to force Lady Saxondale to go abroad, and for ever, so that no more interviews should take place between herself and her lawfully born offspring, William Deveril. As for Staunton, he likewise must be compelled to depart to some distant clime, with a warning that his only hope of safety lay in making his self-expatriation eternal.

Such were the resolves to which the Marquis of Eagledean came; but while explaining them to Mr. Hawkshaw, he did not of course make the slightest allusion to the fact that William Deveril was Lady Saxondale's son.

“My dear friend,” he said, “I accept the alternative which your noble generosity and that of Mr. Denison has left open. There are too many on whose innocent heads the effect of all this guilt would terrifically redound, to permit an exposure to take place. The veil of secrecy must not therefore be lifted from that dark tragedy. But at the same time, if we forbear from handing over the criminals to the grasp of the law, we must not suffer them to escape without some chastisement. We must force them into exile, to different parts of the world, with the warning that all this forbearance will cease if they ever set foot upon the English soil again. Come, my friend, we will depart for London;

we will go together and see these guilty beings — I hope for the last time.”

Mr. Hawkshaw expressed his readiness to accompany the marquis, and indeed to yield to his views in every particular. While refreshments were served up to the squire, Lord Eagledean sought the marchioness in order to inform her that business of a somewhat urgent nature, in which his friend Hawkshaw was concerned, was about to take him to London, and that he should not probably return until the following day. Meanwhile the consultation between Doctor Ferney and the Edenbridge surgeon had terminated; the physician had recommended the mode of treatment which was the best for adoption in respect to the invalid, and he was now about to take his departure. As a matter of course, the marquis offered him a seat in his own carriage to the railway-station, which Doctor Ferney accepted. The physician thus became a fellow traveller with Lord Eagledean and Mr. Hawkshaw to London, for when the station was reached, the marquis could not possibly express a desire to separate from Doctor Ferney's society in the train, though in his heart he would much rather have travelled alone with Mr. Hawkshaw. In about an hour and a half the metropolis was reached, and as they were all three going to the West End, they took a vehicle at the terminus. The conversation had all the while been upon indifferent topics, so that Ferney had not the slightest idea whither his two travelling-companions were actually bound. Conduit Street, where the physician dwelt, was all in the way toward Park Lane. The driver of the vehicle therefore received orders first of all to proceed to Doctor Ferney's dwelling. In due time this destination was reached, and the physician alighted at his own door. As he was about to take leave, it occurred to him that having been most liberally treated by the marquis in respect to the amount of the fee placed in his hand immediately after the consultation at Edenbridge Park, he was bound, for courtesy's sake, to offer some little apology for what might appear a most rude neglect on his part in respect to a certain matter, but which he had his own good reasons for having hitherto so long remained silent upon.

He was standing on the curbstone, looking into the vehicle where the marquis and Hawkshaw remained seated. Hands had been shaken, and farewells said, when that

thought to which we have just alluded occurred to the physician. It was a most disagreeable, a most painful topic for him to touch upon; it revived so many afflicting associations. But still he felt himself bound, in common courtesy, to say a word upon the subject, and he summoned up all his fortitude for the purpose.

"My lord," he said, "I have not forgotten that a long, long time ago you honoured me with a call, and brought me a phial the contents of which you requested me to analyze. On three or four occasions after that, your lordship called again, to inquire whether I had made the analysis, and I feel ashamed when I reflect that I continuously answered I had not as yet found time. Your lordship suddenly ceased from calling altogether, and during the lengthy interval which has passed since then, I have often feared you might have felt offended with me. When, therefore, I received the letter inviting me to Edenbridge, I was gratified by the thought that your lordship was not angry —"

"No, Doctor Ferney," interrupted the Marquis of Eagledean, "I had ceased to think of the matter," — though the real truth was that after the discovery of William Deveril's parentage, his lordship had taken no further step to penetrate any deeper into Lady Saxondale's guilt. "I can assure you I have not been offended, and as the interest attached to that phial has passed away, you need not suffer it to remain for another moment in your thoughts. And now farewell."

"Farewell, my lord," answered Doctor Ferney. "Can I tell the driver whither he is to convey you?"

"To Saxondale House, in Park Lane," responded the marquis.

The mention of that name, so closely following upon the discourse relative to the phial of poison, struck the physician as something not merely accidental, but superstitiously portentous. It gave a most poignant keenness to all the memories which had just been excited in his brain; the effect produced upon him was that of a sudden shock. He started, turned deadly pale, and then stood gazing in a species of ghastly consternation upon the Marquis of Eagledean.

"Heavens! are you ill, Doctor Ferney?" exclaimed the

nobleman, who, as well as Hawkshaw, was astonished and affrighted by the physician's looks.

"Yes—I am ill—I—I feel—very ill," gasped Ferney, scarcely knowing what he said, and actually experiencing the most sickening sensations.

"Ill, my kind benefactor, my best of friends!" exclaimed an old man, who happened to come up to the spot at the moment, after having been for his usual little walk; and just as he was about to ascend the front door-steps, he caught those words which fell from Doctor Ferney's lips. "Let me support you."

"Never mind, Thompson—I am better now," said the physician, suddenly rallying and regaining his self-possession.

"Thompson?" ejaculated the Marquis of Eagledean, who, though the name was a common one enough, never heard it mentioned without thinking of the individual who, if he were found, could doubtless throw so much light upon William Deveril's early history. "Did you say this gentleman's name was Mr. Thompson?"

"Yes, my lord," answered Ferney, astonished at the question, as was also Thompson himself, and even Hawkshaw too; for it certainly seemed a very strange one, the motive for putting it not being apparent.

"I am sure you will pardon me, Mr. Thompson," said the marquis, "for the seeming discourtesy of my behaviour, but I have vowed that whenever I meet any one bearing your name, and being of a certain age, I would not fail to put a particular query. I have no doubt that I shall receive from you the same answer I have already had from a dozen other Mr. Thompsons to whom I have addressed myself on the subject. But nevertheless I shall take this liberty with you."

"This is the Marquis of Eagledean, and that is his friend, Mr. Hawkshaw," said Ferney to Thompson, who accordingly bowed in acknowledgment of the introductions.

"Your lordship can take no liberty," said Thompson, "and therefore whatsoever question you may have to put to me shall be readily answered."

"It is a simple one," rejoined the marquis, really attaching but little importance to the incident; for the antipodes are not farther from each other than from his imagination was the hope that his query would elicit the response it was destined to meet. "Again I must ask you to excuse my

freedom. Indeed, the question itself may savour of impertinence, but I can assure you it is through no illegitimate curiosity I ask if you were ever at any period of your life connected with theatricals? "

"Most assuredly I was, my lord," answered Thompson.

"You were?" ejaculated the marquis, starting as if galvanized. "But one word more," he added, with a feverish excitement which astonished those who beheld it. "Were you ever yourself the manager of a company of performers? "

"I was, my lord," rejoined Thompson.

"You were? Question begets question," exclaimed Lord Eagledean. "Excuse me, but were you acquainted with a family named Deveril? "

"I knew them well, my lord," was the response, given with increasing astonishment on the part of Thompson, and in which Hawkshaw and Ferney both naturally shared.

"A man and his wife, with a boy and girl," continued the marquis, with rapid and excited utterance, — "the girl named Angela, the boy William — "

"To be sure! the very same!" ejaculated Thompson. "But the boy was not really their son — I have been questioned about this before, by a woman named Madge Somers, who was murdered, I think I heard — "

"Enough, enough, Mr. Thompson!" cried the marquis. "Another time — to-morrow — or presently — I will come and have some conversation with you."

"Dear me, my lord," said Thompson, more and more surprised at all that was taking place, "I hope there's nothing amiss. As for the boy I am speaking of, — he must be a young man now, — he had the mark of a strawberry on his shoulder — "

"What?" ejaculated Ferney, once more becoming deadly pale, and once more, too, staggering back as if seized with a sudden indisposition. "Good heavens! is everything about to transpire?" and these words, quite involuntarily spoken, were uttered with an indescribable anguish and terror.

"I see," said the marquis, at once convinced that Ferney himself had something important which he could communicate, and that there was likewise something more serious and significant than sudden indisposition when he turned so ghastly pale at the mention of the name of Saxondale, "I see that I must have some immediate conversation with

you both. Hawkshaw, my dear friend, excuse me if I may now appear to be treating you with a want of confidence, but — ”

“ No apologies, my dear marquis,” said the squire. “ I am well aware that whatever you do is for the best.”

Lord Eagledean alighted from the vehicle, and Doctor Ferney requested the squire to enter the house, observing that whatsoever private discourse had to be held might take place in another room; but even as he spoke, the physician's manner was still strangely confused, he trembled nervously, and the ghastliness of pallor seemed to have settled itself immovably upon his countenance. They all entered the dwelling together. Mr. Hawkshaw was shown into one room, while the Marquis of Eagledean accompanied Doctor Ferney and Thompson to another. We shall leave the squire to the astonishment into which all these proceedings naturally flung him, and we shall see what took place between the other three.

Doctor Ferney sank, like one thoroughly exhausted both in mind and body, upon a sofa. The fortitude which had so long upheld him in the maintenance of Lady Saxondale's various secrets appeared altogether to have given way. He looked like a man who felt that the time destined by Heaven itself for the fullest revelations had now come, as if the veil of mystery which had so long shrouded the past was to be drawn aside by the invisible hand of Providence itself. He was thoroughly crushed and spirit-broken. Remorse for the part which he had enacted in suffering himself to be made the tool of that wily woman seized upon his soul; his sensation was that of a guilty person who feels that the hour has come when penitence must ensue and atonement be made; and under such influences as these the spell of that very infatuation which now for twenty-one long years had bound him to the image of Lady Saxondale was itself well-nigh broken. At all events, the talisman had lost its hitherto marvellous power. He had a conscience on which there rested a heavy load, and he longed to ease himself thereof.

Both Thompson and the Marquis of Eagledean saw that Doctor Ferney was painfully agitated, that bitter feelings were torturing his soul, and they scarcely knew what conjecture to form as to the precise cause of so much trouble. Thompson especially, who had lived with the physician

for the last eighteen months, was more astonished than even the marquis, because he knew how pure and upright was the tenor of his benefactor's existence. He had looked upon him only as the slave of science; he could scarcely fancy it possible that he had ever committed a crime.

"Doctor Ferney, and you also, Mr. Thompson," said the Marquis of Eagledean, addressing them both in a solemn manner, "the finger of Heaven is visible in the incidents which have taken place within the last few minutes. It seemed destined that I was to mention the name of Saxondale in order to excite some particular feeling in your breast, Doctor Ferney; it seemed too, Mr. Thompson, that I was simultaneously thrown in your way in order to receive from your lips those statements which you evidently have it in your power to make in respect to a young gentleman who is known to the world as William Deveril."

"For my part, my lord," at once responded Thompson, "I have not the slightest interest in making any concealment, especially as I am even now ignorant of the use or value which the details I am enabled to communicate may prove to you. Indeed, all I know is this: that many long years ago I was with my company of performers in one of the midland counties. Amongst that company was a young couple of the name of Deveril, a steady, well-behaved, respectable pair, — an exception, indeed, to the general rule with regard to the profession which circumstances had compelled them to embrace. One day they were walking out together in the neighbourhood of some town in a midland county, — I forget exactly which at this moment, — when they were struck by the appearance of an elderly gipsy woman, who had a beautiful baby in her arms. The child was about four months old, and though so sweetly pretty, looked sickly and delicate; it was, moreover, clad in rags. The Deverils stopped and spoke to the woman, — who accosted them, indeed, to solicit alms. They saw at once that the child was not of the gipsy race, for its complexion was perfectly fair. They felt assured it had been stolen, and was now carried about in the arms of a mendicant for the purpose of exciting sympathy. They questioned the gipsy very closely, and the tale which she told seemed too roundabout and too full of prevarications to be consistent with truth. She vowed that she had re-

ceived the child from another gipsy woman who was a perfect stranger to her, that this other gipsy woman had told her she had got the child a few weeks back from a gang of tramps of her own race, but with whom she had likewise been previously unacquainted.

“Whether true or whether false, the narrative afforded the Deverils no clue to the discovery of the unfortunate child’s parents. In their indignation at the thought that the poor little innocent might have possibly been torn away from a comfortable home, they made use of some threatening language to the elderly gipsy woman, to the effect that there were laws and authorities to compel her to give a more satisfactory account than she had done of the way in which she became possessed of that infant. Either being really alarmed, or else having had the child already long enough upon her hands, the gipsy suddenly laid the infant down on the grass by the roadside, and darted away as fast as her legs could carry her. Considering that she was an elderly person, she sped at an astonishing rate; and though Deveril pursued her, so soon as he recovered from the astonishment into which the suddenness of that proceeding had thrown him, he could not overtake her. He lost her amidst a maze of lanes leading out from the highroad where the occurrence took place, and it is therefore probable that while he was pursuing one direction, she had plunged into some by-path in another. When he retraced his way to the spot where he had left his wife, he found her seated on the bank with the child in her arms.

“Your lordship can guess the sequel. The Deverils were generous-hearted, though poor, and they resolved to adopt the unfortunate infant that had thus been thrown in their way. They gave it their own surname of Deveril, and the Christian name of William. A year afterward they had a child of their own; and of such angelic beauty was she that they called her Angela. Not for a moment, however, did they think of renouncing the task they had imposed upon themselves of rearing the little William, -- whom, indeed, they loved as much as if he had in reality been their own son. They were not less intelligent and considerate than they were kind-hearted. They accordingly resolved to bring up William with the idea that he was in truth their own offspring, until he should reach the age of manhood; and to

this resolution they came in order that as he himself grew up he should not have his sensitive feelings wounded by being compelled to regard himself as an interloper in the bosom of that poor and humble family. Besides, they did not wish the tenderest years of his life to be saddened and disturbed by the knowledge that he had been torn from his own legitimate parents; and thus was it for the poor boy's sake that he was brought up to consider himself as the son of those who from mere charity had adopted him. I esteemed the Deverils; I was on terms of intimacy with them, apart from being their employer in the dramatic profession, and they confided all their motives and plans to me. Now, my lord, I have told you everything with which I am acquainted on this subject; but I may repeat what I ere now said in the street that the child who was so adopted had the tiny mark of a strawberry just in this part where the neck joins the shoulder."

Thus speaking, Mr. Thompson indicated on his own person the spot to which he alluded with regard to William Deveril. The marquis had listened with the profoundest attention and interest. Doctor Ferney, with his countenance buried in his hands, had not appeared to listen at all; but he nevertheless had lost not a single word of everything Thompson had been saying, and he suddenly raised his eyes at the very instant that Thompson indicated the place where the strawberry-mark on William Deveril's shoulder would be found.

"Yes, yes; it was there too that I —"

He had ejaculated those words with a startling abruptness as he sprang up to his feet; but suddenly stopping short, without finishing the sentence, he placed his hand upon his brow, and sank back again on the sofa with an expression of ineffable anguish sweeping over his features.

"Doctor Ferney," said the Marquis of Eagledean, approaching the physician, and speaking in a voice of the deepest solemnity, "whatever you have to make known, I adjure you to reveal it, in the name of that Providence which has brought about the incidents of the hour that is passing."

"Do you, my lord," inquired the physician, "know that William Deveril, — the lost child whom the poor players adopted?"

"I do," responded the marquis. "He is married to my

own niece; and, what is more, I am acquainted with the real truth of his parentage."

"Ah, I understand it all! I comprehend it now," ejaculated the miserable Ferney, literally writhing in mortal anguish. "But Heaven knows that when I lent myself as that lady's instrument, I suspected not for what purpose it was to serve. My lord, — and you, Mr. Thompson, — you behold before you the man who perverted his scientific skill to the consummation of a fearful imposture; but I repeat — yes, solemnly I repeat, that I knew not at the time the iniquity I was assisting to consummate."

"What mean you?" demanded the marquis.

"I mean, my lord," responded Ferney, who felt as if some irresistible influence was now urging him to make the revelation, "I mean that this right hand of mine formed upon the neck of him who now bears the title of Lord Saxondale a peculiar mark, a mark of which the description was most accurately given to me, — the mark of a strawberry."

Having made this confession, Ferney once more sank down upon the sofa, a prey to feelings which may be better imagined than described. The marquis stood transfixed in amazement, while an ejaculation expressive of a similar sentiment burst from the lips of Thompson.

"Yes, it was I who did it," suddenly exclaimed Ferney, as he again sprang up from the sofa; and now there was a sort of maniac wildness in his looks and his manner. "Oh, truly have you observed, my lord, that the finger of Heaven is visible in all this! And I feel — yes, I feel that this is indeed the day for penitence, for atonement, and for retribution. Not another hour, not another unnecessary minute shall be wasted, ere wrong shall give place to right. Be the consequences to me what they may, I will do justice where justice ought to be done."

It was with all the vehemence of the wildest emotions, with all the impassioned excitement of feelings painfully worked up, that the physician had given vent to that hurricane of words; and while their last echoes were still vibrating through the air, he rushed like one frenzied from the room.

"Stop, Doctor Ferney — stop! I entreat, I command you!" cried the Marquis of Eagledean, now suddenly ren-

dered keenly alive to the dreadful consequences of exposure in respect to Lady Saxondale.

But the physician heard him not, — or at least heeded him not; but precipitating himself in frantic haste down the stairs, he rushed forth from the house. The vehicle was still waiting at the door; he sprang into it, and gave a hurried direction to the driver, who at once whipped his horse, and away flew the cab in the direction of Park Lane.

The Marquis of Eagledean rushed down the stairs after the physician, but reached the threshold of the front door only in time to catch a glimpse of the vehicle as it was dashing away. For the driver, judging by Ferney's excitement, and knowing him to be a physician, conceived that some life and death affair was concerned. He accordingly failed not to ply his whip and chose not to spare his horse.

"Good heavens! my lord," said Thompson, who had followed the marquis down to the street door, "what will ensue? What will be the consequences?"

"My dear friend, what is all this?" cried Hawkshaw, now rushing forth from the parlour, where he had been waiting, and from the window of which he had observed the physician's egress, which had every appearance of a flight in wildest terror.

But Lord Eagledean could not answer either of his querists. He was overwhelmed with consternation at the thought that the fullest exposure must now inevitably take place, and that all William Deveril's forbearance, all his hopes of saving his mother from shame and ruin, would in a few minutes become as nought. At that instant an unoccupied cab passed along the street; and the man who drove it, perceiving three gentlemen standing on the threshold of the hall door, held up his hand in the usual mode of hailing for a fare.

"We may yet be in time to prevent it!" ejaculated the marquis; and beckoning an affirmative to the cab-driver, he rushed down the steps.

Hawkshaw and Thompson followed him mechanically, and the next moment they were all three seated in the vehicle.

"Where to, gentlemen?" demanded the driver.

"To Saxondale House in Park Lane," was Lord Eagledean's hurried and excited response. Then, as the vehicle drove rapidly away, he said to Hawkshaw, "My dear friend,

whatever be the result of the present proceeding, it were wrong, it were ungenerous, to keep you in the dark as to its meaning; for Mr. Thompson, who is seated next to you, can tell you, even if my lips uttered it not, that William Deveril is the true and rightful Lord Saxondale."

The squire literally bounded upon his seat; but we must leave the marquis to give him the few hurried explanations which the short space that was occupied in the drive to Park Lane permitted, while we transport the reader to Saxondale House itself.

CHAPTER XXX

THE BIRTHDAY

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon — about an hour previous to the scenes at Doctor Ferney's house — that several persons were assembled in the State Drawing-room at Saxondale House. These were Lady Saxondale, Juliana, Edmund, Lord Harold Staunton, Lord Petersfield, and Messrs. Marlow and Malton.

This was the day on which, according to the baptismal certificate, the heir of Saxondale attained his twenty-first year.

It was therefore a day of business, to be succeeded with festivities in the evening. The table in the State Drawing-room where the assemblage had gathered was covered with parchments, deeds, and documents. The time had arrived when the guardianship of Lord Petersfield and Marlow and Malton was to terminate, when the requisite releases were to be signed by Edmund, and when the transfers of the Saxondale property were to be duly made by the trustees.

We must glance at the demeanour and bearing of those present on the occasion. First of all, Lady Saxondale, looking eminently handsome, wore upon her countenance a certain expression of satisfaction, which Petersfield and the lawyers regarded as a becoming maternal pride in respect to the offspring who was now entering upon the enjoyment of his estates. The reader, however, will scarcely require to be informed that this expression on her ladyship's features was rather one of triumph at the success of all her deeply laid schemes; for she had not the slightest fear that her own lawful and legitimate offspring, William Deveril, would breathe a syllable or raise a finger to prevent the consummation of the monstrous fraud by which he was excluded from

his rights. Secondly, Edmund himself was in a fever of ecstatic joy; his dark crime was for the moment forgotten, and in the secret depths of his heart he was thinking to himself that he should speedily again shake off the yoke which his mother had ever since the date of that foul deed succeeded in reimposing upon him. Thirdly, Juliana looked on with an outward calmness, but with an inward exultation; for she had resolved that, as the price of keeping the tremendous secret with which she was acquainted, she would extort from her mother a concession of a handsome income, which would enable her to prosecute her own pleasures after her own independent fashion. Fourthly, Lord Harold Staunton, who, as the reader is aware, knew nothing at all of the fearful deception which was being practised, had his own pleasurable feelings; for, what with being Lady Saxondale's paramour, and having, as he fancied, obtained immense influence over Edmund, he saw every opportunity of continuing a life of luxurious indolence. Fifthly, Lord Petersfield looked so immensely pompous, and at the same time so awfully grave, that he seemed the very embodiment of the proudest diplomatic mystery; and if any one at the moment had dared to ask him pointblank whether he were really Lord Petersfield or not, he would doubtless have considered it his duty to fence with the question for at least half an hour ere he answered it. Sixthly, Mr. Marlow was all excitement and bustle, unfolding one paper and rolling up another, making a correction here and a memorandum there, and, in short, appearing as brisk as if he were full of quicksilver. Seventhly, his partner, Mr. Malton, had all the sedate businesslike demeanour of a shrewd and intelligent practitioner.

These seven personages were, as we have said, gathered around the table in the State Drawing-room at about four o'clock on the day of which we are writing. Business was now to be proceeded with, to be followed by a sumptuous banquet, which was ordered for seven o'clock. The attainment of a majority under such circumstances, where immense estates and revenues were concerned, was a matter of such importance as to absorb every other feeling on the part of such men as Petersfield and the lawyers. Thus, though they knew full well that Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton were much more intimate than they ought to be, though they likewise knew that Juliana's career had

been far from the purest and most creditable, and though, in addition to these circumstances, they were equally aware that Edmund himself was a dissipated profligate, they did not consider the present moment to be the time to bestow cold looks, make pointed allusions, or display any particular fastidiousness on their own parts. In a word, they regarded it as a day on which the past might be put aside, for the present, and when every indulgence should be shown and every friendly feeling ought to prevail. Under these circumstances was it that those seven persons were assembled.

But just as Mr. Malton was beginning to read over the releases which Edmund had to sign, a domestic entered the room and presented a card to Lady Saxondale, without, however, uttering a word. For a moment, but only for a moment, she turned pale and trembled; yet so quickly was her self-possession regained that not a soul present observed that she had even for that single instant been thus shaken.

"I will come immediately," she said to the domestic, who bowed and retired. Then addressing herself to the company, she observed, with a bland smile, "It is a visitor of no consequence, but nevertheless one whom I must see for a few minutes. You can proceed, Mr. Marlow, with the reading of the release, as, for my part, I am already acquainted with its contents."

She then left the room. But scarcely had the door closed behind her, scarcely did she find herself on the landing, when she was seized with a recurrence of that tremor which was so transient in the presence of the company; and as a frightful idea swept like a barbed arrow through her brain, she murmured to herself, "My God! can he have thought better of it? Can he have repented of the sacrifice he had promised to make? Can he mean to assert his rights? No, no, it is impossible. He loves me too well to plunge me into ruin. I have too much influence over him for that. A little cajolery, plenty of caresses, a more than usual amount of endearments, and he will be docile, he will be submissive."

Thus buoying herself up with hope, though nevertheless not without some degree of painful suspense and poignant apprehension, Lady Saxondale repaired to the apartment to which the visitor had been shown. This visitor was none other than William Deveril. Unaware that the Marquis of Eagledean had so suddenly come up to London, our hero,

having some business in the metropolis, had journeyed thither; and having terminated it sooner than he had expected, he thought that he would pay his mother a visit of a few minutes ere hastening off to the railway station to return to his own abode. We must add that he was totally ignorant that this was the birthday of Saxondale's heir, — his own birthday, by rights, — but the benefits of which were to all appearances to be reaped by another.

Lady Saxondale entered, as we said, the apartment to which William Deveril had been shown; and with all the generous feelings of his heart, with all the enthusiastic fervour of a filial love which could even blind itself to a mother's faults, he rushed into her arms. In that gush of tenderness was the significant proof that she was safe, and that it was merely a casual visit which he had thus paid her, a visit inspired by no motive hostile to her own schemes.

"My dearest boy," she said, clasping him to her bosom, and lavishing upon him caresses which appeared the tenderest and the most fervid, "I am delighted to see you again. Would that it were possible, my beloved William," — for by this Christian name she was accustomed to call him, — "we could meet oftener. But for many reasons you know it is impossible."

"Alas! I know it, dearest mother," responded our hero; "and you will admit that I obey the dictates of my own feelings as little as possible. If I come to you once a month, it is the very outside —"

"You are indeed as prudent, dearest boy, as you are kind-hearted and generous toward your affectionate mother," and as she thus spoke the wily woman pressed him again to her bosom. "I am so sorry, dearest William," she went on to observe, "that I have some persons on business with me at this moment, and I shall not be able to remain very long with you."

"Never, my beloved mother," quickly responded our hero, "will I interfere with your proceedings. I will therefore depart at once, contented and happy to have embraced you; and the next time I call, perhaps you will have a little more time to devote to me."

"Rest assured that it shall be so," answered her ladyship. "But yet you shall not leave me in such a hurry. You

know how I love you, and I cannot find it in my heart to hasten you away. Yes, dearest William, I love you all the more on account of your noble conduct toward me."

"Oh, how often have I conjured you," exclaimed our hero, "not to express the slightest syllable of thanks on that account. It is a duty which I owe you, and being such, it is cheerfully performed."

"Dearest boy!" murmured Lady Saxondale, gazing upon him with every appearance of mingled tenderness and admiration. "And you are sure, William, that you have never once repented of the decision to which you came, — that there have not been moments when you have regretted the sacrifice you have made?"

"Never once, mother!" cried Deveril emphatically. "No, not for a single moment."

"And never," continued Lady Saxondale, "have you breathed in the ear of your wife —"

"No, never — not a syllable. That is the only secret which I have kept from Florina. In every other respect my heart is revealed to her as if my breast itself were transparent. Oh, dearest mother, if you entertain the slightest misgiving on my account, banish it from your mind, dismiss it from your thoughts. You may confide in my good faith as implicitly as if it were an angel from heaven that gave you the assurance."

"And all the fondest love which a mother can bear for her son is yours as your reward," murmured Lady Saxondale, as she bestowed upon him a parting embrace.

"Farewell, dearest mother," responded Deveril. "In a month we shall meet again."

They then separated, Lady Saxondale returning with exultant heart to the State Drawing-room, and our hero descending the stairs to issue forth from the mansion. As he crossed the threshold of the front door, he bade the hall porter good afternoon, and that domestic sententiously replied, "Good afternoon, Mr. Deveril."

"Deveril?" ejaculated a middle-aged gentleman who, at the instant, having alighted from a vehicle, was hurrying up the steps. "Deveril! was that the name I heard mentioned?" and he stopped short, surveying our hero rapidly, and also in a wildly excited manner.

"My name is Deveril, sir," was the response, courteously

given, but likewise with some degree of astonishment at the singular behaviour of his interrogator.

“ Yes — it must be! — the very age — the likeness, too! ” said that individual, in a quick, musing tone to himself. “ A word with you, if you please, sir, a word with you. It is of the highest importance. And yet, as you are here, at Saxondale House, you must know — But no matter. A word with you.”

“ With me? ” exclaimed our hero, in increasing astonishment.

“ Yes, with you. Are you not William Deveril? I am Doctor Ferney, a physician whose name, perhaps, may not be altogether unknown to you. I have just seen the Marquis of Eagledean, and Mr. Hawkshaw — ”

“ Ah,” exclaimed Deveril, “ is Mr. Hawkshaw in London? ”

“ He is. But there is another thing,” Ferney went on to say, in the same hurried and excited manner. “ A certain Mr. Thompson — ”

“ Thompson! ” echoed Deveril, an intense interest now blending with his amazement.

“ Yes. But we cannot converse here. Come with me.” Then addressing himself to the hall porter, the physician said, “ Have the kindness to show us to an apartment where we may converse for a few minutes.”

The domestic hesitated not to comply with this command, inasmuch as the name of the eminent Ferney was well known to him, and, moreover, Deveril himself was an occasional visitor at the mansion. He had caught, too, some portion of the hurried and ejaculatory exchange of observations which had just passed upon the door-steps, and without understanding anything in its true sense, he saw enough to be convinced that something of importance was progressing. He therefore conducted the physician and our hero into a parlour opening from the hall, but he paused to inquire of the former whether he should announce his presence to her ladyship.

“ No, not yet. Do not disturb her for the moment,” ejaculated Ferney; and he seemed all in a nervous trepidation until the domestic retired, closing the door behind him. Then, still with excited utterance, he said, abruptly, “ What are you doing here? Tell me quick! Tell me, I beseech you!”

"I came to call upon Lady Saxondale," was our hero's response; and he could not feel offended by the physician's questioning. On the contrary, he himself was now excited and agitated at all that was passing.

"Lady Saxondale! Wherefore speak of her thus coldly?" exclaimed Ferney. "But you do not know — it is evident you do not. You are completely in the dark. Ah, it is for me to be the first to enlighten you!"

"Good heavens, what mean you?" cried Deveril, now trembling with apprehension lest the secret which but a few minutes back he had so solemnly pledged himself to his mother to keep should have become known to the physician. Then, as he recollected that the name of Thompson was mentioned on the door-steps, he felt assured that his conjecture must be the true one.

"What do I mean?" ejaculated the excited Ferney. "Here, strip off your coat — your waistcoat — unfasten your shirt —"

"Oh, my poor mother!" murmured Deveril, as he caught the physician violently by both arms, and forced him into a chair; for it was in a sort of frenzy that Ferney had begun almost to tear our hero's raiment from his back. "Silence! compose yourself. I conjure you to compose yourself. Whatever you may know, sir, must be kept inviolable."

"Heavens! is it possible," cried Ferney, starting up in a still wilder excitement than before, "that you yourself do know everything, and that you have submitted thus to be defrauded of your rights?"

"Doctor Ferney," answered our hero, "on my knees do I supplicate your forbearance, your mercy toward my — toward Lady Saxondale."

"Oh, speak out the words fully! Call her your mother!" cried the physician.

"No, no — not aloud, the very walls have ears," murmured Deveril, with tremor in his accents, and an almost frenzied affright in his looks. But as the physician was bounding toward the door, he sprang up from his knees, flew after him, and literally hurled him back. "Sir," he exclaimed, with all the vehemence of passion, "it is not your secret which you seem so madly inclined to betray. It is mine, and I invoke curses upon your head if you dare reveal it."

"Ah! young man," cried the physician, growing all the more rabid in his excitement in proportion as our hero's frenzy increased, "you may indeed invoke curses upon me, for it is I — wretch, villain that I have been — who have proved the means of depriving you of your birthright. But wrong shall be done you no more; everything shall be proclaimed in the face of day."

"For God's sake, spare me — spare my mother!" cried Deveril, again falling upon his knees, and clasping his hands wildly, as his arms were outstretched toward the physician.

But Ferney heeded him not, and availing himself of the opportunity to rush to the door, he flung it open, he dashed into the hall, demanding of a footman, "Where is your mistress? Where, I ask?" and he stamped his foot with impatience.

"In the drawing-room above, sir," responded the astounded lackey. "But her ladyship —"

"No matter!" cried the physician, and he rushed up the stairs.

William Deveril, in a state bordering upon frenzy, maddened at the thought of the shame, the ruin, the total destruction, which must overtake his mother, darted in pursuit of Doctor Ferney; while the domestic and the hall porter, who beheld this singular scene, exchanged looks of perfect bewilderment, being utterly at a loss what to think.

But we must now return to the State Drawing-room, to which Lady Saxondale went back after her interview with her son. She entered with the calm composure of one who had merely received a casual visitor, of whom she had succeeded in getting rid after some twenty minutes' conversation. She resumed her seat at the table, motioning Mr. Marlow to continue the reading of the releases, to the end of which he had not yet got, as they were very long. He had paused for an instant, out of respect for her ladyship, when she thus reappeared, but on that sign from her he continued the recital. Volatile, quick, and bustling, as his habits were, he nevertheless could settle himself down on occasions into comparative sedateness; and he was now reading the details of the documents in that slow and deliberate manner which was best calculated to render the contents effective and impressive. In about ten minutes more after Lady Saxondale's return to the room, the reading

was brought to an end, and then Mr. Marlow, addressing Edmund, spoke in the following manner:

“Your lordship has heard all the details of these releases, which you are requested to sign not merely in acquittal of the trust which has been exercised on your behalf by my Lord Petersfield and the firm to which I have the honour to belong, but likewise in evidence of satisfaction at the mode in which that trust has been carried out. Here are the deeds which are about to be handed over to your lordship, and which will place you in full enjoyment of the domains and revenues whereunto you are entitled. Your lordship will have the goodness to sign these releases, and those papers are then yours.”

Edmund took the pen which the solicitor presented to him, and was about to write the name of “Saxondale” on the parchment whose contents had just been read, when Lord Petersfield, thinking it a proper opportunity for him to make a set speech, waved his hand in a dignified manner for a pause to ensue ere the business should be thus terminated.

“Permit me,” he said, looking awfully solemn, and speaking with all the gravity of the veteran diplomatist, — “permit me as the friend of your long-deceased father, as the friend of your family for many, many years, as one who has beholden you grow up from infancy to that manhood which you have now attained, — and I think I may venture to assert that it is really you yourself whose growth I have thus studied, and not another’s, — permit me, I say, to congratulate you on the attainment of your majority, — a majority which, I believe I may add without any fear of contradiction, places you in the possession of your estates. I am not accustomed to make hurried assertions, I am not in the habit of speaking precipitately or rashly, but I think I may venture to affirm that you are the possessor of those estates, your identity is beyond dispute, and I am congratulating the legitimate, the lawful, the unmistakable, — shall I say the well-proven-to-be heir of Saxondale?”

“No, it is false!” ejaculated a wildly speaking voice, as the door was dashed open; and Doctor Ferney, with the air of a lunatic just escaped from Bedlam, burst into the room, followed by William Deveril.

Lady Saxondale started up as if suddenly galvanized. A wild scream thrilled from her lips, and she sank senseless

upon the floor. William Deveril, who had stopped short on beholding that assemblage of persons, sprang forward to catch his mother; but he was too late to prevent her from falling, and, almost frantic, he snatched her up in his arms and conveyed her to a sofa.

At the same instant other hurried footsteps were heard upon the landing, and the Marquis of Eagledean, Mr. Hawkshaw, and Mr. Thompson now made their appearance upon the scene.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE RIGHTFUL HEIR OF SAXONDALE

No words in the English language, nor in any known tongue, have power to convey even a faint idea of the excitement and confusion which were thus suddenly produced in that apartment. Lord Petersfield had merely dogmatized in his wonted sententious manner, without the slightest possible suspicion that, while he was expatiating on Edmund's identity as the veritable heir of Saxondale, he was treading on the most ticklish ground, and that by a coincidence he was sending forth verbiage which admitted of so marked and abrupt a refutation. He sat aghast in his chair; Malton, the sedate partner, looked astounded; Marlow, the volatile one, was all feverish excitement. Juliana comprehended that all was lost, and when Hawkshaw made his appearance she abruptly fled from the room. Staunton was seized with an inconceivable bewilderment, which quickly became blended with a strong feeling of terror on beholding his uncle, the Marquis of Eagledean. As for Edmund, he was stricken with amazement; but the next moment he felt assured that it could be nothing beyond a madman's freak. Of course he knew Ferney well, having been a captive at the physician's house; but it was natural enough for him to conjecture that the doctor, instead of being fitted to take charge of lunatics, had become a lunatic himself.

Lady Saxondale had fainted, as we have already said. Her son had borne her to a sofa, and sustaining her in his arms, was giving vent to ejaculations half-frantic, half-pathetic.

"Mother, dearest mother — No, no, I mean Lady Saxondale, open your eyes. Do look up at me. No harm shall befall you. It is not I who have done it. I will contradict

everything that is said — mother — your ladyship — dearest — no, Lady Saxondale! O God, I am mad! I am frenzied!”

“Ring for her ladyship’s maids,” exclaimed the volatile Marlow; and he was bounding toward the bell-pull when the Marquis of Eagledean called him back.

“No, sir,” said his lordship, “you had better not. Enhance not this terrible exposure. Shut the door, Hawkshaw. Water! — let us throw water on her ladyship’s countenance.”

“Oh, my lord,” cried Deveril, flinging a look of wild reproach upon the marquis, “what have you done?”

“It is not I who have done it,” exclaimed Lord Eagledean. “Heaven itself ordained this to be the day of revelation, atonement, and retribution, the day on which injustice is to be proclaimed and justice done, the day on which imposture is to be unmasked and truth developed, the day, in fine, on which the rightful heir of Saxondale is to take possession of his own; and that heir is he who has hitherto borne the name of William Deveril!”

While giving utterance to these last words, Lord Eagledean swept his looks around upon all present, and the effect was startling indeed for those who were not hitherto in the secret. Lord Petersfield was more than ever struck with the conviction that one can never be sure of anything in this world; and he even began to tremble lest the next announcement to be made should be to the effect that he himself was not Lord Petersfield at all, — that he was quite another person, John Noakes or Tom Stiles, as the case might be. Marlow poured forth a perfect volley of questions; Malton looked perfectly confounded. Lord Harold Staunton knew his uncle too well not to feel assured that he was speaking the truth; and moreover, the startling announcement which had been made cleared up in an instant the one mystery which he knew Lady Saxondale had always kept inviolably concealed from him. As for Edmund himself, — though we mention him last, Heaven knows he was not the least interested in these strange and almost frightful proceedings! — he was now seized with the most torturing misgivings; he turned pale as death, and quivered like an aspen leaf as he lay back in his chair.

But while we are thus describing the effects produced by the Marquis of Eagledean’s announcement, this noble-

man himself had seized on a decanter of water which stood on a side-table where wine and cake had been placed, and he hastened to sprinkle some of it on Lady Saxondale's countenance. That countenance was marble pale, and even before the water was thus sprinkled upon it there were crystal drops there. They were tears, — but not tears that had flowed from her own eyes; they had fallen from the lashes of her son as he bent in frenzy over her. She began to revive; and now our hero, utterly overcome by his own highly wrought, indeed, excruciating feelings, himself fell down in a deep swoon. Hawkshaw and Doctor Ferney hastened to bear him to another sofa in that spacious drawing-room; and the physicians now literally tore his garments off his back, the squire mechanically assisting, under the impression that it was a necessary process to bring him back to life.

“There!” cried Ferney in a wild, excited tone, and with vehement gestures, “there is the mark, the proof of his birth!”

“Ah! but I,” ejaculated Edmund, springing up to his feet from the chair in which he had lain back, “have also a mark like that!”

“I know it, sir!” was Ferney's quick response; “but this right hand of mine — wretch, villain that I am! — this right hand of mine, sir,” he repeated still more vehemently than before, “made that mark upon your shoulder!”

Ejaculations of astonishment burst from the lips of Lord Petersfield, the two solicitors, and Lord Harold Staunton. A wild cry of rage thrilled from the lips of Edmund, and they all gathered around the sofa on which the real Lord Saxondale was stretched in his deep swoon. Those ejaculations were repeated as their eyes concentrated their glances upon that mark, — a mark not so large as a sixpence, but perfectly defining the semblance of a strawberry. Then all those looks, being suddenly withdrawn from that focus, exchanged glances of wonderment with each other.

“My lord, spare me! I conjure you to spare me!” a voice was now heard to speak, — a voice the low, deep accents of which were filled with a tremendous anguish; a voice, in short, so changed from its natural tone that those on whose ears it fell had to glance in the direction whence it

came in order to assure themselves that it was really the voice of Lady Saxondale.

And hers in sooth it was. She had now recovered; she was sitting up on the sofa, the picture of blank dismay, the personification of indescribable despair.

"Madam," responded the Marquis of Eagledean, to whom that doleful, oh, so doleful appeal was made, "it were the very refinement of cruelty to address you in words which should add to the tortures you now experience. I therefore hesitate not to proclaim that as much leniency shall be shown you as under circumstances can be manifested, — not, however, so much for your own sake as for that of your admirable son who would have made every sacrifice for you."

"Tell me at once," cried Edmund, flying toward Lady Saxondale with a fierce, a maddened, a diabolic expression of countenance, "tell me, is this true? Am I not your son?" and he seized her forcibly by the wrist, literally shaking her in the furious convulsion of his rage.

Her ladyship, though crushed down to the very earth, though trampled upon, as it were, by the iron heel of the sternest calamity, though overwhelmed with the ruins of that fabric of iniquity which had suddenly crumbled in upon her, nevertheless at the instant experienced one single feeling of satisfaction, which was that if she herself were utterly discomfited, the same fate had at least overtaken the ill-conditioned wretch whom she had hitherto called her son, the viper whom she had nourished to sting her. For a moment her large, dark eyes glistened with that expression of malignant satisfaction as she forcibly tore her arm away from his grasp; and she was about to give utterance to some bitter retort, when the horrifying idea flashed to her mind that if she goaded Edmund to desperation, he might, in a paroxysm of rage and vindictiveness, or in the cruel bewilderment of his feelings, proclaim the murder of Adelaide, and that Lady Saxondale was the instigatrix. She accordingly exercised a sudden control over herself, and assuming an air of the profoundest commiseration, said, "Poor boy! it will be better that you and I should have a few minutes' discourse together."

The Marquis of Eagledean knew nothing particularly to the detriment of Edmund, beyond the profligacy of his morals, and the generous, noble man could not help experiencing a

certain degree of compassion for the young man who was thus all in a moment hurled from the pinnacle of rank and wealth into the depth of obscurity and dependence. With this sympathetic feeling, he naturally considered it best that whatsoever explanations had to be given between that woman who had brought up another's person child as her own and that young man on whom had come, like a thunderbolt, the tremendous announcement that he was not the son of whom he had hitherto regarded as his mother, the marquis thought, we say, that such explanations ought to take place between them alone together.

He therefore said, "Sir, compose your feelings as well as you are able, trust to the generosity of those who perhaps entertain some little sympathy on your behalf, and I think that I may safely promise you shall not be left altogether uncared for. Lady Saxondale, take him to another room. Speak to him there; do, as indeed you ought, your best to comfort and console him, and in the meantime I will consult with those who are here upon the course which is to be adopted, so that for your son's sake," — and he glanced toward the sofa where the real Lord Saxondale was only just beginning to recover from his deep swoon, — "it shall be measured with as much regard to your feelings as the circumstances will permit."

Edmund — for so we had better continue to call him, though that was not really the Christian name which he had received at his birth from his mother, Madge Somers — had not spoken another word after Lady Saxondale had addressed him with that air of seeming compassion. Pale as a ghost, he had stood riveted to the spot, no longer able to shut his eyes to the conviction that everything was indeed at an end so far as rank and riches were associated with himself. The blow was fearful, the shock tremendous; any other mind would probably have gone stark, staring mad, and shrieked out in the wildness of delirium. But it was not so with Edmund Somers; he seemed to be reduced to an unnatural and incomprehensible state of being. He gasped for breath, he looked as if gazing upon a horrible spectre that had suddenly sprung up before him; and yet the light that shone in the depths of his eyes was of a sinister and undefinable description.

"Come, Edmund," said Lady Saxondale, still in that

low, plaintive voice with which she had previously addressed him, "come, let us in all things follow the counsel of the Marquis of Eagledean; for to him have we both now to look for much that will influence our positions, — indeed, the future of our lives."

She took the young man's hand, and he suffered himself mechanically to be led from the room. Not a word was spoken by those who remained behind, as they thus went forth. Doctor Ferney, not daring to throw another glance upon Lady Saxondale, was intent upon recovering our young hero from his swoon. Her ladyship conducted Edmund to her own boudoir, — this being an apartment remote from that which they had just left, and having double doors that would prevent the possibility of anything which might pass between them being caught up by an eavesdropper; for she well knew that the domestics must already suspect that something strange was going on, and she likewise apprehended that the scene with Edmund Somers would be far from an agreeable one. She had, however, a fearful interest in soothing him, if possible. She had to prevent him, as already hinted, from revealing in rage or in madness the tremendous secret connected with the death of Adelaide.

Edmund had suffered himself to be led up to that boudoir. He had walked like an animated statue, neither looking to the right nor to the left; his hand merely lay in that of Lady Saxondale, but clasped it not. Yet all the while there was still that sinister and incomprehensible light playing in the depths of his eyes.

They were now in the boudoir. Her ladyship had taken the precaution to lock the outer door, and to close securely the inner one, which was covered with scarlet cloth. She made Edmund sit down upon a chair; she took another opposite to him, and now their eyes met. That woman who had reared him as her son looked him in the face; that young man who had hitherto believed her to be his mother looked also in the face the woman who was not his mother. She beheld the ominous light in his eyes, and for an instant a cold shudder passed through her form, — that form which within the last ten minutes had been racked and rent, lacerated and tortured, agonized and crucified, with the most fearful feelings that could possibly be diffused through a human frame from the sources of the soul.

“Edmund,” she said, still preserving that low plaintiveness of tone, and now forcing herself to become almost a suppliant at his very feet, though in her heart she longed to call him “viper,” as she had often before done, and give way to a wild, maniac joy at the thought that in her own fall she had dragged down along with her the youth who had so frequently rebelled against her, — “Edmund,” she said, “for Heaven’s sake look not thus upon me! It is a fearful moment for us both, but if you suffer, I suffer likewise. You ought not to be irritated against me; it is not my fault if these plans — the work, the labour, and the toil of long, long years — have all exploded in an instant. Through me you would have had rank and riches; to me you would have been indebted for the proudest of positions. Think of all I have undergone for your sake, — the warrings by day, the agonies by night — ”

“Enough of this!” suddenly ejaculated the young man, springing up to his feet. “Tell me,” he demanded, in a hoarse, thick voice, “whose son I really am.”

“Do not ask me,” responded Lady Saxondale, in an imploring voice, for she was frightened by his looks and his manner. “It is needless to enter into particulars — ”

“Needless? No!” interrupted Edmund, with a sort of dogged resoluteness, which afforded still further proof that he was in a most unnatural state of mind. “Tell me, I repeat, whose son I am. If some beggar’s brat when you adopted me, or bought me, or stole me, whichever it were, at all events let me know the worst. Tell me, then, who I am. There is something horrible and hideous to be ignorant of one’s parentage. Tell me who I am. Think not that by lifting the veil and making me aware that I owe my existence to some low-born wretches, you can inflict a sterner blow than that which has already struck me. Tell me, I say, who I am,” and he spoke in a manner such as never he had spoken in before.

“Edmund, Edmund!” murmured Lady Saxondale, not knowing what to think, — whether he were in that state of ominously unnatural calm which precedes the sudden explosion of the volcano, or whether the force of circumstances had made his mind put forth powers which it had never hitherto developed, but which were now coming to his aid to enable him to meet his present position with the true courage

of a man, — “ Edmund, Edmund, press me not upon this point, I conjure you. Let us talk upon other subjects. I will not abandon you. My own son will give me riches; you shall share them — ”

“ The name of my parents! ” interrupted Edmund, still in that hoarse, thick voice, but with a more lurid flashing of the sinister eyes. “ What was it? ”

“ Your father died before you were born, ” answered Lady Saxondale, terrified into giving this response. “ He left your mother on the eve of her confinement, in destitution — ”

“ And that mother — who was she? Name her! ” exclaimed Edmund, seeing that Lady Saxondale hesitated. “ At least let me know my mother’s name. ”

“ Margaret Somers, ” answered Lady Saxondale, her soul shrinking within her.

“ Somers? ” ejaculated Edmund, and for a few moments he reflected in a strange, bewildered manner. “ I have heard that name before — Margaret Somers! Why, good God! Madge is short for Margaret! That was the name of her who died some time ago at the house of him who this day has proved to be your son. And by the description of her, she was the same that I saw — Eternal heavens! I comprehend it all! Yes, yes, it is clear as daylight! ” and in a moment the young man became violently excited.

“ Edmund, Edmund! ” exclaimed Lady Saxondale, almost wild with alarm.

“ Oh, my own mother was she in whose way I fell that time! ” he continued to cry forth, in allusion to his meeting with Madge Somers in the miserable hut near the Hornsey Wood Tavern, when he was in search of Angela, but when he subsequently fell in with Emily Archer. “ Yes, yes, my own mother — that horrible-looking wretch! God forgive me for saying so! But it is too dreadful to think that she was my mother, ” and the miserable young man sank upon a chair, covering his face with his hands, and weeping bitterly with mingled rage and shame and anguish.

Lady Saxondale knew full well to what woman he had alluded; because Madge Somers had told her, the first time she ever called upon her in Park Lane, how she had encountered Edmund, and how she had recognized him to be her own son. Now that her ladyship beheld the young man

weeping thus bitterly and plunged into grief, the terror with which he had a few moments back inspired her turned into a sort of satisfaction — or was, at all events, relieved, because she flattered herself that she could once more exercise omnipotent sway over him, and prevent him from giving vent either in rage or frenzy to the fearful secret of the murder in the Trent. But all of a sudden Edmund dashed away his tears, and starting up, he bent his eyes upon Lady Saxondale with a renewal of that sinister expression which had before filled her soul with vague, nameless, shapeless terrors, and in a voice that was hoarse and deep, he said, “So that woman was my mother? Oh, better that you were my mother than she — much as I hate you!”

“Hate me, Edmund?” and Lady Saxondale again quivered all over, and again felt as if she would never pass through this frightful ordeal.

“Yes, hate you!” repeated the young man, with accents so vehement and looks so sinister that it was impossible to doubt the truth of his assertion. “What reason have I for loving you? — but have I not every cause to detest you? Why did you take me from my mother in mine infancy, to bring me up to believe myself that which I am not? Why did you cradle me in down, only that I might be flung back again upon rags? Why did you make me eat off plate of silver and of gold, only that I might be thrown back on the sorriest crust? But this is not all. Why did you,” — and here he ground his teeth with the pent-up fury of his concentrated rage, — “why did you teach me to become criminal? Why, woman, why did you make me a murderer?”

And the last words came hissing from his lips as if borne on the panting breath of a reptile.

“Edmund, Edmund!” exclaimed her ladyship, “wherefore go on thus? You throw all the blame on me —”

“On you?” he vociferated fiercely. “On whom would you that I should accumulate it? Detestable woman that you are! I hate you, and —”

“And what, Edmund?” almost screamed forth Lady Saxondale, as the most awful terrors filled her soul and the frightful visions swept like a desolating hurricane through her imagination, — the avowal of the murder from his lips, the summoning of the police, Newgate, the Old Bailey, the black cap on the judge’s head, the sentence of death, the

gibbet, the crowd, the tolling bell, the chaplain's prayer, the halter, and the drop!

"And what, you ask me," he cried, his countenance suddenly expressing a fury that was frenzied and terrible. "This!" and snatching up from the toilet-table a knife which lay there, he made one tiger-like spring at Lady Saxondale.

"No, no! Spare me! — in mercy spare me!" she shrieked out, flying toward the door.

"Wretch, you shall die!" thundered forth Edmund, and at the same instant he seized upon her.

She turned to battle for her life, while her piercing screams echoed through the house; but her foot tripped, and as she fell the infuriate Edmund plunged the knife into her bosom. Her rending screams suddenly closed in an awful gasping moan. The young man drew forth the knife from her bosom, and with a wild cry of mingled triumph, rage, and desperation, he plunged it into his own breast. He fell down heavily close where Lady Saxondale herself had fallen, and for a few moments there was a dead silence in that room. But only for a few moments, for the door, which her ladyship had locked, was burst open, and in rushed the Marquis of Eagledean, Hawkshaw, Thompson, and the two lawyers, Lord Petersfield almost immediately bringing up the rear. Then what a horrifying spectacle met their eyes!

But where was Doctor Ferney? The true and rightful Lord Saxondale had recovered from his swoon, but only to rave in the delirium of fever. He had been borne to a bed-chamber, and the physician was there, in attendance upon him.

And where was Lord Harold Staunton? A few words will suffice to inform the reader. The moment after Lady Saxondale had quitted the State Drawing-room, leading the discomfited and ruined Edmund away, the Marquis of Eagledean had imperiously beckoned Lord Harold to the farther extremity of the apartment, and had there addressed him in the following terms:

"I have long known that you were steeped to the very lips in profligacies, and that toward myself you have at times harboured the most diabolical intentions. But it is only this day I have learned the full extent of your iniquity, and that you are — my blood turns cold as I speak it — a murderer."

Lord Harold staggered back with a countenance ghastly pale, and his eyes fixed in horrified dismay upon his uncle.

"Yes," continued the marquis; "Heaven has decreed that your guilt shall become known, and the waters of the Trent have given up their secrets as evidence against you. Speak not, but hear me. For the sake of the family to which you so unfortunately belong, for the sake of your admirable sister Florina, and for the sake of her husband, that excellent young man, always so noble in nature, now ennobled in name, and who by marriage has become connected with yourself, — for all these reasons the veil of secrecy will be thrown over your enormities. But depart hence. Lose no time in leaving the kingdom. Fly to some far-off land, and thence write to let me know where you are, so that just sufficient for a subsistence may henceforth be allowed you. Depart, sir! Not a word, not a syllable."

Lord Harold Staunton, mentally and morally stricken down to the very dust, though just physically able to drag himself forth from the room, obeyed his uncle's mandate, and in a few moments he quitted Saxondale House — for ever.

But to return to the boudoir. We will not pause to depict the horror, the consternation, and the dismay which seized upon those who burst into that room where the frightful tragedy had taken place. Suffice it to say that prompt assistance was rendered, that Ferney was sent for from Lord Saxondale's chamber, and that when he came, he pronounced life to be extinct in the form of Edmund, but that the vital spark yet remained in that of Lady Saxondale. Profoundly afflicted was the physician, anguish-stricken as well as conscience-smitten, at all that was taking place, at all that had taken place; and so overcome with his feelings was he that it was found necessary for him to be conveyed to his own home, under the charge of the grateful and attached Thompson.

Fresh medical men were sent for, some to devote themselves to the care of Lord Saxondale, others to that of her ladyship. The Marquis of Eagledean sent a message to Juliana, who had locked herself up in her own room, and whose ears the anguished cries of her mother had not reached. She complied with his summons, and he acquainted her with the fearful tragedy that had occurred. She simulated much

more feeling than it was in her nature veritably to experience, and the marquis said to her, "It is for you to watch day and night by your mother's side, so that should she recover — of which the medical men give some hope — she may receive from your lips the assurance that the utmost mercy shall be shown her, and that the veil shall be kept drawn over the darkest passages of her past history. For she has committed deeds, of which I hope and trust — as indeed I believe — that you can have no knowledge; and it is for you to prevent the ears of menials from catching the first words which may fall from her lips when the faculty of speech returns. Do you comprehend me?"

"I do, my lord," answered Juliana, "and I will faithfully obey your instructions."

The Marquis of Eagledean — who, notwithstanding all the excitement of the scenes, blended with horror, too, which characterized this memorable day, preserved his self-possession and his wonted clearness of head — now set off back again into Kent, to break to Florina the twofold intelligence that her husband was the rightful Lord Saxondale, but that he had been seized with a severe illness. The young lady, half-frantic at the latter announcement, insisted upon repairing at once to London, to minister to her beloved husband. This the marquis had foreseen, and he had a post-chaise and four in readiness for the purpose. He despatched by messenger a hasty note to his wife, the Marchioness of Eagledean, to acquaint her with all that had happened, while he himself, with his usual indomitable energy which rendered him insensible of fatigue, accompanied Florina to London. During the journey he broke to her the circumstances which as yet he had left untold: namely, those of the fearful tragedy. Florina was horrified to a degree; but in respect to her husband the marquis assured her that she had no serious cause for apprehension, as his illness was merely the result of the overwrought excitement which he had experienced, and that in a few days he would be convalescent.

Pass we over these few days, and let us say that a week had elapsed since the memorable incidents which we have been chronicling. In the meantime there had been an inquest on the body of Edmund, and from the situation in which his own corpse and Lady Saxondale's inanimate form

were found in the boudoir, — coupled with the circumstance that her rending shrieks had alarmed the household, — the jury had no difficulty in coming to the decision that the young man had perished by his own hand, after having endeavoured to murder her ladyship. It was of course necessary that in the depositions made at this inquest the imposture palmed off upon the world by Lady Saxondale in respect to Edmund, and to the prejudice of the rightful heir, should be fully described; and the report of that inquest, through the medium of the newspapers, gave this much of the astounding narrative to the public. The verdict of the jury included an expression of their belief that the deceased young man, considering all the circumstances, could not have been in a sound state of mind, but that he must have been goaded to frenzy when he perpetrated his double crime; and thus this humane view of the case forbade not his interment with Christian ceremonies. The funeral was a plain and simple one, — very different indeed from what it would have been, with all appropriate pomp and splendour, if he had died in possession of that title which for twenty-one years he had unconsciously usurped.

The rightful Lord Saxondale continued under the influence of fever for an entire week; and it was not until the expiration of this interval that he became possessed of his reasoning faculties. Then he recognized the beloved wife of his bosom, the charming and beautiful Florina, who had unweariedly ministered to him during his illness; but when he began to question her relative to his mother, she was careful not to inform him of the horrible tragedy which had taken place. She merely suffered him to understand that her ladyship was ill and confined to her own chamber; but she gave her husband as much hope as she dared, and perhaps even more, in order to tranquillize him, that this illness of Lady Saxondale's would result in convalescence.

It was not however so. Her ladyship recovered her own consciousness at about the same time as her son regained his in another chamber beneath the same roof. But the wound she had received, though not mortal in itself, was evidently leading to fatal results; and as her last hour drew near, the wretched woman, profoundly conscience-stricken, sought to make all possible atonement for her crimes by a full and complete confession. The Marquis of Eagledean

was selected by her as the recipient of these revelations; and one afternoon, about ten days having now elapsed from the date of the tragedy, his lordship found himself seated by the bedside of the dying lady to hear from her lips the narrative of the past. Juliana had been requested to leave the room; and in a feeble voice, in broken language, and with many self-interruptions, Lady Saxondale was enabled to furnish sufficient details for the marquis to obtain a clear and precise insight into those facts which were previously altogether unknown to him, or which were but dimly outlined to his knowledge.

CHAPTER XXXII

HISTORY OF THE PAST

THE reader will remember how great were the affliction and dismay which seized upon the old Lord Saxondale and his young wife Harriet, as well as upon the entire household at the castle in Lincolnshire, when the intelligence came upon them like a thunderbolt that the infant son and heir was stolen from its nurse's arms. At first her ladyship was really inclined to believe that Ralph Farefield — who she had no doubt was at the bottom of it — purposed to retain the child in some place of concealment, in order to bring his uncle to terms. But this hope wore off in a few hours, and when she was enabled deliberately and seriously to calculate how much Ralph had to gain by the child's death, she could not blind herself to the conviction that her infant son's murder was an extremity but too certain to be adopted by Farefield, — the risk of discovery being worth running on the one hand, considering the immensity of the stake to be played for on the other. The reader is aware that Lady Saxondale possessed a mind beyond the standard strength of her sex's energies, and thus her resolve was speedily taken. She represented to her husband that it would be advisable for her to repair to London, under an assumed name, and secretly institute inquiries into Ralph Farefield's recent movements, or act otherwise, as circumstances should suggest. The old lord consented, and her ladyship proceeded to the metropolis, accompanied by her principal tirewoman, Mabel Stewart. This Mabel was about thirty years of age, discreet, prudent, and cool-headed, and one in whom her ladyship fancied she could put the utmost trust.

Taking the name of Smith, Lady Saxondale hired lodgings in a respectable house in Islington. This house was occupied

by a widow lady named Ferney, whose son had recently commenced practice as a surgeon. The worthy woman had so impoverished herself, in order to afford her son the means of completing his professional education, that when the front parlour was converted into a surgery, and the back one into a receiving-room for patients, the expenses incurred thereby left serious embarrassments behind. Of course Mr. Ferney did not at once reap any considerable fruits from his hard studies; and while there were no incomings on the one hand, yet on the other the debts had to be paid, a certain appearance had to be kept up, he and his mother had to live. The house was larger than was necessary for so small a family, it was well furnished, and, though with considerable reluctance, they were compelled to put up a bill announcing the drawing-room floor to let. Lady Saxondale needed lodgings, and also needed the aid of a surgeon in carrying out her design. She saw the bill in the window; she was struck by the coincidence that her two requirements might be afforded beneath one and the same roof, and shrewd as she was, she had no difficulty in reading the circumstances of the people of the house. A struggling medical man, an impoverished mother, and thence the necessity for letting lodgings. She entered the house; she was then in all the bloom of her beauty, and her quick eye showed her in an instant that the pale, pensive young surgeon, whom she found seated with his mother, was struck by admiration at her appearance. This, then, was the very place for Lady Saxondale, and, as Mrs. Smith, she became the occupant of the drawing-room floor. In order at once to ingratiate herself with the mistress of the house, she took the floor for a year, paying the entire rent in advance; and this godsend suddenly rescued the Ferneys from the serious embarrassments and apprehensions under which they had been recently labouring.

Lady Saxondale did not let the grass grow under her feet. On leaving Lincolnshire she had not the slightest intention in reality of troubling herself or wasting time about Ralph Farefield's proceedings; her plan was already settled. She was resolved to obtain some poor person's child, and represent it as her own lost infant son. For she argued to herself that if Farefield had not really made away with her little Edmund, and should hereafter produce him, the heir would in this case be restored; and Ralph would be too glad to

hush up the whole matter without seeking to punish her for a fraud and imposture, because she in her turn could punish him for the theft of her son. But, on the other hand, if he had really murdered that son, — which she felt convinced he had, — he would not dare proclaim that the supposititious one whom she purposed to palm off was not her own child; for if he did, it would be tantamount to confessing himself the murderer of the true, rightful, and lawful one. Therefore, in either case, the astute Lady Saxondale saw that she would be perfectly safe, and that in the long run Ralph Farefield must inevitably be outwitted. She made a confidante of Mabel, and scarcely were they installed in their lodgings at the Ferneys' house than the faithful domestic was despatched into the streets of London and to the poorer neighbourhoods in search of such a child as by age and appearance would answer the required purpose.

Lady Saxondale was a well-read woman, and in the course of her reading she had stumbled upon a book containing many curious narratives relative to the uncertainty of circumstantial evidence, and the fallibility of human judgments when trusting thereto. One history in particular had struck her, — a history that is doubtless familiar to many of our readers, namely, that of Martin Guerre. The circumstances of this remarkable story may be shortly summed up. Martin Guerre, a Frenchman, took leave of his wife to embark on a speculative voyage to the Mediterranean. Years elapsed, and he returned not; so that the wife believed herself to be a widow. But at length the inhabitants of her native place were one day startled by the intelligence that Martin Guerre had come back, and that happiness had reëntered his long-deserted and desolate home. The neighbours flocked in to congratulate the husband and wife who were thus restored to each other, and the tale of the former was simply that he had been a prisoner for years amongst the Algerines. Time passed on, and again, one day, were the inhabitants of the town startled by the intelligence that another Martin Guerre had just made his appearance. Again, too, were there crowds at the house, and immense was the surprise of the neighbours on finding that the two Martin Guerres were as like each other as if they were twin brothers. The wife was herself utterly unable to decide between the claims of the two, and an appeal was made to the law tribunals to

decide betwixt them. The tale told by the last-coming Martin Guerre was that he had been in slavery, where he had fallen in with his litigant rival, and that as their personal appearance presented a remarkable similitude, a great friendship sprang up between them. He went on to say that he freely unbosomed all his family secrets to his friend, which would account for this latter being enabled to speak to the wife upon circumstances which she would naturally suppose known only to herself and to her husband. Finally the plaintiff informed the court that his rival had managed to escape before him, and that it was evident he had basely availed himself of these extraordinary circumstances to gain possession of a comfortable home and a handsome wife, both belonging to another. Then came the most remarkable features in this trial. The plaintiff showed certain spots upon his body, which the wife proved to have marked her first husband; but, to the wonder of the court, the defendant exhibited marks precisely similar! However, it was finally ascertained that the plaintiff — namely, the last-coming Martin Guerre — was the true one, and that the other was a base impostor who had usurped his rights. The latter subsequently confessed that a skilful surgeon's hands had created upon his person the very marks which so closely resembled those on the body of the real Martin Guerre, and which the impostor had, during a series of years, frequent opportunity of observing when they worked together half-naked on the fortifications or in the arsenals of Algiers.

This was the history which had made an impression on the mind of Lady Saxondale, and which flashed to her recollection with strangely suggestive impulses at the moment she was in bitterness bewailing the loss of her son. The hand of a skilful surgeon had created divers marks of a particular nature, and all according to a description given from mere memory on the back and shoulders of Martin Guerre's rival: and could not another surgical hand create the one mark which was needed on the neck of an infant as a proof of its identity with the lost heir of Saxondale? But while Mabel was looking after a child, Lady Saxondale herself was doing her best, not merely to ascertain the degree of intelligence possessed by the pale, pensive surgeon, but also to make an impression upon his heart. Though too proud to be beguiled into weak-

ness or frailty by actual sentiment, there was nevertheless nothing to which she would not stoop, if necessary, in order to accomplish those aims that were to outwit Ralph Farefield, and secure to herself a paramount ascendancy in the Saxondale family during the long minority which, considering the old lord's age, an heir might have to pass through after his death. She did her best to ingratiate herself with the widow Ferney, — made her presents, but in the most delicate manner, and, under pretence of adding to her own comforts, purchased a quantity of new things, in the shape of plate, china, and furniture, which in an apparently casual manner she gave the widow to understand she should leave behind when her term was up.

Her excuse for being in London was a chancery suit; and she alleged herself to be the widow of a rich country squire in the north of England. She soon discovered that the surgeon was a man of extraordinary talent, that he was devoted to his profession, that he had made it his study by day and by night, and that he had submitted to almost incredible privations in order to purchase "subjects" (in other parlance, dead bodies) at different times to forward his anatomical practice. The more Lady Saxondale saw of him, the more was she convinced that she could model him to her purpose. He had a laboratory fitted up in the house, and she affected the deepest interest in his experiments. Ferney was delighted; he believed that this interest was genuine, for he was simple-minded, honest, and credulous; a man of wonderful intellect in one sense and of profound ignorance in another; intelligent only in all that related to the objects of his studies, but ignorant as a mere child in the ways of the world and in the workings of the human heart. In less than a week he was completely infatuated with his mother's beautiful lodger. With him, indeed, it was love at first sight, and the passion thus gained ground so rapidly from the circumstance that its object seemed to display such deep interest in the very matters which so profoundly interested himself. Though she was careful at first not to manifest anything bordering on an indelicate forwardness by accompanying him to his laboratory, yet of an evening she would visit the sitting-room occupied by his mother and himself; and while the old lady dozed in her armchair, she would turn the conversation upon the enthusiastic surgeon's experi-

ments, asking questions, listening with apparent delight to his explanations, and, with her own ready intelligence, proving that she fully comprehended them. It was a dangerous position for a young man whose unsophisticated heart had no defences afforded by worldly experience against the wiles of a beautiful woman, — a dangerous position, we say, for him to be placed in; and, unconsciously as it were, he abandoned himself to the growing infatuation.

Within the first week after the arrival in London, chance threw Mabel Stewart in the way of Margaret Somers, a widow with an infant child, the father of which had died ere it was born. The woman — who, as well as the babe, was wrapped in the rags of beggary — asked alms of Mabel Stewart. She contemplated the child attentively, and in so doing observed that it had a little mole between the neck and the shoulder, almost in the very place where the strawberry appeared upon the lost heir of Saxondale. Affecting to be deeply touched with the woman's tale, she gave her some silver, and bade her call on the following day at the house in Islington, "when perhaps something more would be done for her." Madge Somers did call, and saw Lady Saxondale, who at once felt assured that the child, by its appearance, would answer her purposes. She treated Madge Somers with the utmost kindness, gave her money and clothes, and bade her return in a day or two. She then redoubled her wiles in respect to Ferney, but so artfully as not to transgress the bounds of modesty nor actual propriety. And now, too, she hinted that she should feel pleased in the inspection of his laboratory, — choosing for the opportunity a morning when Mrs. Ferney was absent for a few hours on a visit to some friends. When there, alone with the surgeon, she bent over crucibles and retorts, examined phials and glasses, witnessed experiments, and even practised some, all the while fanning his passion with the thousand and one arts which a skilful woman of the world knows so well how to carry into effect. In a moment of irresistible infatuation, Ferney cast himself at her feet, vowing that he was her slave. She gave him encouragement, but still in a manner that was calculated only to render him more completely submissive to her will.

Availing herself of this opportunity, she turned the discourse gradually away from purely chemical experiments,

questioned him on surgical matters, and gradually advanced toward the topic which she was anxious to broach. The unsuspecting Ferney — while expatiating on the subject — assured her that he would undertake to create almost any marks resembling natural ones on the person of an infant. But it is not necessary to dwell upon this point of the narrative, nor to extend the details of those means by which Lady Saxondale led Ferney to promise that he would give her a proof of his skill in this particular respect. Madge Somers came again, and Lady Saxondale now played off the artillery of her wiles upon this woman. She invented some story to account for her desire of possessing herself of a child whom she would adopt as her own and bring up in affluence. The bribe offered was a large one; and Madge Somers had been dragged through the mire of too much misery and suffering and too many low scenes to have much good principle left, but still she had the natural love of a mother for her offspring. Nevertheless, she consented to part with it; and leaving the child, she went away with a heavy purse in her pocket.

The widow Ferney was under too many obligations to Mrs. Smith (as Lady Saxondale called herself) to ask impertinent questions, or to exhibit an inconvenient degree of curiosity, while the surgeon was too infatuated with the beautiful lodger, and too callous in respect to proceedings which did not concern himself, to pay any particular attention to this freak of the child being left at the house; for Lady Saxondale was careful not to let it transpire that she had purchased it, and that its mother had left it for good. Ferney was easily induced to practise his skill upon the infant; and Lady Saxondale, as if quite in a casual manner, and also as if catching at the first whimsical thought which entered her head, expressed her wonder whether he could convert the mole into the form of a strawberry. He declared that he could. Then she began to define specifications in respect to the actual size, shape, and appearance which this strawberry-mark was to take, — all, she said, with laughing cajolery, to put his skill the more severely to the test. He undertook to gratify what he regarded as her caprice, and with all the less hesitation because the operation would be attended with little pain to the child, and thus his natural humanity would not be shocked. It was done; and

Lady Saxondale experienced a glow of inward triumph when she perceived upon the neck of the babe a mark so closely resembling that with which her own son was born, that she felt convinced it would deceive the medical man and the nurse who had seen the lost heir at his birth. And now, too, she could fully comprehend the exact truth of all the details in the history of Martin Guerre.

But it was necessary to remain in London until the mark itself should be completely healed up; and from time to time she wrote cheering and encouraging letters to her husband in Lincolnshire, as described in one of the opening chapters of this narrative. Days grew into weeks, and during this interval Lady Saxondale continued to encourage, without however seeming to do so, the infatuation of the surgeon's passion. But as the widow did not again leave the house for more than half an hour at a time, Lady Saxondale was too cautious to enter the laboratory again. She did not choose to do aught to excite the woman's suspicions, and she had induced Ferney to keep the surgical proceeding of the strawberry-mark profoundly secret from his mother. This he readily promised; and so completely was he under the empire of Lady Saxondale that it was not difficult for her to obtain from him another pledge, namely, that he would never mention the circumstance at all. But in his calmer moments, thoughts — dim, vague, and shapeless suspicions — would steal into the surgeon's mind that he was involved in some mystery which he could not comprehend, that there was a meaning and a purpose in the proceeding of the strawberry-mark, and that it was not a mere whim on the lady's part, nor a mere test of his skill. A secret voice whispered in his soul that he had been unconsciously drawn into a complicity with something which he could not comprehend, that Mrs. Smith was more than she seemed, that rank and distinction and a haughtier name were probably veiled under the commonplace appellation of Mrs. Smith. But when he again found himself in her presence, all his scruples and suspicions vanished. He seemed to live only for her; he rejoiced in having been enabled to do aught to serve her, either in the ministering to a mere whim or in the furtherance of some deeper and more important end.

But if Lady Saxondale visited the laboratory no more,

she nevertheless regularly passed the evenings in the sitting-room of the widow and her son, or else she had them to tea in her own apartment. While the old lady dozed, or actually slept soundly in her armchair, the wily Harriet Saxondale practised all her arts to enslave the surgeon so completely that when she should be gone her image might remain on his soul, to render him faithful to his pledges of secrecy. She exhibited an unwearied interest in his experiments, she learned his receipts, and amongst them was one for a certain composition, or elimination, of which he was in reality the discoverer, but which has only within the last few years been known to the world under the name of chloroform. Thus a month from the date of the arrival in London was drawing to a close; the mark was completely healed, and Lady Saxondale was thinking of getting back to Lincolnshire, when a circumstance occurred which for a moment threatened all her plans with utter annihilation.

One evening Madge Somers made her appearance at the house, and as Lady Saxondale was taking tea with the Ferneys in their own apartment, the woman made straight for Mabel Stewart's chamber, which she knew. Mabel was at the moment undressing the babe, and she was taken so completely aback — indeed, was so utterly confounded by the suddenness with which Margaret Somers burst in upon her — that she had not time to cover up the mark that had been made on the infant's shoulder. Madge, impelled by motherly affection, sprang forward to snatch up the child and embrace it, when she caught sight of that mark. She was now confounded in her turn; and Lady Saxondale, having been informed by the servant of the house "that Mrs. Somers had come to fetch away the babe which Mrs. Smith had been so kindly keeping for a little while," hurried up to Mabel's chamber. Then ensued an exciting scene. Lady Saxondale endeavoured to persuade Madge Somers that the original mark had strangely and unexpectedly taken this development. The mother knew not what to think; she scarcely believed the tale that was told her, and yet she did not know how to discredit it. Again and again did she study the mark and its exact nature, — or, rather, its appearance as artificially rendered; and thus it became indelibly impressed on her memory. She vowed that she would have her child again, that she repented of the bargain,

that it was an unnatural one, which she could not be compelled to keep, although she admitted having squandered away in dissipation the greater portion of the gold she had received. Lady Saxondale offered larger bribes to induce the woman to adhere to her original compact, and, after considerable difficulty, Madge Somers assented to her ladyship's overtures. She went away with five hundred pounds in her pocket; and the next morning Lady Saxondale intimated to the Ferneys that urgent business, connected with the fictitious chancery suit, compelled her at once to leave for the country.

She did not, however, choose to say that she never intended to return to her lodgings, though she whispered to the widow, when the son was not by, that if she did not come to retake possession of them in a month her lease might be considered to be abandoned. Ferney himself was overwhelmed with affliction at the prospect of this abrupt separation, but to him she whispered, with a tender smile, that she should return shortly. She begged his acceptance of a splendid diamond ring, and he, scarcely knowing what memorial to give in return, thought that nothing could be more suitable than the results of some of the delicate and difficult experiments in which she had taken so much interest. With characteristic simplicity, he presented to her a phial of chloroform, together with a small casket filled with elegantly cut little bottles, containing delicious perfumes. Lady Saxondale and Mabel returned into Lincolnshire with the child, and they reached the castle to find the old lord dead, and to learn that Ralph Farefield had just arrived.

The reader is aware of the circumstances under which Lady Saxondale and Ralph Farefield met. The child was displayed, with the mark upon its neck, and Ralph was at once smitten with the conviction that Chiffin had deceived him in his assertion that the infant heir of Saxondale had been made away with. The reader will recollect that her ladyship led Ralph Farefield into a window recess, and there, pretending to have some sympathy for him, she made an appointment to meet him at eleven o'clock on the same night in the chapel. The fact was that, notwithstanding all her previous self-reasonings in respect to the certainty of outwitting Farefield, she was afraid of him. She knew him to be a desperate man, and as he was now placed in desperate

circumstances, she felt that she was not safe so long as he remained in existence. The supposititious child which had already cost her so much anxiety and trouble might be cunningly and treacherously made away with, and then adieu to all her grand schemes, her towering hopes, and her lofty projects. She had consummated a tremendous imposture; she now felt that it was necessary to ensure it by an additional crime. Her heart had become hardened, her soul indurated, her conscience blunted, against all compunction and remorse; and it was Ralph Farefield's death which was required to consolidate the position she had been at such pains to build up.

She met him in the chapel; she told him a tale of a treasure being concealed in the vault. He was desperate, and any straw flung out to him was a hope to save him from drowning in the vortex of despair. Besides, though he himself was vile and so capable of iniquity, he could not possibly think that the beautiful Lady Saxondale was equally wicked. It was with an air of ingenuous frankness that she had told him of twenty thousand pounds being in the vault, — of which he himself was to take five; but in his own mind he resolved to self-appropriate the entire sum. He found, however, that she had taken her precautions against any sudden attack which vindictiveness might urge him to make upon her, and that there was a witness to the entire proceeding; for when bidden to look forth from the chapel door, he beheld Mabel in the corridor. Then he knew that if he attempted violence to retain the entire treasure, an alarm could be raised; and he was constrained to make up his mind to content himself with the portion she had promised. In obedience to Lady Saxondale's instructions, he began to descend the steps leading into the vault, she following him. But all in a moment her arm was stretched forth, a kerchief was applied to his nostrils, he inhaled the fatal chloroform, and fell headlong into the water which flooded the place. There he was drowned.

It happened that almost immediately after the departure of Lady Saxondale and Mabel, with the child, from London, business suddenly compelled Mr. Ferney to proceed to Gainsborough, a town he had never visited before; nor indeed was he ever previously in that part of the country at all. Little did he suspect that he was only within a few

miles of the Mrs. Smith who had captivated his heart, and who was in reality the now widowed Lady Saxondale; and little, too, on the other hand, did Lady Saxondale herself fancy for a single moment that the surgeon on whom she had practised her wiles was for the time being so near a neighbour. He became possessed of the body of Ralph Farefield in the way described in an earlier chapter of this narrative; and immediately returning to London, never visited Lincolnshire again until many long years had elapsed, and he had risen to the highest eminence in his profession.

And years and years too must now be passed over in this chapter of explanations, — the leap taking us from the middle of 1825 to the middle of 1844. The next incident we have to note was the meeting of Madge Somers with her son, after a separation of nineteen years. During that interval she had passed through the depravities of an abandoned life, so that when she was first introduced to the reader, in our opening chapters, she had become the companion and the accomplice of such villains as Chiffin the Cannibal and the rest of the gang whose headquarters were at the public-house in Agar Town. It will be recollected how Edmund fell in with her at the cottage near the Seven Sisters Road, when he was in search of Angela Vivaldi. She laid a plot with Chiffin for his assassination while he slept; but just as she was about to plunge her knife into his breast she caught sight of the mark upon his neck. She knew him to be her son, for that mark was indelibly impressed upon her memory. His features, too, — though he was now a young man, — were precisely what she could fancy the infantile face would have grown into. There was no doubt it was her own son whom she had meant to immolate.

We need not recapitulate the means she adopted to get him safe out of the house, and save him from an otherwise certain death at the hand of Chiffin. When he was gone, she recollected that Chiffin had exhibited a strange surprise when she had mentioned to him that the intended victim was Lord Saxondale. She had just discovered that he who bore the name of Lord Saxondale was none other than her own offspring, and she therefore became anxious to learn why that name should have in any way interested the Cannibal. By means of brandy and water she drew the ruffian out, and learned from him how he had been engaged long

years back to steal and to make away with the rightful heir of Saxondale, but how the child had been left amongst gipsies. The very next night Madge Somers proceeded to Saxondale House in Park Lane, — a night on which its noble mistress gave a grand banquet. Lady Saxondale knew her in a moment, though time and dissipation, depravity and iniquity, had traced upon her countenance those strong lines which were not there when long years back she had surrendered up her child. Madge bluntly told her ladyship that she now comprehended everything, and she received a considerable sum of money as a bribe to keep the secret. With a portion of that money she fulfilled a promise made to Chiffin, of indemnifying him for the loss sustained by the failure of the previous night's enterprise.

The reader does not require to be reminded that Doctor Ferney cherished the passion which he had conceived for Lady Saxondale when she lodged at his mother's house. Nineteen years passed away since that date; the widow Ferney went down to the grave, and the surgeon became a physician, removed from the moderate-sized house and simply respectable neighbourhood at Islington to the large mansion in the fashionable quarter of Hanover Square. Throughout those nineteen years had Ferney retained the image of the beautiful woman impressed upon his heart; and though his infatuation had become attempered down into an endeared, an affectionate, and an undying reminiscence, still was that image cherished by him. For all this long interval nothing occurred to strengthen the dim suspicion which he entertained at the time that the Mrs. Smith of the lodging was other than she seemed to be; but when he thought of the child and the mark he had made upon its shoulder, he did his best to banish the circumstance from his memory, in vague and mysterious dread lest he had indeed been rendered the accomplice of something more than a mere passing whim on the lady's part. So went by the nineteen years, and at the end of this long period he was destined to behold the object of his love again. She called upon him in terror relative to the bottle of chloroform which Chiffin the Cannibal had taken away with him on the night of the burglary at Saxondale House; for we should observe that ever since the practical use Lady Saxondale had made of the chloroform presented to her by Ferney, and which had

cleared her path of Ralph Farefield, she had taken care not to be without so valuable a fluid. Being possessed of the secret how to eliminate it, she was enabled to profit by the instructions received from Ferney at the time she was a lodger in the house at Islington. But, as we were saying, they met after an interval of nineteen years, and Lady Saxondale still passed as Mrs. Smith, though the physician suspected that she was something more. When he took her into his laboratory and showed her the phial of powerful poison which was his most recent experiment, the sudden thought flashed to her mind that it would be convenient for herself to possess it. She accordingly self-appropriated that phial, in the confusion of the crash of bottles which she purposely caused with the fringe of her shawl. From the laboratory she passed into the museum, and there, to her awful wonderment and dismay, did she behold the form of Ralph Farefield, looking as he looked the last time she ever saw him, nineteen years back!

We must now observe that for some time past Mabel Stewart's disposition had considerably changed: her discretion and prudence gave way to fretfulness and ill-temper, she became irritable and dissatisfied, and her disagreeable conduct provoked ill feelings on the part of the other domestics, as well as of Edmund and the young ladies, which only had the effect of irritating her all the more. She was cognizant of two damnatory circumstances in respect to her mistress: namely, the secret relative to Edmund, and the murder of Ralph Farefield. It was Mabel's growing perverseness which had flashed to the mind of Lady Saxondale when she self-appropriated the bottle of poison at the physician's house. On the very next day following her mysterious visit to Conduit Street, Mabel exhibited herself in a light more outrageous than ever. It will be recollected that she was not merely abusive, but that she made use of threats; and Lady Saxondale was even then more than half-resolved to make away with her. But still she hesitated, for, notwithstanding her soul was so deeply stained with crime, she could not readily bring herself to the perpetration of another. In the evening of the same day on which that scene took place with Mabel, Madge Somers called again, and this time it was to insist that measures should be taken to stop the prosecution of the Cannibal and Tony Wilkins

on account of the burglary. Her ladyship was compelled to submit, and likewise to present Madge with a further supply of money,—all of which was lost at the gaming-table in that female pandemonium which the vile woman frequented.

The visits of Madge Somers, the conduct of Mabel, the behaviour of Edmund, and divers other circumstances which were related at the time, were now goading Lady Saxondale to despair, and she felt that no possible strength of mind would enable her to bear up against so much. Therefore when, some days afterward, another scene with Mabel took place, and the woman insisted that all the domestics of the household should be formally instructed to show her the completest deference, Lady Saxondale's mind was made up with reference to one whose existence upon earth was fraught with so much terror and danger in her eyes. That same night Mabel was poisoned with a drop of Doctor Ferney's fatal elimination.

The next incident which has to be noticed is the visit paid by Juliana at night to Madge Somers. In a chance conversation with Edmund, she learned, as will be remembered, a description of this woman, and it precisely tallied with that which she had already received from the lips of Frank Paton. She was at that time at daggers drawn with her mother, and was therefore most anxious to ascertain wherefore such an ill-looking person could visit Lady Saxondale, and what power she had acquired over her. Guided by the information received from Edmund, she set out, visited Madge at her cottage, and by pretending to come on a message from Lady Saxondale, gradually and skilfully wormed out of her enough to make her comprehend the tremendous secret connected with Edmund. These circumstances were followed by the visit of Lady Saxondale and Juliana to the castle in Lincolnshire. There, as it will be remembered, Lord Harold Staunton boldly propounded his plans to Lady Saxondale, and gave her to understand that he meant to make her his wife. She promised compliance, though secretly cherishing a very different intention. Lord Harold was to go to London for the purpose of bribing Emily Archer into silence with regard to the tale of the masquerade and the duel; but no sooner had he taken his departure, when Lady Saxondale wrote a letter to Chiffin, desiring him to hasten down to the castle. She had resolved

to make away with Lord Harold, but inasmuch as Mabel had died so recently and so suddenly beneath her roof in London, she feared that another sudden death so closely following on the former, and beneath the roof of another of her mansions, would lead to suspicion. She therefore discarded the idea of poison, and wrote, as just described, to summon Chiffin to her aid.

Lord Harold returned into Lincolnshire, and was closely followed by Emily Archer herself. From the interview which took place between her ladyship and the ballet-dancer, the former perceived that she was completely in the power of the latter, and that circumstances had thus raised up in her path another obstacle which must be cleared away. Having already made up her mind to a fresh deed of turpitude, in respect to Harold, it required no great struggle with her conscience and no severe battling against compunctious scruples to transfer her murderous intent from the young nobleman to the ballet-dancer. With that devilish cunning; too, which was characteristic of her, she calculated that she might render Harold her instrument in her new design, and postpone for further consideration whether she should marry him or not. Indeed, she almost began to think it would be better to make him her husband, as he had already become her paramour. She was not too old to be devoid of dread as to the consequences of the intrigue; and at all events she would secure in the half-infatuated, half-selfish young nobleman, a permanent coöperator and accomplice in her numerous machinations. She broke her wishes to him in respect to Emily Archer, and by various representations, arts, and wiles she bent him to her purpose. The plan was all arranged, and in order to place Harold in circumstances which might utterly avert suspicion after the enactment of the contemplated tragedy, the little scene was got up in respect to the apparent accident with Mr. Hawkshaw's thoroughbred. It will be remembered that the appointment with Emily Archer and her maid was arranged for between nine and ten o'clock in the evening of that same day, the spot being midway between the castle and Gainsborough. Lady Saxondale retired from the drawing-room for about a quarter of an hour, on pretence of writing letters in the library, but in reality she repaired to the chamber occupied by Staunton, and where it was supposed he was stretched helplessly on his

back in consequence of the accident. But, according to preconcerted arrangement, he was ready dressed for his expedition. He muffled himself in his cloak, so as to hide his countenance in case of meeting any one, and also in case the attack upon the intended victims should fail and he might have to fly to escape detection on their part. He was, moreover, provided with his pistols, each being double-barrelled, and every barrel loaded with a bullet. Then, aided by Lady Saxondale, he passed forth from the castle by means of a window in one of the tapestry chambers, and the tree which grew against that casement.

A little later in the evening, when supper was served up, Florina suddenly intimated her intention of ascending to her brother's chamber, to inquire if he would partake of some refreshment. Lady Saxondale, knowing he could not as yet have possibly returned, was for an instant smitten with dismay at the threatened proceeding, but instantaneously recovering herself, she affably offered to accompany Florina. They proceeded to the chamber of the supposed invalid, her ladyship taking good care to be the first to reach the door; and affecting to listen on the threshold, she made a sign for Florina to remain where she was. Then she advanced on tiptoe to the couch, wherein she well knew she should find nobody; and hastening back to the young lady with every appearance of noiseless caution, assured her that her brother was sleeping. Thus did the wily woman extricate herself from an embarrassment which a few minutes before had appeared serious indeed. When the household retired to rest, she proceeded again to Harold's chamber, and this time found him there. The tragedy had been accomplished. One pistol had sufficed to do the deed, each of the two barrels of that one weapon having sent forth a bullet with fatal effect. The masquerade-dress had been thrown into the river; but in his confusion and horror Harold had likewise flung in the pistol which had accomplished the double murder. The other weapon, which there had been no necessity to use, was restored to his pistol-case. From Harold's chamber Lady Saxondale proceeded to the chapel, which she was accustomed to visit on particular nights, in order to see if Chiffin had attended to her letter. She found him there, and from his lips heard the confirmation of Harold's tale of the tragedy. But she did not require the villain's

services now, for the purpose which had originally induced her to write to him: instead of making away with Lord Harold, she had decided upon espousing him. She however engaged the Cannibal on that occasion, by the offer of an immense bribe, to rid her path of Mr. Gunthorpe and William Deveril, — little suspecting at the instant that the former was a great nobleman, and the latter was her own son. Early on the following morning Lady Saxondale visited Harold's chamber again, for a thought had struck her, filling her mind with uneasiness. The clothes he had worn on the previous evening were sure to be wet, and might be stained with blood; these evidences of the crime must therefore be caused to disappear. It was as she suspected; those garments were in the condition she had foreseen. A bundle was therefore made of them, and from the window of the tapestry-chamber did she consign them to the depths of the Trent.

Emily Archer was no more; that obstacle was removed from her path. But scarcely was this crime consummated, when another circumstance for the moment threatened Lady Saxondale with destruction. This was the sudden appearance of Doctor Ferney at the castle, — Doctor Ferney, who now discovered who was the Mrs. Smith that he had so long known by no other name, but whom he at length found to be the brilliant Lady Saxondale. He came to inform her that the body of Mabel Stewart had been taken to his house, and that he had ascertained she had died by poison, — that very poison the elimination of which was one of the results of his own experiments. It is, however, only necessary to glance at this circumstance, for the purpose of reminding the reader how Lady Saxondale succeeded in overcoming the scruples of the physician, and rendering him pliant to her interests and ductile to her purposes once more.

Shortly after these occurrences, Madge Somers found her way into Lincolnshire. Her funds were exhausted, she required more money; and whence could she so readily or so easily obtain it as from the hands of Lady Saxondale? Having arrived at Gainsborough, she was on her way to the castle, when she accidentally slipped into the river, and was gallantly rescued by William Deveril from a watery grave. They were both hospitably treated at the peasants' cottage. Madge, on recovering, and previous to taking her departure, was desirous to express her gratitude to the young gentleman

whose magnanimous conduct had made a deep impression upon the woman's mind. But while she was seated with him in the chamber where he lay, he fainted through exhaustion; and then, to her infinite surprise, Madge beheld between his neck and his shoulder a mark precisely similar to that which she knew to be on the person of her own son, the young man then passing as Lord Saxondale. It will be remembered that from the lips of Chiffin she had heard the entire story of how the rightful heir of Saxondale had been stolen in his infancy, and had been left amongst gipsies; she now therefore knew that in her deliverer from a watery grave she beheld that heir. She scrutinized his features, and she saw a sufficient resemblance between his countenance and that of Lady Saxondale to corroborate her belief. When he awoke to consciousness the facts she gleaned from him confirmed the idea, if any such confirmation were needed. The reader will remember with what solemn earnestness she adjured him to say whether he had listened favourably to Lady Saxondale's overtures of love; and likewise how strangely the ejaculation, "Ah!" had come forth from her lips, when in the course of conversation he declared that he had never been within the walls of Saxondale Castle in all his life.

It appears to be a special decree of Providence that no nature shall ever become so completely brutalized but that it has at least one single glimmering of a better feeling left, that no heart shall be rendered so utterly obdurate as not to have one single chord that may sooner or later vibrate with a kind sympathy. All this was illustrated in the case of Madge Somers. She owed her life to the young man who lay stretched before her eyes, and she was touched on his behalf. She saw that a tremendous wrong had been perpetrated, and that he was debarred of his just rights. Her conscience smote her for having surrendered up her own son to usurp the place which this young man ought to occupy; and there was even a sensation of solemn awe in her soul as the thought was forced upon her that Heaven itself had sent this young man to deliver her from death, in order that by the awakening of her sympathies and her remorse its own inscrutable purposes might be worked out in the bringing of him to the attainment and enjoyment of his own.

Madge was a singular being, and her course was decisively taken. She at once saw that, without corroborative evidence,

the bare assertion of William Deveril's claims to the estates and peerage of Saxondale would be but of little avail, and that everything depended on the discovery of the man Thompson, who could tell more about him. For Deveril had been adopted as the child of those to whom he was evidently in no way related. He had regarded them as his parents, nothing had occurred to make him suspect the contrary; and as they were dead and gone, the evidence of one who might tell a different tale and show that he was not their son was indispensably needful. Madge Somers was sanguine as well as persevering. She was resolved to search for the man Thompson, and to set out upon the enterprise with as much courage and spirit as ever did a warrior of other times embark upon a crusade to a far-off land.

This narrative of explanations is now drawing toward a close, and there remains only one incident to which attention need be specially directed. This was the consignment of Edmund as an alleged lunatic to the care of Doctor Ferney. It will be remembered that when Edmund was removed thither from the asylum of Doctor Burdett in the middle of the night, Doctor Ferney was left in ignorance until the very last moment of the name of the patient he was about to receive. This name was not mentioned to him until Doctor Burdett's keeper was hurriedly taking his leave, and the next moment the physician remained alone in the parlour with the young man who had been announced to him as Lord Saxondale. The mere mention of the name struck upon Ferney's heart as a remorse; and as he contemplated the bearer of that name, and saw that he possessed not the faintest resemblance to Lady Saxondale, strange suspicions began agitating in the physician's mind. Now for the first time did those thoughts of the past, which were dim, vague, and shapeless in respect to the mystery of the strawberry-mark, begin to develop themselves into consistency; and he shuddered within himself as he thought it possible that he could at length read the tremendous truth. Hence that anguished murmuring to himself of, "My God! my God! if it should be so — and I have been instrumental — But no, it cannot be — But if not that, what else?"

Tortured by the horrified feelings thus excited within him, Ferney waited in feverish impatience until he thought Edmund was asleep in the room to which he was consigned,

and thither did he stealthily repair. Edmund did sleep; and the physician, unfastening his night garments, examined his shoulder. Yes, his suspicion was confirmed: there was the mark which his own hand had made! On the following day he called, in a half-distracted state of mind, upon Lady Saxondale; but again did the wily woman succeed in overruling all his compunctions and conquering all his scruples.

The reader knows the rest, — not forgetting the murder of Adelaide, Edmund's wife, — and it is therefore useless to have recourse to any additional recapitulation. It will, however, be perceived that all the details which have been given in this chapter could not have emanated entirely from the lips of Lady Saxondale when she lay upon her death-bed, and when her confession was made to the Marquis of Eagledean. But those facts which were deficient in her own narrative were either already within his lordship's knowledge, or the range of his conjecture, or else were subsequently revealed by Ferney; so that no incident was wanting to afford in due time a complete reading of all the mysteries of the past.

Lady Saxondale died in the evening of the same day on which her confession was made, and let us hope that the repentance which she expressed was sincere. It was not until several days afterward that it was deemed prudent to break the intelligence of her decease to her son, Lord Saxondale; but though for a few hours it plunged him into a relapse, yet this was succeeded by a development of energy arising from a sense of the last duty which he had to perform toward his parent. Forgotten was everything in the shape of injury that he had sustained at her hands: he thought of her only with mingled love and grief. He followed her remains to the tomb, and the tears which he shed over her coffin were as full of anguish as if it were the best, the kindest, and the most virtuous of mothers whose loss was thus deplored.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A NIGHT IN FRANCE

It was about ten days after the tragic incidents at Saxon-dale House in Park Lane, and between eight and nine o'clock in the evening, that an ill-looking man, very indifferently dressed, entered a small wine-shop in the little town of Vairan, situate midway between Lyons and Grenoble. He passed into a room devoted for the accommodation of wayfarers and customers, and, in wretchedly broken French, called for some brandy and something to eat. The French waiter looked at the fellow with a very evil eye, as if he thought that he was scarcely capable of paying even the moderate expense to be incurred for his refreshments, or, at all events, that his appearance was of so suspicious a nature the establishment could very well do without such a patron. The man — whose countenance was of a most hangdog description, and the fierceness of which was enhanced by a dark beard of three or four days' growth — scowled terribly upon the waiter, and tossing down a couple of francs, growlingly muttered a frightful imprecation in English, adding, in his broken French, "Take your money, and give me the change."

The waiter, though still with some degree of reluctance, quitted the room to fetch what the man had ordered, and presently returned therewith. The fellow was in the midst of his repast, moistening his bread and meat with a frequent draught of brandy and water, when the door of the room opened, and another English wayfarer entered, whose appearance was scarcely more commendable than that of the other. He was dressed like a decayed groom or coachman, but had altogether so savage an expression of countenance that it was difficult to suppose he could have recently been

in any gentleman's service in either of those capacities. The man, who had first entered raised his eyes from the meal before him, and when his looks encountered those of the newcomer, they both started with the suddenness of mutual recognition, and grim smiles of satisfaction and astonishment appeared upon their countenances.

"What, Chiffin, old feller?" ejaculated the one who had last entered, and he thrust forth his hand.

"Yes, it's me, Mat," responded the Cannibal, laying down his food and grasping the Cadger's outstretched hand. "It's no other than the famous Mr. Chiffin, Esquire, that you see before you."

"And uncommon sorry I am to see Mr. Chiffin in no better plight," answered Mat, surveying the Cannibal's seedy apparel and dirty, unkempt, unshaven appearance.

"Well, I can't say," growled the latter, "that I can pay you any better compliment. Things have gone precious hard with me for some time past."

"And with me, too," rejoined Mat the Cadger, "particularly since I come into this devil of a country where I can't speak a sentence of the lingo."

But here the conversation was temporarily cut short by the entrance of the waiter, bearing some refreshment which Mat the Cadger had ordered as he passed the bar, — his knowledge of the French tongue being confined to the half-dozen words expressing the articles which he most generally needed, such as bread, meat, brandy, cheese, tobacco, etc. The waiter, whose suspicions had been excited by the appearance of Chiffin, had certainly but little cause to be moved in his favour when he perceived that he had found a companion — perhaps a friend, and perhaps an accomplice — in the almost equally ill-looking rascal who had last entered. It naturally occurred to the man that the meeting of these two — both being Englishmen, and both being of an evil aspect — was not so accidental as it seemed and as in truth it was, but the thought struck him that they had met at the wine-shop to concoct some villainy. Therefore, upon leaving the room, he mentioned his suspicions to the master of the establishment, and this individual thought it prudent to send an intimation to the *gendarmes* in the town, to the effect that two very ill-looking foreigners were at the moment beneath his roof.

Meanwhile Chiffin and Mat the Cadger were discussing their refreshments and continuing their discourse.

“Why, it must be a matter of pretty near eighteen months, at all events fifteen or sixteen,” said the Cannibal, “since you and me separated on that night when we were so preciously sold in endeavouring to carry off Madge Somers. You jumped out of the window.”

“The best thing I could do,” replied Mat. “But what did they do with you? For you never turned up afterward.”

“What did they do?” growled Chiffin. “Why, they didn’t behave unhandsome, I must say, considering all circumstances. They packed me off to France; and when I was safe landed at Calais, I had thirty pounds put into my hand. Now you must know that Lord Eagledean had sent to America some time before that, to order a good sum of money to be paid to me if I presented myself in person to receive it. So I was resolved to go over to New York and take possession of the blunt. Well, I got as far as Havre de Grace, — a place where the packets sail from for America. I took my berth as a steerage passenger, and as the ship wasn’t going to sail for three or four days, I thought I would amuse myself by looking about the town.”

“And so you got into some scrape,” interjected Mat, “I’ll be bound.”

“By Satan, you are just right there,” growled the Cannibal, with a fearfully gloomy look, “and the worse luck for me, too. I got blazing drunk at a wine-shop, kicked up a diabolic row, smashed three or four Frenchmen almost to bits, was took before the magistrate, and got sent to quod for six months. There was a pretty start, — or, I should say, it wasn’t any start at all, for the ship sailed without me, as a matter of course, and my passage-money was forfeited.”

“Well, that was a misfortune,” observed the Cadger, as he emptied his glass.

“So I came out of gaol with only about twenty francs in my pocket,” resumed the Cannibal, “and what was I to do? I knowed it was no use to write to Lord Eagledean and ask for more money. He had quite enough reason to be sick and tired of me. But I did write to Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton, and got no answer. I suppose they thought fit to cut their old acquaintance when he was in trouble.”

"Very likely," said Mat. "But what have you been doing ever since you came out of gaol?"

"Leading a life that would be hard to give an exact account of," answered the Cannibal. "Wandering about like a lost dog, — ay, and like a half-starved one, too, sometimes, — doing a bit of priggging here and highway robbery there, having a precious lot of very narrow escapes, and, in short, dragging on such an existence that I'm uncommon tired of it. Ah, what a fool I have been! The money I have had, the use I might have made of my noble patrons!" and in desperation the Cannibal dashed his clenched fist forcibly upon the table.

"Well, I can't tell of better things," observed the Cadger. "England got too hot to hold me, and so about a month ago I came over to France. I had a trifle of money with me, and so as yet I haven't been forced to do anything queer in this country. I meant to get on into Italy, where there's a gentleman I had some claim upon a good many years ago; and as he keeps a lot of horses and dogs, I have been thinking he might take me into his service, — particularly as he has been too long abroad to know anything to my discredit. But my funds fell short at Lyons, and so I am forced to make up my mind to do the best I can to get on to Florence, which is where the gentleman is. I have walked every bit of the way from Calais to this place, and have taken a month to do it."

"And now," asked the Cannibal, "how much money have you got in your pocket?"

"Not more than enough to pay for what I have had here, and my bed. To-morrow morning I shall go upon the tramp, without a sou left."

"And that's exactly my case," rejoined the Cannibal. "What's to be done? For I suppose that now chance has flung us together, we sha'n't separate in a hurry."

"Not if there's any good to be got by keeping with each other," rejoined Mat the Cadger.

"Why, if I had only a pal to work with, I shouldn't be as I am," proceeded Chiffin. "There's plenty of travellers on all the roads, but it isn't an easy thing for a fellow single-handed to stop a carriage or chaise. It's even dangerous to tackle a man when he's alone in a gig, for he may have pistols about him, and I have got none. Now, Mat, what do you say? Shall you and me work together?"

"It seems as if it was all arranged beforehand," answered the Cadger, "or else why did destiny fling us together? Yes, Chiffin, I will work with you."

Here the landlord entered the room, and pretending to look about for something, surveyed his two customers in a manner which not only showed them how little welcome they were, but implied, as plainly as looks could do, that if they had finished their meals he would rather have their room than their company. They did not however immediately choose to take the hint, and so he retired.

"Now, old feller," said Mat the Cadger, "I suppose you know what that means? We can't have beds here, they don't like the looks of us, and it's not the first time, since I have been in France, that my appearance has told against me."

"Well, it isn't a very handsome one," observed the Cannibal; "neither is mine, for that matter. But as we can't stay here, let's toddle; and as we have agreed to work together, let's make a beginning to-night. Perhaps we shall get something worth having, and to-morrow shall be able to enjoy ourselves with a good booze for old acquaintance' sake. What say you?"

"With all my heart," replied Mat the Cadger. "I am a trifle tired or so, after a walk of twenty-five miles to-day from half-way to Lyons; but if there's anything to be got, I am not the chap to give way to fatigue."

"Then come," said the Cannibal; and aware that he and his friend were regarded with suspicion by the landlord, he concealed his club underneath his coat, which he buttoned over his chest.

The two villains, having settled their score, issued forth from the wine-shop, and quitting the town of Vairan, they continued on the road to Grenoble. It was now about ten o'clock; the moon was shining bright, it was a delicious evening, and all objects were plainly visible. They went on, conversing together, but stopping every now and then to listen whether they could hear the sounds of any approaching equipage; for they were resolved, if circumstances should appear favourable, to commence their partnership operations without delay. An hour passed, and they encountered only a few poor wayfarers, who did not present an appearance which rendered it worth while to run any risk by attacking

them. Chiffin had his club in readiness for action, Mat the Cadger had likewise a good stout stick, and these weapons were formidable enough in the hands of such desperate characters.

Presently they heard the sounds of an equipage approaching from behind. They stopped and listened, and as it drew nearer, their experienced ears made them aware that it was a vehicle drawn by two horses.

"The very thing!" muttered Chiffin; "there will be only one postilion. You make a dash at him, and leave me to deal with anybody else that there may be."

"All right," responded Mat. "There's nothing like settling our duties beforehand." Then, as the equipage came in sight, he added, quickly, "Yes, it's a pair!"

"And no one on the box," immediately observed Chiffin. "A light *calèche*, too, — not more than two travellers inside, I'll be bound. Let's walk slowly on, and seem to be talking, as if we didn't mean mischief."

The chaise came up; the animals were jogging along at the usually miserable pace at which post-horses are accustomed to proceed on the French roads, and the postilion, with his great heavy boots, was sitting comfortably enough in his saddle, totally unsuspecting of impending mischief. All in an instant Mat the Cadger sprang at the horses' heads, clutched the reins with one hand, and with the club which he held in the other, struck down the postilion. But the Frenchman was not stunned, and instantaneously springing to his feet, he resolutely and valiantly grappled with the Cadger.

Meanwhile Chiffin had flown to the door of the *calèche*; but just as he tore it open, the traveller inside — for it contained only one gentleman — fired a pistol, and the bullet whisked by the Cannibal's ear. Fearing that there might be a second pistol in readiness, Chiffin threw himself upon the traveller, tore him out of the chaise with the force and fury of a wild beast, and hurled him to the ground. At the same moment the horses, frightened by the disturbance, dashed away, and the hind wheel of the chaise went completely over the traveller's neck, breaking it, so that death was instantaneous.

The horses dashed on, and as the chaise passed away, the shadow which it had thrown upon the ground disappeared as suddenly from the spot, so that the clear moonlight now

streamed full upon the face of the dead traveller. An ejaculation of astonishment burst from the lips of Chiffin, for in that traveller he at once recognized Lord Harold Staunton!

At the same moment the galloping sounds of horses' hoofs were heard approaching from the direction of Vairan, and Chiffin flew to the assistance of his comrade, Mat the Cadger, whom the French postilion had flung upon the ground, and on whose breast his knee was placed. The Cannibal's club dealt the unfortunate postboy such a tremendous blow as to dash out his brains, and he fell dead upon the spot. The next instant the two ruffians had leaped the hedge which skirted the road, and were flying across the adjacent field. But the comers on horseback — who, indeed, consisted of a posse of *gendarmes* — were not to be thus balked. They gallantly leaped the hedge, and dashed across the meadow in pursuit of the fugitives.

“We are done for, Mat!” exclaimed Chiffin. “It's the guillotine, or else a resistance unto death!”

“Resistance!” echoed the desperate Cadger, and, like two wild beasts at bay, they turned to face the *gendarmes*.

These — who were half a dozen in number — called upon them to surrender, but the only answer was a furious attack made by the villains; for they were goaded to mingled frenzy and despair, and they literally sought death. One officer was struck to the ground by a blow of Chiffin's club, another had his arm broken by the Cadger's cudgel; the others closed in around them. But still the two desperate men fought with a valour worthy of a better cause, until Mat was stricken dead with a blow of a cutlass, and a bullet through the brain ended the iniquitous career of Chiffin the Cannibal.

Lord Harold Staunton's passport told who he was. The report of his death was published in the newspapers, and through this channel shortly came to the knowledge of the Marquis of Eagledean, who, though he deplored the fate of a young man cut off ere he had time to repent of his manifold sins, was nevertheless relieved from the apprehension of being succeeded in his title and estates by one whose soul was stained with the crime of murder.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CONCLUSION

No difficulty was experienced in making good the claims of our hero to the title and estates of Saxondale. The subject of those claims was duly investigated by a Committee of Privileges appointed by the House of Lords, the principal deponents being the Marquis of Eagledean, Doctor Ferney, and Mr. Thompson. The marquis, while giving his evidence, merely recited so much of the late Lady Saxondale's confession as had immediate reference to the question under investigation; her deeper and darker crimes he kept entirely out of view. Doctor Ferney, spirit-broken and crushed, not merely by the recollections of the past, but also by the recent horrors which had occurred at Saxondale House, presented but the ghost of his former self; so that his appearance, and the tale of love's infatuation which he told, won for him a considerable amount of sympathy. As there was not any ground to believe him culpable of a conscious and wilful complicity in the initiation of the imposture twenty-one years back, but as it was only too evident that his passion had rendered him the weak tool of an artful and designing woman, — moreover, as it was through his instrumentality that this imposture was suddenly blazoned forth to the whole world, — it entered not into the mind of any one to proclaim him worthy of punishment. When the judgment of the committee was pronounced, and Lord Saxondale was invited to take his seat amongst the peers of England, Doctor Ferney, having done all that was required of him, resolved to withdraw completely into private life. He gave up his profession, he quitted his house in Conduit Street, and he retired to the picturesque dwelling at Rhavadergwy in Wales, which the Marquis and Marchioness of Eagledean

placed at his disposal. Thither he was accompanied by the faithful and attached Thompson, on whom Lord Saxondale settled an annuity, so as to relieve him from a complete state of dependence on the physician. No museum and no laboratory were established at Rhavadergwy. Doctor Ferney had conceived a sudden and unconquerable disgust for all those circumstances and pursuits which could not fail to remind him vividly of the past, and it was in the recreations of literature that the remainder of his days were spent. He lived but three or four years after the occurrences at Saxondale House; his health gradually declined, his constitution, never strong, gave way, and he expired in the arms of the attached Thompson.

The full extent of Lady Saxondale's crimes, as well as those of Lord Harold Staunton, was religiously concealed from our hero and the beautiful Florina. Indeed Lord and Lady Saxondale are now completely happy. Their grief for the loss, the one of a mother, the other of a brother, gradually became attempered down to a pious resignation, until it was absorbed in the elements of felicity with which they were so profusely surrounded. They have four children, two sons and two daughters, constituting the chief source of their happiness, and in whom are reflected the manly beauty of their father and the feminine graces of their mother.

The Marquis of Eagledean is now in his seventieth year, but as hale and as hearty as when we first introduced him to the reader. There being no heir to his title, the entail of his estates ceases, and he is enabled to bequeath them to whomsoever he chooses. Lord and Lady Saxondale, being already immensely rich, require nothing at the old nobleman's hands; it is the same with Lord and Lady Everton; the same, too, with the Count and Countess of Christoval; and therefore the bulk of the marquis's property is willed to Mr. and Mrs. Paton, a munificent jointure being reserved for the marchioness. All those personages whose names have just been mentioned are as happy as the reader can wish them to be; and, beyond those petty evils which are incidental to even the most prosperous human condition, no cloud threatens to cast its shadow upon the tenor of their existence.

Juliana — fortunately for herself — became subjected to

influences alike corrective and beneficent, when the terrific drama developed its mingled phases of wonderment and horror at Saxondale House. The vigils which she kept by her mother's bedside until almost the last moment impressed upon her mind the terrors of that death-bed to which guilt had brought her parent, and she was led to deplore her own frailties. Then, on the rightful Lord Saxondale's recovery from his illness, she found herself clasped in the arms of a brother, — a brother who was prepared to receive her as his sister, and to treat her with all the kindness which was characteristic of his nature. The period of mourning for the deceased Lady Saxondale was passed by Juliana at the mansion in Park Lane, with her brother and her sister-in-law; and as it drew toward an end, she received a note from Mr. Forester, respectfully and affectionately worded, soliciting an interview. This she declined, in the belief that he was desirous of drawing her into a renewal of that connection which had been cut short by the tragic circumstances at Saxondale House. A few months elapsed, during which Juliana heard no more of Mr. Forester; but at the expiration of that interval she received a second note, assuring her that the impression her image had left upon his mind was stronger than he had at first fancied, and he offered her his hand. This she accepted, and her brother, Lord Saxondale, settled upon her an annuity of fifteen hundred a year; so that it proved by no means an ineligible match, in a worldly point of view, for Mr. Forester. But inasmuch as Juliana's character had been too much damaged for her to hope speedily to regain her footing in English society, she and her husband have since their marriage resided abroad, chiefly in Italy; and we are happy in being enabled to add that the lady's conduct has been perfectly and scrupulously correct.

It may easily be supposed that the Marchioness of Villebelle, the beautiful Constance, was perfectly astounded when she learned that the deceased Edmund was not her brother, but that he whom she had known as William Deverill stood in this light toward her; and mingled with that wonderment was a profound affliction at the tragic end of her mother. Her husband continued to fill eminent diplomatic situations throughout the reign of Louis Philippe, and likewise while the Republic lasted; but when Louis Napoleon

usurped the imperial crown of France, the high-minded marquis refused to serve under the new dynasty. Fortunately for him, a very distant relative, whom he had not seen and scarcely known for years, died about the same time of that usurpation, and the marquis found himself the heir to a large fortune. From motives of delicacy, — being unwilling to meet his former wife, if wife she could be called, the Countess of Christoval, — he has visited England rarely; indeed, only for a few weeks at a time, to enable Constance to see her brother and sister-in-law, and now the marquis and marchioness are settled down on the handsome estate in the south of France which formed a portion of his recently acquired inheritance.

We must not forget to observe that Mary Anne — Constance's faithful lady's-maid — formed an excellent matrimonial alliance. She was one morning combing out her long, luxuriant hair before a glass placed on a toilet-table near the window of her chamber at the mansion of the French Embassy in Madrid, when she unconsciously became the object of admiration on the part of a middle-aged English gentleman who was lodging at an hotel on the opposite side of the street. The admirer was a bachelor, with a moderate fortune, and he longed for the bliss of matrimony. He soon contrived to form an acquaintance with Mary Anne, he wooed and won her, and the marriage has been a perfectly happy one, notwithstanding the disparity of some sixteen or seventeen years in their respective ages.

Lord Petersfield paid the debt of nature a few months after the incidents at Saxondale House. He had to be examined as a witness in a lawsuit which came under the cognizance of the Court of Queen's Bench; and it is supposed that the exceeding home-thrust questions which the learned counsel put, and which compelled him for once in his life to give pointblank answers, appeared to his mind so utterly destructive of that diplomatic reserve which had become habitual, and so completely subversive of his solemn gravity, as altogether to upset him and unable to bear up against the shock, he took to his bed, which he never left alive.

Squire Hawkshaw continues unmarried, and is likely to remain so. He is an occasional visitor at the houses of those friends with whom circumstances rendered him so intimate, and he is always a welcome guest.

A few years back, a certain Mark Bellamy was convicted of forgery before a criminal tribunal at Vienna, and was sentenced to work in the Austrian quicksilver mines for the remainder of his life. About the same time, Mrs. Martin — another creature of the late Lord Everton, the uncle and persecutor of the present one — died in wretchedness in an English workhouse.

We have now no more to relate. Our task, so far as the present narrative is concerned, has reached its termination. But ere laying down our pen, we invite the attention of our myriads of readers to a fourth and concluding series of "The Mysteries of the Court of London."

END OF VOLUME XV.

THE FORTUNES OF THE ASHTONS

VOLUME XVI



"THE CHAMPAGNE QUICKLY BEGAN TO
CIRCULATE"

Page 357

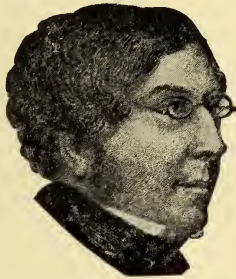
THE CHAPMAN QUARTER BOOKS TO
GIBBONS
1800-1801

The Works of
George W. M. Reynolds

The
Fortunes of the Ashtons

Volume I

The Mysteries of the Court
of London



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REYNOLDS' WORKS

CHAPTER I

THE BROTHERS

IT was in the middle of the year 1824, that two brothers were entered as graduates at one of the colleges of Oxford University. Their name was Vivian; they belonged to the noble family of Viviandale, but as their father was a junior scion thereof, his pecuniary means were rather limited. The Honourable Mr. Vivian, who was a widower, had but these two sons, and he hoped by giving them a collegiate education, to fit them for such professions as they might respectively be led by taste or opportunity to adopt, and in which the family interest was likely to push them on. They were two handsome youths, — reflecting in their own persons the masculine beauty of a fine and haughty race, — with dispositions naturally good, but nevertheless already somewhat warped by a fond father's too great indulgence, as well as by the influences of that sphere of life in which they were born, and in the midst of which they had been caressed, petted, and flattered.

At the time when they entered Oxford University, Hugh, the elder, was in the opening of his twenty-first year, Bertram, the younger, a little past eighteen. They were of equal stature, but Hugh was more strongly and stoutly built than his brother, not merely because his additional two years had given to his form more manly developments, but because the younger was naturally of a more slender and more gracefully symmetrical figure. Though it was impossible not to be struck by the haughtily handsome

countenance of the elder, it was equally impossible to avoid drawing a comparison in favour of the more delicately chiseled Grecian profile of the latter. The expression of Hugh's features was entirely of the sense; that of Bertram's of the sentiment. While the former indicated a love of pleasure, strong passions, and a disposition which was sensuous as well as proud, that of the latter denoted a rare intelligence blended with its pride, and the classic curl of the short upper lip declared an instinctive disdain of falsehood. Hugh's forehead was large, prominent, and massive, that of Bertram high and arched; the former pale from a too early acquaintance with dissipation, the latter pale likewise, but as if genius itself had stamped that pallor there. Thus the brow of the elder brother seemed one on which passion and pleasure might in after years trace their lines; while that of the younger brother had all the immortality of the intellect predicted in its marble dream. The eyes of both were dark, — those of the elder flashing with all worldly feelings, those of the younger with the lightnings of the mind. Hugh's hair was black, strong even to coarseness, and without a gloss; that of Bertram was of raven richness, shining with its own natural velvety brightness, and clustering in excessive luxuriance over the small, delicate, well-folded ears, and by the sides of the alabaster temples. Altogether, the elder brother was one whose fine appearance could not fail to command admiration, but nothing else; while that of the younger brother inspired the same feeling, but blended with interest, and almost love.

On entering upon their college life, Hugh soon formed acquaintances of dispositions congenial with his own, and gave himself up to manly sports by day and dissipated pleasures by night. Hunting, racing, boating, fishing, and cock-fighting constituted the former; revelling, cards, and visits to forbidden haunts of pleasurable vice composed the latter. On the other hand, Bertram — led by taste as well as by a sense of duty — applied himself to his studies, but he could not altogether escape the influences of an elder brother's example. In aristocratic families, where the casualties of nature may raise elder brothers to the possession of hereditary titles and estates, younger brothers are apt to look up to them with perhaps too much deference, from a sense that they may in process of time be placed in the position of

destiny's arbiters in respect to the worldly career of those whom the laws of primogeniture and entail thus throw in dependence upon them. Moreover, there is often, even in the breasts of the best-disposed youths, a spirited and prideful disinclination to be taunted with being "bookworms" and "saints," when elder brothers invite them to partake in pleasures and amusements; and thus is it that well-principled lads are frequently led, by a sense of false shame, to quit pursuits in reality most congenial to their tastes, and deviate into others but little consonant with their inclinations. To all these varied but potent influences was Bertram Vivian subjected, and when once the ice was broken, — when once, in other words, he had left his studies to accompany his brother and that brother's boon companions amidst scenes of pleasure, — the compunctious feelings attendant thereon gradually wore off. Not, however, that Bertram became inveterately dissipated, or that he abandoned himself so completely to pleasure, as did Hugh, but still he was not so steady as he ought to have been. The consequences were, that at the end of the first year of the two young men's collegiate experience, they found that they had far outstripped their pecuniary means, and that they had contracted debts which they dared not mention to their father, and which nevertheless without his succour they had not the remotest chance of liquidating.

The university tradesmen were not however clamorous. It was sufficient for them to know that the Vivians belonged to a family in which there were lofty titles that bespoke the accompaniment of great wealth, and they considered themselves tolerably safe in being sooner or later paid by some member of this aristocratic family. Hugh pursued his career of extravagance as if he were actual heir to the Marquisate of Viviandale from which the family lustre was derived, between which and himself there were nevertheless great gulfs fixed; while Bertram, though without the moral courage to stop short in the pathway of ruin, was at times distracted by the sense of those difficulties that were gradually enmeshing him in a web which he feared to be inextricable. He had not, we say, the moral courage to check himself: that feeling of false shame, and that idea of more or less dependence on his brother, to which we have already alluded, prevented him from asserting the natural rectitude

of his position and courageously obeying its impulses in spite of all other considerations. But fortunately for him, something occurred which turned all his thoughts and all his feelings into a completely new channel.

The brothers had been about a year at the university — they were now respectively somewhat past twenty-one and nineteen — when Bertram accidentally formed the acquaintance of a half-pay captain in the army and his daughter. The gentleman, whose name was Lacey, was stricken in years; he had married late in life, — one child was the issue of this alliance, — but the event which rendered him a father made him also a widower. His means were limited, but he had done his best to rear his darling Eliza in a becoming manner. He had stinted himself to give her a good education, and as she grew up in loveliness and in virtue, she rewarded him for his care with the most devoted affection. Sensible of the numerous sacrifices which her father had made on her account, she felt that no degree of tenderness could be too great wherewith to recompense such a parent. His will, therefore, was her law, and if he had demanded any sacrifice at her hands, even that of her life, she would have made it resignedly, nay, more, cheerfully.

And exquisitely beautiful was Eliza Lacey. A year younger than Bertram Vivian, that is to say, with eighteen summers upon her head at the time their acquaintance was formed, youth and health lent all their charms to her face and figure. A cloud of raven tresses fell around her oval countenance; her complexion was matchless in its transparent purity, pale on the lofty, expansive brow, dazzlingly fair on the softly rounded shoulders, the arching neck, and the Hebe-modelled bust, but with the rich carnation tint upon the cheeks, and with a still more vivid and a riper crimson on the lips. The delicately pencilled raven brows arched nobly above eyes that were large and dark, and which though so bright had an ineffable sweetness of expression. Her features were outlined with a perfect regularity, and her teeth were as white as pearls. A little above the medium stature of woman, her figure, just in all its proportions, had a certain graceful and flowing roundness in the contours and in the limbs, which added to its marvellous symmetry. All her movements, even to the slightest gesture, were characterized by an unstudied elegance, and thus, in

every respect, was she the rarest model of feminine beauty. Her disposition was amiable and good, naturally trustful and confiding; incapable of guile herself, she suspected it not in others. Scandal and malice, jealousy and envy, were known to her only by name, beyond which she had no experience of them. Her manners and her conversation were modelled by her character, — frank, artless, and fascinating. Yet though so utterly unacquainted with the darker sides of humanity and the treacheries of the world, she was not on this account to be regarded as an easy victim for seductive perfidy; her very innocence was in itself a defence. The intuitive sense of her sex's dignity and of virginal propriety would in a moment have led her to resent the slightest word that shocked, or the first look that threatened her with insult.

Such was Eliza Lacey. She dwelt with her father in a small but comfortable house on the outskirts of the University City, their only attendant being an elderly female who was in Captain Lacey's service at the time of his marriage, and who had therefore known his charming and interesting daughter from the moment of her birth. Captain Lacey, on leaving the army and settling down into married life, had fixed his abode at Oxford, not exactly through choice, but from the fact that the death of a relative had bequeathed him a small property consisting of three houses. In one of these he lived; the other two were let, and the moderate rentals derived therefrom, added to his own half-pay, constituted his entire income. This was small enough, but still, by dint of the strictest frugality, the little family was enabled to maintain a respectable appearance and avoid debt. The possession of the houses likewise relieved Captain Lacey's mind from the bitter anxiety which he would otherwise have felt at the thought of death snatching him away from the world ere his daughter should be comfortably settled in it, for though his half-pay would die with him, yet the rents of the little property would produce a sufficiency for the subsistence of her who would be left behind him. Thus, though well aware that the city of Oxford was by no means the most suitable place for a beautiful girl, as Eliza was, to reside in, Captain Lacey was in a certain measure chained to the spot; and, moreover, he trusted to his daughter's admirable principles as a sufficient safeguard

against whatsoever temptation might be thrown in her way. He had, however, been careful in avoiding the acquaintance of any of the young collegians, and though several attempts were made on their part to obtain an introduction to Captain Lacey and his daughter, they had all proved ineffectual.

It is needless to particularize the details of the accident which threw Bertram Vivian in their way. Suffice it to say that on one occasion he was fortunate enough in being close at hand when a half-tipsy undergraduate, meeting the young lady in the street, offered her an insult, and he struck the fellow to the ground. To escort Miss Lacey to her home became a courteous necessity on his part, and which she could not without rudeness decline; to be invited to walk in and receive the thanks of her father was an equally natural sequence. During this brief interview, Captain Lacey was so favourably impressed with his daughter's deliverer that when the latter solicited permission to call and pay his respects again, utter churlishness could have alone refused it. He did call, and he became enamoured of Eliza Lacey. The tone of his conversation, his agreeable manners, the delicacy of his conduct, and the unstudied evidences of a fine intellect which developed themselves, all contributed to confirm Captain Lacey's favourable opinion on the one hand, and to make their impression upon Eliza's heart on the other. The captain, without setting himself studiously and deliberately to work to inquire into the young man's prospects, thought it, when he happened to learn that Bertram belonged to a noble family, quite sufficient to prove that these prospects must be good; and though hitherto he had entertained a very indifferent opinion — bordering indeed almost upon aversion — for the Oxford collegians, he was now inclined to fancy that Bertram Vivian constituted at least one very favourable exception.

Bertram called as often as he dared, consistently with delicacy, when this acquaintance first commenced; his visits, however, soon became more frequent, and from the very fact that he found pleasure in taking a quiet cup of tea and passing his evenings in that humble parlour, the captain argued everything in favour of the young man's steadiness. Thus was it that as weeks grew into months, and Bertram's attentions became more and more marked toward Eliza, the father inwardly rejoiced on beholding the evidences of a

mutual attachment on the part of the young couple, for he felt that his gray hairs would go down with additional resignation, and even with contentment, to the grave, if previous to his death he had the happiness of seeing his beloved daughter comfortably settled in life. If the captain had been wise — or, in other words, more cunningly and shrewdly worldly-minded — he would have taken the trouble to inquire into the young man's prospects, when he would have found that though belonging to the Vivian family, yet as the younger son of a younger branch, Bertram had nothing but that family's interest to push him on in the world. The retired old officer was, however, naturally indolent, too apt to take his own views of things as positively acquired facts, and withal exceedingly self-willed, so that whatever he got into his head, he regarded as something quite as positive, real, and actual, as if it had received ten thousand unmistakable corroborations.

Months passed on, and Bertram Vivian became steadiness itself. Scrupulously keeping secret his acquaintance with the Lacey family, he withdrew himself from the society of Hugh and his companions, love rendering him utterly indifferent to the taunts which a false shame would not at one time have suffered him to endure. His brother fancied that he was seized with a studying fit, and being at length tired of endeavouring to draw the "bookworm," as he called him, from his pursuits, he vented his annoyance in such terms as "milk-sop" and "saint," and ultimately left Bertram altogether to his own courses. Thus, all the time that the younger brother could spare from his studies — and some too which he pilfered therefrom — he passed at Captain Lacey's house.

It was a dream of bliss in which the two lovers were plunged. Months and months had elapsed since their acquaintance first commenced, and though their lips had breathed no avowal of affection, yet their looks had mutually told the tale. They never walked out together, because Bertram did not choose to stand the chance of encountering, when in the companionship of Eliza, any of his college friends, — least of all his brother. He was fearful of being dragged into the necessity of introducing them, and from such an idea he recoiled loathingly. It was sufficient happiness for him to sit by the charming girl's side in the com-

fortable little parlour, conversing with her, reading to her, looking over books with her, gazing upon her while she worked, and exchanging tender glances. Even the presence of her father was not felt as a restraint, for the old gentleman, when not dozing in his armchair, treated him with as much kindness as if he were a son, considered him as good as formally engaged to his daughter, and smiled upon them both. But if the father took no pains to make direct inquiries into the young man's prospects, the artless and unsophisticated Eliza, it may be easily supposed, made none at all. She just knew that he was connected with the Viviandale family, and no more. As for there being anything selfish in her love, the Alpine snows were not purer. It was a youthful heart's first virgin affection that was given to Bertram Vivian; on his side it was a young man's first love, profound, glowing, impassioned, but all a dream, without the soberness of waking reflections. He paused not to ask himself whether this vision of bliss could ever be realized, whether it were possible that he should ever lead Eliza Lacey to the altar. The present was so full of rapturous enjoyment that he looked not beyond it. Youthful love is in itself faith and hope; it is the religion of the heart, as the worship of God is the religion of the soul. It has a sort of tacit reliance upon the future, without studying the grounds on which such reliance is based; it believes in paradise, as the worshipper of the Almighty believes in paradise also, without knowing when or how the period of enjoyment is to be brought about.

Thus a year passed away from the date of Bertram's acquaintance with the Laceys, when, in the middle of 1826, he was suddenly startled from his dream of bliss. A death in the family, by removing the old marquis, called another to assume the coronet, and the two young men were summoned peremptorily from Oxford to attend the funeral of the deceased peer. The same letter gave them to understand that the circumstance of their heavy debts had come to their father's knowledge, that they must be careful to bring with them lists of their liabilities, with a view to their prompt and equitable settlement, and that they were to give notice to their tutors that they would return to Oxford no more. If it were a merely temporary separation from Eliza, Bertram could have borne it, as indeed he had borne, during the

vacation, a brief interruption to their constant companionship. But now that he was given to understand that his father's circumstances, being somewhat improved by the death in the family, enabled him at once to provide for his two sons, and that therefore their collegiate career was at an end, the young man's grief knew no bounds.

In a state bordering upon frenzy, he flew to Captain Lacey's house, and sought an interview with Eliza. Her father was out for his usual walk at the time, and some household duties had kept the young maiden at home. The unexpected visit from her lover at an unusual hour would have been fraught with ineffable pleasure, were it not for the distressing intelligence he had to communicate. They threw themselves into each other's arms, they embraced tenderly; it was the first time that ever their lips had met in kisses, — the first time that ever Eliza's heart beat against Bertram's own. They were both now awakened, as if by a thunderclap, from their dream of bliss, and for the first half-hour of this parting interview, their affliction bordered upon despair. But did we not ere now say that love itself is faith and hope? and it is not in the nature of youthful souls to abandon themselves altogether to utter desperation. Neither was it in this case. By degrees they grew calmer, and Bertram whispered vows and protestations and hopes in the ear of his beloved.

"My father," he said, "purposes at once to embark me in some career in which I may doubtless acquire fortune and eminence. The family to which I belong is rich and powerful, and with all the advantages of such interest, my struggle against the world can neither be a painful nor a long one. Besides, sweetest, dearest girl, your image will serve as my guiding-star, the beacon of hope, the emblem of that reward which shall crown all my arduous toils. A few years — perhaps only two or three may be necessary — will soon pass; we are both so young, dearest Eliza. We shall then be young still, and when we meet again to part no more, oh, what happiness will await us! And then, too, whatever may be the career for which my father destines me, I may from time to time be enabled to hasten thither, on the wings of love, to see you. We can write to each other, and in all these prospects, in all these circumstances, there are many sources of consolation."

The head of the weeping girl — that beauteous head,

drooping like a tulip on its slender stalk — sank on her lover's shoulder, and she murmured expressions of unchanging love, as well as of gratitude for the solace he proffered her.

“ You are mine, adored Eliza,” he said. “ You are mine, and here, in the face of Heaven, do I pledge myself wholly and solely unto you. Take this ring, my well-beloved; it has the initial of my Christian name graven on the stone. Keep it, Eliza, as an earnest of those vows which I so solemnly, sacredly plight you now.”

Almost blinded by her tears, the lovely being placed the ring in her bosom, and drawing off one from her own fair finger, she murmured, in accents that were broken and scarcely audible, yet filled with the soft, plaintive harmony of her dulcet voice, “ And you, dearest Bertram, take this. It bears also the initial of my name. I will not tell you that I shall remain constant. My own heart gives me that assurance, and you, who can read the secrets of that heart, know that it is entirely and inseparably thine.”

Bertram took the ring, pressed it to his lips, and placed it upon his finger. Then the moment for parting came. Oh, who can depict the anguish, the excruciation of feeling, which marked that moment? The calmness which had succeeded the first ebullition of despair, and which in itself was only comparative, vanished altogether. Bertram strained his adored Eliza in convulsive violence to his breast; they both felt as if the tenderest cords of their hearts were being rudely torn asunder. They separated in a state bordering upon frenzy. Bertram rushed from the house, while the young maiden, sinking upon a seat, felt as if she and happiness had shaken hands for ever.

Captain Lacy returned home about a quarter of an hour afterward, and when the agonizing intentness of Eliza's affliction had somewhat passed away, or at least was mitigated by the hopes which she busied herself to conjure up. For, oh, it was so necessary for that young heart to sustain itself with hope! The captain was thunderstruck when his daughter informed him of what had occurred. He — good, credulous, but self-willed man — had arranged everything so comfortably in his own mind. Bertram would no doubt stay another year longer at the university, he would then be well provided for by his family, and his marriage with

Eliza would at once take place as a matter of course. Such was the captain's foreshadowing, but the dream was suddenly dispelled, and with the destruction of his delusions came worldly-minded reflections, thickly pouring in. His eyes were now opened to the fatal error he had committed; he ought to have inquired at the outset whether in due time Bertram Vivian would be in a position to settle in marriage. He now comprehended that so far from anything of the sort, the young man had to enter on the career of life, and, with certain chances given him, carve them out into substantial shape as best he could.

The captain was by no means such an idiot as not to bethink himself that separation and altered circumstances make a wonderful change in the youthful heart; and firmly convinced as he had previously been that all would go on smoothly in love's career, to be crowned with the marriage of the young couple in the end, so settled did his conviction now become that the whole thing was as good as broken off between them. He inwardly cursed himself for his folly, but out of regard for his daughter, he did not at once suffer her to perceive how altered his views were in respect to the hope that he should ever see her the bride of Bertram Vivian.

A few days elapsed, at the expiration of which interval Eliza received a letter, dated from Oaklands, the seat of the head of the family to which her lover belonged, and which was situated in Hampshire, far away from the city of Oxford. There it was that the old marquis had died, and his successor had taken possession of the hereditary honours and estates; there it was, too, that all the members of the family were now assembled, to attend the grand funeral which was to consign the deceased peer to his last resting-place. The letter was such a passion-breathing epistle as an enthusiastic lover might be expected to write, and as an adoring maiden might expect to receive. It told her that Bertram's father, now Lord Vivian, had not as yet spoken to either of his sons in respect to his intentions concerning them, but that such communication was reserved until after the funeral, when Bertram would write again to his beloved.

And in a few more days another letter came. But if it were written almost in despair, so it likewise nearly filled with despair the heart of the affectionate maiden. Bertram was at once going abroad as a paid attaché to the English em-

bassy in the United States, and seas would therefore soon roll between himself and his beloved. So hurried were the preliminaries for his departure, and so closely was he watched by his sire, that he had no opportunity of obeying the dictates of his heart, and flying to Oxford to bid Eliza a last farewell. But he renewed all his pledges of devoted affection, reminded her of the exchange of rings, and conjured her to sustain her spirits for his sake.

Captain Lacey, to whom these letters were shown by his daughter, — who never in her life kept anything secret from her father, — was more than ever convinced of the infatuated madness of his own conduct in suffering the young couple to linger on in their dream of bliss while himself hoped that it would be ultimately realized. He saw that his daughter's happiness was altogether at stake, and painful though it were for him to take such a step, it was nevertheless his duty to make her aware of his sentiments. Better for her now to envisage at once the uncertainty of her heart's hope ever being fulfilled, than for her to continue cherishing that hope with the prospect of having it blighted in the end. He therefore gently and gradually, and with ill-subdued emotions, represented to her that Bertram Vivian had evidently to commence the upward toil of life, that years might elapse ere he would be sufficiently independent to come and claim an almost portionless young lady as his bride, that in the meanwhile the ardour of his passion might cool, new faces might inspire new sentiments, and even if another affection might not beguile him from his first love, prudential reasons might induce him to form some brilliant matrimonial alliance. Eliza listened with mingled grief and astonishment to her father's observations, and enthusiastically did she express her conviction — uttered, however, amidst torrents of tears — that Bertram would remain faithful. Captain Lacey had nerved his fortitude to the accomplishment of a certain duty, and he was resolved not to do it by halves. He therefore went on to say that Eliza, if she were prudent, would do well to prepare herself for any eventual disappointment, and that painful though it were for him to issue a harsh injunction, he felt the absolute necessity of forbidding all correspondence between herself and Bertram, adding that he himself would write the young gentleman a letter to explain his views on the subject.

He did write such a letter. It was kindly and considerately worded, recommending Mr. Bertram Vivian to abstain, for at least a couple of years, from any correspondence with his daughter, suggesting that this interval would fully test the state of his feelings with regard to her, and promising that if at the end of the period he should still experience the same attachment, he (Captain Lacey) would be only too delighted and proud to permit Eliza to renew her engagement with the Honourable Mr. Bertram Vivian.

The young lady's good sense showed her that her father was acting with a due regard to her welfare, and, moreover, it was her habit to submit implicitly to his will. She had the fullest confidence in Bertram; she had equal confidence in the strength of her own love. Two years, oh, what was this interval as a test for that love which she felt assured would outlive centuries, if human existence itself ranged over ages! The very necessity of clinging to hope made her picture to herself this interval as soon passing away, and then there need be no further barrier to her happiness. The engagement would be renewed, or, rather, reacknowledged by her parent, and if years should still elapse ere she became Bertram's bride, she could wait, happy and contented in the consciousness of possessing his love.

The letter was despatched at once to Bertram Vivian. It reached him on the eve of his departure for the United States, and his reply came by return of post. He bowed to Captain Lacey's decision, not but that it pained him sorely, yet he bowed, so that this very submission might be taken as a proof of his love, shown to the daughter through the deferential respect paid to the father. But he besought Captain Lacey to assure Eliza of his undying constancy, of his imperishable devotion.

CHAPTER II

THE DUKE OF MARCHMONT

A YEAR had passed away, — it was now the summer of 1827, — when the English newspapers gave some meagre and scantily outlined account of a deplorable catastrophe which had taken place on an American river. A pleasure-vessel, having a numerous party on board, amongst whom were several gentlemen attached to the English embassy in the United States, had been upset in a sudden squall, and every soul had perished. The paragraph gave the names of some of the principal personages who had thus met their death, and amongst those names was that of Bertram Vivian.

Captain Lacey was reading an Oxford paper one morning after breakfast when this paragraph met his eyes, and the sudden ejaculation which burst from his lips caused Eliza to question him with trembling anxiety as to the source of his emotions. He dared not conceal the fact from her, but ere he showed her the paragraph itself, he gradually broke the fatal truth. Even before he had finished, poor Eliza comprehended it all. Not a tear escaped her eyes, no word fell from her lips, but pale as marble, she sat the image of dull, deep, blank despair. Her father caught her in his arms; then the flood-gates of her ineffable affliction were opened, and she wept long, bitterly, agonizingly. Oh, for the hopes which that heart had cherished, to be thus blighted all in a moment! Oh, for the fabric of expectant bliss which her faithful and trusting soul had built up, to be thus shattered in an instant! It was too cruel. Captain Lacey, with the tears running down his wrinkled cheeks, besought her to calm her sorrow for his sake, but the entreaty was a long time vain.

Hours passed ere Eliza could even bring herself to think

deliberately upon this fearful loss; days passed ere she could awaken herself to a sense of the necessity of a pious and holy resignation to the will of Heaven. And during these days, it appeared to her as if it were all a dream, and that her brain was only morbidly reeling beneath the weight of some imagined calamity. In the night she would start up from a feverish and troubled sleep, — wakened as if by the anguished voice of a drowning one thrilling on her ears, and pressing her hands violently to her throbbing temples, she would ask herself if it could possibly be true. At length this dreamlike state of being passed away, and left her to the astounding sense of the awful reality. She prayed to Heaven for strength to bear up against it, but there were times when she felt as if she were going mad. Then, passionately, oh, how passionately, would she press Bertram's ring to her lips, and in this memento of his love in other and happier days was her only consolation. Alas, how poor a one! and yet it was a solace, though feeble as the last thread which retains the invalid to existence in the depth of a malady when the crisis for best or worst is come.

Misfortunes never arrive alone. But a few weeks after the receipt of the intelligence from the United States, a fire broke out in Captain Lacey's house, and so rapid was the spread of the devastating element that all three dwellings were reduced in a few brief hours to blackened ruins. Scarcely an article of furniture was saved: the inmates considered themselves fortunate in escaping with life alone. But this was not the full extent of the terrible calamity. Fire insurance was not so generally practised in 1827 as it is nowadays, and unfortunately Captain Lacey's property was not insured. The principal source of his income was thus cut off irretrievably, irreparably, and he found himself in his old age, with ill-health and infirmities growing rapidly upon him, reduced to his half-pay, — a mere scanty pittance. And this too would die with him. What was to become of his daughter at his death, oh, what? There was yet another misfortune in store for the poor captain and Eliza, for their faithful domestic, who had been with them so many years, was thrown upon a sick-bed through the shock occasioned by the fire, and in a few days she breathed her last.

There was a widow lady in London named Mrs. Bailey, who was very distantly related to Captain Lacey, and with

whom he had corresponded at distant intervals. She was rich, occupied a splendid mansion at the West End of the metropolis, frequented the best society, and gave grand parties. A thorough woman of the world, she had all the callousness, amounting almost to heartlessness, usually characteristic of one who makes fashionable appearances her whole and sole study. The only notice she had condescended to take of her humble and poor relations at Oxford was the sending them a basket of game and a turkey at Christmas, accompanied by a brief note conveying the compliments of the season; and the acknowledgment of the gift, together with an expression of similar compliments, formed the extent of the captain's periodical correspondence with Mrs. Bailey. But now that the poor captain had such anxious cares relative to his daughter, he wrote a long letter to Mrs. Bailey, detailing the serious alteration of his circumstances in consequence of the fire. In this letter he spoke with a father's pride of the exquisite beauty of Eliza, the amiability of her disposition, and her dutiful conduct as a daughter, adding that his means had enabled him, though by dint of great sacrifices, to give her an education not altogether apart from certain elegant accomplishments. Now, this letter arrived at a time when Mrs. Bailey felt the want of some new attraction to give zest to her entertainments, which the fashionable world began to consider rather "slow affairs," the same faces being constantly met in Mrs. Bailey's drawing-rooms. The idea struck her that her requirement might be fulfilled in the person of Miss Lacey, if she were even only half as beautiful as the paternal pride had depicted her. She accordingly lost no time in writing back to Oxford, assuring Captain Lacey, with much seeming kindness in the wording of her letter, that she sympathized deeply with him in his misfortunes, and inviting himself and Eliza to come and pass a few months with her in Grosvenor Square. She enclosed a bank-note for twenty pounds, begging that the remittance might not be taken as an offence, but merely as a subsidy to defray the travelling expenses of those who were about to confer an obligation on herself by giving her their companionship.

Captain Lacey was overjoyed at this really unexpected goodness, as he considered it, on the part of his relative. Eliza would fain have lingered a few weeks longer at Oxford,

to compose her mind somewhat after so many recent and frightful calamities, but she saw that her father was now all anxiety to get to London, and with her wonted amiable submissiveness, she stifled the half-prayer, half-remonstrance which had risen to her lips. The preparations they had to make were few, and they quitted the humble lodging to which they had retired after the conflagration had deprived them of their home. During the journey, Captain Lacey implored and enjoined his daughter to render herself as agreeable as possible to Mrs. Bailey, by which, in plain terms, he meant that Eliza was to shake off her low spirits and her looks of sadness by all means in her power. Misfortunes as well as anxieties on his daughter's account had rendered Captain Lacey worldly-minded and selfish. He hoped that in Mrs. Bailey's gay saloons Eliza would captivate some wealthy personage, and ever ready to jump at conclusions, the captain regarded it as almost as good as settled that Eliza should form a brilliant alliance. He did not, however, impart his views to his daughter, and the poor maiden little suspected that he was dreaming of fresh matrimonial projects on her behalf, within only a few weeks after the receipt of the frightful intelligence which had given a death-blow to the former ones. Though inwardly full of sadness, though feeling that the first affections of her heart being so cruelly blighted, she never again could love, indeed, though considering it to be a sacred duty to cling to the image of her lost Bertram, Eliza assumed as much external calmness as she could possibly call to her aid; while the natural vigour of her constitution had prevented the bitterness of affliction from making any ravages upon her beauty, beyond chasing away the colour from her cheeks. Therefore when she arrived in London, and was introduced to her relative Mrs. Bailey, she appeared to be of a loveliness so exquisite and so interesting, with the expression of pensiveness upon her countenance, that the old lady, in the enthusiasm of joy, gave both herself and her father a welcome that seemed disinterestedly cordial.

It was the month of September when the Laceys arrived in London, and the greater portion of the fashionable world being out of town, it was not the season for Mrs. Bailey's parties. She herself seldom went out of town; she disliked the country, hated the seaside, and would not for worlds give

up the amusements of shopping in Regent and Bond Streets. It was therefore fortunate for Eliza's state of mind that she was not at once called upon to appear in the midst of crowded assemblies; and during the three months which now passed after her arrival in London, her grief for her lover's loss settled itself into such a holy resignation that she was no longer agitated with paroxysms of wild grief and convulsive weepings. But the expression of her eyes grew softer; a melancholy pensiveness settled upon her features, relieved, however, by that half-sad, half-sweet smile which resignation gives to the human countenance, and which is so touchingly interesting when on the beautiful face of woman.

The year 1827 was drawing toward its close, when the gaieties of the metropolis commenced. At first there were only small parties at Mrs. Bailey's house, but these grew larger and larger in proportion as the members of the fashionable world flocked back to their town mansions. Thus Eliza was not precipitated all in a moment into the midst of brilliant assemblies; she was led on by degrees to become accustomed to the bustle, animation, and gaiety of West End society, and though she would infinitely rather have remained in the solitude of her own chamber, to reflect on the image of the lost one, yet she yielded to the entreaties of her father that she would make herself agreeable to Mrs. Bailey in all things; and it was precisely to shine as a star that Mrs. Bailey had invited her to London.

Eliza Lacey soon became the object of universal admiration. Her beauty was considered to be naturally of a pensive and touchingly interesting cast; no one except her father knew how recent incidents had softened the former sunlight of her loveliness into this half-subdued tone. When in the midst of a brilliant company, with flowers upon her brow and diamonds on her neck, none of those who surrounded her suspected that the former rested above a brain that had throbbled to the most harrowing affliction, or that the latter lay above a heart where love, the fairest of all the gems of the soul, had become lustreless for ever.

It was in the first month of the year 1828 that Mrs. Bailey gave a more than usually grand party, for the purpose of doing honour to a guest of the highest rank who was to be present. This was the Duke of Marchmont. He was a man in his fifty-fifth year, tall and upright, of a lofty demeanour, a

severe and thoughtful expression of countenance. His bearing had all the aristocratic hauteur of his high rank, attempered, however, by the manners of a polished gentleman. His face was long, his features were prominent, his complexion was pale, almost to sallowness, but he had evidently been very handsome in his time, and might still be pronounced a fine man. His hair and whiskers, once dark, were now of a grayish tinge, but his teeth were so admirably preserved, and so singularly white for a person of his age, that when he smiled they gave to his countenance a younger aspect. He had never been married, and had not until recently worn a ducal coronet upon his brow.

Such was the Duke of Marchmont, — a nobleman possessed of great wealth, with a splendid town mansion, and three palatial residences, with their accompanying estates, in three distinct counties. Many a cap, to use a vulgar phrase, was therefore set at this great peer; many a manoeuvring mother made excruciating efforts to lead the ducal attention to her marriageable daughters. Hitherto all in vain; but on the night of Mrs. Bailey's grand entertainment, his Grace's heart seemed to be smitten. He was evidently fascinated with the bewitching beauty of one fair creature there, and this was Eliza Lacey. But the young lady herself was the only one present who did not observe anything pointed or marked in the duke's attentions. Mingled with her resignation, there was a kind of dreamy, listless apathy which still clung to her, as if the senses had not as yet completely recovered the stunning influence of the blow they had received several months back. Weeks passed on; at every entertainment given by Mrs. Bailey, the Duke of Marchmont was sure to be present; at whatsoever house Eliza visited in company with her relative, there was the duke likewise sure to be. He was paying his addresses to her as visibly and as sedulously as a man could; everybody else saw and knew it, — the object of these attentions alone remained unaware that they were proffered. She still continued to look forth upon the world as if from the midst of a mental dreaminess within; there was something more mechanical than voluntary in her conversation, her looks, and her smiles, in her bearing, too, and in all her movements. But inasmuch as there was a consistent uniformity in her tone and demeanour, with an ineffable sweetness over all,

it could not possibly have struck any but the very closest observer of human nature that in the still waters of her soul a profound grief lay buried. Such observers are not often found in the gay circles of fashionable life, and the Duke of Marchmont himself, though shrewd and intelligent, was not much versed in the reading of the female heart.

At length the duke took an opportunity to make an offer of his hand to Miss Lacey. She heard him with an astonishment perfectly bewildering, but which gave to her an air of modest, maidenly confusion. She could not utter a word: a veil had suddenly fallen from her eyes, — the haze through which she had looked upon things around her abruptly yielded to clearness. She comprehended for the first time that she had been the object of attentions bestowed for several months, and that in the very dreaminess and listlessness of her mind she might have seemed to regard them as welcome because she had accepted them. It was one afternoon when the duke called at Mrs. Bailey's house, and when he found Eliza alone in the drawing-room, that he made her the offer of his hand. Taking her bewildered amazement and the subsequent emotions for bashful confusion, and this confusion for a tacit assent, he raised her hand to his lips, kissed it with respectful tenderness, and intimating that he would seek her father, quitted the room.

Then, more vividly perhaps than for some time past it had done, rose up before Eliza's mental vision the image of the lost Bertram, and clasping her hands convulsively, she sat in dismay, indeed, almost in horror, under the crushing influence of the thought that she had unwittingly proved faithless to that image. The ring with the initial B was in her bosom; it ever lay next to her heart. She drew it forth, kissing it in the resuscitated wildness of her grief, while the tears flowed in torrents from her eyes.

She had grown comparatively calm again, the ring was replaced in her bosom, the traces of her weeping were wiped away, and she was deliberately reflecting how to disabuse the Duke of Marchmont of the error into which he had fallen in supposing that his attentions were agreeable to her, when the door opened and her father entered the room. Though full of infirmities, the old man rushed toward her, caught her in his arms, strained her to his breast, and ere she could give utterance to a word poured forth a perfect deluge

of language, thanking her for having accepted her ducal suitor, congratulating himself on living to behold his daughter on the verge of so brilliant an alliance, declaring that his mind was relieved from a myriad anxieties, and ending by assuring her that his gray hairs would now go down in contented resignation to the grave. Eliza was shocked, astounded, and bewildered. She saw that her father's mind was bent upon this match, and that it would literally break his heart if she rejected the ducal overture. Yet her brain whirled; it was almost maddened at the idea of becoming another's, — she who in her own soul had vowed a life of celibacy to the memory of her lost lover! Her father renewed his thanks, renewed his own self-congratulations, wept, laughed, danced, and behaved like the veriest child. Mrs. Bailey entered in the midst of this scene, and embracing Eliza, proffered her own congratulations. The poor young lady was overwhelmed with all these demonstrations of exuberant joy; she strove to speak — her tongue refused utterance to what she would have said, — her emotions choked her; and when she burst into tears, she was again embraced by her father and Mrs. Bailey in their turns.

In the course of that day, however, she found an opportunity to speak with her sire alone, and she also spoke with calmness. She assured him that she did not love the duke, that the love she had borne for Bertram was the first and the last of which her soul was susceptible, and that her heart was entombed in the watery depths which had engulfed the adored lost one. Captain Lacey was at first half-frantic at the idea of his daughter rejecting this brilliant alliance; he wept, he knelt, he prayed, he beat his breast, he tore his hair, he threw himself, grovelling in wretchedness, upon the carpet. Oh, could the affectionate daughter resist that spectacle? She who had ever entertained so illimitable a sense of the many, many sacrifices her father had made for her, — she who had always held herself ready to make any sacrifice for him. We will not dwell upon this distressing scene; suffice it to say that at the expiration of an hour — in which all the acutest feelings through which the human soul can pass were essentialized and concentrated — Eliza yielded. With the resignation of martyrdom, with the calm, pale, statue-like despair of a victim consenting to self-immo-

lation for some purpose of stupendous import, she agreed to become the bride of the Duke of Marchmont.

But there was one stipulation which she positively laid down. It was now the close of April, 1828; upwards of a couple of months must elapse until the two years should be completed since her father's written pledge to Bertram Vivian that under certain circumstances the engagement with him should be renewed, and though the afflicted Eliza entertained not the faintest hope that there was the possibility of aught occurring, or of a miracle being wrought, to give scope for those circumstances, it nevertheless seemed a superstitiously sacred duty that the full time should run out. And it required also two complete months to finish the year since the intelligence had reached her of Bertram's death, and though circumstances had prevented her from wearing sable garments as a tribute to his memory, her heart at least required the completion of a year's mourning, — a mourning, however, that she knew would be eternal. Her stipulation therefore was that the bridal-day — the day of her immense self-sacrifice — should not be fixed at any date earlier than the month of July. To this her father readily promised concurrence; the principal point was gained, and that was sufficient.

The interval passed far too quickly for the afflicted Eliza, but outwardly she suffered no traces of her soul's utter despair to present themselves. She had made up her mind to self-immolation; she resolved that her martyrdom should excruciate only herself. She felt that she had no right to suffer the duke to perceive that she was a victim; neither did she wish to mar the happiness which her father was now experiencing in the last days of his existence. In short, she armed herself with a preterhuman courage, and but for the paleness of her cheeks and the slight deepening of the air of pensive sadness upon her countenance, no one could have told that another dagger had been driven into her already too cruelly wounded heart.

On the 10th of July, 1828, the marriage was solemnized, with some degree of privacy, and only in the midst of a select circle, none of the duke's relatives being present. His Grace had his own reasons for not inviting to the bridal those who were most nearly allied to him, inasmuch as his marriage was a fatal blow — or at least might prove so,

if blessed with issue — to all who would profit by his death if he remained single. And Captain Lacey had his own reasons likewise for encouraging the duke in the idea of private nuptials, but what these reasons were, he explained not beforehand to his daughter. She herself asked no questions; she knew not even the names of the duke's relatives, nor who they were; she sought to know nothing more than circumstances brought to her knowledge, and this knowledge was limited to the fact that he on whom she bestowed her hand was the Duke of Marchmont, and that she was now a duchess.

CHAPTER III

THE DUCHESS OF MARCHMONT

THE ceremony was over, the wedding-breakfast, given by Mrs. Bailey, and which was of a most splendid description, likewise reached an end, the instant was approaching when Eliza, now Duchess of Marchmont, was to bid adieu to her father and her relative, and accompany her husband to whichever of the country-seats it was where the honeymoon was to be passed, but which the young bride knew not. She was even ignorant of the very names of them all. Retiring from the breakfast-table, she sought the chamber where her maid was in readiness to assist her in making the requisite change in her apparel for the journey, and it struck strange, almost unnatural to Eliza's ear when she was addressed as "your Grace" and "my lady." Her toilet being finished, she repaired to a parlour where she knew, according to an intimation given by her maid, that her father wished to say a few words to her in private, and bestow without restraint the last embrace before she was separated from him. There she found the old man in a state of happiness strangely blended with a nervous excitement, but assuredly not with grief at the prospect of parting. Not but that he loved his daughter dearly, as the reader well knows; his pride, however, was too highly gratified, his relief from cares on account of her future welfare was too complete, and perhaps his satisfaction at the result of his plans was too full, to leave room for aught savouring of sorrow. Only that nervous excitement was blended, as a sort of alloy, with his other feelings, and this the unsophisticated Eliza took for the tinge of grief which it was natural to suppose that he experienced, but which he really did not feel.

"My dearest girl," he said, clasping her in his arms, "your

beauty and your worth have raised you to the highest pinnacle. Once more — and for the last time — must I allude to something connected with the past.”

Here the duchess shuddered as if with a glacial chill shooting through her, although it was the sultry month of July. Her pale countenance became paler, and her hand was instinctively placed upon her heart, for there was Bertram Vivian's ring concealed.

“Only a few words,” said Captain Lacey, quickly, for he saw this emotion and comprehended it. “You now belong to another; you are the bride of a nobleman whose honour is unimpeachable, as his rank is lofty and his wealth immense. I need scarcely tell you, Eliza, that he knows nothing of the past, and if you be wise, if you be prudent, if indeed you wish to be kind and considerate toward him, you will cherish that as your own secret, or, rather, forget that it ever was.”

“I cannot, father,” said Eliza, in a low, deep voice. “I cannot forget it. But, as you have observed, it is my secret, and it shall remain so. Let me relieve you of all apprehension on that head. I am now the duke's wife; I comprehend all that is becoming on my part in my new position. I should feel honoured and flattered by his preference of me, did I possess a heart still capable of being moved by such feelings, but at least I shall be careful not to wound nor shock my husband by suffering him to know that I have loved another, that I cannot love him, that the power of loving a second time is dead within me.”

“Dearest daughter,” exclaimed Captain Lacey, “I am delighted and distressed to hear you speak thus, — delighted to find that you so admirably appreciate the duties of your new position, distressed to think that the memory of the past is still so strong within you.”

“Father,” replied Eliza, earnestly, “distress not yourself on my account. It is done; I am resigned, if I be not contented. No, distress not yourself; but God grant that all possible happiness may be yours for the remainder of your days,” and as she uttered these last words, tears trickled slowly down the pale cheeks of the Duchess of Marchmont.

“Eliza, my darling,” said the old man, much moved, “let me see you exercise a becoming fortitude.”

“I am strong, and I am calm, too, again, father,” re-

sponded the duchess, wiping away her tears. "What other counsel have you to give me ere we separate?"

"Only a few words more," resumed Captain Lacey. "I might say much — I might tell you many things, but the time is too short now, the carriage is at the door, your ducal husband is waiting to bear away his beloved bride. And, moreover," continued the old man, with an increase of that nervous excitement which his daughter mistook for sorrow at the approach of the parting moment, "it would arouse too many painful feelings, too many sad recollections. But yet, my darling daughter, there are a few words which must be spoken. You may perhaps shortly hear names mentioned in your presence which will vividly recall that past to which I have alluded. You may discover, too, that your marriage has given you connections which — But no matter. It is only a single word of parting advice that I have time or fortitude enough to proffer, and that is to conjure you to be upon your guard, so that whatever you may hear shall not lead you to betray to your husband that you were at one time the betrothed of another."

"Father," replied the duchess, with a glacial firmness of tone and a statue-like immovability of features and of form, so that not a muscle of her countenance was stirred by affliction, nor the folds of her splendid scarf agitated by the bosom's heavings, "you have seen with what fortitude I have passed through the ordeal of this day's ceremony; you have seen likewise that by my conduct I have never once given the Duke of Marchmont ground for the supposition that he is an object of the merest indifference to me. By all this let my future conduct be judged; by what I am you may estimate what I shall be. Yes, I am firm. My destiny is fixed, and I accept it. Even if he whose image is dearer to me than I can express were by a miracle to be brought back to life, were he suddenly to stand before me, I feel that I am nerved with the courage, — it may be of despair, — but nevertheless it is the courage that alone is adequate to support me even through such an ordeal as that. Now, father, are you satisfied?"

Singular and incomprehensible was for an instant the expression which flitted over the old man's features; the next moment it was succeeded by one of gladness, indubitable, unmistakable, and straining his daughter to his breast,

he exclaimed, "I thank thee, beloved Eliza, for these assurances. Go, my darling; the moment is come for us to separate. Go, and may a father's blessing attend thee as a talisman to keep thy mind thus firm, thus nerved."

The young duchess was to a certain extent struck by her father's look, manner, and words, which appeared somewhat singular, but Mrs. Bailey entered at the moment to announce that the carriage was in readiness. She embraced her sire again, she embraced her relative also; and then issuing forth, found her husband ready to escort her to the magnificent equipage.

And now she was seated by that husband's side in the carriage with ducal arms emblazoned on the panels, symbolic of the almost princely rank to which that day she had been admitted as a partner. The four horses, guided and urged along by the two expert postilions, dashed through the streets, and in a short space London was left behind. Eliza, while responding with that pensive sweetness which had become habitual to her, to the remarks which the duke made, revolved in her soul all the details of the parting counsel which her father had given to her, and it was not very long before her presence of mind and her fortitude were put to the test. For in the course of an affectionate and endearing speech, the duke gave her to understand that they were on their way to the most splendid of his three country-seats, that it was situated in Hampshire, and that its name was Oaklands.

A glacial thrill shot through her like an electric shock at the mention of that name, but she was so completely on her guard that her countenance betrayed nought of what was agitating within. In case, however, that it should, she looked from the window for a few moments, as if contemplating the scenery by which they were passing, but she gazed on vacancy. Oaklands! that was the country-seat to which Bertram Vivian had repaired when he parted from her at Oxford, and it belonged to the family of which he himself was a scion. How, then, could it now be in the possession of the duke her husband?

"We shall be there," continued his Grace, "completely by ourselves at first, and this seclusion, my beloved Eliza, I hope will not prove disagreeable or monotonous."

"Nothing, my lord," she answered, with her accustomed

sweet amiability, "that is consistent with your will and pleasure can be objectionable to me."

"Thanks, my sweet Eliza, for that response," and her husband pressed her hand to his lips. "In due time you will be introduced to the other members of the family, or, rather, they will be presented to you, and then we will have a gay company at Oaklands. Your father and Mrs. Bailey shall join us, and my own sweet Eliza shall do the honours of the house of which I am proud and happy to make her the mistress."

The duchess gave a suitable response, and as the journey was continued, the discourse was continued also, but nothing more was said by the duke to put his bride's fortitude and presence of mind to the test. Yet Oaklands — that name of Oaklands — kept agitating in her brain. She longed to ask her husband how it was that this estate had fallen into his possession, but she dared not; and as he said nought upon the subject, she supposed he either took it for granted that she was already informed thereon, or else that he considered it to be a matter of but little moment.

After a four hours' rapid drive, the duke informed Eliza that they were now entering upon the estate, and in another half-hour an antique edifice, appearing above the embowering groves, broke upon the view. This was Oaklands. And she was about to set foot within those walls, to tread where Bertram had trodden, to sit where he had sat, to gaze upon objects which were familiar to him in his lifetime. As the equipage dashed along a noble sweep of carriage-way through a vast and superbly wooded park, she thought to herself that every tree which reared its stately head there had been known to Bertram, that she was now passing amongst scenes where he also had passed, she was breathing, as it were, the very air which he had breathed. It was sufficient to resuscitate all the anguish of her affliction for his loss; it was enough to overpower her with irresistible emotions. But her soul was nerved with a preterhuman fortitude, and however much she might have felt internally her pale countenance betrayed nothing of all this.

The equipage dashed up to the front of the splendid mansion, and troops of domestics came forth from the hall to welcome their ducal master and his lovely bride. She ascended to a chamber to change her dress, and perhaps if

she had been alone, she might have given way to the pent-up feelings that were agitating in her soul. But she was attended by two maids, and she dared not betray any inordinate emotion in their presence.

Some days passed, during which nothing particular occurred that requires mention. In the meanwhile the duchess had inspected all the apartments of the immense mansion, and though, by the sumptuous elegance of the fashionable dwellings she had seen in London, she was prepared for all the evidences of boundless wealth in her new home, yet its splendour far eclipsed all her foreshadowings. One portion only remained unvisited, and this was the picture-gallery, which was under repair at the time of her arrival. Those repairs were finished, and one morning the duke proposed that she should inspect the place, which contained, as he stated, not only some paintings by eminent masters, but likewise the portraits of many of his oldest ancestors, as well as of his relatives who were more recently deceased. Thither they repaired. The paintings by the great masters occurred first in the gallery, and then came the portraits. Those of the duke's elder ancestors engendered no particular sentiment beyond mere interest and curiosity, but when Eliza reached those of the relatives who were but recently deceased, strange thoughts and feelings began to take birth in her mind, — thoughts that seemed to be expanding into memories, feelings that appeared to connect the present with the past; and as she gazed with a growing wonderment, and even with consternation, the bewildering fancy which was at first dim, vague, and shapeless strengthened into a conviction that there was in these portraits a pervasive family similitude from which a never-to-be-forgotten image was neither estranged nor disconnected. But the last portrait of all which hung in the array of successive family delineations — Eliza almost shrieked out as her eyes riveted their looks upon it. It represented a much older man than Bertram, but the resemblance between them was so striking, it seemed as if the original could have been none other than Bertram's father.

Strange suspicions and wild fancies swept through Eliza's mind, but her agitation was concentrated within. The very tremor which thrilled through her was one of the soul rather than of the body; outwardly she was calm and serene, or at

least the duke observed nothing strange nor unusual on the part of his wife. For a moment she averted her eyes from the portrait. She thought, she hoped, that what she fancied might be a delusion produced by the circumstances of one image being ever uppermost in her mind, and that therefore perhaps in her morbid imaginings she beheld that image to a certain degree reflected in the canvas before her. But as again she glanced along the array of the last half-dozen scions of her husband's family, or rather, their representations there, back to her mind came the conviction that it was no creation of the fancy, but that the pervasive resemblance was there, commencing feebly with the scion most remote, strengthening visibly with each of those that followed, until settling into that unmistakable similitude of a paternal prototype. Therefore, again were her eyes riveted upon this last, and all her acutest memories were painfully revived, — memories of the lost, the dead, the ever loved.

“That,” said the duke, who still perceived nothing strange on the part of his wife, but merely attributed to a natural curiosity and interest the intentness with which her survey was fixed upon the last portrait of all those belonging to the family into which she had so recently entered, — “that one represents my younger brother, the late Lord Clandon, who died a little more than a year back. It was most unfortunate, just after he had been raised to the peerage, at the same time that my marquise was raised to a dukedom.”

“And the title of your marquise, my lord?” said Eliza, in a tone of inquiry, and though she stood still as a marble statue, ineffable feelings were agitating within.

“The title to which I succeeded by the death of an old uncle a little more than two years back,” replied her husband, “was that of Viviandale. Shortly afterward it was elevated to the Dukedom of Marchmont. That same death rendered my younger brother Lord Vivian, but a lord only by courtesy, and he was raised to the peerage by the style and title of Baron Clandon.”

“And previously to that death which first of all made him a lord by courtesy,” said the duchess, “I presume he was simply the Honourable Mr. Vivian? Forgive my ignorance upon these subjects — ”

And she stopped short. Not another word could she utter;

more powerful still, indeed almost overwhelming, were the feelings that agitated in her soul.

“I am charmed, dearest, that you thus question me,” responded the uxorious duke, “and I am delighted to answer your questions. Yes, my younger brother was merely the Honourable Mr. Vivian until about two years back. But, as I was explaining to you just now, it is a little more than a year since he died suddenly. Ah, Eliza, there were cruel circumstances connected with his death. In a word, he received a very painful shock. It was the intelligence from America that his younger son — his best beloved — had perished — Good heavens, Eliza dearest, are you ill?”

“No, my lord, no, it is nothing, I can assure you,” said the duchess, quickly, as she instantaneously recovered her self-possession. “This place struck cold to me —”

“Yes, dearest, it is cold,” said the uxorious duke, though in reality the sultry sun of July was pouring its effulgence upon the entire glowing scene without. “The painters and gilders, the burnishers and decorators, as well as the picture-cleaners, have been here. But perhaps it is the odour of turpentine and paint which has even affected you more than the cold? Come, let us away. We will revisit the gallery on another occasion.”

Eliza, pale as a marble statue, took her husband’s arm, and accompanied him forth from the gallery. On the landing without, they encountered one of the footmen, and the duke bade him express his displeasure to the steward for not having taken measures to rid the gallery of the disagreeable odour which filled it. He moreover ordered fires to be lighted there, declaring that it was damp, and that what with the exhalation of the paint and the moist chill, her Grace had been rendered quite unwell. Eliza pleaded headache, and withdrew to her own boudoir, where she shut herself up to deliberate on all that had just passed.

A veil had fallen from her eyes. She now understood full well — too well — the meaning of those words of caution which her father had uttered in the last moments preceding their separation. She had married into the very family to which Bertram belonged; her husband was none other than the uncle of her lost loved one. That her father all along knew such to be the case, she could not possibly conceal from herself, but that the fact had been religiously

concealed from her, both by her parent and Mrs. Bailey, was equally certain. That the duke himself should never have spoken in a manner to make her aware of the circumstance was not to be wondered at, for he had never talked to her about any of his relatives at all, and this silence on his part she could now likewise understand. For a man of his years to take unto himself a young wife was of course galling to that expectant kindred which had so much to gain by his dying childless. It would therefore have been a delicate topic for him to touch upon, and without any other motive had he avoided it, for he himself was utterly ignorant of bygone circumstances in respect to Eliza and Bertram, — ignorant even that they had ever been acquainted. It was still further apparent that in respect to the Vivian family, certain promotions in the aristocratic hierarchy had given loftier titles, accompanied by changes in their distinctive names, so that not for an instant could she have possibly suspected that the Marquis of Viviandale had been elevated into the ducal grandeur of Marchmont; and if by chance the name of Lord Clandon had ever fallen upon her ear, she would have had no possible clue to associate it with the family to which the lost Bertram had belonged. But now she comprehended it all, and again and again recurred the astounding thought that by a wondrous combination of circumstances she had entered the family which it was at one time the hope of her heart to enter, but that this entrance was effected, not as at that time she had so fondly anticipated, — it was by her becoming the bride of the uncle, and not of the dearly cherished nephew, that the consummation was brought about.

Oh, how she had been sacrificed! But so strong was the filial feeling in the bosom of this excellent young lady — so completely was it interwoven in her very nature — that even in the depth of her own anguished feelings she sought excuses for her father. He had longed to behold her settled in life; it was, after all, natural that his ambition should covet this haughty alliance for his daughter. He had acted only with the conscientiousness of a parent, and if in so doing he had driven deeper down into her heart the dagger that was already planted there, it was with no studied intent to inflict additional pain. No rancour therefore might her gentle bosom harbour against him, and to

strengthen herself in the continuance of her filial love, to fortify also the extenuation which she conjured up for whatsoever duplicity or concealment there might have been in his recent conduct, she bethought herself of all the manifold sacrifices he had made for her in her girlhood. Yet amidst all these reflections would come the sickening, blighting, blasting one that she had been rendered by circumstances doubly perfidious, as it were, to the memory of the lost but ever loved, that she had not merely become the wife of another, but that other a near relative of the cherished and deplored one. A vague sense of having committed even a crime, a dim, undefined idea of having been thrown into a position which by its associations and connections revolted against the natural purity of her thoughts, filled her soul with consternation and dismay. But it was done, her destiny was fixed, and she must bear her burden and resign herself to the lot in the best manner that she could. Above all, she must scrupulously continue to veil from her husband the sorrow which rested in the depths of her soul, — that hidden sorrow which she would carry with her to the grave.

About six weeks passed away, and the portrait-gallery was not revisited. If ever the duke started a proposition of the kind, Eliza was ready with a suggestion for some other recreative pursuit. There was this part of the estate still to visit, or there was that part which she should like to see again. In the same way, too, when occasionally her husband seemed to be approaching the topic of his younger brother's death and the causes which led to it, Eliza was equally ready with some observation to turn the discourse into quite another channel; and in order to do this effectually, she would assume a sudden liveliness, perfectly genuine in the estimation of the enraptured and uxorious duke, but in reality fraught with the nervousness of a feverish excitement often bordering on the hysterical.

Thus the period of the honeymoon passed away, and one morning, at breakfast-time, the Duke of Marchmont said, "My dearest Eliza, we may now think of deviating somewhat from the routine which perhaps is becoming monotonous to you. We must have a little gaiety at Oaklands, and to tell you the truth, I had arranged what ought to have been a surprise for you, but I cannot keep the secret any longer. Your father and Mrs. Bailey will be here in the

afternoon. Our friends Sir William and Lady Lomax and their three daughters — who were present, you know, at the happy ceremony which made you mine — are likewise coming to pass a week with us. Tell me, dear Eliza, are you pleased with these arrangements?"

The duke studied his utmost to render himself and all his plans agreeable to his young bride, and with her habitual amiability, she expressed her gratitude and her satisfaction.

"And there is another guest, too, whom we may expect this evening in time for the dinner-hour," continued the duke. "My nephew, Lord Clandon, who has just returned from a long Continental tour, has written to offer his congratulations on my marriage, and to express his earnest desire to pay his respects to my beautiful duchess. The letter is altogether nicely and prettily worded, with a manly generosity and frankness, too, for which," added the duke, almost involuntarily, and in a sort of musing strain, "I should scarcely have given Hugh credit. However," he went on hastily to observe, as if ashamed at having thus betrayed even the slightest fear as to the impression which his marriage might have made upon his nephew, "I have answered him kindly, and invited him to visit us."

Again did the mention of that name of Clandon call up with painful vividness the memories of the past, — those memories which were in reality never absent from Eliza's mind, but which unless thus stirred up floated only with the sereneness of resignation, as a sort of perpetual under-current of the thoughts. Yet though thus strongly agitated within, her countenance betrayed nothing of what she felt.

In the course of the afternoon Mrs. Bailey's travelling-chariot dashed up to the grand entrance of Oaklands, and Eliza was clasped in the arms of her father. He mistook the filial enthusiasm of her embrace for an evidence of complete satisfaction and happiness on account of the alliance which she had formed, and whatsoever apprehensions had previously filled his mind on that score were dissipated in a moment. But when Eliza came to regard Captain Lacey attentively, she perceived that he was looking exceedingly ill, and that the smiles which her presence and his own relieved thoughts conjured up beamed upon a countenance that was thin, haggard, and careworn. She comprehended all that he must have felt on her account, — his deep anxiety

lest his parting injunctions should have been disregarded, and that she might have betrayed the past when made aware of the family into which she had married. Pained by his appearance, she lavished upon him the most tender caresses, and the old man's happiness now appeared as complete as the pride of his ambition had already been. As for Mrs. Bailey, it was a proud thing for her to be enabled to salute a duchess as her relative; so that in the increased consequence and importance which it gave her, she found infinite reason for self-congratulation at having taken the captain and his daughter by the hand in the moment of their need.

A little later in the afternoon Sir William and Lady Lomax, with their three daughters, arrived, and as the dinner-hour drew near, several other guests — dwellers in the neighbourhood of Oaklands — were introduced. But still there was one to arrive whose appearance Eliza deeply dreaded. This was Lord Clandon. When at Oxford, she had never seen Hugh; she was likewise aware that Bertram had never breathed to his brother a syllable of their love, and it was not therefore through fear that this would be betrayed to the duke that the duchess dreaded to encounter Lord Clandon. But she thought to herself that if Lord Clandon bore a resemblance to the lost Bertram, her presence of mind would be put to the sorest, severest test it had as yet experienced, and she would have to pass through an ordeal fraught with anguish and mental agony to which the tortures of the rack were paradise in comparison. But the dinner-hour came, and Lord Clandon made not his appearance. After waiting some time, the duke decided that the banquet should be served up. It was so, — the ladies in due course adjourned to the drawing-room, where in another hour they were joined by the gentlemen. It was now past nine o'clock, and Eliza was just congratulating herself that the dreaded meeting would be postponed until the following day, when the sounds of an equipage dashing up to the front of the mansion reached her ears. Now she summoned all her fortitude to her aid, — all her presence of mind. Sir William Lomax — a tall, thin, aristocratic-looking man, far advanced in years — was conversing with her at the time, and this perhaps was fortunate for her, inasmuch as if younger and more penetrating eyes had been fixed upon her countenance, the evidences

of a strong inward trouble might have been read. The drawing-room door was thrown open, and a domestic announced, in a loud voice, "Lord Clandon."

The duke greeted his nephew warmly, and there was something in his cordial clasp of the hand which seemed to convey a heartfelt gratitude for the generous, frank, and magnanimous manner in which Hugh had expressed himself with regard to a marriage which he had in reality so little reason to like. For Lord Clandon, in default of issue, was the heir to the estates and title of Marchmont, and this alliance on the part of his uncle with a young wife only just twenty-one years of age naturally gave every promise that Hugh's hopes and expectations would be disappointed.

"Welcome, my dear nephew, to Oaklands," said the duke. "And now permit me at once to present you to one to whom you are anxious to become known."

Eliza had not dared fling even a single glance toward the door when it opened. She rose from her seat, and stood motionless, a wild excitement in her mind, but with all the outward appearance of the unstudied grace of a serene and dignified self-possession. There was confusion in her brain, a veil before her eyes; Sir William Lomax was saying something to her, she knew not what it was. His voice and the voices of all the others in the room seemed like an unintelligible blending of humming, droning sounds. She heard persons approaching her; then her husband's voice said, "Eliza, I have pleasure in introducing my nephew, Lord Clandon."

All in an instant she became vividly, frightfully, terribly aware of the necessity of exerting her fortitude to the utmost. And it came, like a wondrous inspiration. She raised her eyes; she beheld before her a fine, tall, handsome man, really not more than a few months past four and twenty, though looking three or four years older. His hair was of jetty darkness, and wanted the rich gloss and the silky fineness to make it resemble that of the lost Bertram. His features, somewhat largely chiseled, were haughtily handsome, yet with the traces of either fatigue or dissipation in his lineaments. But altogether there was a sufficiency, more than a sufficiency of a family likeness to bring back the image of Bertram most vividly to her mind, even if at the moment any such impulse should have been wanting

at all. Nevertheless, Eliza's self-possession remained. The astonishment which she experienced at her own fortitude amounted almost to a feeling of gladness; and thus was it with a smile and with all her habitual sweetness of manner that she gave Hugh her hand, welcoming him to Oaklands.

Lord Clandon's demeanour was alike respectful and friendly, or it might be termed delicately courteous, toward her whom, though three years younger than himself, marriage had made his aunt. The duke and Sir William Lomax remained chatting with them for a few minutes, and then the former, taking the baronet's arm, sauntered away to another part of the room, for the purpose of leaving his wife and nephew to get over the first restraints and awkwardness of an introduction and become better acquainted with each other. Eliza resumed her seat; Lord Clandon, with fashionable ease, sank upon a chair near her, and at once began to converse on the current topics of the day. He spoke of the Italian opera, of the last new novel, of a drama which had made "a great hit," and of two or three approaching "marriages in high life." Then he spoke of his travels in foreign parts, and he related several adventures which had befallen him, but in a pleasing manner, and without any offensive egotism.

He was evidently a man of the world, well accustomed to all the usages of the sphere in which he moved, and by his discourse the impression was conveyed that he had a great deal of frankness and high-mindedness in his disposition. Such was the opinion Eliza formed of him, and indeed it was all the more natural she should do so, not merely because there was no appearance on his part of a studied straining to make that impression, but likewise because he spoke in the kindest and most dutiful terms of his uncle, at the same time treating the duchess herself with a courtesy which had all the friendliness proper to subsist between relatives, and all the respect which so young a man was bound in delicacy to show toward the still more youthful bride of an elderly relation.

Presently Lord Clandon was introduced to Captain Lacey; and when the latter, after some little conversation, had retired to the card-room, to form one at a rubber of whist, Lord Clandon said to Eliza, "Is it possible that you ever resided at Oxford?"

The duchess had for the previous half-hour been prepared for some such question as this, and it was therefore without any visible trepidation that she replied in the affirmative. But she said no more, and no inquiring look was thrown upon Hugh, to seek the motive of the question.

"It struck me," continued Lord Clandon, "when I read the account of your marriage in the newspaper, — I was then in Paris, by the bye, — that the name of Captain Lacey, who was mentioned as your Grace's father, was not altogether unfamiliar to me, and the moment your venerable parent was just now introduced to me, I felt persuaded I had seen him before. Yes, I recollect, he was once pointed out to me at Oxford — But perhaps your Grace is unaware that I myself passed a couple of years in that city? Indeed, I am afraid," he added, with a smile, "that we collegians were not considered steady enough for reception into private families."

Eliza slowly turned her looks upon Lord Clandon, to assure herself whether there was any hidden meaning in his remark, — any pointed allusion to the one exception which had been made in favour of his brother Bertram with regard to a reception at Captain Lacey's house at Oxford; but she was convinced that he intended nothing, and that it was merely in a conversational manner he had thus spoken.

"Yes," said Eliza, in answer to a question which he had put, "I was aware that you were at Oxford."

"It is somewhat singular," Hugh went on to observe, "that we should have been in the same town a comparatively short while back, yet such total strangers to each other, and now that we should meet — for me," he added, with a smile and a gentle inclination of the head, "to have the honour of addressing your Grace as a relation. Let me see, it was two years last June since I and my brother Bertram left Oxford. I can assure you I was by no means sorry; I was getting heartily tired of the same kind of life, though it was all pleasure. But then pleasures pall upon the senses," he added, with the languid tone and the jaded look of a man who had drunk to satiety of that cup of pleasure whereof he spoke. "As for Bertram, I don't know how it was, but he was wretched to a degree at leaving college. Perhaps he was not quite so wild as I was, and had rather a fancy for his studies. Don't think the worse of me because I now

confess that little wildness on my part. When it is gone and past, one may talk of it. Bertram was more sentimental and serious than I — ”

At this moment the duchess dropped her handkerchief, which Lord Clandon hastened to pick up for her. It had fallen from her hand, as a faintness coming over her made her fair fingers relax their hold upon it. Within the last few minutes the name of Bertram had been mentioned half a dozen times in her hearing; it would have been sufficient for this mere mention to agitate her profoundly, but when she heard the name — that sacred, loved, lamented name — thrown forth from the lips with what appeared to be the mingled levity and callousness of one who, although his brother, could yet speak of him as if the recollection of his loss were unaccompanied with a single regret, it was sufficient to overwhelm all Eliza's fortitude in a moment and make her sink down beneath the influence of her excruciated feelings. Again, however, did a species of preterhuman self-possession come to her aid; the little incident of the handkerchief startled her into a vivid consciousness of the peculiarities and perils of her position, and her countenance was serene once more.

Lord Clandon was already continuing the same topic, when Sir William Lomax advanced with his wonted stiff stateliness of manner, and with his eyes half-closed, — for he thought that this appearance gave him an air of intellectual consequence, — and joining in the conversation, he turned it upon another topic. But all of a sudden the door opened somewhat hastily, — hastily enough to startle the inmates of the room, and to stop the music which a piano was sending forth beneath the fingers of a young lady. It was Mrs. Bailey who made her appearance, and hastening up to the duchess, with a look of ill-subdued agitation, she said, “ Do not be frightened — pray do not be frightened. We hope it is nothing, but your Grace's father — ”

“ My father? ” echoed Eliza, starting up to her feet in sudden terror.

“ Pray do not be frightened. It is but a slight fit, and fortunately, Doctor Rodney being one of the guests — ”

The duchess waited to hear no more; she rushed wildly

from the room, and in a few moments knew the worst. Captain Lacey, while seated at the card-table, had been stricken down by paralysis, which had deprived him of consciousness.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONTENTS OF THE DESK

How uncertain are the affairs of this life! The mutations from weal to woe are as often of lightning rapidity as of gradual stealthy movement, and swift as the changes of the magic lantern may the scene shift from the brilliantly lighted saloon where music fills the perfumed atmosphere, to the chamber of death where the sounds of weeping prevail. Thus was it at the ducal mansion of Oaklands. At the very instant that soft melody was flowing upon the ears in one apartment, and cards were being played in another, the sable wing of the Destroyer was unfolding itself above that high, antique roof; the music was to cease suddenly in consternation, the victim's last card was played!

It was long past the hour of midnight. Captain Lacey was stretched in a sumptuous couch, plunged in that last sleep which paralysis often brings, and from which there is to be no awaking in this world. Eliza knelt by the side of that couch, with her father's hand pressed to her lips. She was weeping, not loudly and bitterly, but in that low, continuous manner which perhaps indicates a deeper and more concentrated anguish of the soul. The duke stood near her, and frequently did he bend down to whisper a few lowly uttered but tender and earnest words in her ear, imparting such solace as in existing circumstances could be given. Doctor Rodney was near the head of the bed, watching with an ominous countenance the evidences of the soul's approaching transition from its mortal tenement into the regions of immortality. The old housekeeper — summoned to officiate as a nurse, though the patient was indeed well-nigh beyond all human ministrations — was likewise there. Every possible assistance had been rendered, every available means adopted to

grapple with the Destroyer's power, but vainly and ineffectually; Eliza's father was on his death-bed. As the gray dawn of morning glimmered in through the casements and made the wax lights burn pale, the spirit passed out of the form which for several hours had remained in slumbering unconsciousness.

The duke led his deeply afflicted wife away from the chamber, and besought her to seek rest in her own boudoir. Even in the midst of her acute anguish, her profound sorrow, she could not help being smitten with a sense of her husband's considerate kindness toward her, and for the first time, perhaps, since the marriage ring was placed upon her finger, she pressed his hand with a sincerely felt warmth. We will not linger upon this scene. The reader who already comprehends the tenderness of Eliza's heart, and the full extent of her devoted attachment toward her father, can picture to himself the immensity of the sorrow which her soul experienced. The funeral took place, and the remains of Captain Lacey were consigned to a vault in the village church at Oaklands, about a mile distant from the ducal mansion. Thus how soon did the gloom of a funeral succeed to the gaiety of a wedding, how soon did mourning garments clothe the exquisitely fair form which had lately been arrayed in a bridal dress!

Captain Lacey had brought his writing-desk in his portmanteau to Oaklands. The duke, through kindest consideration for his beloved duchess, caused every article belonging to her deceased father to be carefully put out of sight, save and except that writing-desk, which he thought might possibly contain papers, perhaps a will; for his Grace was not altogether acquainted with his departed father-in-law's pecuniary circumstances. At all events he considered that whatever there might be in the desk, it was the sacred duty of Eliza alone to open it. Therefore, at the expiration of about a month after the funeral, — when the first bitterness of anguish had passed, and the mind of the bereaved daughter was becoming subdued down into the serenity of a holy and pious resignation, — the duke one day took that desk into her boudoir, presented her with the key, which had been found in the deceased's garments, and imprinting a kiss upon her cheek, left her to the fulfilment of a sad but necessary task. Eliza recognized her father's desk in a moment, and

again, in the conduct of her husband, did she perceive much delicate consideration, which her heart, though it could not love, was yet enabled to appreciate. The sight of that desk brought tears to her eyes, and thus weeping before she opened it, she was in a measure relieved as well as strengthened to address herself to that duty.

She opened the desk. The first paper she took out was a tress of her mother's hair, — that mother who had died in giving her birth, and whom she had never known. She pressed it to her lips; again she wept, and wiping away her tears, proceeded with her task. The next paper she drew forth was addressed to Captain Lacey, in the well-known hand of Bertram, and she knew the letter likewise. It was the one which he had written from Oaklands, bowing to the decision of Eliza's father that two years were to elapse ere their correspondence should be renewed. She had never seen this letter since the day it arrived, she had never read it but once, yet she now recognized it in a moment, and every line of its contents was imprinted on her memory as if seared there with red-hot iron. Her first impulse was to open and read it again, but she checked herself; the very thought struck her as being an infidelity to her husband. She could not prevent herself from thinking of Bertram, she could not prevent her mind from clinging with a soft, sad, serene affection to his image; she had no power over her own volition. But, on the other hand, she felt that she had no right to do a positive deed which might resuscitate all the frenzy of her regrets for his loss; she had no right to voluntarily seek for the evidences of that love which Heaven had refused to crown with happiness. Therefore, under the influence of this most scrupulous delicacy, Eliza put the letter aside, and again cast her looks into the writing-desk.

But, ah, wherefore does she start? What writing is this which next meets her eye? What letter is that which, addressed to her father, she eagerly, greedily, almost frantically snatches up? She examines the direction, she looks at the postmarks; a faintness comes over her, the letter drops from her hand. She snatches it up again, and again she scrutinizes the postmarks. Thoughts of strange and wild contexture sweep through her mind, — fancies so poignant, so bewildering, so fraught with a solemn wonderment and at the same time a fearful suspense, that they are almost

overpowering. A single glance at the interior of that letter would clear up all doubt, relieve her of all suspense; and she knows, she feels, she has the conviction that it will do so, but there is within her a shuddering awful horror to arrive at that certainty. Thoughts so wild, apparently so impossible, are agitating in her brain; and yet what she thinks of is possible, for the proof is there; she holds it in her hand. There is within her the certainty that it is so; and yet she flutters and trembles and quivers with all the doubt of agonizing suspense. This state is intolerable. She opens the letter, she reads, but only a few words and for a few moments; and she sinks down upon her knees with a low, deep, long-drawn, gasping moan, the full meaning of which it would be almost impossible to describe.

Her head is bowed upon the chair from which she has sunk down, her face is buried in her hands, and that boudoir is silent as the grave; not even the pulsations of her heart nor the respirations of her breath are audible. She is motionless as the sculptured effigy of Despair kneeling by a monument of a loved and lost one. Yet it is not that she is in a state of unconsciousness. No, her sense remains, but experienced only as a stunned, dismayed consternation. There is something awful, something profoundly solemn, in the mental condition of that kneeling lady. She weeps not, her bosom is not convulsed; there is not a tremor thrilling through her form, not even the slightest creeping agitation to give sign of life. Yet she lives, but hers are unutterable, ineffable feelings.

Minutes elapse while she thus remains kneeling by the chair, her face buried in her hands. At length slowly, oh, so slowly, she rises up like a ghost ascending from the tomb, and as a ghost she is marble pale. If she caught the reflection of her own image in the mirror opposite, she would start in dismay; she would not believe, in the first shock, that it was herself she beheld imaged there. But she has no outward vision for anything; her eyes behold nothing in the room. All her thoughts, all her senses, all her faculties, are absorbed in one idea which lies at the bottom of her soul.

Again several minutes elapse, and then with a slow, mechanical movement, as if unconscious of the very impulse which she is obeying, Eliza stoops down and picks up the letter which has fallen from her hand, — that letter which

has produced all which we have just been describing. And now she sits down and reads it calmly and deliberately. Oh, with what a calmness! It is the calmness which the ocean of hyperborean regions displays when frozen into solid ice, — the calmness of that glacial spell which can alone tranquillize the mighty waters that if the talismanic power were removed would boil and rage in all the wild ebullition of the tempest. It is the calmness of the volcano that sleeps under a power superior to its own, when its lava is hardened into petrification, but which, if the spell should be removed, and a spark should be set to the inflammable concrete, would pour forth the gush of the burning levin.

Eliza read the letter mechanically, deliberately, from the first word to the last. It was finished, and then only did she display any outward emotion; then only was it that a strange expression — a sad expression indeed to be seen upon the countenance of one so young and beautiful — passed slowly over her features, while simultaneously a glacial tremor trailed itself as slowly through her entire form.

“ I thank thee, O God, for one thing,” she said, in a voice which seemed as if borne upon a breath of ice, — “ and only for one thing. The rest is all dark — horrible — frightful — incredible! ”

It did not seem to strike her that she had given utterance to something savouring of impious blasphemy, in accepting only one of the many dispensations of Providence on which her thoughts were evidently fixed. But she was in that state when the human soul is so chilled by despair that the form to which it belongs is but a breathing, animated marble statue.

She looked over the remaining papers in the desk. There was another letter, in the same handwriting, of a recent date, — a very recent date, — and this also Eliza read. Again were her feelings excited poignantly, horribly, agonizingly; and for some minutes she was convulsed with the tortures of anguish, while the tears rained down her cheeks. She wrung her hands, too, — yes, wrung them bitterly, bitterly; and it was long ere she recovered even the calmness of despair. Then she again looked into the desk, but there was nothing more to interest her. Impossible indeed would it have been for any other paper to produce a state of being more deplorable, more deserving the whole world's com-

miseration, than those which had already placed a petrifying spell upon the heart of the unhappy Duchess of Marchmont. She locked up all the papers in the desk again, and the desk itself she secured in a bureau of which she kept the key. For the remainder of that day she stayed in her boudoir, sending a message by one of her maids to her husband, to the effect that she begged his kind consideration and wished to be alone.

The duke naturally fancied — as indeed was but too terribly the case — that his wife had found in the contents of the desk something to make her thus court solitude, and he obtruded not his presence upon her. But on the following morning, when she descended to the breakfast-parlour, she expressed her gratitude for all his goodness toward her; and when he saw how pale she was, he thought to himself that the documents she had found in the desk must have revived all her bitterest affliction at her father's loss. He, however, delicately and carefully abstained from breathing a word in allusion to the subject, much less to inquire what the contents of those papers might have been. From that day forth the sadness deepened upon Eliza's countenance, but also blended with a sweeter and holier resignation; her tones acquired that soft plaintiveness of harmony which characterizes the voice that is accustomed to keep down an ebullition of feeling; her cheeks remained pale, but not with a sickly whiteness: it was the perfect transparency of the complexion which loses not its animation when the tint of the rose dies away.

We should observe that Lord Clandon had left Oaklands almost immediately after Captain Lacey's funeral, as did also Mrs. Bailey; the other guests who had been invited to stay there had, for delicacy's sake, taken their leave on the very morning after the demise of the duchess's father. The Duke of Marchmont, thinking that change of scene would contribute to the restoration of his wife's spirits, and that a southern clime during the approaching winter would benefit her health, proposed a visit to Italy. Eliza, ever amiably ready to yield to her husband's wishes in all things, gave her assent in that calmly serene manner, tinged with sadness, which had now become habitual to her, and to Italy they accordingly went.

The winter passed; spring revisited the earth, clothing the trees with a tender verdure, and covering the boughs with

blossoms. Summer followed, to expand that verdure into a more brilliant green, and to prepare the boughs for the rich fruitage of autumn. It was in the beginning of September, 1829, — exactly one year from the death of Captain Lacey, — that the Duke and Duchess of Marchmont returned to Oaklands. The duke had some reason to flatter himself that his hopes, when they set out upon their travels, had not been altogether unfulfilled. It was not that the colour had come back to Eliza's cheeks, — that appeared to have gone for ever, — but as there was nought of insipid deadness in the purity of her complexion, her beauty was not marred, only rendered the more interesting. There are some forms which remain uninfluenced by the sorrow which lies deep in the heart; it is ever so when that sorrow exists always the same, breaking not forth in sudden and violent ebullitions, to be succeeded by periods of exhaustion. These cause the wear and tear of the frame, but it is the former state which shows itself but little outwardly, and so it was with the Duchess of Marchmont. Her figure retained all its rounded contours, its rich proportions, its flowing outlines; splendour, elegance, and grace, blended with a touching interest as well as with a becoming dignity, rendered her a being of whom any husband might be proud. And the Duke of Marchmont was proud of his Eliza; he had seen her as much admired in Italy as she had been in England, and he now hoped that as England was reached again, she would mingle in the society which her rank and loveliness qualified her to adorn, and where she would shine as a star of matchless and sweetest beauty.

The Duke of Marchmont's arrangements were that they should remain at Oaklands throughout the autumn, until the Christmas season, when they would remove to the town mansion. His Grace was accustomed to submit to his wife's approval whatsoever he projected; for to her only was he neither proud nor autocratic, and she on her side invariably gave her sweetly and softly expressed assent to all his proposals. But in order that the stay at Oaklands might not be dull nor monotonous, and in order that Eliza might again gradually glide into the gaieties of society, after a year of mourning for her father, the duke suggested that they should entertain a select circle of friends. Accordingly invitations were sent to Mrs. Bailey, to the Lomax family, and to half

a dozen other members, male and female, of the fashionable world. They came in due course, and though Eliza received them with her wonted affability, and did the honours of the mansion with a becoming grace and dignity, she experienced no real relief in their society from any of the sorrows that lay deep in the immortal caverns of her heart.

Lord Clandon was at his shooting-box in a midland county when the duke and duchess returned to England. On learning their arrival, he lost no time in writing a dutiful and affectionate letter to his uncle, expressing a hope that the amiable duchess had recovered so far as could be expected from the shock of her father's death. The duke, flattered and gratified by this fresh testimonial of Hugh's complete and generous deference to the head of the family, responded in cordial terms, and invited him to pay a visit to Oaklands. Lord Clandon was unmarried, and the duke jocosely hinted in his letter that it was high time Hugh should think of taking unto himself a partner for life, and that probably amongst the lady guests assembled at Oaklands he might find one who in personal and pecuniary points of view would prove an eligible match. The pecuniary point of view was perhaps the more important for Lord Clandon's consideration, inasmuch as he was far from rich. His income amounted to a bare two thousand a year, — little enough to support his position as a peer, and a mere trifle indeed for one whose habits were expensive and extravagant. The duke well knew that his nephew was thus straitened in his means, and in the same letter which conveyed the invitation to Oaklands he enclosed a cheque upon his banker for a handsome amount. Lord Clandon hastened to acknowledge the epistle and its enclosure, expressing a fervid gratitude for his uncle's considerate kindness, and promising to be at Oaklands at the expiration of a week.

The same post which brought this letter from Hugh brought one from another quarter, likewise addressed to the duke. To this second letter a kind response was likewise returned by his Grace, accompanied by an invitation to Oaklands. And Eliza knew that this letter was received, and that this invitation was given. The answer came, to the effect that the writer would be at Oaklands in the afternoon of the following day.

That afternoon came. The duke and his wife were alone

together in the drawing-room, for it so happened that all the guests were out riding or walking in the grounds, enjoying the beauty of that autumnal season. A very close observer — if such a one had been present — might have noticed that the cheeks of the duchess were paler than even their wont, — paler because that animation of the complexion which had survived the fading of the natural carnation tint was temporarily deadened into a complete whiteness. And such an observer, too, would perchance have seen that there was a strange light in the large dark eyes. The duke, however, perceived not all this, for Eliza seemed busily occupied in the contemplation of a number of magnificent prints which one of the guests had brought from London a day or two previously. The duke was standing in one of the bay-windows of the drawing-room, which commanded a view of the carriage road, for he was in expectation of the promised arrival.

It was about four o'clock on this particular afternoon that a post-chaise dashed up to the grand entrance of Oaklands, and the duke exclaimed, "Here he is! More than three years have elapsed since last I saw him."

Eliza remained occupied with the prints, but turning them over more rapidly than at first. The duke went on making observations relative to the individual who had just arrived, but it scarcely seemed as if the duchess heard them, for she gave no response. In a few minutes footsteps were heard approaching the door; that door was thrown open, and a domestic announced, "The Honourable Mr. Bertram Vivian."

CHAPTER V

BERTRAM VIVIAN

ELIZA rose from her seat, and the duke took her hand to present her to her relative, — that relative whom he fancied she had never in her life seen before, but, alas! whom she had known so well and loved so tenderly. She was white as a sheet, and her deathlike pallor was rendered all the more visible by the half-mourning garb that she wore. Her raven hair, arranged in massive bands, threw out, as it were, the colourless countenance in its purest marble relief; her lips were of the hue of ashes; but there was a strange light glistening in her eyes as she bowed to Bertram Vivian. Then there was a quick revulsion of feeling within her, pangs of ineffable anguish shooting in rapid succession through her heart; and while her fortitude was sufficient to prevent any outburst of that woe, any ebullition of that harrowing agony, it had the effect, on the other hand, of sending up the hectic hues of excitement to her cheeks, so that her husband, as he glanced with proud satisfaction upon his young wife, while introducing her to Bertram, thought that she had never seemed so beautiful before.

And Bertram Vivian himself, how looked, how felt he? He was now in his twenty-fourth year, a young man of Apollo-like beauty. His hair clustered in raven curls of exceeding richness about that high marble forehead where Genius sat enthroned, his tall slender figure was masculine symmetry itself. But he, too, was deadly pale; yet to the duke's eye was no agitation on his part visible. But how different to the eyes of Eliza! The glance, the one glance, which she had dared throw upon him, made her aware in an instant that he was a prey to a deep, silent, inward agitation, as tremendous and as excruciating as that which she felt

herself; and she saw, too, that notwithstanding his air of outward composure, there was something about him almost bordering upon terror which her eye alone could detect. Doubtless he feared lest all in a moment the adamantine bonds of tensely nerved prudence and preterhuman self-control wherewith he and she had fortified themselves should he snapped asunder, as Samson broke the Philistine bonds, and that there might ensue a wild scene of agony, flooding tears, and convulsive sobs, in which they would both be lost. But when Bertram beheld her so completely the mistress of herself, that feeling of terror passed away in an instant, and with a coldly courteous dignity he returned her salutation.

“Bertram, my dear nephew,” exclaimed the duke, hastening to embrace him, “welcome to Oaklands! Welcome — doubly welcome — all the more that I have not seen you since that shocking but false report of your loss — But, Eliza dearest, you must at least give my younger nephew as kind a greeting as you bestowed upon the elder one when first you met a year back.”

For the duke remembered that when Eliza and Lord Clandon had thus met, she graciously proffered him her hand, giving him at the same time words of welcome. But now to Bertram no hand was stretched forth, no syllable was spoken.

“Welcome to Oaklands, Mr. Vivian,” said Eliza, in a voice which he knew to be unnaturally calm, but which struck the duke as only being strangely and unaccountably chilling; at the same time she proffered her hand, which Bertram just held for a moment.

Again had a revulsion of feeling taken place within her, she was again all marble, and it was a hand cold as that of the dead which Bertram thus touched.

“And so, my dear nephew,” said the duke, “you only returned from St. Petersburg a few days back? By the bye, how was it that when you came from the United States, last June twelvemonth, you did not take London in your way to see your relatives and your friends, ere proceeding to St. Petersburg?”

“You are aware, uncle,” responded Bertram, “that when I obtained leave of absence from my post in America, it was my purpose to pass a few months in England. But on arriv-

ing at Liverpool I received an official despatch, announcing that I was appointed first attaché to the embassy at St. Petersburg, and the positive orders were that I was to proceed thither without a moment's delay. I did so."

"Well, well," said the duke, "there is nothing like zeal and obedience in the performance of your duties. The Foreign Office is much pleased with you; and I shall ask that you be appointed envoy to one of the minor courts. It is a proud thing for you, Bertram, to reflect that when only a few months past your twenty-third year you will be an ambassador. Or, if you like to go to Parliament, I can put you in for one of my pocket-boroughs at the next general election."

"My lord, I would much rather leave England again as soon as possible."

"Well, we shall have plenty of time to talk it over, for I mean you to stay a few weeks with us, now that you are here. Your brother, Lord Clandon, is expected in a few days, and we have a select party at Oaklands."

"I should now wish to retire to my chamber," said Bertram. "The roads are dusty —"

"To be sure!" cried the duke; and ringing the bell, he ordered the domestic who answered the summons to show the Honourable Mr. Vivian to his apartment.

"And it is time," said Eliza, after a pause, during which Bertram with a slight bow had quitted the room, "it is time that I should dress for dinner."

In a few minutes the duchess was alone in her boudoir. This meeting with the loved one — the one who was still so dear to her — had been almost more than her fortitude could bear up against. Throughout the ordeal she herself was astounded at her own courage in supporting it; but now that she was alone in her boudoir, her feelings could no longer be restrained. She threw herself upon her knees, her anguish burst forth, the tears gushed in fountains from her eyes, her bosom was convulsed with sobs.

"Oh, father, father!" the voice of insufferable agony went up from her heart, as she thus apostrophized her dead parent, "you knew not the misery you were entailing upon me at the time. But if from the mansions of the other world it be given to the spirits of the departed to look down at what is passing in this, you can now understand it all. May God forgive you, father — even as I have forgiven you."

When she grew somewhat calmer, the Duchess of Marchmont reviewed the details of the meeting which had just passed. While Bertram was answering his uncle's observations, he had spoken with a cold firmness, and without even so much as glancing toward herself; but when he had said that he was anxious to leave England as soon as possible, he had spoken with an emphasis which she could full well understand. Oh, why had he come to Oaklands at all? Wherefore cause them both to run this tremendous risk? Did he suppose that the duke was acquainted with the circumstance of their love? No, it was impossible, for if so, Bertram would not have paid this visit. The natural delicacy of his feelings would have kept him away; but how was it that his pride had not also kept him away? Did he suspect how she had been deceived and sacrificed, or did he fancy that she had wilfully proved faithless to her love for him, and, dazzled by the proffer of a ducal coronet, had bestowed her hand upon his uncle? In all these matters Eliza was in a state of the utmost uncertainty. But could her doubts be cleared up? Must she seek or afford an opportunity for explanations? No, she was resolved not to trust herself alone with Bertram Vivian. Rather, ten thousand times rather, exist even under the weight of his injurious suspicions, if such he entertained, than do aught which might savour of impropriety in her position as a wife, or lead her to even an unfaithful thought or unduteous word with regard to her husband. And that he did entertain those suspicions, she was more than half-afraid; for there was a certain pride, a certain cold assertion of manly dignity, in the way in which he had met her. Why, then, had he come to Oaklands? Was it to upbraid and reproach her? Was it to demand the return of the ring which he had given her, and to restore the one which he had received from herself?

The Duchess of Marchmont saw more than ever the necessity of exerting all her fortitude. She did her best to assume her wonted outward calmness, and she bathed her eyes copiously to efface the evidences of weeping ere she summoned her maids to assist at her toilet. When this toilet was completed, she repaired to the drawing-room, where she found the duke in conversation with the assembled guests; but Bertram was not there. It was not until within a few minutes of the dinner-hour that he made his appear-

ance. How handsome did he look! — but not finely and majestically handsome; it was rather a delicate and intellectual but still masculine beauty which characterized him. There was no colour upon his cheeks, and his glossy dark whiskers threw out the paleness of those cheeks all the more visibly. But the exquisite classic profile, the haughty curl of the upper lip, and the godlike nobility of the alabaster brow, with the raven curls clustering around it, rendered that head a model of sculptural perfection. His movements were slow, yet not sluggish; they were replete with ease and elegance, but they, as well as the expression of his countenance, indicated to observers generally the thoughtfulness of his mind, and to Eliza alone the existence of a deep, ineffable, imperishable sorrow in his heart. His voice was, as it were, clouded from the same cause, but full of a fine masculine harmony; and when, as he glided with ease into the discourse that was progressing as he entered, a smile appeared upon his lips, it was a cold, glacial smile, resembling the light which the sun flings upon ice.

When dinner was announced, it became Bertram's duty — as the last male comer, and likewise as a relative — to escort the duchess to the banqueting-room. It was only with a cold courtesy that he approached her; with the same cold reserve did she bow slightly as she took his arm, but not with more airy lightness sits the butterfly upon the flower than lay the fingers of Eliza upon the arm of Bertram Vivian. As they headed the procession to the banqueting-room, Bertram spoke of the weather, of the beauty of the grounds, and of the most indifferent topics. It was the same as he sat on her right hand at the dinner-table; and when he took wine with her, the bows that were exchanged were the merest and the slightest inclination of the head, without a smile upon either countenance. All was chilling and distant between them. Thus the dinner passed away, and every one, not even excepting the duke himself, had noticed that there was a strange formal reserve, a chilling ceremonial distance, with merely the gloss of well-bred courtesy over all, between the duchess and Bertram Vivian. But of course no remark was verbally made, though covert and stealthy looks of surprise were exchanged. The natural impression was that Bertram, less generous, less magnanimous than his elder brother, looked with ill-disguised dis-

content and annoyance on the marriage which his uncle had contracted, and that the duchess, perceiving this conduct on his part, resented it in a dignified and becoming manner.

When the ladies had retired, the duke, not wishing to judge his nephew hastily, but at the same time feeling it incumbent upon him to take some little notice, if only by barest allusion, of a tenor of conduct which every one had perceived, motioned him to bring his glass and come and sit next to him. Bertram obeyed with an alacrity which, trifling though the incident were, displayed a most willing obedience, and scarcely was he seated by the duke's side, when he said, in an earnest manner, "Accept my sincerest thanks, dear uncle, for the handsome addition you have so continuously made to my own restricted income. I have endeavoured to render myself worthy of your generosity. And now, scarcely am I beneath your roof when you make me offers of which any young man ought to be proud. I never will, I never can forget your goodness. God forbid that I ever should," and it was with the sudden impulsiveness of a naturally fervid nature that Bertram took his uncle's hand and pressed it warmly in his own.

The duke for an instant gazed upon him in wonderment as he said to himself, "Is it possible that Bertram is a vile hypocrite, that in his heart he detests my marriage, that he is not altogether able to conceal his sentiments from my wife, but that, fearing he has gone too far, he now seeks to propitiate and conciliate me?"

Yet there was nothing in the young man's countenance, nothing in the honest frankness with which his dark clear eyes encountered his uncle's looks, to justify those suspicions. The duke was bewildered, and Bertram went on speaking.

"You asked me," he said, "if I would like to enter Parliament, but I have no wish to remain in England. English habits and tastes do not suit one who has been upwards of three years abroad. Besides," added Bertram, quickly, "my views are entirely cast in the diplomatic sphere, and therein, dear uncle, do I solicit your interest. Believe me, I am in haste to get abroad again, no matter to what part of the world. I deemed it my bounden duty to come to Oaklands to pay my respects to you, to assure your Grace of my gratitude, and to congratulate you on the happiness which you evidently enjoy."

“Yes, I am happy with my amiable duchess,” responded the duke; and once more were his eyes fixed earnestly and scrutinizingly upon Bertram Vivian.

“Report had not failed to waft her manifold good qualities to my ears,” he observed, without the slightest change of countenance, “even before I had the honour of meeting her Grace this day.”

“And yet methinks, Bertram,” said the duke, “you hardly treated her with the friendliness of a relative.”

The young man gave no immediate answer; he dropped his kerchief, and deliberately picked it up. This interval of a single moment was sufficient for him to recover complete self-possession.

“Rest assured, uncle,” responded Bertram, “that my conduct shall ever be marked with the profoundest respect toward the Duchess of Marchmont — yes, ever!”

The duke bit his lip for a moment. He thought there was something cold and distant in the answer, — something which justified his suspicion that Bertram in his heart hated the match. But yet it was not a reply which would bear any comment on his Grace’s part. It might even admit an interpretation which would throw out the delicacy of his nephew’s feelings in the most admirable light. What if he considered that respect was the only, or at least the most becoming demeanour which he ought to adopt toward a lady a year younger than himself, and who had merely become connected with him by marriage with a relative? What if he were to consider that anything savouring of a more advanced cordiality might touch upon familiarity, and that such familiarity might be viewed suspiciously by the world? And then, too, Bertram had really so little to gain if the duke had remained unmarried and if he were to die childless. The elder brother, Lord Clandon, would become Duke of Marchmont, he would no doubt marry, he would probably have issue, and Bertram Vivian would gain the empty title of a lord by courtesy, without a peer’s rank, and without a single additional farthing to his income.

All these thoughts swept through the mind of the Duke of Marchmont in the space of a few moments, and when he again turned his eyes upon Bertram Vivian, there was so much open-hearted frankness, so much lofty intellectuality, so much true grandeur of the soul depicted upon his faultlessly

beautiful countenance, that the duke felt he must have wronged him with his unfavourable suspicions, while, on the other hand, his favourable conjectures to account for his nephew's conduct toward the duchess must, after all, be the right ones. The gentlemen rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room, where coffee was served around. Bertram leaned against the mantelpiece, at a distance from all the rest,—at intervals silent and abstracted, at others falling with well-bred readiness and intellectual ease into the conversation that was going on. He did not once approach the duchess, he never addressed his observations to her; but then, no one could consider this as extraordinary, inasmuch as his remarks were made generally, and not in reply to the previous observations of any particular individual. Still there was a visible restraint on the part of both Bertram and the duchess, for she never once even so much as turned her eyes upon him; and she also had her intervals of silence and abstraction, which never were perceived before. The guests separated to their respective chambers with the conviction that Bertram hated the marriage, and that the duchess fathomed his feeling and properly resented it in the way that a well-bred lady could alone exhibit her offended and indignant pride. The Duke of Marchmont, too, again wavered in his opinion, and was again inclined to think that this was the true reading of the mystery. He therefore said nothing to Eliza on the subject, for fear of wounding her feelings; but he secretly resolved that if these scenes were renewed, Bertram's visit to Oaklands should be cut very speedily short.

On the following morning, at breakfast, there was the same cold constraint, the same distant formality, between the duchess and Bertram Vivian. When the amusements of the day were about to be settled, the duchess proposed a riding-party, amongst other recreations, whereupon Bertram, on being invited by the duke to join it, excused himself on the plea of having letters to write. In the afternoon, when there was to be a boating-party on the splendid piece of ornamental water in the neighbourhood of the mansion, Bertram begged to be excused from joining it, as his physician had recommended horse exercise and he could not dispense with his daily ride. The guests were astonished. He would not ride when they rode, but he now chose to ride

when they did not. The dinner was marked by the same sort of conduct, the evening passed in a similar manner, and the effect of all this was to throw a species of damp upon the spirits of the guests. The duke himself now became cold and distant to Bertram, and, not choosing to deign any further discourse with him on the topic, resolved to speak to his wife.

"Eliza," he said, when they had retired to their chamber, "it is impossible I can conceal from myself the strange, I may even call it the rude and uncourteous manner, in which my nephew behaves toward you."

For a moment the duchess trembled from head to foot, but her agitation escaped her husband's notice. Then, almost instantaneously recovering her presence of mind, she said, in her serene, calm voice, "I have nothing to complain of in Mr. Vivian's treatment."

Again was the duke smitten with the thought that his favourable construction must be the true one, — that Bertram was resolved his conduct should be merely respectful, and nothing more, that Eliza understood his meaning, appreciated it, and was not merely satisfied, but pleased. The duke therefore said no more, but he thought within his own heart that this self-imposed restraint would necessarily be mitigated into a little more congenial cordiality in the course of a few days.

The next three or four days, however, passed in precisely the same manner, and it became evident that Bertram absolutely avoided the duchess as much as he possibly could. If, when in the drawing-room, a movement was made by the guests which threatened to leave him alone with Eliza, he would abruptly quit the apartment. He had ceased to conduct her to the dinner-table; he placed himself (and some thought, studiously so) as far from her as possible. He never addressed himself direct to her, unless absolutely obliged, and then his tones were chillingly glacial. Her demeanour, on the other hand, began to grow evidently distressed, notwithstanding all her efforts to maintain a dignified composure. The truth is, it was an ordeal that was wearing her out, she could not support it. All her love for Bertram Vivian was revived with its full pristine power and tenderness. Indeed, it had never been extinguished; it had given place to resignation when she believed him to be no more; it had remained, as it were, lulled and subdued by the

strong dominion of self-control during the year which had elapsed since, by the contents of her father's desk, she had discovered that he was alive; and when Bertram himself, in all his living, breathing beauty, again appeared in her presence, that love was inspired with fullest vitality once more. To be with him, to behold him often and often when all the rest thought that her eyes gazed elsewhere, to breathe the same atmosphere, to hear the melting music of his voice, at times pouring forth its eloquence as if in golden tones, to know that she might have been his, after all, if no duplicity and deceit had sacrificed her, and, what was more still, to have the inward conviction that he loved her even now as much as ever he had loved before, — oh, all this constituted an ordeal fraught with anguish that was ineffable, with tortures that were harrowing, with an affliction the poignancy of which was crucifying!

The Duke of Marchmont was bewildered. At one time he thought one thing, at another time another. Now his conjectures were favourable to his nephew, the next moment they became quite the reverse. He felt as if a scene were passing around him which he could not understand, as if there were some strange mystery, to the reading of which he possessed no possible clue. That things could not go on thus, he felt persuaded; but how was he to interfere? How was he to treat with importance a matter which in reality might have no importance at all? If he made up his mind to speak to his nephew, Bertram at once took the initiative of the discourse, but quite on some other subject, and all his expressions were most dutiful and affectionate toward his uncle. Thus the duke would go away from him, leaving unsaid all he had meant to say. If he spoke to his wife when they were alone together, Eliza still declared that there was nothing in Mr. Bertram's conduct of which she had to make the slightest complaint; and she even added, in an unguarded moment, "that it was precisely what it ought to be." The duke put quite a different construction on her words from that which they ought to have borne, and giving her credit for a delicacy of feeling which, though carried to an extreme, was yet in the right direction, he embraced her with all his uxorious fondness.

It was in the midst of these circumstances that Lord Clandon arrived at Oaklands on the promised visit. The

brothers had not met since they separated, more than three years back, at that very same mansion, after the death of the late Marquis of Viviandale, — that death which, by altering their father's position at the time, had led to their recall from college. Bertram precipitated himself into Hugh's arms, and if the joy of the latter were less exuberant, it was not considered the less sincere, but merely that it had a different mode of demonstration, the dispositions of the two being not completely alike. Lord Clandon was all cordial courtesy and respectful friendliness toward the duchess; his demeanour appeared to be precisely what it ought from a relative of his age to one of hers. Thus the presence of Lord Clandon at Oaklands threw out, by the effect of contrast, the cold reserve and glacial formality of Bertram into still stronger relief.

Lord Clandon had not been half an hour on this occasion at the mansion before he observed his brother's conduct toward the duchess. At first he himself was as much astonished as the rest, for he had not the remotest suspicion of anything that had taken place between Bertram and Eliza when she was Miss Lacey at Oxford. Neither did he conceive it possible that his brother loved the duchess; for if so, Clandon thought that Bertram would pursue quite a different course and would seek to render himself as agreeable as possible. There was a mystery to be cleared up, and Hugh resolved to penetrate it. But how? He threw himself in Bertram's way, walked out alone with him, turned the conversation on the duchess, and endeavoured to draw his brother out. But not the slightest syllable of explanation was volunteered. Lord Clandon accordingly saw that he must go upon some other tack. He watched his brother's and Eliza's demeanour toward each other for the next two days; still all was mystery. Then he bethought himself of a plan to arrive at its solution.

“My dear Mrs. Bailey,” he said to this lady, one morning courteously offering her his arm to escort her for a walk through the grounds after breakfast, “have you observed nothing?”

“Observed what, my lord?” inquired the antiquated votary of fashion, — “that the eldest Miss Lomax's hair is red, though it passes in a complimentary way for auburn, that Miss Rachel Lomax has freckles, and that Miss

Mary drank three glasses of champagne yesterday at dinner? ”

“ No, nothing of all that,” answered Lord Clandon. “ You are a relation of my amiable, beautiful, and accomplished young aunt — ”

“ To be sure I am!” said the old lady, proudly. “ It was at my house, your lordship is aware, that his Grace first met Eliza and became enamoured of her.”

“ I know it,” rejoined Clandon. “ And being the duchess’s relation, you are of course in her confidence? ”

“ Ah, there you are wrong, my lord!” exclaimed Mrs. Bailey. “ It is this which pains me. Eliza never consults me in anything. Even her very orders to her milliner are given without the least deference to my opinion, and though certainly everything becomes her — ”

“ Well, then, my dear Mrs. Bailey,” continued Hugh, “ if you are not in her Grace’s confidence, you ought to be. Yes, you ought to be,” he added, still more emphatically, “ for there is something going on which no one can understand.”

“ It certainly struck me,” said the old lady, “ that the Honourable George Curzon is paying his addresses to Mary Lomax, but really I do not see that her Grace can interfere. Of course the young man’s intentions are honourable — ”

“ My dear Mrs. Bailey,” interrupted Lord Clandon, “ it is not this that I mean. A lady of your shrewdness, experience, and penetration,” he went on to say, in order to flatter the dame and win her over to his purpose, “ a lady of your tact and judgment — ”

“ I flatter myself that I am not deficient in all that,” observed Mrs. Bailey, with a proud elevation of the head, “ for I was the first to detect that the turtle-soup was burned yesterday, and that there was no cayenne in the vermicelli.”

“ Then with such penetration, my dear Mrs. Bailey,” quickly resumed his lordship, “ you cannot possibly have failed to notice the extraordinary conduct of my brother Bertram toward the duchess — and I might add, her equally extraordinary conduct toward him. I consult you as a relation of the duchess, as her best and sincerest friend; and if there is anything to be done to bridge the gulf which evidently separates my brother from her Grace, if there be anything that can place them on a more cordial footing, pray make use of my services.”

“ Well, my lord,” said Mrs. Bailey, delighted and flattered at being thought of so much importance as to be consulted in the matter, “ there is something, you know — or, rather, you do not know, for it is a profound secret. The late Captain Lacey imparted it to me, strictly enjoining me, however, not to divulge it. But as you have expressed yourself in such kind, such generous, such admirable terms, I think it would really be wrong for me not to take you into my confidence.”

“ My dear Mrs. Bailey, rest assured that I shall not abuse it;” and Hugh spoke with the ill-repressed eagerness of one who hovers in suspense on the threshold of a mystery’s solution.

“ Well, I will trust you,” said Mrs. Bailey, who was as frivolous as she was vain and selfish. “ The fact is, Bertram and Eliza were acquainted at Oxford. They loved each other madly; they separated with an exchange of rings. I don’t know whether they have them still, but I do recollect that Eliza wore hers very frequently up to the day of her marriage, but never since. Well, the report reached England of Bertram’s death, and shortly afterward Captain Lacey and his daughter removed to London to live with me. In due time the captain received a letter from Bertram, expressing a hope that if the report of his death which was published in the English papers had come to his knowledge, the contradiction had likewise been seen. This, however, had escaped the captain’s notice. Well, Eliza was beginning to be admired in my saloons, and though the duke had not as yet seen her, there was every prospect of her forming some brilliant alliance. So I of course gave my advice on the subject, and of course Captain Lacey followed it. ‘ Bertram Vivian,’ said I, ‘ is the mere cadet of a junior branch of a great family, and Eliza, with her beauty, can look much higher. Depend upon it, she will marry a peer of the realm. Keep this letter secret. Now that she is resigned to the belief of her lover’s death, it is a pity to disturb that feeling. At all events, let her continue in ignorance of Bertram’s miraculous escape until we see whether she cannot form a better match.’ Captain Lacey thought my counsel good, and adopted it.”

“ And therefore,” observed Lord Clandon, “ Eliza married the duke in the belief that Bertram was no more? ”

“ Precisely so,” answered Mrs. Bailey. “ But I can assure

you that for the last month or so both her father and myself were dreadfully nervous and uneasy — I mean the last month previous to the wedding. For a second letter came from Bertram. It was addressed to the captain at Oxford, as the former one was, and was sent on by the postmaster, with whom he had left an intimation whither his letters were to be forwarded.”

“Yes, to be sure; quite prudent,” interjected Lord Clandon. “But that second letter —”

“It came to say that Bertram’s love was as strong as ever,” continued Mrs. Bailey; “that the two years’ test imposed by Captain Lacey had nearly expired, and that close upon the heels of the letter itself, Bertram was coming by the next ship to claim Eliza as his bride. Well, I certainly had some little difficulty in preventing the captain from revealing everything to his daughter, but he was soon argued out of his foolishness, and so the match took place with the duke, your uncle.”

“And did you hear anything more of Bertram? Did he call in Grosvenor Square when he visited England?” inquired Lord Clandon.

“No, nothing of the sort,” answered Mrs. Bailey, “and I was very glad of it. Why should I have borne the brunt of his wild ravings? I suppose he saw the account of the marriage in the newspapers, and so the tale was told. It is very unfortunate he should have taken it into his head to come to Oaklands. For my part, I think he had better have stayed away. However, it is impossible, considering all things, that he and the duchess can behave to each other in a different way than what they do; and since he has chosen to come hither, I think their conduct is highly creditable to both. What I fear is that it may lead to some suspicion on the duke’s part —”

“You believe, then,” interrupted Lord Clandon, “that my uncle is totally ignorant of the former acquaintance and of the love between Eliza and Bertram?”

“Oh, I am certain of it,” exclaimed Mrs. Bailey. “Eliza positively assured her father, within an hour after the wedding, that never from her lips should her husband hear of the past, nor from her conduct be led to suspect that her heart was not his. And now, my lord, that I have told you the secret, what course do you consider it prudent to suggest?”

"These revelations, my dear Mrs. Bailey," responded Hugh, "have come upon me with such startling suddenness that I am unable in a moment to proffer an opinion. I will tell you in a few days what I think ought to be done. Perhaps I may speak privately to my brother, worm out of him the history of his love, and then advise him to absent himself from a place where his presence is dangerous."

"In any case, my lord, do not compromise me," said Mrs. Bailey. "The Honourable Mr. Bertram Vivian is civil and polite enough to me, — for of course he cannot suspect that I had anything to do in leading Eliza to jilt him, — and I do not want to be brought into collision with anybody."

"Rest assured, my dear Mrs. Bailey," rejoined Lord Clandon, "that I will manage the matter with as much tact and delicacy as if it were you yourself who had the conduct of it."

"I rely upon your lordship," said the foolish woman, who did not reflect that she had been avowing to the very individual most interested in the duke's remaining unmarried the schemes and stratagems to which she had been a party in order to bring about that alliance between his Grace and Eliza.

Having escorted Mrs. Bailey back to the mansion, Lord Clandon sauntered forth again into the grounds, to reflect upon all that he had just heard. Presently he beheld his uncle approaching along a shady avenue, accompanied by a large favourite bull-mastiff answering to the name of Pluto. His Grace was walking slowly, with the air of one in deep preoccupation. The mystery of the scene which was constantly before his eyes was bewildering him more and more, and he saw no issue thence by any feasible means.

"Ah, my dear uncle!" said Clandon. "What, walking alone? Where are all the guests?"

"The Lomaxes are getting ready for departure," responded the duke. "In fact, I don't wonder that they should have abridged their visit —"

Then stopping short, he suddenly stooped down to caress his dog, in order to hide his vexation.

"What mean you, my dear uncle?" inquired Clandon, as if with an air of perfect surprise.

"I mean, Hugh," responded the duke, suddenly turning his looks fixedly upon his nephew's countenance, "that there

is something going on which I cannot comprehend. I must speak out; I am glad that accident has thus thrown you and me together at this moment. There is something in my heart that I burn to unbosom to a confidant. You love me, Hugh; you have testified the noblest and most disinterested attachment — I wish to God I could say the same of your brother.”

“What, my lord!” ejaculated Clandon, “has Bertram been wanting in love and respect toward your Grace, the head of the family, our benefactor, our uncle —”

“Hugh,” interrupted the Duke of Marchmont, “it is impossible you could have remained blind to all that is going on. Bertram treats the duchess with downright insult. At first his conduct was merely a cold reserve, on which the best interpretations might be put. But now he has been nearly ten days here, and instead of getting on a more friendly footing, he behaves with ill-concealed aversion. The duchess, all amiability herself, will not admit that it is so; she cannot see through it. But I can blind myself no longer, Hugh. I have endeavoured in my own mind to make every possible allowance for Bertram, and all in vain. It is the blackest ingratitude on his part, and I am determined not to put up with it.”

“But, my dear uncle,” said Lord Clandon, with a conciliatory tone and manner, “pray do not judge hastily, pray do not visit your displeasure upon my brother. You have been pleased to signify that my conduct is worthy of your approval; as a favour therefore for myself, I entreat your Grace to be lenient toward poor Bertram.”

“This intercession on your brother’s behalf, Hugh, does you infinite credit,” rejoined the Duke of Marchmont. “But such conduct is intolerable. It is not merely insulting to the duchess, insulting to myself, but insulting likewise to all the guests. A damp has been thrown upon the spirits of a circle which I gathered about me for purposes of gaiety.”

“Would you, my dear uncle, permit me to offer a suggestion?” asked Lord Clandon, in a mild and submissive manner.

“To be sure, Hugh,” responded the duke. “Speak. I am glad that your own magnanimous conduct enables me to treat you as a confidant. In a word, do you not think

that your brother is chafed at this marriage of mine, and that he is venting his spite upon the duchess?"

"No, uncle," ejaculated Lord Clandon, with the emphasis of conviction, "I am certain that it is not so. Bertram is too generous-hearted, too magnanimous to entertain any such mean and paltry feelings. I, who know my brother's disposition well, can read the clue to the whole mystery."

"Can you?" exclaimed the duke, full of delight and suspense. "Then, what is it? But take care, my dear nephew," he added, more gravely, "how you suffer your love for your brother to blind your eyes to the real truth."

"Listen, uncle, and judge for yourself," responded Lord Clandon. "My brother is a young man naturally diffident, naturally afraid, also, of having his actions wrongly judged. He was ever like this. His very sensitiveness throws him into extremes; the delicacy of his sentiments sometimes renders his conduct seemingly outrageous. He doubtless trembles lest the slightest attention paid to his amiable young relative should be wrongly construed —"

"Well, but those are the very conjectures with which I myself," interrupted the duke, with an air of disappointment, "have sought to account for his conduct, but I fear that they are not the correct ones."

"Bear with me, uncle," said Hugh, deferentially, "and grant me your patience. My brother is two years younger than myself, and though he has seen more of the world in the shape of travel, he knows less of it in useful experience. Regard his position, — a young man of a little more than three and twenty, suddenly presented to a lady relative, even younger than himself. He feels that it is not for him, but for her, to define the degree of friendly intimacy and becoming cordiality on which they are to stand toward each other. Doubtless as he found her ladyship, so has he modelled his own conduct."

"Indeed, Hugh," observed the duke, as he slowly retrospected over all the details of his wife's and Bertram's bearing toward each other, "I think you are right. And now I remember, the very first moment he made his appearance at Oaklands, Eliza did not receive him with a befitting welcome. Yes, there is much truth in your words. She neither gave him

her hand nor spoke a single syllable, till I prompted her to do both. I fear me that Eliza was to blame after all. ”

“ You see therefore, dear uncle, that Bertram has measured his own demeanour by that of the duchess. Her Grace received him frigidly, as you have just explained to me. Now, Bertram has his pride as well as his sensitiveness — ”

“ I understand it all,” exclaimed the duke. “ Idiot that I was, not to comprehend it before. Of course, it was natural enough. Bertram thought himself slighted. He came with enthusiastic feelings of kindness toward us both, and at the very first instant of his encounter with the duchess, those feelings were chilled within him. After so cold a reception, it was clearly for her, as the mistress of the mansion, to make amends by the increasing cordiality of her demeanour. She has been cold, she has been inhospitable, and Bertram’s sensitiveness has shrunk from so much glacial reserve. Truly, Eliza has been to blame, and poor Bertram is to be pitied. I will go at once and speak my mind to the duchess.”

“ Not so, dear uncle,” exclaimed Lord Clandon, holding the duke back. “ You have condescended to listen to my mode of reading the mystery — ”

“ You are as clear-headed, Hugh, as you are generous-hearted,” cried the duke. “ Proceed! I will be guided by your counsel.”

“ If I were you,” continued Clandon, “ I would say nothing to the duchess in the form of upbraiding; I would not even suffer her Grace to perceive that you understand the reason of Bertram’s conduct, or that you attribute it to a prideful sensitiveness at her Grace’s coldness. But this is what I would do: I would take opportunities to throw her Grace and Bertram more together, so that while the former will be forced to unbend, the latter will be compelled to take such unbending as an atonement for past inhospitality. It were a pity that there should be any differences in a family within the circle of which all the elements of happiness and good-fellowship are comprised.”

“ Right, my dear nephew,” exclaimed the duke; “ your counsel is admirable, and it shall be adopted. I will go at once and see what can be done. By the bye, the Lomaxes are about to take their departure; let us hasten to bid them farewell.”

The duke and Lord Clandon accordingly retraced their

way toward the mansion, which they reached just as Sir William Lomax's travelling chariot drove around to the front entrance. The duchess and the other guests, including Bertram, came forth from the hall to see the Lomaxes off, and the farewells being said, the chariot drove away with Sir William and his family. Those who remained behind lingered upon the steps in conversation for a little while, when the duke abruptly said, "I forgot to tell you all that the new fountain has commenced playing this morning at the end of the lower terrace. Come, let us go and witness it. Clandon, give your arm to Miss Anstruther; Bertram, take you charge of the duchess; Mrs. Bailey, permit me to be your escort."

Bertram Vivian could not possibly refuse an injunction so positively delivered; Eliza, on the other hand, could not decline the offer of his arm. The duke flung a quick glance of satisfied triumph at his elder nephew, as much as to bid him observe how dexterously he had taken the first step in following his counsel, and the procession of ladies and gentlemen, consisting of pairs, moved away from the mansion.

The feather rests not more lightly upon the ground from which the slightest breath of the zephyr may lift it, than did Eliza's hand on the arm of Bertram Vivian. They led the way toward the fountain, and Bertram's conversation was confined to topics of the veriest indifference, Eliza only answering in monosyllables. The fountain was reached; it was flinging up its jet of water high into the air, and opinions of approval were generally pronounced.

"Now," said the duke, "let us ramble without restraint about the grounds. The weather is too charmingly fine not to be taken advantage of. Bertram, I do not think you have seen the grapery, and I recollect that the duchess was speaking of it this morning. You go thither. Mrs. Bailey, I promised to show you my golden pheasants; they are in this direction."

The party, consisting of pairs, as already said, separated from the vicinage of the fountain, and thus broke up as it were, each couple sauntering into the path which struck the fancy at the moment, — all but Bertram and Eliza, and they remained riveted near the fountain, each a prey to a deep inward agitation.

But they were now alone together.

CHAPTER VI

BERTRAM AND ELIZA

ALONE together, for the first time since they had thus met at Oaklands, — alone for the first time since they parted three years and some months back, in the little parlour at Oxford. Alone together! dangerous position, and, oh, how embarrassing, how full of ineffable feelings too, for those who had loved so tenderly and so well!

The duchess was marble-pale, but on Bertram's cheeks there was the hectic flush of excitement, — not a flush gradually dying off into the surrounding whiteness of the skin, but a deep red spot upon either cheek-bone, as if consumption's illusive dyes were glowing there. A false, unnatural fire burned in his eyes; it was evident that he felt like a man who had just reached some crisis which had been foreseen, which he had known must come, but yet, when it did arrive, found him utterly unprepared to meet it. He trembled with agitation; he could no longer repress his feelings. A glance over either shoulder showed him that the last couples of the party were disappearing in the shady avenues, and there he was, alone with her whose image was indelibly impressed upon his heart, whose love had been alike his Elysian joy and his ineffable misery.

Several minutes passed, and there they stood, — Eliza seeming to have her looks fixed upon the fountain, but in reality beholding nothing, Bertram now contemplating her with the strong excitement of feelings too long pent up to be repressible any longer.

“Eliza,” he said at length, and that word, that name, was alone thrown out at the time from his lips. It was followed by nought beside, and yet he felt that he had a million things of which to disburden his oppressed spirit.

And that name, when spoken by his lips, thrilled with galvanic effect through her entire form. Never had she thought that her own name was beautiful until she had first heard it pronounced by his tongue. And his voice, too, had all those melting cadences, all that clouded harmony of sadness, which is so perfectly but dangerously calculated to stir up the tenderest emotions of the soul.

"Eliza," he repeated, after a long pause, during which he had gazed on her with mingled rapture and despair, "at length we are alone together."

"And we ought not to be alone together," she answered, in a voice which would have been inaudible were it not for its natural clearness, and now her cheeks were suddenly mantled in blushes.

"Wherefore should we not be alone?" asked Bertram, bitterly. "Is it that your conscience tells you I have come as an accuser, and that you are afraid to look your accuser in the face?"

"No, Mr. Vivian," said the duchess, proudly, as she raised her eyes and fixed them on him for a few moments; then they were suddenly bent downward again, and the pearly tears gushed forth. "I see," she added, again in a voice scarcely audible, "that you believe me guilty of the foulest, vilest, most dishonourable perfidy. But it was not so — No, Bertram, it was not so."

"What, Eliza?" he ejaculated, in amazement. "What is this that I hear?" Then the next moment he added, with scornful bitterness, "But you are heaping insult upon injury to treat me as a poor credulous fool."

"Bertram," answered the duchess, in a voice that was low but clear, and again raising her eyes toward his countenance, on which she gazed with the steadiness of innocence in her looks, "as I have a soul to be saved, as there is an Almighty who hears my words now, and will punish me hereafter if I wilfully deceive you, I was not guilty."

"Eliza," said Bertram, suddenly seized with the wild excitement of rage, fury, and indignation, and again his eyes flashed forth unnatural fires, "if you were deceived, maledictions, ten thousand, thousand maledictions upon the heads of those —"

"Cease!" almost shrieked forth the horrified duchess, her

countenance expressing ineffable agony. "You would invoke curses upon the head of my perished father."

"My God, I comprehend it all!" murmured Bertram, and he placed his hand upon his throbbing brows, as if thereby to steady the brain that rocked and reeled within.

"Yes," continued Eliza, now hurried away by the strong impulse which opportunity as well as her own feelings gave her to justify herself, "I was deceived, Bertram, cruelly deceived. God, who alone can read the human heart, knows how true I was to you, and if an angel-witness were to appear before you now, that holy being could tell how I cherished your image while you were absent, how I cherished it even after the terrible report that you had gone down to a grave in the deep waters. Bertram, it was not until I became another's that I learned the tremendous truth that you were alive."

"Eliza, Eliza! this is agony for me to hear," murmured the wretched Bertram, his countenance filled with despair. "I wrote to your father twice —"

"I know it," she interrupted him softly, but, oh, with what a world of ineffable feeling in her looks: "I know it. My father deceived me — But spare him, spare his memory. May God have forgiven him!"

"Eliza," continued Bertram, "I believe you. There is truth in your looks, truth in your words. I always believed you truthful, until the fatal day when, on arriving in England to hasten and claim you as my bride, I read in a newspaper the report of your marriage. Just Heaven! what searing, blinding, sight-blasting words for me. Do you know, Eliza, that for hours I was like one gone mad, — that I strove to lay violent hands upon myself, and that the persons of the hotel prevented me?"

"Bertram, Bertram, tell me not all this," moaned Eliza, sobbing bitterly. "It is more than I can endure. Since the first instant that the intelligence of your death reached me, my life has been one long agony, one continuous throe of indescribable despair. The rack may torture for hours or for days, and the miseries of the victim will end in death, but my rack, Bertram, has now lasted for more than two long years, and it will last, Bertram, until I go down into the cold grave where alone this heart of mine can be at peace."

"Eliza, it is now for me to implore you to be calm, to

entreat that you will not talk to me in this distracting, frightful way," and Bertram, falling on his knees upon the stone margin of the fountain's reservoir, took her hand and pressed it to his lips, but the next instant dropping it — nay, more, even tossing it away from him — he started up, exclaiming in violent excitement, "That hand is another's. It is sacrilege in me to touch it."

Eliza's tears fell fast and bitterly. She would not have withdrawn her hand of her own accord, — at least not so abruptly as he had flung it from him. She was shocked, she was hurt, she was wounded; the affliction which that poor creature endured in those rending moments was such as no man, even the most vindictive, could wish his mortal enemy to undergo.

"Pardon me, Eliza," said Bertram, in a tone of tenderest contrition; "I was rude — I was brutal. But, heavens! I am not the master of myself," and again he pressed his feverish hand to his wildly throbbing brows. "Let me say a few words of explanation," he resumed, after awhile, and speaking in a more collected manner. "By a miracle — or by almost one — I was rescued from a watery grave in the depths of the Potomac. I knew that the report of an accident in which so many lives were lost — indeed all save one — would be copied from the American into the English newspapers, and when recovered from the almost fatal illness of many weeks into which the shock and horror of the calamity plunged me, I lost no time in writing to your father. Not a doubt was in my mind but that your fears would have been relieved as to myself, long before that letter could reach England, but if not, it was beyond the power of human conception to suppose that your father would keep you in that dark, dreadful belief of my death. Oh, Eliza, how I counted the months, the weeks, the days, the hours, that were to elapse ere I beheld you again! Oh, how I cherished your image! Never man loved as I loved — never, never."

He turned abruptly aside, and his convulsive sobbings smote upon Eliza's ears, striking her very brain as if with a succession of heaviest blows, impaling her heart upon the stake of indescribable agony. And yet she dared not stretch out a hand to touch him, to awaken him as it were from that nightmare of hideous woe. She remembered that she was

a wife, and though the very thought was crucifixion, it was nevertheless one which she must endure.

“Yes, Eliza,” continued Bertram, when after a short space he grew calmer, “no man ever loved as I loved. At length I reached England,” he continued, abruptly taking up the thread of his narrative, “joy, ineffable joy in my heart. Behold yon butterfly sipping the honey from the flower on which it has settled. Thus did my soul rest on the delicious sweets of its own reflections; thus did my spirit repose in delight upon the roseate tints of love, the fairest flower of the human heart. But what if a rude hand were abruptly stretched forth to clutch that poor butterfly, and, stripping off its wings, were to toss it, still alive, on that parterre, to writhe out the rest of its existence in agonies, never more to sip the sweets of the flower from which it was taken? But thus was it with me; thus was it with the soul that lives in this breast.”

And as Bertram spoke, he beat his clenched fist violently upon his chest.

“You will drive me mad,” murmured Eliza, who seemed as if she were about to faint.

“Heaven forgive me,” cried Bertram, “for torturing you thus, but I cannot check this outpouring of my feelings. The burden of my sufferings is too great, Eliza, for my soul to bear. I have but a few words more to say, and I entreat you to hear them. I was at Liverpool when I read the account of your marriage in the paper, — a marriage with my own uncle. What could I think, but that you were faithless to me? When reason returned, I wrote to the government, entreating to be at once appointed to a post in another embassy, for I had resigned my situation in that at Washington. My request was promptly acceded to; I was nominated to the embassy at St. Petersburg. Thither I sped without delay. Never did man travel so fast. It was the mad endeavour to outstrip my thoughts, to distance, so to speak, the agonies which, like pursuing fiends or ravenous wolves, were upon my track. At length I was ordered home to England with important despatches. I arrived, as you are aware, but a few days back, and I said to myself, ‘I will see her once more. Such perfidy as hers, in return for so much love, must not go unreprieved. Whatever the risk be, I will see her.’ And there was another reason too, Eliza:

it was that I purposed to give back your ring, and to demand mine."

"Take back your ring, Bertram," said Eliza, in a low, tremulous voice, and now it seemed to her that she was about to sever the very last feeble tie which in any way connected her with an Elysian past, and as she spoke, she slowly drew forth the ring from her bosom.

"Ah," ejaculated Bertram Vivian, a wild joy flashing suddenly in his eyes, "you have kept it there, next to your heart. Oh, then, Eliza, you have not ceased to love me, even when becoming another's?"

"Bid the flower divest itself of its fragrance, bid the green plant put off its verdure of its own accord," she answered, solemnly, "and it is commanding impossibilities. Bid the waters of that fountain cease to well upward while the motive power is there, and it were also commanding what cannot be done. Think not therefore that my heart could put away that love which has become as inseparable from it in life as the fragrance is from the flower or the verdure from the plant while the warm season lasts. Think not either that it is in my power to still the feelings which rise upward from the hidden springs of my soul."

There was a holy solemnity, a sanctified pathos, in Eliza's tone as she thus spoke, and as her words ceased, she proffered the ring which she had drawn forth from her bosom.

"No, Eliza, no," exclaimed Bertram, with renewed excitement. "I will not take it back. Whatever henceforth we may be to each other, and that perhaps is as nothing," he added, bitterly, "still, still shall you retain the pledge of my love, as I will keep the pledge of yours. There can be no sin in this."

"I will keep it, Bertram," answered the duchess, after a few moments' hesitation, and she consigned the ring back to its resting-place next her heart.

"Oh, but if all this be possible," abruptly exclaimed Bertram Vivian, as fresh ideas came sweeping through his mind, but replete with newly awakened suspicion and mistrust, all the force and anguish of which were at the same instant reflected in his countenance, "how was it, Eliza, that you bestowed your hand upon mine own uncle? Did it not strike you that there was something to shock the purity of the feelings —"

“Accuse me not, Bertram,” interrupted Eliza, with a look full of candid yet mournful ingenuousness. “There is not a question you can put to me which I am not prepared to answer. And I will answer every one frankly and truthfully. Oh, if this were not my purpose, I might shield myself in dissimulations of all kinds — I might affect offended pride and indignant innocence at being thus questioned. But as my soul is guileless, it needs not such artifices wherein to take refuge. Bertram,” continued the young lady, with an expression of ineffable woe upon her countenance and anguish in her tones, “you know not all the arts that were adopted to enmesh me in this web which is inextricable. God forgive me that I should thus have to allude to my own father, but it is so. As I have a soul to be saved, I knew not that my husband was your uncle until the knowledge came too late. Never had I heard that the Marquisate of Vivian-dale had been changed into the Dukedom of Marchmont — ”

“One word, Eliza,” ejaculated Bertram, who during the first portion of her speech had become all confidence and trustfulness in her sincerity, but in whose heart the reptile of suspicion suddenly lifted up its head again; “is it possible that during the months of courtship my uncle never once alluded to myself?”

“Never once,” responded Eliza, emphatically. “He never spoke of his relations, much less named them. And my father was careful that the name of Vivian should never be mentioned in my hearing, in connection with the Duke of Marchmont. Are you not aware that the nuptials were private?”

“Ah, private, I understand,” ejaculated Bertram bitterly; “the better to exclude the members of the family. But as you have mentioned the nuptials, Eliza,” he went on to say, and now his eyes were riveted upon her with all the scrutinizing keenness of fresh suspicion, fresh distrust, “when the minister was performing the ceremony, did he not ask you if you would take John Ferdinand Henry Vivian, Duke of Marchmont, as your husband? And you said yes.”

“Bertram,” responded Eliza, steadily meeting his gaze with looks that were all ingenuous sadness and mournful innocence, “that marriage ceremony was to me a dream at the time; it appears to me a dream now. I beheld everything through a mist, and if I look back upon it from the

present moment, it still appears a something shrouded in obscurity and gloom. Yes, it was a dream,— a waking dream, in which I slumbered with my eyes open. I beheld nought, I heard nought, I felt nought. No, I felt not even when the marriage-ring was placed upon my finger, and if I responded yes to the question that was put to me, it was either mechanically, or else because there was some one nigh to whisper the word in my ear. Had the name of him whom I was taking as a husband been that of Lucifer himself, I should not have heard it, I should not have perceived it in that paralysis of the senses; I should have unconsciously become the bride of Satan. Oh, Bertram, it is not the least cruel of all the phases of the ordeal of torture through which my lorn and desolate existence has been dragged,— it is not the least cruel, I say, that I am compelled to give these explanations, these self-vindications now."

"Oh, wretch that I am, it is I who torture you," exclaimed Bertram, literally shivering from head to foot in the wildness of his excitement and the frenzy of his feelings. "I who love you so madly am torturing you thus horribly. But again I declare to you, Eliza, that I am not master of myself. God knows I strive to look upon the world in the same light that I used to regard it, as one of sunshine and of flowers, but the sunshine turns into a dark, noisome mist enveloping me in a pestilential haze, the flowers, so beautiful to the eye, appear to exhale poisons, and methinks that if I stretch forth my hand to pluck one, a reptile would start forth from amidst the foliage and fix its venomous fangs upon my flesh. Yes, everything is changed to me. The world appears to be made up of deceits, with a gloss over all; the parterres of roses are but hidden pitfalls for the feet. Is it not dreadful, Eliza, that one so young as I should have his heart thus seared, thus warped, thus devastated, so that everything I behold or reflect upon is viewed with suspicion and mistrust?"

"It is dreadful, dreadful, Bertram," murmured the unhappy young lady, quivering from head to foot. "But for Heaven's sake, talk no more thus!"

"What would you have me talk of?" cried Bertram, with increasing bitterness. "Would you have me speak of happiness? It is gone for ever. Of hope? There is none for me. What inducement have I to prosecute a career which

would have led me on to fame and fortune? She on whose brow it would have been the proudest moment of my life to place the laurels won by intellect, or the coronet to be gained in the service of my country, has become another's. Ah, Eliza," he ejaculated abruptly, as a fresh suspicion flashed to his mind, "you said just now that you had some knowledge of those letters which I wrote to your father —"

"I found them in his desk after his decease," interrupted the duchess. "Then — and not till then — did I learn that you were alive. Then, too, — and not till then, — did I learn that I might have been yours. No mortal eyes, Bertram, beheld my rending anguish on that occasion. But God saw it, and believe me, that never did the heart of woman throb with such throes, never did human eyes shed such tears, never did living creature kneel for awhile in such profound dark, unutterable despair. And yet there was one thing, Bertram, for which I thanked God, and only one thing. It was that you had not perished in the deep waters, that your young life had not been snatched away."

"Would to Heaven that I had so died, Eliza!" ejaculated Bertram, bitterly. "But those letters of mine, those two letters, did your father leave them that you might become acquainted with his guilt?"

"No," she responded. "Perhaps you have been told that he died suddenly, that he was stricken down all in an instant —"

"Ay, as if by the blasting lightning," interjected Bertram, with a fierce, sardonic bitterness. "Perhaps there was Heaven's retribution in that."

"Spare me, spare me," moaned the wretched Eliza, clasping her hands in agony. "Remember that it is to the daughter of that departed father you are now speaking."

"God help me, Eliza!" exclaimed Bertram, once more pressing his hand to his brow, and staggering back a few paces; "I tell you that I am going mad. But those letters, wherefore had he not destroyed them?"

"It is a mystery which I cannot explain," replied the duchess, in a low, murmuring voice. "Perhaps an unknown, an unaccountable influence led him to preserve them; or perhaps it was an oversight —"

"No, no, Eliza," ejaculated Vivian, with feverish quickness. "It was no oversight, it was the all-powerful, unseen,

unknown, but irresistible influence of which you have spoken. The finger of Heaven was in it. It was decreed that the evidences of my constancy, my fidelity, my unperished and imperishable love, should survive your father, that those evidences should not constitute a secret to die with him, but that they should exist to meet your eyes, and convince you that Bertram Vivian was true to his plight."

"And do you still mean to reproach me?" asked Eliza, in tones that were scarcely audible, while the tears rained down her cheeks. "It is cruel, Bertram, it is unkind, after all the explanations I have given you. Methought that you were ere now satisfied of — of — my own imperishable love, when you saw that I carried your ring next to my heart?"

"Eliza, I have wronged you," exclaimed Vivian, who throughout this long and painful interview had been moved by a thousand different and conflicting impulses. "Pardon — forgive me. My conduct has not only been unkind; it is brutal, cowardly, base. You have been a victim — I see it all. May Heaven have mercy upon us both!"

"And now, Bertram," asked Eliza, at length coming to the question which she had foreseen must be put, "what is to be done? How will you act?"

"What mean you?" he demanded, abruptly, a wild joy flashing in his eyes. "Would you —"

"Bertram, Bertram," almost shrieked forth Eliza, as she read what was passing in his mind. "No, there is one sacrifice I cannot make for you, and this is the sacrifice of my duty to my husband. I would lay down my life for you, but not for worlds would I prove faithless to the vows of duty, constancy, and obedience which I pledged to him whose name I bear."

"Eliza, forgive me, pardon me, I beseech you," said Bertram, in a tone and with a look of deepest, most humiliating contrition. "If for an instant I yielded to the wild, the thrilling, the impossible hope which flashed to my mind, it was not that I could deliberately insult the purity of your character. No, no! Heaven forbid that I should prove a villain, that I should brand myself as a wretch — No, no, I will not."

He seized the hand of the duchess as he thus enthusiastically spoke, and pressed it with convulsive violence.

"Bertram," she said, in a low, soft voice, as she gently

disengaged her hand, "again I ask you what you will do, now that the interview which was inevitable has taken place? You must not remain here."

"And I cannot leave all in a moment," quickly responded Vivian. "Take my arm, let us slowly return to the mansion. For a few days, Eliza, must I linger here; it would excite the strangest thoughts if I were to depart precipitately."

"And I have been half-afraid, Bertram," murmured the duchess, "that strange thoughts have already been excited by your demeanour toward me."

"Oh, I have been half-mad," he ejaculated. "I have known not what to do. When coldest and most distant toward you, when, believing you wilfully faithless, I have been pointedly frigid and reserved in my manner, my heart was in reality bursting. I could have thrown myself at your feet, imploring your pardon, I could have cried out in the strong voice of my agony, I could have melted into tears and wept like a child. But you ask me what I will do? I will remain yet a few days, until the duke shall have procured for me the promised diplomatic situation in some far-off land, — the farther off, the better, and then, Eliza, we will part — to meet no more."

The duchess gave no response. She took Vivian's arm, and they walked on together through a shady avenue toward the house. She would fain have urged his prompt departure; she trembled lest, after this interview, there should be a change in their demeanour toward each other, so marked and pointed as to excite attention. But how could she express a wish to hurry him away? How could she utter the word which was to make him precipitate the moment when he would bid farewell to her for ever? She could not, she had not the heart to do so; while, on the other hand, she felt so firm in the rectitude of her own principles, so strong in the sense of that duty which she owed to her husband, that she did not even insult herself by thinking of the necessity of avoiding temptation.

They entered the mansion, and Eliza at once retired to her own boudoir, there to reflect, in solitude and without restraint, upon all that had taken place, and there, perhaps, to weep likewise over her sad, sad lot which might have been so different.

CHAPTER VII

THE SHADY AVENUE

THAT evening, when a domestic entered the drawing-room to announce that dinner was served up, Bertram hastened forward to escort the Duchess of Marchmont to the banqueting-room — an act of courtesy which for some days he had ceased to perform. And now, too, it was all the more marked, inasmuch as it was the place of his elder brother, Lord Clandon, to perform that ceremonial office. But the duke was pleased when he beheld the incident, and he flung a significant look upon Lord Clandon, as much as to bid him observe that the duchess and Bertram were already getting upon a little more friendly footing, so that the elements of discord might be expected soon to disappear from the bosom of the family.

Bertram sat next to the duchess at dinner, and though a complete change had taken place in his mind toward her, though he now regarded her as a victim who still loved him, and not as a wilfully faithless one who had ceased to love, he had a sufficient power of self-control not to show by his conduct any abrupt alteration in his feelings. He was now, to all outward appearance, courteously polite, and nothing more, — courteously polite and profoundly respectful. Still that politeness — evidencing itself in the thousand little attentions which the circumstances of the dinner-table enable a gentleman to manifest toward a lady next to whom he is placed — was a considerable advance upon the former glacial frigidity of his demeanour. The duke, however, was pleased; Lord Clandon seemed likewise gratified by his brother's courtesy toward their young and beautiful relative, and his lordship took an opportunity to whisper to the duke when the ladies had retired, "You see, dear

uncle, that my advice was good. Her Grace has unbent somewhat, and Bertram's wounded pride is healing proportionately."

On the following day there was a riding-party after breakfast. Bertram required not to be pressed to join it, and somehow or another, he found himself, when they started off, by Eliza's side. In the afternoon there was a boating-party; Bertram had no letters to write, no other kind of exercise, recommended by his physician, to take, no plea of indisposition to keep him indoors. He escorted the duchess to the barge, and he again kept by her side when they took their places therein. But at dinner-time prudence whispered in his ear that he must not continue to monopolize the society of his fair relative; Lord Clandon therefore escorted her to the banqueting-room.

In the evening, when they were all in the drawing-room, Lord Clandon, after lounging about with a languid, fashionable ease, chatting to one, then to another, pausing to look over a print, or loitering a few minutes near the piano at which a young lady was seated, presently dropped into a chair next to that occupied by the duchess, for Bertram, having been seated with her for the previous half-hour, had thought it prudent to bestow some attention on others present.

"You know not," said Lord Clandon, in a low voice to Eliza, "how deeply I felt my first meeting with that dearly beloved brother of mine, after our separation of more than three years. Your Grace must not think me so spoilt by the pursuits of the fashionable world as to have lost all fraternal love. Besides, Bertram is a brother of whom one can be proud. I do really believe he is the handsomest young man in all England. What exquisitely chiseled features! what symmetry of form! But all that is nothing in comparison with the light of intellect which shines upon his noble brow. And yet I fear me," added Clandon, in a tone of mysterious confidence, "that he is not happy."

Eliza was actually frightened as Hugh addressed her in these terms. She trembled to the very utmost confines of her being, but it was with an inward tremor, outwardly invisible. She dreaded lest Clandon had penetrated the secret, but as she bent her searching gaze upon him, while he was riveting his own looks upon the graceful form of Ber-

tram at the farther extremity of the room, she felt satisfied that there was really nothing significant in his remarks, but that they were merely conversational, the topic being caught up by accident at the moment.

"Yes," continued Clandon, "I believe and hope that Bertram is destined to shine in the world. My uncle, your Grace's noble husband, — as noble in nature as he is in name, — has written most pressing to the government to appoint Bertram as minister to one of the minor courts, and I have no doubt that in a few days intelligence will arrive that the Duke of Marchmont's interest has not been exercised in vain."

Eliza made some suitable response, and Lord Clandon, after a little more conversation of the same sort, highly eulogistic of Bertram, rose and sauntered away to another part of the room.

"My dear Mrs. Bailey," he presently took an opportunity of whispering in this lady's ear, "you saw yesterday and to-day that there has been some little change in my brother's demeanour toward the duchess. The fact is, I have no doubt things will be all right now, and those two in whom we are both naturally so much interested will get upon that amicable footing whereupon they ought to stand together."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Bailey, also in a low, cautious tone. "I thought that Mr. Vivian was behaving differently, for when we met at breakfast this morning, and the duchess glanced at the cold chicken, your brother was the first to offer her a wing."

"Nothing can transcend your shrewdness and penetration, my dear Mrs. Bailey," rejoined Clandon, with a smile, and he then lounged toward the piano again.

A week passed away from the date of that interview which we have recorded at such length in the preceding chapter, — an interview in which all the acutest and intensest feelings of which human nature is susceptible were called into play. Bertram and Eliza loved as fondly as ever; how could it be otherwise? But still they were both shielded against temptation by the rectitude of their principles, and thus when left alone for hours together, it was only in their looks and in their sighs that the duchess was unfaithful in her duty to a husband, or Bertram in that toward an uncle. They spoke no more of their love; it was a topic which by tacit

consent they avoided. There was no significant pressure of the hands, no embrace snatched, no kiss exchanged. Yet as they sat or walked together, they often found themselves, when unobserved by others, gazing into the depths of each other's eyes; and when suddenly recollecting that there was impropriety and danger in this, they averted their looks amidst blushes on the cheeks and sighs coming up from the heart, — those looks, however, which were again so soon to meet and blend in the soft transfusion of their spirits. And these looks, impossible of control, impossible of repression, conveyed all the adoration which was mutually felt, — fondness commingling with fondness, the beams of tenderness intertwining together. But their discourse, as we have already said, was not upon love, and they were both too intellectual to dwell incessantly upon light, every-day topics, while, on the other hand, they could not bring their minds to the calm, serious, deliberate discussion of books, the sciences, or the arts. Therefore was it that long intervals of silence would reign between them, but a silence only of the tongues, — a silence in the midst of which a thousand things were said by the eloquent language of the eyes. Any stranger who might have seen that young man of godlike beauty, and that young lady of excelling loveliness, would have at once concluded that they were mated in marriage, or that they were lovers soon to be so joined, for even the most superficial glance must have perceived a certain fitness in the union of this couple. But destiny had decreed otherwise: they loved, yet they were not mated; they adored each other, but a stupendous gulf existed between them.

The Duke of Marchmont never for a moment suspected that it was possible for his wife and Bertram to form an attachment for each other, much less that they already loved from an old-standing acquaintance. He believed in the high honour of his nephew and in the purity of his wife. And he was right in so believing. He never even asked himself whether it was dangerous that they should thus be thrown together; the thought never for an instant entered his head. He was by no means a jealous man; that is to say, his jealousy was difficult to excite save and except by palpable evidence and on unquestionable grounds. He had flattered himself that Eliza loved him, and in the glacial coldness which she and Bertram had mutually shown during

the first few days of the young man's presence at Oaklands, he had seen what he thought to be the demonstrations of positive aversion toward each other. Now, therefore, that he saw their manner mutually changed, he rejoiced to think that they had got upon a more friendly footing, and he said to himself, "Eliza is making atonement for her chilling inhospitality of the first ten days, and Bertram, with a chivalrous magnanimity, is doing his best to convince her that her former conduct is forgotten and forgiven. Hugh certainly gave me the best possible advice, and I wronged poor Bertram when I attributed the frigid reserve of his demeanour to an ungenerous aversion to the alliance which I have formed."

Thus, we say, did a week pass from the date of that interview in which Bertram and Eliza gave mutual explanations, and passed through such an ordeal of rending, agonizing emotions. This week flew rapidly away in the estimation of the two lovers, for such indeed they were. They both felt that it was wrong to be so much together, dangerous to what little remained of their wrecked happiness, if not dangerous to their virtue. Yet by an irresistible attraction were they brought together again and again, and each successive day beheld them more and more in each other's society. This was at least some happiness for them; it was another dream in which they were to a certain extent cradled, but a dream to the waking up from which they neither dared to look forward. At length, however, they were startled from this dream, as rudely as a loud clanging bell smites upon the ear of a sleeper, and they were startled up, too, unto a sense of anguish as acute as that which the doomed one feels when awakened by the striking of the clock which tells him that in another hour he is to die.

One morning, when the letters and newspapers were placed upon the breakfast-table, by the Duke of Marchmont's side, there was one document amongst the missives which the experienced eye of Bertram at once recognized as a despatch from the Foreign Office; and the quick glance which he threw upon the duchess made her likewise aware that something might now be expected, — something that should decree the doom of separation. The duke took up the packet, opened it, read it, and then, extending his hand to Bertram, said with a smiling countenance, "Permit me,

my dear nephew, to be the first to congratulate you on your appointment as minister to the court of Florence."

"And I, my dear brother," exclaimed Lord Clandon, with every demonstration of pride and joy, "likewise congratulate you on this distinguished promotion."

Eliza proffered congratulations also, but it was with an almost preterhuman effort that she kept down the flood of feelings which surged up into her very throat. Mrs. Bailey and the other guests followed in the congratulatory strain, but the duchess perceived that it was with a forced urbanity and a difficultly repressed petulance of impatience that Bertram responded in a suitable and becoming manner.

"You perceive, my dear nephew," resumed the duke, "that your nomination to the Tuscan embassy is accompanied by the strictest injunctions that you set off for Italy with the least possible delay. Much as I shall be grieved to part with you, I dare not suffer my own selfish feelings to stand in the way of your public duties. To-morrow therefore, Bertram, you must bid us farewell."

"Yes, to-morrow," said the young man, in a voice the strangeness of which was only comprehended by Eliza, unless indeed it was also understood by Lord Clandon, who knew the secret of their love, for Mrs. Bailey was at the moment too busy in the discussion of a piece of perigord pie to take notice of anything else.

After breakfast Eliza and Bertram walked forth together in the garden. Mrs. Bailey and the other guests accompanied Lord Clandon on a visit to the grapery; the Duke of Marchmont retired to the library, to address a letter to the Foreign Secretary thanking that minister for the prompt attention paid to his request on Bertram's behalf. But on reaching the library, the duke perceived a note lying on the writing-table, addressed to himself. He wondered that it should have been left there, instead of being brought in unto him, as was the custom with all correspondence, the instant of its arrival. It was not a letter with any postmark upon it, and therefore it had not come from any distance. The writing of the address was unknown to the duke, but it occurred to him that it was written in a feigned hand. The writing all sloped backward instead of forward, just as if penned by the left hand instead of with the right; in

short, it bore every indication of a studied attempt to disguise what it naturally would have been.

The duke opened it, but scarcely had he read the first two or three lines when the note dropped from his hand. He grew pale as death; sickness at the heart first seized upon him, then an almost maddening rage, and he was rushing to the door, when he abruptly stopped short. He grew calm all in an instant, but it was a terrible calmness, — a calmness full of deep, portentous menace. He picked up the note and read it through. Its contents were not long, but they were significant, — fearfully, terribly significant. This much might have been judged, were an observer present, by the growing corrugation of the duke's brow, the contraction of his forehead into lines so deep, so strongly marked that it appeared as if they never could leave that forehead in its wonted smoothness again.

"No," he muttered between his teeth, "it cannot be. It is a foul, base calumny. An anonymous writer! What faith is to be put in him? And yet — and yet — Eternal God! if it be so, I am the most miserable of men. Ay, but my vengeance shall be terrible."

Then he paced to and fro in violent agitation, until suddenly stopping short again, he looked at the letter once more. Dark and ominous was the shade which came over his countenance; his eyes shone with a sinister fire, his lips, ashy white, quivered as if with the palsy.

"No, no," he ejaculated at length, and as if in answer to some thought or plan which had almost settled itself in his mind; "not without better proof than this."

He slowly folded up the note, consigned it to his waistcoat pocket, and issued from the mansion by a private staircase and a side door. He descended into the grounds, plunging at once in the midst of the most thickly wooded avenues. In a few minutes he beheld his wife and Bertram walking at a little distance. She was not leaning upon his arm; there was nothing in their demeanour to confirm the suspicion and justify the jealous rage which that anonymous letter had excited in the duke's soul. Presently they turned at the end of the avenue; he concealed himself behind a group of evergreens, too thick for himself either to see or to be seen. But it was to their discourse, as they passed the spot, that he meant to listen. In a few minutes they drew near, and

quite unconscious who was hidden by those bushes, they did pass.

"I shall leave immediately after breakfast to-morrow morning," Bertram was saying. "I must first repair to London, to pay my respects to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and then without loss of time must I proceed to Florence. It is most kind of my uncle to have interested himself in procuring me this appointment."

"Most kind," observed Eliza.

Then there was a pause in the discourse, so that as they passed on, the duke heard no more of the conversation when it was resumed. But if through the dense foliage his eyes had been able to observe the countenance of the two lovers, he would have seen that their looks were mournfully significant enough, though the words which had reached his ears were without the slightest import. Yet even in them there was a significancy, though the duke comprehended it not. They had been conversing seriously on the approaching separation; they had exerted all their fortitude to the attunement of their minds to the point necessary to make them recognize and acknowledge that it was better they should thus separate. There was consequently in their hearts a thankfulness of deeper meaning toward the duke than that which their words seemed to express, — a thankfulness that through his interest the opportunity and period had been brought about for a separation which they both laboured to recognize as so necessary. But the Duke of Marchmont, who neither saw their looks nor had overheard the previous portions of their discourse, was for a moment shocked that he should have given way to jealous suspicions on the faith of an anonymous letter. He was seized with a sense of profound humiliation; the natural pride of his soul revolted against his own conduct, and hurrying away from his hiding-place, he regained the mansion by a circuitous path.

Nevertheless the fiend of suspicion had obtained an entry into his soul; the demon of jealousy could not be so readily expelled as he wished, hoped, and thought. He endeavoured to compose himself to write, but he could not. He was restless and uneasy, and twenty times during the next hour did he draw forth the anonymous letter and scan its contents again. When luncheon was served up, he carefully watched

the conduct of Bertram and Eliza toward each other, though without having the slightest appearance of doing so. His perception was now sharpened, and he caught a rapid exchange of glances between them, which under other circumstances he would not have noticed, but which were now fraught with a tremendous significancy to his imagination.

After luncheon, Lord Clandon proposed a boating-party, which was readily assented to by every one present. Again did the duke, during this recreation, continue to watch his wife and Bertram, and nothing occurred to strengthen his suspicions, and once more did he endeavour to reason himself into the belief that they were utterly unfounded. At about four o'clock the company, leaving the boats, retraced their way to the mansion, and the ladies separated to their own chambers to make some change in their toilets. The duke retired to the library, which commanded a view of the grounds, and from the window did he keep watch. Presently he beheld Eliza and Bertram straying forth alone together, and slowly bending their steps toward the shady avenues. Again too did he descend by the private staircase and issue forth by the side door.

It was a delicious autumnal afternoon, and a genial warmth filled the atmosphere. Eliza had already dressed herself for dinner, when putting off her boating raiment, so as to avoid the trouble of performing another toilet. She wore a dark half-mourning dress, with a low body, according to the fashion of the times. Her arms were bare, — those arms so exquisitely rounded; her bosom, neck, and shoulders shone dazzlingly in their polished whiteness. Nothing sets off a finely rounded form to greater advantage than dark apparel, and nothing can throw out the transparent purity of the skin more brilliantly. The superb contours of Eliza's shape, now in all the glory of rich womanhood, and the spotless beauty of her complexion, were thus advantageously displayed by her half-mourning garb. Her raven hair, with a rich velvet gloss upon it, flowed in heavy masses upon those dazzling shoulders, and formed a dark cloud against which her swanlike neck seemed an alabaster pillar. Never in the eyes of Bertram Vivian had she seemed so wondrously beautiful before, and as he walked by her side, gazing upon her with an irresistible fascination, his heart, first melting into tenderness, was soon rent with agony at the

thought that this was the last time they would ever be alone together, — the last time perhaps that he would ever have an opportunity of so gazing, without restraint, on the object of his heart's adoration. And she too was profoundly moved. He had said at the interview by the fountain that when they parted it would be for ever, and these words he had not since recalled; they remained therefore deeply imprinted upon her heart.

“To-morrow, Eliza,” said Bertram, at length breaking a long silence, and speaking in the low, deep voice of indescribable mournfulness, “to-morrow we shall separate, and prudence tells me that it must be for ever. Would to God,” he exclaimed, in a sudden paroxysm of that wild excitement which he had displayed at the fountain, but to which until now he had not again given way, — “would to God that I had not lingered here so long. I feel like one whose next step will be to plunge into the vortex of despair.”

“Bertram, Bertram,” murmured the afflicted lady, “we must exert that fortitude which by tacit consent has hitherto sustained us since we met yonder,” — and her eyes glanced toward the fountain.

“Oh, that expression of tacit consent, Eliza,” ejaculated Vivian; “does it not show that there is a blending of our spirits, a secret intelligence existing between our hearts, a transfusion of feeling from soul to soul —”

“Hush, Bertram,” said the duchess; “we must not, we dare not give way again to our recollections of the past.”

“Oh, but that past is all our own, Eliza,” cried Vivian, with growing excitement; “though the present is taken from us, and the future — Ah, that future, dating from to-morrow. It will be a hideous blank on which I shudder to fix my gaze. No, not a hideous blank; it will be a world of rending, torturing feelings. By Heaven, Eliza, I shall go mad! I cannot endure it — I shall lay violent hands upon myself.”

“Bertram,” almost shrieked forth the wretched duchess, in a voice of piercing agony, “you horrify me — you fill me with despair.”

“Heaven forgive me, Eliza, for thus torturing you,” said Bertram, quickly, “but I am not able to control my feelings. Oh, wherefore was I born to endure so much misery? Wherefore did I ever know you? Angel that you were to me at the

time when we first loved, it is anguish, it is torture, it is crucifixion, to look upon you with the knowledge that you are lost to me, — that you are another's. Oh, Eliza, you know not how much I was indebted to that love of yours. I never told you the truth before; I will tell it to you now. I was plunging headlong into the vortex of dissipation, I was weakly and shamefully suffering myself to be led on into vicious pleasures and the ways of extravagance, when you suddenly appeared on my path, clothed with all the brightness and the sweetness of a guardian angel. I loved you; you loved me in return, and it was that delicious love of yours which made me an altered being. From that moment my existence has been one of purity and honour, and I can look the world in the face without being conscious of aught to raise up a blush to my cheeks. It was you who did this, Eliza, you who saved me. How much therefore do I owe you! with what grateful recollections is my love intertwined. Think you, then, that a love which is so blended with gratitude can easily endure disappointment? No, Eliza, no. You are dearer to me than life, and to-morrow, when we separate, it will be for me like parting from that very life itself."

"Oh, Bertram, what can I say, what can I do, to comfort you?" murmured the almost heart-broken Eliza, as the tears rained down her cheeks and her bosom was convulsed with sobs.

"What can you do, what can you say, Eliza? Nothing, nothing. There is but one thing — No, no, I dare not mention it; I will not entice you from your husband. But to leave you with him is to condemn myself to a life of horror, or else to cut it short and perish in the blood of a distracted suicide."

"Bertram," shrieked Eliza, wildly, "recall those dreadful words. Oh, recall them, I implore you! For my sake, for all the love I bear you —"

"Oh, to hear you speak thus of your love," cried the impetuous and impassioned Bertram, "is the revival of joy ineffable," and obedient to the impulse of the moment, he caught Eliza in his arms, he strained her to his breast.

At that instant a cry so wild and savage that it resembled that of a ferocious hyena smote on the ears of Bertram and the duchess, and starting from each other's embrace, they

flung their terrified looks around. Those looks encountered the duke, who was just emerging from a shady avenue. Emerging! no, he was rushing on with the mad fury of the wild beast whose cry his own had resembled, and Eliza, with a half-stifled moan of soul-crushed agony, dropped senseless upon the ground. All in an instant the spectacle of the rapidly advancing duke vanished from Bertram's gaze; he beheld only the inanimate form of the beloved Eliza. He raised her in his arms; kneeling upon the ground, he supported her against his breast. He besought her in passionate accents to open her eyes and to look upon him.

"Leave her, sir," thundered the voice of the duke; "leave her, sir. Begone — depart hence, execrable villain that you are."

"Hear me, uncle, hear me, I conjure you!" exclaimed Vivian, a prey to such wild and torturing feelings as no pen can describe. "If not for my sake, at least for hers —"

"Begone, sir," again thundered forth the duke, and rushing forward, he violently tore the still inanimate form of his wife from Bertram's arms.

At this instant it happened that two of the female servants, having been to some other part of the grounds, appeared upon the spot, to which they were attracted by the fierce and thundering ejaculations of their ducal master. They were astounded at what they beheld, — that master tearing away his wife from the arms of Bertram Vivian, the duchess insensible, Bertram himself pale and quivering with excitement.

"Bear your mistress to the house," said the duke, sternly, "and consign her to the care of her maids."

The two female domestics hastened to obey the instructions thus given them, and as they bore away the inanimate form of Eliza, the duke turned to follow.

"Uncle, for God's sake hear me!" cried Bertram, in a voice of most imploring agony, as he caught the duke by the arm.

"Not a word, sir, not a single word," vociferated the furious husband, and in his mad rage he struck his nephew a violent blow upon the temple.

The young man's countenance became crimson, turning all in a moment from the whiteness of a sheet to the hue of a peony, and his first impulse was to avenge the blow. But

not more quickly flashes the lightning through the air than did the recollection glance in unto Bertram's mind that it was his uncle — a much older man than himself — who had thus struck him, and turning abruptly away, he rushed madly along the avenue. At the extremity thereof he encountered his brother, Lord Clandon.

"Bertram! for Heaven's sake what is the matter?" exclaimed Hugh, with an air of amazement at his brother's fearfully excited looks and frenzied pace.

"Hugh," cried Bertram, stopping suddenly short, and addressing Lord Clandon in broken sentences, "something terrible has happened — terrible, terrible. Our uncle believes that Eliza is guilty — For God's sake go to him! Assure him that on the oath of one who never yet was convicted of falsehood, she is innocent! Dearest, dearest brother, save poor Eliza, save her, for God's sake! No matter what may happen to me!"

"But what has occurred, Bertram? Tell me; speak! You know that I will do anything I can to serve you —"

"The tale is too long to tell," hastily responded the younger brother, "and every moment is precious, — precious as life itself. Go quick — see the duke — swear to him that his wife is innocent. Go, Hugh, go, I beseech you."

"But where can I see you again?" asked Lord Clandon, quickly. "It is evident that you are in a state of excitement —"

"See me?" ejaculated Bertram, as if for a moment scarcely comprehending the question. "Yes, yes, I must see you again — I must receive the assurance that the duke is satisfied. Where shall we meet? I dare not return — Come to me presently at the village tavern; I will await you there."

"Be it so," rejoined Clandon, rapidly. "I will do my best," and he hurried toward the mansion, while Bertram Vivian pursued his own frenzied, distracted course in the direction of the village about a mile distant.

CHAPTER VIII

THE AVENGING HUSBAND

LORD CLANDON reached the house, and in the looks of the domestics whom he found in the hall he beheld consternation and wonderment depicted. At the same instant the Duke of Marchmont came hastening down the staircase, crying in a loud voice, "Let Mrs. Bailey's carriage be got ready this moment. Hasten away, some of you, to give the orders. Let there be not a single instant lost unnecessarily."

Three or four footmen scampered off to the stables to issue their master's commands, and the duke, now perceiving Lord Clandon, walked straight up to him with sternly fierce looks, and said, in tones of deep, concentrated rage, "Hugh, my happiness is wrecked through your accursed counsel."

"For Heaven's sake, my dear uncle," exclaimed Lord Clandon, "do not reproach me! Be just, be generous, as you have ever yet proved yourself."

"Oh, Hugh, I am half-mad!" murmured the duke. "Forgive me — I wronged you. But come hither."

Thus speaking, he hurried his nephew into the nearest parlour, and when they were alone there together, he began pacing to and fro in the most violent agitation.

"My dear uncle, it kills me to behold you thus," said Clandon, approaching his relative with an air of earnest, sympathizing entreaty. "Tell me what I can do —"

"Nothing, nothing; my happiness is gone for ever. And yet," said the duke, suddenly assuming a calmer aspect and a more dignified manner, "I ought not to torture myself thus for a vile woman and an infamous young man. Hugh, are you aware," he added, speaking as if through his set teeth, "that she whom I lately called my wife and loved as such is unworthy of that name and of that love?"

"Alas! my dear uncle," responded Lord Clandon, "I met my unfortunate brother, and he —"

"Not a syllable, Hugh," interrupted the duke, sternly, "not a syllable. I know your generous heart, I know how you love your brother, but if you dare plead for him, I quit the room this instant, or you shall quit the house for ever. I know that they will tell me they are innocent. Guilt always proclaims its innocence, and the more damning it is, the bolder is its effrontery. Hugh, not another word," and thus speaking, the Duke of Marchmont walked forth from the room.

Lord Clandon remained there for a few minutes after his uncle had left him, and then he hastily ascended toward the drawing-room. But on the landing he met Mrs. Bailey, who was descending from her own chamber, ready dressed as if for a journey.

"Oh, dear me, my lord," she said, quivering with a nervous trepidation, "what a dreadful thing! The duke has ordered me to take Eliza away as soon as my travelling-carriage can be got in readiness —"

"And what else did he say?" asked Hugh, eagerly.

"Nothing," responded Mrs. Bailey; "nor would he allow me to put in a single word. I hope, my lord, you have not told his Grace all that I said to you the other day?"

"Not for worlds, Mrs. Bailey, not for worlds, my dear madam," rejoined Clandon, hastily. "And for Heaven's sake, if the duke questions you in any shape or form before you take your departure, beware how you breathe a syllable of those circumstances which you mentioned to me."

"I shall take very good care not to do that," answered the lady, still trembling with nervous agitation. "Oh, what a shocking thing! And I who hadn't my smelling-bottle at the moment I heard of it."

"Hush! footsteps are ascending," said Lord Clandon.

In a few moments the Duke of Marchmont made his appearance; his demeanour now sternly and haughtily composed, but with an evidently forced rigidity of the features, and his countenance was ghastly pale.

"My dear madam," he said, approaching Mrs. Bailey and taking her hand, "I am grieved that it should become your duty, as my wife's only remaining relative upon her own side, to bear her away from a house which ceases to be

her home. I thank you for the readiness with which you have complied with my request. Take the guilty woman with you; in a few days my solicitors shall communicate to you what my intentions are. Farewell, madam. Hugh, attend upon Mrs. Bailey to her carriage, and see that she accompanies her."

With these words, the duke was moving abruptly away, when, as a thought struck him, he turned and said, "If she goes down upon her knees, Hugh, to entreat and implore that you will bring a conciliatory message to me, I command you, on pain of my unforgiving displeasure, on pain of my eternal wrath, to refuse compliance."

He then passed into the nearest room, locking the door behind him, so that the quick turning of the key reached the ears of Mrs. Bailey and Lord Clandon, who remained upon the landing. In a few minutes one of Eliza's maids descended from above, and presenting a letter to Mrs. Bailey, said, "Her Grace entreats, ma'am, that you will hand this to the duke."

"Indeed, poor soul," cried Mrs. Bailey, "I can do nothing of the sort, for the duke will neither hear nor see anybody on her Grace's behalf. Unless indeed your lordship," she added, addressing Clandon, "would make one last effort —"

"Yes, yes, I will," responded Hugh. "Yes, I will! It is a sacred duty, and even though I risk my uncle's displeasure, I will perform it."

He took the letter, and hastened to knock at the door of the apartment in which the duke had shut himself. His Grace demanded from within who it was, and when Lord Clandon answered, the door was at once opened. The uncle and nephew remained closeted there together for about ten minutes, while Mrs. Bailey and the lady's-maid waited on the landing.

"How is her Grace now?" inquired the former, "and why was it she begged I would not come into her room a little while back?"

"Her Grace, ma'am," replied the maid, with a saddened countenance, "looks as if she were ten years older than she was an hour back. But it was with a strange calmness she sat herself down to write that letter which Lord Clandon has so kindly taken into the duke. Heaven send that its contents may move his Grace! It was only because my

poor mistress was occupied on that letter that she could not see you. Oh, ma'am, her Grace may have been weak and imprudent, but it is hard to believe her guilty."

Mrs. Bailey — being well acquainted with all Eliza's earlier history, and knowing how deeply she had loved Bertram, besides being a woman whose notions of the better side of humanity had been warped, if not actually spoiled by the frivolities of fashionable life — really did believe in her own heart that Eliza was completely guilty, and she could not help shaking her head ominously in response to the maid's expressed doubt on the subject. The countenance of the maid herself therefore fell suddenly as she beheld that look, and her own previously wavering opinion settled into a conviction unfavourable to the unfortunate Eliza.

At this moment Lord Clandon came forth from the apartment, where he had been closeted with the duke, and his looks showed that his mission had proved unsuccessful.

"His Grace read the letter," he said, in a low, deep voice. "After much trouble I persuaded him that this was at least an act of justice which he owed toward the duchess. But his opinion is not to be moved, nor his resolve shaken. His commands are that with the least possible delay the duchess is to leave the house."

The maid, with a sorrowful countenance, ascended the stairs, followed by Mrs. Bailey, and they entered the boudoir, where Eliza was pacing to and fro in a state of mind which may be more readily imagined than described. Another of her maids had remained with her, and this one was standing aside, following with mournful looks the form of her mistress as she thus paced to and fro. Eliza did indeed seem as if she had received a most fearful shock: her countenance was pale as death, her eyes were haggard, her look was as careworn as if she had passed through a dozen years of unceasing, ineffable sorrow. The instant the door opened, her eyes, glistening feverishly with uneasiness and suspense, were flung upon those who entered, and Mrs. Bailey hastening forward, said, "O Eliza, how could you —"

"Madam," interrupted the duchess, all her trepidation settling down in a moment into the most dignified calmness, "I see that you believe me guilty, but I am innocent."

"Well, my dear," answered Mrs. Bailey, "I most sincerely hope you are, but of course you know best."

“ My letter, Jane? ” said the duchess, turning proudly and indignantly away from her relative, and addressing herself to the maid who had followed Mrs. Bailey into the room; “ has it been sent to his Grace? ” and now again there was the feverish glitter of suspense in her eyes as she awaited the response.

“ The duke, ” Mrs. Bailey hastened to interject, “ positively forbade any one to bring him either letter or message, and he locked himself in a room — ”

“ My letter, Jane? ” ejaculated the duchess, now quivering visibly with impatience, but disdainingly to take any further notice of Mrs. Bailey, since this lady had shown that she believed in her guilt.

“ Please your Grace, ” answered Jane, “ Lord Clandon kindly took charge of the letter, his lordship was very much affected, and he was closeted with his Grace for nearly a quarter of an hour. But, my lady — ”

“ Enough, Jane, ” said the duchess, her marble features suddenly becoming fixed and rigid in the last stage of despair. “ I understand you. The duke believes me not. I therefore leave his house at once. But before I go, let me call God to witness that if I have been thoughtless, if I have been weak, if I have been imprudent, I have not been guilty. ”

“ O Eliza — my dear Eliza! ” said Mrs. Bailey, still full of a nervous trepidation, “ pray don't call God's name in vain. ”

“ Woman, ” ejaculated Eliza, fiercely, as she turned abruptly around upon her relative, “ do you dare stand forward as my accuser? ” Then, as Mrs. Bailey staggered back, frightened and aghast, the duchess went on to say, “ I will not accept a home from you. You cannot lay your hand upon your heart and say that you are sensible of no wrongs toward me. You know what I mean. I could curse you, were it not that I should involve the memory of my deceased parent in the same frightful malediction. If I were guilty — but God is my witness that I am not — how much of that guilt would be attributable to your detestable machinations! Begone! remain not here another moment in my presence. ”

Mrs. Bailey — frightened to death lest Eliza should enter into the fullest explanations relative to the past, and thereby seriously compromise her — hurried from the room, and rushed down-stairs in a condition of bewildered terror.

“ Where is the duchess? ” asked Lord Clandon, but as

Mrs. Bailey sped past him, not knowing what she was about, he hurried after her. "Do tell me, my dear madam," he continued, in a voice full of anxiety and uneasiness, "what has occurred?"

"Don't ask me, my lord! Don't ask me, I beseech you!" she ejaculated. "To be abused and reviled and taunted, after I helped to make her a duchess, — it is perfectly shocking."

"Shocking indeed," said Lord Clandon, who was now enabled to comprehend pretty well what had taken place. "But are you going without her?" he asked, as Mrs. Bailey rushed through the hall to her carriage, which was waiting at the entrance.

"Yes, my lord; pray let me go. I can assure you I have had quite enough of Oaklands."

"But the duke's commands are that you should take the duchess with you."

"The duchess will not come, and thank Heaven that she won't!" rejoined Mrs. Bailey, who was all in a flutter of mingled anger and affright, and without even waiting to be handed to the carriage, she scrambled up into it as best she could.

Lord Clandon bowed courteously, and the equipage drove away. Then he stood irresolute for a few moments how to act. Mrs. Bailey had taken her departure, leaving the duchess behind, and the duke's orders were consequently disobeyed. Hugh decided, after a short deliberation with himself, upon ascending to his uncle's apartment to obtain further instructions.

Let us now see what in the meanwhile had taken place in Eliza's chamber. So soon as Mrs. Bailey had fled thence in the manner already described, the Duchess of Marchmont, sinking down from her temporary excitement, into that blank, dead, unnatural calmness which indicated utter despair, said to her maids, "Give me my bonnet, my shawl, my gloves, and I will take my departure."

"Shall I order a carriage for your Grace?" inquired Jane, adown whose cheeks the tears were trickling, although in her heart she believed the duchess guilty notwithstanding her solemn protestations to the contrary.

"No," answered Eliza, "I will depart on foot. Portionless and penniless was I received as a wife; portionless and

penniless will I go forth as a discarded and branded creature."

The two maids threw themselves weeping at Eliza's feet, conjuring her not to carry this resolve into execution, but she was firm, and in that very firmness she issued her commands in a voice that seemed more than decisive: it was even stern. The maids rose, and in profound silence gave her the things she asked for. When she was dressed for departure, her looks softened toward them, and she said, in a tremulous voice, "Your kindness, my dear girls, touches me deeply, for, oh, this is indeed a trial in the midst of which such kindness is to be felt. Farewell. Trouble not yourselves for me. Remain here until you are sought out and questions are put to you as to the mode of my departure. Then say that as I brought nothing with me of my own when the duke took me as a wife, so I bear nothing away with me. Tell him likewise that in my writing-desk he will find the papers to which I alluded in the letter just now sent him. And once again, farewell."

With these last words — and not trusting herself to fling another look upon the two weeping damsels — the duchess abruptly quitted the chamber. Seeking the private staircase, she descended it quickly, and passed out of the side door into the grounds. No one observed her egress, and the two maids remained together in the chamber, weeping bitterly at the mournful circumstances under which they were thus suddenly deprived of a mistress whom they loved, and whose conduct had been uniformly kind toward them.

Meanwhile Lord Clandon, as the reader will recollect, had returned to the apartment wherein the duke had locked himself, his nephew's object now being to report that Mrs. Bailey had gone without the duchess, and to obtain further instructions. In about ten minutes Lord Clandon issued forth again, and summoning a footman, desired him to go and give immediate instructions to have the plain chariot gotten in readiness. He then ascended to the room which Eliza had so recently left, and knocked gently at the door. The summons was at once answered by Jane, down whose cheeks the tears of affliction were still flowing fast.

"I wish to speak a few words to her Grace," said Clandon, the expression of whose countenance was deeply mournful.

"Her Grace, my lord, is gone," answered Jane, sobbing violently.

"Gone?" ejaculated Clandon, in astonishment. "What mean you? No equipage has departed —"

"Her Grace would not have a carriage," rejoined the lady's-maid; "she is gone away on foot."

"On foot?" echoed Clandon, with continued amazement. "But where? whither? What purpose has her Grace in view?"

"All this, my lord, I know not," answered Jane. "Her Grace bade us farewell, and departed, as I have told you."

Lord Clandon descended the stairs slowly, and in profound mental deliberation. Again he knocked at the door of the apartment in which the duke had shut himself, but this time the key turned not in the lock. From within, however, the duke demanded in a voice which sounded irritable and stern, "Who is it? Wherefore am I thus incessantly disturbed?"

"It is I, uncle," answered Lord Clandon. "Her Grace has taken her departure —"

"Enough. Trouble me no more. Leave me, I insist," exclaimed the duke from within. "Give orders, Hugh, that no one comes to me. I would be alone — entirely alone."

Lord Clandon dared not speak another word, and hastening away from the door, he was about to summon a domestic, when he beheld his own valet Travers ascending the stairs.

"Go and counter-order the travelling-carriage," said Clandon, "which a few minutes back I commanded to be got in readiness."

"Yes, my lord," said the valet, and he hurried off to execute his master's instructions.

It was now six o'clock in the evening, and the guests were all grouped in the drawing-room, discussing in whispers as much as they knew of what had taken place. Some were suggesting the propriety of immediately ordering their carriages and taking their departure, as their presence under existing circumstances might be regarded as an indelicate intrusion. But others recommended that no precipitate steps should be taken, as after all it might transpire that the duchess had been wrongly judged, and a complete reconciliation might take place between herself and the duke, for they knew not that Eliza had already left Oaklands.

In the midst of these whisperings, Lord Clandon entered the drawing-room, and the guests perceived at once by his countenance that something terribly decisive had taken place. He expressed his regret that anything should have occurred to mar the pleasure which had hitherto prevailed at the mansion, and he delicately yet plainly intimated that an irreparable breach had arisen between his uncle and the duchess, that the latter had left the mansion, and that the former, overwhelmed with affliction, had shut himself up in the solitude of his apartment. The guests longed to hear more explicit details, but good taste prevented them from putting any questions, and they now saw that there was nothing for them to do but to order their carriages and separate to their respective homes. As a matter of courtesy, Lord Clandon requested them to wait for dinner, which would be shortly served up, but this, under the circumstances, was a mere ceremonial act of politeness, which was of course declined. Immediate orders were issued to have trunks packed up and carriages gotten in readiness. The commands were promptly obeyed, and by seven o'clock on this memorable evening the guests had all taken their departure.

Lord Clandon now hurried off toward the village where he had promised to meet his brother, and which was about a mile distant. Less than a quarter of an hour's rapid walk brought him to the tavern in the village, and on inquiring for the Honourable Mr. Bertram Vivian, he was at once shown into the little parlour where his brother, with feverish anxiety and harrowing suspense, was awaiting his arrival. Very nearly three hours had elapsed since they parted in the grounds of the mansion, and when Bertram so passionately implored Hugh to hasten away and assure their uncle of his wife's innocence. During this interval, which had seemed an entire age, the unfortunate Bertram had endured agonies of mind which, if spread over whole centuries, and portioned out as the lot of millions of human beings, would even thus in each infinitesimal part have been excruciatingly intolerable, but which, when condensed into the space of three hours, and aggregated as the burden which a single individual had to bear, were overpowering and soul-crushing beyond the capacity of language to describe. The first glance which Lord Clandon threw upon his brother, as he entered the little

parlour of the village inn, showed him how fearfully Bertram must have suffered.

“What tidings, Hugh?” inquired Bertram, literally gasping with the fever of suspense, and with the horrible misgivings which Lord Clandon’s melancholy expression of countenance was but too well calculated to inspire.

“Alas! nothing good,” was the elder brother’s response.

“Nothing good,” murmured the unhappy Bertram, his features indicative of despair. “But what has occurred? Tell me, Hugh,” he exclaimed, with feverish haste. “Did you assure our uncle —”

“My dear Bertram,” rejoined Lord Clandon, taking his brother’s hand and pressing it, “I did all that I could, but in vain.”

“And my letter?” cried Bertram; “has not the duke had my letter?”

“Your letter?” exclaimed Clandon, in astonishment.

“But now I bethink me,” Bertram went on to say rapidly, “it could not have reached the house before you must have left. I despatched it by a boy half an hour back. I was mad, frenzied, goaded to desperation. The time was passing, and you came not — I knew not what to do — my anxiety was intolerable —”

“And what said you to the duke in your letter?” asked Lord Clandon.

“I scarcely recollect,” replied Bertram. “I tell you that I was mad when I wrote it — I am mad still. My God, and she innocent. But where is she, Hugh? What has become of her?”

“She has left Oaklands,” answered Lord Clandon. “First of all she was to depart with Mrs. Bailey —”

“And she has left?” exclaimed Bertram, wildly; “she has left? She has lost her home, — she who is innocent. Oh, wretch that I am! It is I that have caused this fearful havoc of feelings, — this frightful desolation of circumstances,” and the miserable young man wrung his hands bitterly. “But she has left, you say?” he almost immediately added. “Whither has she gone?”

“I know not,” responded Clandon. “Mrs. Bailey departed without her, and the unfortunate Eliza quitted the house on foot, alone —”

“Good heavens! is this possible?” ejaculated Bertram,

and the wildness of frenzy was in his eyes. "Eliza gone forth alone, unattended, on foot, an outcast, a wanderer! Oh, it is intolerable," and snatching up his hat, he rushed madly to the door.

"Whither would you go, Bertram?" cried Lord Clandon, seizing his brother forcibly by the arm to hold him back.

"Whither would I go?" ejaculated the almost maddened young man. "To find her whom my insensate passion has ruined; to console her, if consolation be possible, to implore her pardon, to adopt means to prove her innocence —"

"But, Bertram —"

"Detain me not, Hugh, detain me not," and thus speaking with increasing frenzy of feelings and rabid vehemence of manner, Bertram rushed forth from the village inn.

Lord Clandon hurried out to the threshold of the front door, but his brother had already disappeared from his view.

CHAPTER IX

THE CATASTROPHE

ABOUT a quarter of an hour after Lord Clandon had left the mansion to keep his appointment with Bertram, a letter, addressed to the Duke of Marchmont, was brought by a boy and delivered to the hall porter. The boy, who was already paid for his trouble, tarried not for any further recompense, but hurried away the moment he had acquitted himself of his commission. That was the letter which Bertram had sent, but the address on the outside, as well as the contents within, were written in a hand so changed by the violent agitation of the writer, that no one, however familiar with his usual style of penmanship, would for a moment have suspected that it was his own. The hall porter gave the letter to a footman, who, proceeding up-stairs, knocked at the door of the apartment in which the Duke of Marchmont still remained.

“Who is there?” demanded the nobleman from within, and his voice was half-stern, half-passionate. “I expressly ordered —”

“A letter, my lord,” responded the footman, trembling with alarm.

“From whom?” demanded the duke.

“I know not, my lord,” rejoined the domestic. “It is in a strange hand —”

The duke opened the door, and received the letter. The footman, as he caught a momentary glimpse of his master’s countenance, saw that it was deadly pale, with the traces of all strongly wrought feelings upon it. Hastily closing the door again, the duke looked at the address, and not recognizing the writing, opened the letter, but the instant his eye settled on the first words of its contents, he dashed it upon

the carpet, and trampled it under foot. Ashamed of himself, the very next instant, for this impotent manifestation of vindictive fury, the Duke of Marchmont picked the letter up, and prompted by an irresistible feeling of curiosity to see what Bertram could possibly have to adduce in the face of evidence which his Grace regarded as so decisive, he sat down and read the letter through. It consisted chiefly of broken sentences, solemn oaths, sacred adjurations, — all attesting the innocence of the duchess, and there were some incoherent allusions to a long-existing love between them, as well as to a cruel deception practised by her deceased father and Mrs. Bailey in order to make her the duke's wife, so that a gleam of light began to dawn in unto the comprehension of Eliza's husband.

“ Good heavens! ” he said to himself, with a feeling of horror at the lengths to which he had gone, “ if it be indeed true that in a moment of weakness, and under the influence of sorrow's agony at the idea of parting, Bertram should have caught her in his arms, but that she was innocent. Yet no, I cannot think it. I was prepared for protestations of innocence, and I even said that the deeper the guilt, the more impassioned its denial. No, no; they are guilty, — this viper of a nephew, that wanton of a woman. But their love of other times, and that deception practised on her — ”

And the duke was staggered. He pressed his hand to his brow; he would have given worlds to discover that the wife whom he had loved so fondly, and of whom he had been so proud, was really innocent. His soul yearned to think her so; his heart bled at the idea of its possibility, and at his own implacable harshness. An idea struck him. He went forth from the room, and inquired for Lord Clandon, but he was informed that Hugh had gone out a little time previously. Then the duke ordered Jane, her Grace's principal lady's-maid, to be sent to him in the drawing-room. During the few minutes which elapsed ere the young woman made her appearance, the Duke of Marchmont composed his looks into an expression of cold and severe dignity, for he was too proud to display before others all he felt.

“ Jane, ” he said, as the maid entered the room with a sorrowful countenance, and with the traces of weeping still upon it, “ your mistress has taken her departure? ”

"Yes, my lord," was the response. "Her Grace was very, very unhappy —"

"And whither has she gone?" interrupted the duke.

"I know not, my lord."

"But the instructions she gave to the coachman? You doubtless attended her to the carriage."

"My lord," rejoined the maid, tears bursting forth afresh, "her Grace went away on foot."

"On foot?" cried the nobleman, in astonishment.

"Yes, my lord," continued Jane. "Her Grace said that she came to you without a carriage, and she would go away as portionless."

"Ah!" murmured the duke, and then his eyes were earnestly fixed upon the maid, as if his soul experienced an avidity for whatsoever words of explanation might next come from her lips.

"Her Grace called God to witness her innocence," proceeded the maid. "Ah, my lord! it would be a shocking thing to fancy human nature is so bad to take such an oath—"

But the young woman stopped short, for she recollected Mrs. Bailey's words and manner, and she trembled at the idea of pledging herself to a belief in the innocence of one who might after all be guilty.

"And what else did the duchess say?" demanded the duke, with the petulance of feverish impatience.

"Her Grace bade me tell your lordship," responded Jane, "that you would find in her writing-desk the several documents to which her letter to your Grace made allusion, — I mean the letter which Lord Clandon was good enough to take in to your Grace."

"Ah, that letter! I did not — But no matter," and the duke hastened abruptly from the room.

He ascended to his wife's boudoir. He found the writing-desk; he knew it to be the one which her father had left behind him, and which he himself had placed in Eliza's hands a short time after the funeral. It was unlocked, for the duchess had purposely left it so. The duke drew forth its contents, and Bertram's letters to the late Captain Lacey, which he found therein, gave him a complete insight into all those bygone matters to which his unhappy young nephew's agitated communication from the village had merely made rapid and almost incoherent allusions.

The duke was astounded: a veil fell from his eyes, and in a moment he comprehended the real meaning of that strange conduct which Bertram and Eliza had observed toward each other during the first few days of the young gentleman's visit to Oaklands. And he, the duke, had purposely thrown them together. He had studied to place them on a friendly footing. Ah, if he were dishonoured, he had indeed, though unconsciously, been the author of that dishonour. But what in his heart he had for the last quarter of an hour been wishing and yearning and craving might come to pass, he now more than half-believed. Was it not indeed possible, nay, more, was it not probable, that Eliza had been only weak, not guilty, and that Bertram's vindication was true, when it declared that under the influence of irrepressible feelings — not being at the moment master of himself — he had caught her in his arms? The longer the duke thought of this, the more was he inclined to put faith in Bertram's statement. The very circumstances attending the departure of his wife, as he had just heard them from Jane's lips, seemed to be tinged with a dignity far more compatible with conscious innocence than with a sense of guilt.

“O Eliza! Eliza!” groaned the unhappy duke, in the mingled anguish and reviving fondness of his heart; “if I have wronged you, — good heavens, if I have wronged you! And that I have, I fear, nay, I am well-nigh convinced. You sought not to be on intimate terms with Bertram; you were cold and distant toward him. Your demeanour was, under all circumstances, that which it ought to have been. And I threw you together, I forced you into each other's society, I left you alone together. Ah! it was natural you should speak of the past, — victims that you had both been made to a hideous deception. Yes, Eliza, you are innocent. Your weakness I forgive. You shall come to my arms again, and it is I who will on my knees sue at your feet for pardon.”

The duke rushed forth from the boudoir in a state of mind bordering on frenzy. All his habitual dignity was forgotten, — all his wonted pride was as nought, under the influence of the strong feelings which now possessed him. He reached the landing whence the drawing-room opened, and there he abruptly encountered Lord Clandon, who had just hurried back from the village after the interview with his brother.

“ Ah! ” ejaculated the duke, as if the presence of his elder nephew suddenly reminded him of things which, in the previous whirl of his conflicting, distracting thoughts, he had utterly lost sight of. “ Come hither, ” and the duke abruptly passed into the drawing-room, followed by Lord Clandon.

Their interview did not last above ten minutes, but what its nature was, we have at present no means of describing. Suffice it to say that at the expiration of this brief interview, the door opened as abruptly as when the duke entered that room, and his Grace came forth. Descending to the hall, he said, in a quick, excited manner to the lackeys, whom he found there, “ Let all the male domestics disperse themselves over the neighbourhood, in search of the duchess. If her Grace be found, tell her that I — her husband — have wronged her.”

Ejaculations of joy burst forth from the lips of all who had heard this announcement of Eliza's innocence, for her natural goodness and her affably condescending manners had endeared her to the entire household of which she was so late the mistress.

“ Yes, ” continued the duke, his voice swelling with the excitement of his feelings, “ let her Grace be told that I have wronged her, that I beseech her to return, and that she will be received with open arms. Disperse yourselves all about, enter every house, cottage, or hut, where it is possible that your mistress may have taken refuge. Depart, I say, and a hundred guineas for him who finds her ladyship. I also shall go forth in the hope of discovering my wrongly banished wife.”

Having thus spoken, the Duke of Marchmont put on his hat and rushed forth from the mansion. As he descended the steps, his favourite dog — a great bull-mastiff, which has been before alluded to — came leaping up in joy at beholding its master.

“ Come, Pluto, ” exclaimed the duke. “ You seem to understand, faithful dog, that I am bent on something of importance.”

Meanwhile the word had been passed rapidly through the mansion that, by some means or another, the duke had become convinced of the innocence of the duchess, that her Grace was to be sought out, and that a hundred guineas would be the reward of him who might discover her retreat.

To no hearts did this announcement carry a more real joy than to those of the two lady's-maids; and Jane, embracing her fellow servant, murmured, with tears of happiness streaming down her cheeks, "She will return to us, — our beloved mistress will return to us. God forgive me for having suspected her."

All the male servants of the household sallied forth, and dispersed themselves about in every direction, in search of the duchess. Lord Clandon likewise hastened on the mission, vowing that he would add fifty guineas to the sum already promised by his uncle as the reward of the successful searcher.

The shades of evening had already begun to gather over the earth before this expedition was undertaken, but when night came, the moon appeared upon the canopy of heaven, in company with myriads of glimmering stars. Hours passed, but no one returned from the search until after midnight. Then, one by one, the domestics began to reappear at Oaklands, and each successive arrival was accompanied by the announcement of non-success. It was near one o'clock in the morning when Lord Clandon came back; he likewise had to intimate failure. He inquired for the duke, but his Grace had not yet reappeared, and Lord Clandon resolved to sit up for his return.

It was one o'clock when the Duke of Marchmont, followed by his faithful dog, reached his mansion again. His inquiries had been as fruitless as those of all the others; indeed not the slightest intelligence was obtained by any one relative to the duchess. A horrible idea seemed to pervade the generality of the household, — to the effect that she had committed suicide, but no one ventured to breathe such a surmise to the duke, and it did not appear that he entertained it. Perchance he knew Eliza's natural firmness of character too well, to suspect for a moment that she could have perpetrated self-destruction, especially because, if really innocent, — as he now felt convinced she was, — she would cling to existence in the hope that her guiltlessness might be made apparent and the stain wiped away from her character.

"I shall go forth again," said the duke to his domestics, who were assembled in the hall. "My weary limbs shall not press a couch this night, unless I obtain some clue to the retreat of the duchess."

Then he questioned the domestics, one after the other, as to the particular neighbourhoods in which they had been, and it resulted that there was a little hamlet about two miles distant which was left unvisited.

"Thither will I go," said the duke, hope appearing upon his countenance.

Several of the domestics volunteered to accompany his Grace; while all the others proposed to set off again and renew the search.

"No," said the duke, thanking them all with a look, "you have done enough for to-night. It is my will that you retire to your chambers and seek the rest of which you all stand so much in need. If the morrow should dawn and no good intelligence have been in the interval obtained, we will adopt other means to accomplish our purpose. Go you therefore to your rooms."

"And you, my lord," interjected several voices, "stand in need of rest."

"No," responded the duke, "I could not sleep, even if I sought my couch. I will go forth again. It is I who, alas! have done the mischief; it is my duty to effect its earliest reparation. Retire."

"Lord Clandon is sitting up," suggested one of the servants. "Shall I inform his lordship that your Grace is here?"

"No," responded the duke, imperatively, "I have not time for further discourse. Retire to your chambers, I say, and I will go forth alone."

As he thus spoke, the duke waved his hand in a manner which showed that he meant to be obeyed, though his looks again expressed thankfulness for the sympathy exhibited by his dependents. He went forth, and while the servants for the most part repaired at once to their chambers, others proceeded to secure the doors and shutters previously to seeking their own rooms, while Travers hastened to inform his master, Lord Clandon, of all that the duke had said, for Travers was present in the hall during the brief scene which we have just described.

"His Grace should have suffered me to accompany him," exclaimed Lord Clandon; "he will weary himself to a degree that may bring on illness. But as it is, I shall retire to rest, and see that you call me early, Travers, so that I may get on horseback and renew the search after the duchess."

Travers promised to obey his master's instructions, and having attended Lord Clandon to his chamber, proceeded to his own room a few minutes afterward.

As early as six o'clock in the morning — and therefore after only a few hours' repose — the greater portion of the domestics were up and dressed at Oaklands. Leachley, the duke's valet, reported that his master had not as yet returned, and expressions of uneasiness passed from lip to lip. Several domestics meeting each other in the hall were about to decide in which different directions they should issue forth, — not merely in search of their lost mistress, but now likewise in search of their master also, — when a strange sound, like a low, continuous moaning howl, coming from without, reached their ears. None of the doors of the mansion had as yet been opened; the hall porter, an old man, having sat up so late, had overslept himself. The domestics listened, the sounds continued, and in a few moments they were interrupted by a bark, but low and feeble as the moaning howl itself had been.

"It is a dog," ejaculated one.

"It is Pluto, I am almost certain," cried another.

"Let us get the keys from the porter," exclaimed a third, and a general excitement prevailed, for the idea had arisen simultaneously in every mind that there was something wrong, but what it was, no one could conceive, and no conjecture was volunteered.

The keys were procured from the hall porter's room; the front door was opened, and Pluto crawled painfully into the hall. He was feebly wagging his tail, as if in satisfaction at having thus obtained admittance at last, but he was blood-stained in several places, and his eyes, usually so bright and intelligent, were glazing as if in death. He carried something in his mouth, and on creeping into the hall, he did not sink down, though evidently in an exhausted, if not a dying state, but dragged himself painfully from the feet of one domestic to another. He looked up at each, too, in a sort of piteously entreating manner. It was evident that if the faithful and intelligent animal had the power of speech, he would have told some tale.

"The poor dog has been wounded," ejaculated several voices, and looks of horror were exchanged, for the previous misgiving which had smitten the domestics appeared all in a

moment to have strengthened into the conviction that there had been some accident or foul play during the past night, and of which their master was the victim, else wherefore had the dog come back alone?

"But what has he in his mouth?" asked one.

At this moment Lord Clandon, followed by Travers, made his appearance in the hall.

"Good heavens! what is the matter?" he exclaimed, the instant he caught sight of the wounded dog, who now sank down in utter exhaustion, its eyes closing apparently in death. "Where is the duke?" inquired Clandon, as if smitten with the same terrible idea that had already seized upon the domestics.

"Oh, my lord, we know not," responded Leachley, in a mournful voice, "but we dread —"

"What? the duke has not returned," ejaculated Clandon. "Oh, my poor uncle," and he seemed violently affected. "But what is that which has fallen from Pluto's mouth?"

"It is a piece of cloth," said one of the servants, stooping down and picking it up.

"Ah! evidently torn out of a coat," ejaculated another.

"Good heavens, what does all this mean?" exclaimed a third.

"Something dreadful, I fear," added Leachley, with a shudder.

"Disperse yourselves in every direction," exclaimed Lord Clandon, powerfully excited. "I will take horse and gallop along the main roads. Travers — Travers, I say. Why, the fellow was here a few moments back."

Travers was not, however, in the hall at this moment, and Lord Clandon hastened up to his own chamber, where he found his valet.

The orders he had given to the servants were promptly obeyed, for they scattered themselves in every direction, some singly, others going two together. A horse was presently saddled for the use of Lord Clandon, who was speedily ready to avail himself of it.

The butler and Leachley, the duke's own valet, went together on the exciting expedition, and they took the road leading to that hamlet which the duke had set out to visit, as he had stated to the domestics in the middle of the night. It was, as already stated, two miles distant from the man-

sion, but Leachley and the butler had not proceeded above a few hundred yards, when they heard a dragging noise and a panting, gasping, moaning sound behind. They turned, and beheld the wounded dog. The poor animal, having been forgotten in the hall when the domestics dispersed in such excitement at Lord Clandon's bidding, had dragged himself forth, for he was not quite so near death as his exhausted condition and glazing eyes had seemed to indicate.

"Poor Pluto," said Leachley, caressing the faithful dog.

"See how he looks up," exclaimed the butler, "as if asking us to come on."

"Yes, there is some meaning in those eyes, in those half-moaning, half-howling sounds."

"Let us speed onward," said the butler.

The dog now kept in advance; it appeared as if he acquired strength as he went on, as if he were conscious of having some special task to perform, for which all his best energies were put forth. But still continued that prolonged wailing howl,—that lugubrious moan which sounded ominous as a death-knell itself on the ears of the butler and Leachley.

On they went, and in proportion as they advanced, Pluto's pace quickened, his moan became more rueful, he kept looking up at the two domestics, as if entreating them to follow on still and not go back. They themselves experienced the appalled sense of men who felt that every step they took was bringing them nearer and nearer to the solution of some horrible mystery. Presently Pluto dashed forward, around a bend in the road, looked back for an instant to see whether the men were following him, and then disappeared from their view.

But a few instants brought the butler and Leachley around that bend, and they at once descried a dark object on the edge of a pond by the roadside. Pluto, moaning and whining with all the plaintiveness of a human voice, was crouching near that object. A few instants more, and the two domestics reached the spot. Then what a frightful spectacle met their view. Their master, the Duke of Marchmont, lay dead before their eyes,—foully murdered. A dagger, with which the deed was accomplished, remained between the shoulders, where it had been driven deep down. The unfortunate nobleman lay upon his face on the edge of

the pond, into the stagnant water of which one of his arms hung down.

For a few moments the butler and Leachley were so horrified at this frightful spectacle that they were riveted in powerlessness to the spot, but recovering their self-possession after a brief interval, they raised the corpse. Life was extinct; the duke's countenance was cold as marble. He had evidently been several hours dead.

"Alas, he is no more!" murmured Leachley, tears starting from his eyes.

"No more," added the butler, solemnly, and they gently laid the corpse down again.

And now followed a most affecting scene. The faithful dog had seemed to watch the countenances of the two men, while they raised and sustained the corpse between them, as if the animal itself entertained some instinctive hope that they might be enabled to recall their master to life. But when their looks told the worst, and those brief sentences were exchanged, Pluto gave one long, low, whining moan, — a subdued, lugubrious death-howl, — and sank down dead by the side of the corpse.

This incident called forth fresh tears from the eyes of the two domestics. In a few minutes — after having surveyed the scene in mournful silence — Leachley drew forth the dagger, and wrapped it up in his pocket-handkerchief. Scarcely was this done, when the quick trappings of a galloping horse reached their ears, and in a few moments Lord Clandon was upon the spot.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, throwing himself from the horse, and sinking upon his knees by the side of the corpse. "My poor uncle! What fatal accident —"

"Murder, my lord," said the butler, — "a foul and diabolical murder."

"Murder," echoed Clandon, starting up with horror depicted on his countenance. "But I behold no wound," for the corpse was now lying on its back.

"Here, my lord," said Leachley, "is the fatal weapon," and he produced the dagger from his kerchief.

"Bertram's," cried Clandon, the instant his looks fell upon it.

"Mr. Bertram's?" ejaculated both of the domestics, with a simultaneous start of indescribable horror.

“ Did I say Bertram’s? ” exclaimed Clandon. “ No, no, I recall the word — Not for worlds would I impute — No, no, I did not say Bertram’s.”

The two domestics exchanged looks of continued horror, but now blended with dismay and grief, for they both felt that Lord Clandon, having in the suddenness of agonized amazement let drop his brother’s name in connection with the dagger, was now generously seeking to recall the word, so as to save that brother from the dread imputation and its consequences.

“ I will ride back to the house,” said his lordship, “ and procure assistance. But no, I should fall from the steed. I have not strength. Go, one of you. It is my duty to remain here, and watch over the corpse of my poor uncle.”

Leachley, the deceased nobleman’s valet, accordingly mounted the horse, and sped back to the mansion. Most of the male domestics were abroad, searching for their master and mistress, but some few, who had overslept themselves, were still at the house, and of course all the female servants were there. The intelligence which Leachley brought was but too well calculated to overwhelm all who heard it with consternation and grief. A carriage was speedily gotten in readiness, and Leachley accompanied it back to the spot, where Lord Clandon and the butler had remained in charge of the corpse. This was now placed inside the vehicle, which returned at a mourning pace with its sad burden to the mansion. It was not till the lapse of some hours that the domestics who had been on the search — including Travers, Lord Clandon’s valet — came back to the mansion, and as they returned one by one, it was to hear the afflicting intelligence of the duke’s murder. We should not omit to observe that the remains of poor Pluto were likewise taken to the mansion, and when a veterinary surgeon had examined into the exact nature of the wound of which the faithful animal had died, the body was buried in the garden in the midst of a parterre of flowers.

On the following day the county coroner arrived at Oaklands, to hold an inquest over the corpse of the deceased duke. A jury, consisting of tenant farmers and of the principal householders of the village, was summoned for the occasion. The butler and Leachley deposed to the discovery of the corpse by the side of the pond. The dagger

was produced, and Leachley — being a conscientious man, and determined to do his duty, no matter at what sacrifice of his own feelings and those of others — mentioned the circumstance of Lord Clandon's ejaculation of his brother's name the instant the fatal weapon met his eyes. The story in respect to the duchess and Bertram had already got wind throughout the entire district; and thus the coroner and jury, in their own minds, naturally beheld in those incidents enough to strengthen the suspicion that the duke's younger nephew was indeed the assassin.

Lord Clandon — or, as we ought now properly to style him, the Duke of Marchmont, for such indeed had his uncle's death made him — was compelled to appear before the coroner. He entered the room where the inquest was held, with a deep sadness upon his countenance, and for the first few minutes his sobs were plainly audible. The coroner expressed for himself and the jury the grief which was experienced at enforcing his Grace's attendance under such distressing circumstances, but they intimated that they had a duty to perform, and that it must be accomplished.

The oath being administered to the new Duke of Marchmont the coroner said, "I am about to put a question which, however painful it may be, your Grace is bound to answer on the sanctity of the oath you have just taken. Does your Grace know to whom this weapon belongs?"

"Am I indeed bound to answer such a question?" inquired Hugh, and he appeared to speak with the greatest difficulty, so that all present compassionated his afflicting position.

"Your Grace must answer," said the coroner.

"Then if it be so," returned the Duke of Marchmont, in a scarcely audible voice, "I do know that the dagger was the property of — of my unfor— my brother."

"Whose Christian name is Bertram?" said the coroner, interrogatively.

The Duke of Marchmont bowed, groaned audibly, and covered his countenance with his hands.

"When, my lord," inquired the coroner, after a pause, "did you last see your brother?"

"In the evening of the day before yesterday," responded the duke, "in the village of Oaklands."

“And in what state of mind was he at the time, my lord?” asked the coroner.

“He was much excited,” responded the duke, “for circumstances had occurred — But doubtless the rumour has reached your ears? My poor brother protested his innocence —”

“And did your Grace leave him in the village?” asked the coroner.

“No,” returned Hugh. “I sought to comfort and console him, but when he learned that the duchess had left the mansion, he burst away from me in a sort of frenzy. Oh, I fear that his brain was turned — that madness had seized upon it. But still — still I cannot bring myself to think for a moment that he would have been guilty of this crime.”

“We shall not trouble your Grace any farther,” said the coroner.

The Duke of Marchmont rose from his seat, bowed to the assemblage, and passed slowly from the room, followed by the sincerest sympathies of all present.

The landlord of the village inn was next examined as a witness. He deposed to the fact of Bertram having passed about three hours at the tavern in the afternoon and evening of the day preceding the night of the murder, that he was violently excited the whole time, and that he had rushed away in the frenzied state of which his brother had just spoken. Two of the housemaids belonging to the mansion were next examined in succession, and their statement was to the effect that while arranging the chamber occupied by Bertram during his stay at Oaklands, they had seen the dagger lying amongst a few other curiosities, which, as they understood, Bertram had brought with him from the United States. The man servant who had especially attended upon Bertram during his visit was the next witness, and he deposed to the fact that Bertram had shown him the dagger, explaining at the time that it had been long in the possession of some celebrated Indian chief who died a few months previous to Bertram's departure from Washington. The dagger, we should observe, was of very peculiar workmanship, and once seen, could not possibly have been mistaken.

Witnesses were now examined to relate the particulars in respect to the dog. It had been found that Pluto was mortally wounded by a pistol-bullet, but the weapon itself

had not been found, either in the pond or in the neighbourhood, so that it was tolerably evident the assassin had taken it away with him. The cloth which the dog had brought in his mouth was a fragment evidently torn from the skirt of a surtout coat, and it was therefore supposed that the faithful animal had flown at the murderer of his master, in doing which he had received the fatal bullet. It was further shown that Bertram had on a black surtout coat when he left Oaklands after the scene with the duke and Eliza.

The evidence being now complete, the coroner proceeded to sum up. In alluding to the circumstance of the dagger, he said that it had been incontestably proved that the weapon belonged to Bertram, and that the jury, with this fact before them, would have to weigh well whether, under all the circumstances, it was Bertram's hand which committed the deed, or whether some other person had obtained possession of that dagger with the foulest of purposes. The coroner remarked that it was certainly extraordinary that Bertram should have had the dagger about him at the time when he was walking with the duchess and when the incident occurred that compelled him to fly from Oaklands. None of the witnesses had been able to throw any light upon this point, such for instance as proving that the dagger was still in Bertram's room at the time of his flight, or on the other hand, that they missed it from the room. Certain it was the dagger had dealt the murderous blow, and it was for the jury to say whether the hand of Bertram or that of an unknown assassin had wielded the weapon. Having commented upon all other parts of the evidence, the coroner left the matter in the hands of the jury.

The deliberation was not long, and its unanimous result was a verdict of "Wilful murder against Bertram Vivian, now Lord Clandon."

When the tragic circumstances which thus occurred at Oaklands became spread abroad over the United Kingdom by means of the public journals, the usual excitement lasted for a time and then began to die away. Warrants were issued for Bertram's apprehension, a reward was offered by the Secretary of State, advertisements were inserted in the newspapers, but all to no effect: the accused was not to be found. And Eliza? Nothing was heard of her. The natural inference, therefore, was that Bertram and the

Duchess of Marchmont had fled together to some far distant clime, — there to enjoy their illicit love and to escape, the one from the odium, and the other from the consequences of the fearful deed of turpitude which had been committed.

CHAPTER X

DUCAL RECEPTIONS

EIGHTEEN years (within a few months) had elapsed since the tragic occurrences at Oaklands, — eighteen years, during which not the slightest intelligence had ever been received of the accused Bertram and the missing Eliza.

Hugh, Duke of Marchmont, was now in his forty-third year, and that interval had necessarily made some change in his personal appearance. His hair, of such jetty darkness when we first introduced him to our readers, was now undergoing its first change toward gray; harsh lines, telling of strong passions and of somewhat irregular pursuits, were traced upon his forehead and in the corners of his eyes. His countenance was thin and pale, his features had grown angular, but their expression was that of a cold, haughty severity.

He had married about two years after the tragedy at Oaklands suddenly put him in possession of the title and estates of Marchmont, but no issue had blessed the union. The lady whom the duke had espoused was a young creature of only sixteen at the time of the marriage, and fifteen years having elapsed since the solemnization of those nuptials, she was consequently now thirty-one. For some time the duke had earnestly hoped to have an heir to his title and possessions, but as year after year passed and the hope remained unfulfilled, Hugh gradually conceived an aversion toward his young and beautiful wife. This aversion did not at first display itself in any overt acts toward the duchess, but in proportion as it increased, the duke grew all the less careful in concealing it, until the unfortunate duchess could no longer blind herself to the growing indifference of her husband, — an indifference that was merging into downright

hate. At last the Duke of Marchmont separated so far from his wife that they occupied distinct rooms, though still continuing to live beneath the same roof, and preserving, when in society and before the world, all the outward decencies which husband and wife are bound to maintain toward each other. The duchess was not the less virtually and in reality neglected, — the duke seldom dining at home, but seeking his own pleasures in quarters that were most agreeable to him. Though he had been extravagant and improvident in the earlier part of his life, and was indeed overwhelmed with debts at the period he succeeded to the title and domains of Marchmont, he had, since that accession, lived within his income, but then his income was ample enough to minister to all the wants and wishes of even the most pleasure-seeking individual.

The town-mansion occupied by the Duke and Duchess of Marchmont was one of the handsomest and most extensive in Belgrave Square. It had lately been refurnished in a sumptuous manner. The picture-gallery contained some of the finest works of the old masters; all the appointments of the palatial residence were indicative of great wealth and a luxurious taste. Throughout the entire arrangements the voice of the duke himself was autocratic, the duchess not being allowed to interfere. Neither did she seek to do so; her disposition was gentle, meek, and submissive; her lot was an unhappy one, but she endeavoured to bear it with all becoming resignation, and sedulously avoided the aggravation of its hardship by any manifestation of a will of her own in opposition to that of her imperious husband.

It was in the beginning of June, 1847, that the scene occurred which we are about to narrate. The timepiece in one of the elegantly furnished apartments at Marchmont House had just proclaimed the hour of noon, and the duke, who was alone there, laid aside the newspaper which he had been reading. He was sitting, or, rather, lounging upon a sofa; his person was wrapped in a handsome silk dressing-gown of a rich pattern, with a cord tied loosely around the waist. He was thinking of the recreations he had proposed to himself and the appointments which he had for that day, when a footman entered the room, announcing "Mr. Armytage."

An expression of annoyance swept for a moment over the

countenance of the Duke of Marchmont, but it rapidly passed away, as if suppressed by his own strong will, because he did not choose to display it to the individual who was thus ushered into his presence. This individual was a man of about fifty, of middle stature, somewhat inclined to corpulency, and with a countenance that was far from prepossessing. It had a mean, cunning look, — an expression of cold, worldly-minded calculation, which evinced selfishness, love of gain, petty ambitions, and other low, debasing feelings. Yet there was a certain gentility of manner about this person, — a gentility, however, which to the eye of a well-bred observer would seem to have been picked up from contact with his betters, rather than to be naturally his own. He was dressed with some degree of pretension, and at all events looked like a well-to-do individual in comfortable circumstances.

Advancing into the room, Mr. Armytage bowed, with a certain commingling of familiarity and respect, to the Duke of Marchmont, who, without rising from his seat, merely nodded his head, and indicating a chair, inquired, "Well, Armytage, what has brought you hither this morning?"

"I come to consult your Grace," replied the visitor, "on a certain family matter which I have very much at heart, and on which I have been thinking for some little time past, so that at length I resolved to address myself to your lordship."

"A family matter?" ejaculated the Duke of Marchmont, in evident surprise. "What the deuce can you mean? This is the first time you ever thought of consulting me on such a subject, and really, Mr. Armytage, I should fancy that with your shrewdness you are the best possible person in the world to manage your own affairs."

"But sometimes, my lord duke," rejoined Armytage, "the best manager requires the assistance of — of —" he was evidently about to say "a friend," but he substituted the term "an adviser."

"Well, then, proceed," exclaimed the duke, "for it is past midday, and I am not yet dressed to go out."

"Your Grace is aware," proceeded Armytage, "that my daughter Zoe is now in her twentieth year —"

"Ah! is she so old as that?" said the duke, listlessly. "But as you are aware, I have seen her so seldom."

"It is perfectly true," replied Mr. Armytage, accentuating his words into the significancy of a reproach, "that your Grace seldom condescends to appear at my parties, and it is unfortunate that on several occasions for the last two or three years, when I solicited your Grace's presence, you always had prior engagements."

"Well, Armytage, that was not my fault, you know," responded Marchmont. "But about Miss Zoe? You were speaking of her. She is a very beautiful girl —"

"And I flatter myself, my lord," interjected Armytage, "that she is well brought up. I have spared no expense on her education and accomplishments."

"I recollect that she plays and sings admirably," said the duke. "But now, pray come to the purpose."

"I will explain myself in as few words as possible," continued Mr. Armytage. "Your Grace is aware that my poor wife, Zoe's mother, died when she was young, and it therefore devolved upon me to superintend my daughter's training and rearing. I am therefore proud of her, not merely as the personification of feminine beauty and accomplishments, but likewise as a specimen of my own good taste. I mean that the developments of her intellect do credit to the presiding influence —"

"Really, Armytage, you might leave others to sing your praises," interrupted the duke, somewhat impatiently. "What in the devil's name is the use of your talking all this nonsense to me? Let it be taken for granted that your daughter is all you represent, and now tell me what service I can render you, for it is a service, I see plainly enough, that you have come to ask."

"My lord, I am solicitous for the welfare of my beloved and only child," returned Armytage. "To speak the truth with frankness, I have given the most brilliant parties ever since she came out, in the hope of procuring for her a suitable alliance. Several young noblemen are happy enough to feast themselves at my table and to flirt in my drawing-rooms, but, my lord, as yet not one —"

"Has paid his suit to your daughter," said the duke, anticipating his visitor's meaning. "But what would you have me do? You don't for a minute imagine that I have it in my power to find a patrician husband for your daughter?"

“On the contrary, my lord, it is precisely what I do mean,” said Mr. Armytage, “and I will tell you how. Your Grace is intimately acquainted with all those young noblemen who visit me —”

“No doubt,” interjected Marchmont, “because it was through me that you became acquainted with them.”

“Precisely so, my lord,” said Mr. Armytage. “They are your Grace’s companions and friends, you meet them at your club, you ride with them, they visit you at your country-seats and at your shooting-box, they dine at your table, they are satellites revolving around your Grace as their central sun.”

“Well, Armytage, and to what is all this to lead?” inquired the duke.

“Simply to this, my lord, — that you have it in your power to hint to these noblemen that Mr. Armytage is a wealthy man, — a very wealthy man, — that by successful speculations he has amassed a considerable fortune —”

“The young noblemen to whom you allude are aware of this already,” observed the duke.

“Yes, my lord, but they are not aware that I will give my daughter sixty thousand pounds on her wedding-day. Of course this is an announcement which I cannot blazon forth from the head of my dinner-table, nor in the midst of my drawing-room. Your Grace, however, can bring up the conversation, as if quite in an indifferent manner, and whatsoever hint your lordship may throw out in respect to my means and intentions of providing for my daughter will assume for those who hear it the shape of a recommendation to reflect seriously thereon. If the attention of the young noblemen to whom we are alluding be once settled on that particular point —”

“Your aim will be soon accomplished, you think?” added the duke. “Well, it may be so. But do you reflect, Armytage, that these young noblemen are for the most part younger sons, without much means of their own?”

“What matters their means,” ejaculated Armytage, “when I possess ample? I would sooner bestow my daughter on a nobleman without a shilling than on the richest commoner in all England.”

“Really, if this be your game,” observed the Duke of

Marchmont, "I do not think it can be a very difficult one to be carried out successfully."

"Certainly not, if your Grace will only succour me to the extent I have been explaining," said Mr. Armytage. "May I rely —"

"Yes, certainly," responded the duke. "I will take the very earliest opportunity of giving the hint which you have suggested. But what will Miss Zoe herself say if some fine morning you bid her receive the attentions of one whom she does not love?"

"Zoe, my lord, as a dutiful, an affectionate, and an obedient daughter," rejoined Mr. Armytage, sententiously, "will follow her father's advice in all things."

"And suppose that the whole is brought about according to your wishes," said the duke, "you will not eventually throw upon me the blame of any mishaps that may arise, — the squandering, for instance, of your daughter's dowry by the husband whom she may thus obtain —"

"I, my lord, will take care of all that in the marriage settlements," replied Armytage, quickly. "Suppose, for argument sake, that the noble suitor whom I seek for my daughter should be hampered with debts. To a reasonable amount I will liquidate them, and I will guarantee a liberal income — say a thousand a year — for pocket-money and so forth, for my son-in-law. This, with the interest of my daughter's sixty thousand pounds, will yield a sufficient revenue, and the young people will have the prospect of double at my death. Is not this fair, my lord?"

"It is at least explicit," responded the duke, "and as I see that you are so perseveringly bent on marrying your daughter to almost any one, so long as he possesses a title of nobility, I will, as already promised, do my best to help you in the matter."

"For this favour, and for all past ones, my lord," said Armytage, rising from his seat, "I beg to proffer my sincerest thanks."

He then bowed in the same half-respectful, half-familiar manner as before, and quitted the room. As the door closed behind him, a sneering expression of contempt appeared upon the countenance of the Duke of Marchmont, but it was promptly succeeded by a darker scowl of anger and annoyance, at having been thus selected to play the

ignominious part of a sort of helper-on for the ambitious schemings of the parvenu speculator, Mr. Armytage.

A few minutes after the departure of Mr. Armytage, and just as the Duke of Marchmont was about to proceed to his chamber to dress for going out, the door was again opened, and the footman announced Lord Octavian Meredith.

This was a young nobleman barely twenty-two years of age, exceedingly handsome, and of elegant appearance. He was not much above the average height, but his slenderness of shape and perfect symmetry of figure made him look taller than he really was. His hair, curling naturally, and worn somewhat profusely, was brown, but by no means of the darkest shade; his whiskers and a slight moustache added to the manliness of an otherwise youthful countenance. His features were in the Grecian style; his eyes, of dark blue, had all the clearness and brightness proper for the reflection of a soul naturally frank, candid, and generous. His manners were those of the polished gentleman, with the slightest possible tincture of a dissipated languor, but without a real affectation. His voice was singularly pleasing, its tones rich and harmonious, and his conversation, which might be intellectual enough when he thought fit to render it so, received additional attractions from that melody of the voice. He was the youngest of the three sons of the Marquis of Penshurst. The marquis himself was very rich, but excessively mean and parsimonious. The estates were strictly entailed upon his eldest son. The second son, though only six and twenty years of age, was a lieutenant-colonel in the army; Octavian, the youngest of the three, and of whom we are specially speaking, had been intended for the Church, but for reasons which we will proceed to explain, he had renounced all thought of entering holy orders, nor had he indeed any profession at all.

Lord Octavian Meredith was naturally a well-principled young man, with a high sense of honour, and endowed with every ennobling sentiment as well as intellectual quality calculated to make him shine in the world. But he had been sent to college with a limited income, and yet, as the son of a marquis, and himself bearing a patrician title, he was expected to keep up a certain appearance. All young men have their pride in these respects, and this pride frequently overrules their better feelings. Parents should

be particularly cautious to guard against the possibility of their children's good principles being assailed through the weak point of their pride, for no point is more vulnerable. Octavian found himself at college without adequate means to keep up a becoming appearance. He got into debt, and his sense of honour prompted him to meet his engagements according to the punctuality that was promised. He wrote to his father, frankly and candidly explaining his position. The marquis, instead of treating his son with a kind consideration, sent his lawyer to Oxford to offer a composition to the creditors. The tradesmen remonstrated; the lawyer shrugged his shoulders, and told them they might do as they liked, but that they had better take what he offered than stand the chance of getting nothing at all, for that the Marquis of Penshurst was determined not to suffer his son, while a minor, to be fleeced by those who recklessly gave him credit. The tradesmen accepted the composition, and they were given to understand that no further debts contracted by Lord Octavian would be thus settled. Octavian was relieved from his embarrassments, but his position was ruined at the university. He obtained the nickname of "the Bankrupt Lord." The wealthiest of his companions cut him direct; the poorest looked coldly upon him. His situation became intolerable; he wrote to his father to beseech that he might be allowed to choose some other profession than that of the Church; the marquis was obstinate in his refusal, and Lord Octavian left the university in humiliation and disgust.

His father refused to see him for some time, and at last when he consented, he upbraided the young man so bitterly and treated him with so much harshness that Octavian's home became as intolerable as his situation was at Oxford. In a few months' time he attained his twenty-first year, and he then requested his father to make him a fixed allowance. The penurious old marquis sternly refused; his tyranny increased toward Octavian, who, it must in justice be said, did all he possibly could to merit a renewal of the paternal confidence. His mother had long been dead; otherwise he would have found a kind and considerate mediatrix in her. In short, it became impossible for him to tarry beneath his father's roof, and through the intervention of a distant relative who happened to have some influence with the

marquis, Octavian procured an allowance of five hundred a year. Before he left home, he besought the marquis to use his interest to get him a commission in the army, or to launch him into the sphere of diplomacy, but the old nobleman could not forget that his original plans on behalf of his youngest son had been thwarted by his withdrawal from the university, and faithful to his churlish nature, he positively refused to do anything more for him.

Octavian accordingly quitted the paternal home, and took lodgings. He was but little past his majority, and his experiences of life were hitherto bitter enough. His spirit had been chafed, his feelings wounded, his hopes disappointed; he had the will, and he felt that he had the intelligence, to enter upon some career in which he might distinguish himself and carve out his own fortunes, but the opportunity had been denied him. This was indeed a bad beginning for a young man just entering upon the world, sufficient to demoralize him completely, render him indifferent to the good principles which had hitherto for the most part guided him, and prepare the way for his eventual ruin. Octavian did not entirely escape the ill effects of those inauspicious circumstances. On taking lodgings, he was launched as it were upon the town, and his companions were men in his own sphere of life. He became a favourite with them; his obliging disposition, his polished manners, and his natural intelligence rendered him a desirable guest at their tables, while his own limited means compelled him to accept all these hospitalities as the only condition on which he could obtain any society at all.

He was introduced to the Duke of Marchmont, who, from the way in which he was situated with his wife, was fond of giving bachelor dinner-parties and of being surrounded with a number of gay, lively young men, as the reader might have gathered from certain remarks made by Mr. Armytage. Thrown into the midst of this society, Octavian gradually found himself being drawn deeper and deeper into the vortex of dissipation. He kept out of debt, but he could not avoid keeping late hours and joining in the pleasures which his companions courted. To abstract himself from their company at an early hour when what they called "the joviality of the evening" was only just beginning, or to decline forming one of whatsoever party of pleasure

might be in contemplation, would be to seal his own exclusion from those circles in future. What was Octavian to do? He felt that he was entering upon a dangerous career, and that his naturally good principles were already receiving certain shocks, each successive one being accompanied with less remorseful feelings than the former, and he yearned to escape from these evil influences. But how was he to do so? His mind, having been chafed and disappointed, was too unsettled and restless to enable him to sit down quietly in the midst of books, and it was not to be expected that a young man just entering into life would fly to some distant seclusion and turn hermit. On every occasion when invited to dine with the Duke of Marchmont or any other of his friends, Octavian would hesitate what answer to send; he trembled to go, yet knew not how to refuse, and so he went, vowing it should be for the last time. But these "last times" really never reached the end, nor fulfilled their own meaning, and thus Lord Octavian Meredith — with the highest aspirations, and the best capacities for doing himself good — was being gradually and imperceptibly sucked into that vortex of dissipation which London life affords, and in which many a fine spirit, noble intellect, and magnanimous heart is wrecked and engulfed.

It has been necessary to give the reader this long description of a young nobleman who is destined to play no inconsiderable part upon the stage of our story, and he it now was who was ushered into the Duke of Marchmont's presence soon after Mr. Armytage had taken his departure.

"The very one whom at the instant I most longed to see," exclaimed the duke, cordially grasping Octavian's hand. "I was thinking of going for a good long ride, for to tell you the truth, I drank somewhat too much champagne last night — By the bye, you were not one of us at Lord Oxenden's?"

"No, I was at a party at Mr. Armytage's," replied Meredith.

"Ah! Armytage has just been here," said the duke.

"I saw him driving away in his carriage," observed Octavian, "and bowed to him. But I wish, my dear duke, you could give me half an hour of serious conversation, and then I will cheerfully accompany you in a ride."

"Serious conversation, my dear Meredith?" ejaculated

Marchmont, with a laugh. "Are you really disposed to be serious? Come, shall we have luncheon? A glass of hock and some soda-water will do us good."

"Not now, I pray you," responded Meredith. "Give me the half-hour, and then I am at your bidding."

"Be it so, — the half-hour of serious discourse," said the duke, and he stretched himself indolently upon the sofa. "Now, Octavian, proceed; I am all attention."

"You know, my dear duke," resumed the young nobleman, "how I am situated with my father —"

"Now, I will cut you short at once," interrupted Marchmont. "You have temporary need of a sum of money? Tell me without another word how much it is, and my cheque-book is at hand."

"No, my dear duke, it is not that," replied Meredith, his looks expressing his gratitude for the offer. "Nevertheless, I did come to solicit a favour at your hands. It is that you will use your interest to procure me a diplomatic post. I have an inclination to go abroad —"

"Ridiculous, Octavian," exclaimed the duke; "we cannot spare you from amongst our own set. But seriously speaking, my dear friend, I have not the slightest interest with the present Ministry. You know that I belong to the good old school of Toryism; I always vote against the government on principle, and if there were a shoeblack's situation to be given away, I might vainly ask for even so paltry a post for a nominee of my own."

"I feared that it would be so," observed Octavian, his handsome countenance becoming deeply overshadowed, and sorrow clouding his clear blue eyes.

"But what means this sudden resolve on your part?" inquired Marchmont, — "this anxiety to get abroad?"

"You have treated me with so much kindness, I will be frank with you," answered Octavian. "My means are limited, I am dependent on my father's caprice, I have no profession, no position, and I long to improve my circumstances in every respect."

"I understand," said the duke, "and it is natural enough. But, ah, my dear fellow, a thought strikes me! You know I do not flatter, but a young nobleman of your personal appearance, fine intellect, fascinating manners — You should marry."

“ Ah, marry! ” said Octavian, with an ill-repressed sigh. “ I have no fortune, and what father will consent to bestow his daughter, if she be an heiress, upon one so impoverished as I? ”

“ You underrate your own merits,” observed the Duke of Marchmont. “ In matrimonial affairs there are such things as equivalents. Suppose, for instance, a young lady brings you a decent fortune, and you confer upon her the rank and title which she possesses not — ”

“ I know that things are managed in this way,” observed Octavian, slowly, “ but to tell you the truth, it is a proceeding from which my pride recoils.”

“ Pride,” echoed the duke. “ The only sacrifice of pride that I can see would be in the fact of you, a patrician, giving your hand to a plebeian.”

“ You of all men to talk in this way,” exclaimed Meredith, in unfeigned astonishment.

“ Ah! you fancy that I am the proudest of the proud? ” observed the duke. “ But I am looking to your interests — ”

“ And I candidly confess that the sacrifice of pride to which I alluded is not precisely what you are thinking of. I meant to say,” continued Lord Octavian, “ that I should not like to be so much indebted to a wife for the enjoyment of a fortune. As for the distinctions between patricians and plebeians, you know very well that I am not such a Tory as yourself.”

“ Let us recur to my argument about equivalents,” said the duke. “ If you give a title, and the lady brings a fortune, you make common stock of those elements which constitute social position and comfort; you are mutually indebted, and in that respect you stand on perfectly independent grounds toward each other.”

“ Admitting the force of your argument,” observed Meredith, — “ and supposing that I fell in with some young lady who, possessing a fortune, would accept me as her husband, — how could I tutor my heart to love her? And how could I marry her unless it did? ”

“ Oh, if you mean to throw love into the scale,” ejaculated the duke, almost contemptuously, “ I must retreat from the argument. I only undertake to advise you how to obtain a settled position; I cannot compose philters that will

engender love. Perhaps, my dear Meredith, you love already?"

"I know not," responded Octavian, with some degree of confusion. "And yet methinks that the image of one whom I have seen — on two or three occasions — is often present to my fancy —"

"And pray who is this fair being to whom you allude?" asked the duke, "for of course she must be fair, thus to have made an impression on your heart."

"She is the loveliest girl I ever beheld in my life," ejaculated Octavian, with an enthusiasm which he could not at the moment repress, but which when thus given way to left him overwhelmed with confusion.

"But who is she?" inquired Marchmont. "You may tell me; I never interfere treacherously with my friends' love-affairs."

"I would tell you cheerfully, but I myself do not know," responded Octavian. "I have seen her on two or three occasions, walking with a youth whom by the likeness I know to be her brother —"

"Then you have never spoken to her?" asked the duke.

"Never," replied Meredith. "She is as modest as she is beautiful, and I do not think that she even so much as noticed that she was on those occasions the object of my interested regards. No, she is virgin bashfulness itself."

"And to what sphere of life does your unknown fair one belong? Ah, by that telltale blush I see she is beneath your aspirations, or, rather, beneath what they ought to be."

"This brother and sister of whom I am speaking," replied Octavian, in a serious tone, "are evidently respectable —"

"Respectable, but not rich?" exclaimed the duke. "Perhaps tradesman's children, or something of that sort? Now, my dear friend, renounce this phantasy of yours as speedily as ever you can."

"Yes, I must, I must," said Octavian, quickly, and with some degree of emotion. "It is useless to cherish a dream, — madness, in my position, to cradle myself in a delusion."

"The fact is," resumed Marchmont, "that if you fancied an obscure girl ever so fondly and passionately, — I mean in a virtuous sense, — you could not afford to love her. Your circumstances will not permit you. You must marry, Octavian, according to the counsel which I have given you.

It may seem repulsive at first, but the longer you think of it, the more palatable will my plan appear. Get a position, by all means; make yourself truly independent of your father, and of your elder brother after him. There are heiresses who would jump at an offer from a good-looking young man with the title of lord prefixed to his name. What say you, Meredith? ”

“ It is something to be thought over, ” replied the young nobleman, and then he added, slowly, “ If I did form such an alliance, I would do my duty toward my wife. I would surround her with attentions, even if I could not bring my heart to love her with sincerity. But where are such heiresses to be looked for? ”

“ Where? ” said the duke, apparently in a careless manner. “ Oh, that is your business! I have given you the counsel; it is now for you — But, ah, when I bethink me, there is the daughter of that very gentleman we spoke of just now. ”

“ Who? ” inquired Octavian.

“ Armytage, ” was the duke’s response. “ Do you know, my good fellow, that Armytage is a very wealthy man, and that his daughter’s dowry will be sixty thousand pounds on her wedding-day? This I can tell you for a fact. I have known Armytage, as you are aware, for a great number of years; I respect him because he is an upright, honest man, who by his own industry has made himself. ”

“ He was your factor, or steward, or intendant originally, — or something of that sort, — was he not? ” inquired Octavian, who had been listening thoughtfully to all that the duke said.

“ Yes, something of that sort, ” responded Marchmont, again relapsing into his manner of seeming carelessness. “ He scraped together some money, and I think he had a pretty considerable sum left him by a deceased relative. So he came up to London, launched out in business as a merchant and speculator, and thus made his fortune. You know very well, Octavian, that my antipathies are great in respect to the plebeian money plodders on the other side of Temple Bar, but in this individual instance I have never forgotten that Armytage served me faithfully and honestly, and so I have countenanced him. ”

“ The feeling does you honour, my dear duke, ” replied

Octavian, warmly, for he believed in its sincerity. "It is all the more honourable, too, inasmuch as it is at the expense of a prejudice."

"And Zoe — Mr. Armytage's daughter — is really a beautiful girl," proceeded the duke, — "elegant, accomplished, and well calculated to shine in any drawing-room. Come, my dear friend, I see that my counsel is not altogether thrown away upon you. We will have lunch now, and then go out for a ride. You can reflect at your leisure upon all that I have been suggesting."

"Yes," murmured Octavian, with another ill-repressed sigh, as he thought of the beautiful unknown whom he had seen on two or three occasions, and whose bashful loveliness had made more or less impression on his heart.

CHAPTER XI

ZOE

IN a sumptuously furnished drawing-room, in a house belonging to one of the handsomest terraces in the Regent's Park, a lady was seated. The apartment itself was characterized with splendour more than with elegance; every detail of its appointments was rich and costly, so that the evidences of wealth were assembled together with a profusion more calculated for ostentatious display than consistent with refined taste. The walls were crowded with vast mirrors; the style of the furniture was of scarlet and gold; knickknacks which had cost vast sums were scattered about as ornamental trifles. The room, though spacious, was in point of fact encumbered with its own magnificence, and thus was it divested of that real air of comfort which good taste knows so skilfully how to blend with the dazzling effects of splendour.

Yet amidst all these objects of a grand and gorgeous luxury which were so overwhelmingly heaped together in this drawing-room, there were a few slight evidences of a more correct and refined intellect than that which had presided over the general appointments of the apartment. There were flowers tastefully arranged with a view to the harmonizing of their brilliant colours; music rested upon an open piano, and lay upon a stool near a harp. There was a portfolio upon one of the centre-tables, and this contained several beautiful specimens of drawing, alike in pencil and in water-colour. An elegant piece of embroidery-work, half-finished, lay on the sofa on which sat the fair occupant of this room. The books which were formally arranged upon the tables for mere purposes of show were as trumpery in their contents as they were gorgeous in their binding, but

on the sofa, near the embroidery, lay three or four volumes containing the works of the best British poets, and these were in a comparatively common binding. The dress of the young lady herself was simple and neat, in the best possible taste, and therefore in reality characterized with a more real elegance than if it had been of the magnificent style which one would have expected to discern on the part of a female occupant of that sumptuously furnished room. Need we say that it was the refined taste of this lady to which a visitor would feel himself indebted for those little evidences of superior and more intellectual judgment which, few though they were, nevertheless afforded a certain relief to the eye and to the mind, otherwise dazzled and satiated by the presence of all that ostentatious display of wealth?

The lady of whom we are speaking was Zoe, Mr. Armytage's daughter, and the house to which we have introduced the reader was Mr. Armytage's mansion. All the rooms in that house — save two — were furnished with a costliness corresponding to that of the principal apartment; thousands and thousands of pounds must have been lavished in fitting up this gorgeous dwelling. But everywhere throughout the mansion, with the exception of the two rooms to which we have alluded, there was the pervasive indication of the vulgar mind of a parvenu, who, aspiring to move in the best and most brilliant society, fancied that his own plebeian origin and upstart position would be lost sight of in the dazzling splendours by which he was surrounded. The two rooms which formed an exception to the rule were the private apartments of Zoe Armytage herself: namely, her boudoir and her bedchamber. Those she had caused to be fitted up in conformance with her own refined taste, and the simple elegance which characterized these rooms afforded a sufficient proof of what the entire mansion would have been if the same genius had superintended all its appointments.

But now, between three and four o'clock on a certain afternoon, we find Miss Armytage seated in the drawing-room, from the simple fact that this was the visiting hour when "morning calls" might be expected, for in the fashionable world it is always morning until dinner-time, even though the dinner hour be postponed until seven o'clock in the evening. Zoe, however, could not endure the magnificence of that apartment unless it were relieved by the presence

of flowers, and unless her time, when she was alone, could be occupied with music, with her pencil, her embroidery, or her favourite authors. The simply bound books, therefore, had accompanied her from the well-chosen little library in her own boudoir, because not for a single instant could she bear to bend over the nauseating trash which filled the gorgeously bound annuals which lay upon the tables.

Miss Armytage was about twenty years of age. Her countenance was an oval of the most faultless outline; she was not merely beautiful, but interesting, and of that sweet, lovable appearance which, apart from mere beauty, renders a young woman so exquisitely charming. Her features were regular and delicately formed: her nose was perfectly straight; her mouth was small, — the lips classically cut, and of scarlet brightness. Her eyes were large and of a clear limpid blue, fringed with dark lashes, and surmounted by brows well separated and finely arched, so that the expression of her countenance was full of frankness and ingenuous innocence. Those lashes and those brows were many shades darker than her hair, which was of a rich light brown, soft and silky, and with so lustrous a gloss upon it that if worn in bands and left somewhat wavy, it seemed golden where the light fell upon it, and dark where the shades remained. But if worn in ringlets, then did a perfect shower of that light brown hair fall in natural curls on either side of this lovely countenance, descending upon well-formed shoulders, and upon a neck pure and stainless as alabaster. There was something inexpressibly sweet in her smile. The purity of her thoughts made her countenance seem the face of an angel, and as her complexion was delicately fair, though with the roseate tint of health upon the cheeks, this transparent purity of the skin added to the angelic style of her loveliness.

Though not tall, — indeed not above the middle height of woman, — her figure nevertheless appeared of a loftier stature on account of its admirable symmetry, its lithe elasticity, and its flowing roundness of contour and of limb. Every movement was characterized by an unstudied grace; every gesture was replete with an elegance all its own. However plebeian her parentage might have been, there were nevertheless all the best unbought graces of a natural aristocracy about this beautiful and charming creature.

Such was Zoe Armytage. But how was it that such a man as he who was introduced to the reader in the preceding chapter could possess such a daughter? Mr. Armytage had risen from next to nothing. He did not mind sometimes boasting amongst his City acquaintances — never amongst his fashionable ones — that he had been the architect of his own fortune, yet he never was known definitely to state what he was in the beginning. He went no farther back than the period when he acted as steward or intendant over the vast estates of the present Duke of Marchmont. However, at the time when Zoe was old enough to begin to receive impressions from the circumstances in which she was placed, her father was already a well-to-do man. Thus, whatever his earliest position might have been, Zoe's recollections went no farther back than to associate themselves with a comfortable, well-furnished home, with servants, and the usual appendages of rapidly increasing prosperity. Her mother had died early, and as she grew up, she perceived, with an understanding beyond her years, that though her father supervised the governess and the preceptors who managed the various departments of her education, he was by no means capable of judiciously exercising such authority. She loved her father, not merely because she was naturally of an affectionate disposition, but likewise because she beheld, or fancied she beheld, in his zealous care on her behalf, a fond, paternal endeavour to indemnify her as much as possible for the loss of her maternal parent. Thus as she grew up she delicately avoided hurting her father's feelings by suffering him to perceive that her own intuitive good taste and naturally delicate appreciation were as pure gold is to dross in comparison with his vulgar, upstart, parvenu notions. While seeming to follow his advice in all her studies, she nevertheless in reality yielded implicit confidence to the sounder judgment and better tastes of the first-rate governess and masters who were engaged in her tuition. The result was that her mind expanded beneath the best possible influences, totally unaffected by that erroneous one which her father sought to shed upon every phase of its development. For if she had listened to him, she would have devoted herself to the fashionable frivolities instead of to the substantialities of education; she would have become fitted only for a mere drawing-room doll, whereas she had

turned out an intellectual and truly accomplished young lady.

It may easily be supposed that with a mind so gifted and with an understanding so capacious as Zoe's, she could not have failed to observe the ways in which her father had obtained wealth. She knew him to be one who had speculated — if speculation it could be called — with all that worldly-minded shrewdness which invariably left him a gainer, though the enterprise itself should fail and involve all his confiding associates in ruin. She knew likewise that he lent money to the profligate and the necessitous at a usurious rate, and never without security more or less tangible; she knew that the extravagances of the patrician spendthrift and the embarrassments of the struggling, hard-working, industrious trader had been the sources of no inconsiderable part of his immense fortune. She was aware that he had seen poverty in palaces as well as in prisons, and had penetrated into both with no sympathizing object, but for the mere purpose of availing himself of the proud lord's wants or the poor tradesman's necessities, as the means of aggrandizing his own wealth. All this did Zoe know, and therefore she had a complete reading of her father's heart. She knew that it was not merely hard, because hardness melts, and his heart never melted; that it was not merely cold, because coldness may relax, and his never relaxed; but she knew its utter nothingness in respect to all kindly sentiments when dealing with the world, — its complete impassibility in the pursuance of a career which had simply one aim: namely, money-making.

All this Zoe knew, and yet she loved her father. She would not suffer herself to despise him; she could not possibly hate him. She loved him because she fancied — and in this instance only was her judgment at fault — that all he did for her was the result of a doting fondness on his part. Of this fondness she beheld the evidences in the sums he had spent upon her education, the constant care which he made her take of her health, the visible pride with which he surveyed her in his own sumptuous saloons, the separate equipages he kept for her, the lavish profusion with which he furnished her purse, the rich presents he was continuously making her, the exultation with which he would sometimes hint that she ought to form a brilliant alliance, and the

assurance he was constantly giving her that his only object in heaping up wealth was to endow her with those riches. Fine as Zoe's intellect was, and shrewd her understanding, it is nevertheless not to be wondered at if, in her inexperience of the world, and the natural generosity of her heart, she should put the most favourable interpretation upon her father's conduct toward her. But Mr. Armytage did really love his daughter, though it was a love after the fashion of his own sordid soul, — a love that was made up of vulgar pride as much as of any other element. He saw that she was beautiful, and he was proud of her; he heard her accomplishments spoken of, and he flattered himself that for these she was indebted much more to his own supervising judgment than to the fine qualifications of her own intellect or to the proficiency of her governess and preceptors. To her only did he ever speak in accents of fondness; her influence alone could induce him to perform a charitable action, though this he would emblazon with all the flaming hues of his own ostentation. But still Zoe saw how different he was to her than to the rest of the world; she attributed it to a pure paternal fondness, and therefore was it that, with all his faults, she loved her father so tenderly and so well. Little did she think that this father of hers would drag her to the altar and immolate her as the sacrifice to a patrician alliance, rather than suffer her to proceed of her own accord to that altar, to bestow her hand on some plebeian object of her choice, if such choice she should happen to make.

Zoe however had made no such choice. Yet she loved, and who it was that had thus become the object of her affections will be presently seen. He whom she thus loved was as yet totally ignorant that he had made any impression upon the mind of this charming young lady; no one suspected her love, neither her father nor her handmaids. The natural purity of her thoughts, blended with her maidenly dignity, had prevented her from betraying the secret by even the slightest sign whereby the sentiment of love is so often wont to reveal itself. At the time of which we are writing, Zoe's love had not existed many months in her heart, and yet it was already profoundly rooted. It had entwined itself, so to speak, with every fibre of her being. But it was a love entirely of the sentiment, and not of the sense, — a love which was strictly a sentiment, and not a passion, — a

love of that æsthetic character in which the ancient Greeks believed, but the mere mention of which only provokes the sneer of skepticism in this more worldly-minded and practical age. Nor do we ourselves believe that such love is often found. It is the lost paradise of the soul, of which few are now permitted to obtain a glimpse, much less to receive an infusion of its pure and holy light into the sanctuary of their hearts. Yet such a love as that was Zoe's, and she cherished it without ever dreaming of aught beyond. The very idea of its realization would have seemed to her a thought tinctured with grossness, if emanating from herself and not inspired by an avowal on the part of its object.

Having thus sufficiently introduced Miss Armytage to our readers, we may pursue the thread of our narrative. It was, as we have already said, between three and four o'clock in the afternoon that Zoe, having quitted her boudoir, took her seat in the drawing-room to await the presence of any visitor or visitress who might happen to call. Her father had been with her for about half an hour; she had played to him on the piano and the harp, and he had looked over her portfolio of drawings. Not that he had the faintest idea of music, nor the slightest taste in a pictorial or artistic sense, but he chose to affect a very great fondness for those elegant accomplishments in which his daughter excelled, while he cordially detested the course of reading to which she was particularly devoted. He had only left her at the time of which we are writing, to speak to some one on business who had called at the mansion in the Regent's Park, for though he had ostensibly retired from commercial affairs by giving up his counting-house in the City, he nevertheless continued in a sort of private manner his financial enterprises by advancing loans on good security.

Having transacted whatsoever business it was that had called him away, Mr. Armytage returned to the drawing-room, where Zoe in the interval had taken up one of the books which she had brought from the boudoir.

"What are you reading there, my love?" he inquired, leaning over the back of the sofa, which was drawn away from the wall so as to be near one of the centre-tables.

"Cowper's poems," responded Zoe, looking up at her father with a sweet glance, in which there was an amiable

deprecation, for she evidently foresaw the observation that would next come from his lips.

"How absurd," he exclaimed, "to waste your time over that sentimental nonsense. And really, Zoe, when there are so many elegantly bound books which you might group about you, I wonder at your having those poor-looking volumes here in the drawing-room."

"I will put them out of sight, dear father," she at once rejoined, "if you object to them," and she hastened to thrust the books under one of the immense velvet cushions bordered with gold fringes and having long tassels likewise of gold.

"If you don't like the tales and poetry in those volumes," continued Mr. Armytage, glancing toward the trumpery works in their splendid binding that lay upon the tables "it is quite fashionable, you know, to have the last new novel lying by your side. I have often begged you, my dear Zoe, to read fashionable novels; they improve the taste, and furnish ideas for conversation in company."

"Really, my dear father," replied Zoe, who however seldom contradicted or remonstrated against the displays of her sire's false notions and vulgar taste in such matters, "I do not think that these fashionable novels of which you speak can in any way afford improvement for the mind or manners, and as for the conversation, Heaven help those who think of drawing their inspirations from such sources!"

Mr. Armytage was about to reply, when an equipage dashed up to the front of the house, and hastening to the window, he exclaimed, "It is my friend the Duke of Marchmont."

He then sat down and took up a book, so that he might have the air of one who did not put himself out of the way for even a ducal visitor, but would receive him with as little excitement and as little fluttering of pride as if he were the humblest of acquaintances. But he was not destined to receive the visit at all on the present occasion, for when one of his footmen — habited, by the bye, in a livery resplendently gorgeous — made his appearance in the drawing-room, it was not to announce the duke, but simply to request Mr. Armytage to step down, as his Grace had a word to say to him but begged to be excused alighting from his carriage as he was in a hurry to keep an appointment elsewhere. For

a moment a scowl of displeasure appeared upon the features of Mr. Armytage, as if he felt that he was receiving the treatment of a plebeian at the hands of a patrician immeasurably his superior, but the next moment, as a recollection flashed to his mind, his countenance recovered its wonted cold equanimity, and he sped down-stairs.

"No doubt," he thought to himself, as he thus hastened forth to the duke's carriage, "Marchmont has come to tell me something about the affair I spoke to him of a few days back."

The duke was alone inside the carriage, and as Armytage hurried up to the window, the footman who had descended from behind to knock at the front door stood back a pace or two so as not to have the air of listening to whatsoever might be said.

"I just called to tell you, Armytage," said the duke, in a low voice, "that I have been enabled to manage that little business about which you called on me the other day. What say you to Lord Octavian Meredith, youngest son of the Marquis of Penshurst?"

Mr. Armytage reflected deeply for a few minutes, without making any response.

"The family is a very ancient and a most honourable one," continued the Duke of Marchmont. "Meredith himself is a handsome and elegant young man —"

"But if I mistake not," observed Mr. Armytage, "he is at variance with his relatives, and I would not have my daughter marry into any family where she would stand a chance of being cut, and where I myself should not be a welcome guest."

"Of all this you need entertain no apprehension," rejoined the Duke of Marchmont. "The Marquis of Penshurst is more parsimonious than proud, and depend upon it, he will joyfully receive his son and his son's wife when the latter brings an ample dowry with her on her wedding-day. As for yourself, you have only to lend a few thousand pounds to Lord Meredith, the marquis's eldest son, and to Lord Charles, his second son, both of whom are kept by their father's penuriousness in total want of money, — you have only to do this, I say, in order to receive all possible civility at their hands."

"Yes, your Grace speaks truly," said Mr. Armytage. "As for Octavian Meredith, he is a very nice young man,

a son-in-law of whom one might feel proud. But are you sure, my lord — ”

“ I am sure, Armytage,” interrupted the duke, “ that I have managed the thing most capitally for you. Meredith furnished me an opportunity the other day of counselling him relative to his affairs; indeed it was the very same day on which you yourself called, and I have had him with me every day since. You may expect a visit from him this afternoon, so I shall not wait another moment, lest he might think it strange if he were to see me in conversation with you. Play your cards well, Armytage, and the fair Zoe will be Lady Octavian Meredith.”

The carriage drove away, and Mr. Armytage reascended to his drawing-room, perfectly satisfied with the proposed arrangements, for after all the Duke of Marchmont had just said, he saw at a glance how his daughter and himself would obtain, after the marriage, a suitable footing in the Penshurst family. But as he returned to the apartment in which Zoe was seated, his countenance betrayed not that anything unusual was passing in his mind, and as he was invariably accustomed to parade before his daughter, as well as in the presence of his friends and acquaintances, his great intimacy with the Duke of Marchmont, he was at no loss for an excuse for his Grace's flying visit.

“ If I was to listen to that fellow Marchmont,” he said to Zoe, “ you would scarcely ever have my society at the dinner-table. He is always wanting me to go and dine with him. That is what he came for just now. I do really believe he feels more pleasure in my company than in that of any other of his friends. But hark! there's another knock at the door.”

Again did Mr. Armytage take up one of the splendidly bound annuals, and affect to be reading some stanzas by Lady Letitia Fitzharding Fitzpatrick Languishdale. The lines were by courtesy denominated poetry, but in reality they were the most mawkish twaddle that ever was contained in an array of words set out in unmetrical lines, and with false jingles by way of rhymes. The door was thrown open by the gorgeously dressed footman, and Lord Octavian Meredith was announced.

The reader is already aware that this young nobleman had for some little time past been an occasional visitor at

Mr. Armytage's house, and one of those scions of the aristocracy whom the wealthy parvenu had, through the aid of the Duke of Marchmont, secured as the "lions" of his saloons. He therefore received Octavian with becoming courtesy, though with no more cordiality than he had been previously wont to display, for he was careful not to excite a suspicion of the machinations which were in progress. Zoe received the young nobleman with a ladylike affability, and the conversation at first turned upon indifferent subjects. Suddenly Mr. Armytage recollected that he had letters to send off to the post, and he begged his lordship to excuse his temporary absence from the room.

Meredith was now alone with Zoe, and he gave the conversation an intellectual turn. The young lady entered easily into this train of discourse. It was pursued, and both became gradually more and more interested in it. Meredith saw that Zoe possessed a well-cultivated mind; he had all along known that she was accomplished, but he did not suspect the existence of so much of wisdom's treasures in her understanding. He was the more charmed, too, inasmuch as her remarks were made with a mingling of well-bred ease and maidenly bashfulness which totally divested her of the obtrusiveness of the "blue-stocking." He had come expressly thus to draw her out, or, in other words, to fathom the depths of her mind, for he was neither so selfishly degraded in his own disposition, nor so desperate in his circumstances, as to resolve all in a moment to seek as a wife a young female of shallow intellect and frivolous disposition. He remained an hour with Zoe on this occasion, so that he far exceeded the usual limit of a morning call, but the interval appeared to him the lapse of a few minutes only. He had never known so much of Zoe before, and he was as much surprised and delighted at what he thus found her to be on a better acquaintance.

He took his leave, and striking into one of the most secluded portions of the Regent's Park, deliberated with himself. Did he love Zoe? No, assuredly not. Could he bring himself to love her? He sighed. That sigh was an answer to the question, — an answer in the negative. The image of the lovely unknown of whom he had spoken to the Duke of Marchmont suddenly rose up to his mental vision, and he felt that his heart was inextricably engaged there. Then,

should he persevere in his contemplated suit with Zoe? His naturally honourable feelings shrank from the thought. At that instant he almost loathed himself as one who had entertained the idea of performing the despicable part of a selfish fortune-hunter, and he said to himself, "No, poverty sooner, — poverty ten thousand times sooner, in preference to this utter self-abasement in my own estimation."

Two days afterward there was a splendid party at the house of Mr. Armytage, and Lord Octavian Meredith was one of the invited guests. He attached himself to Zoe as her principal partner in the dance; he turned the music for her as she sat at the piano; he accompanied her in a duet. He had a fine voice and sang admirably. Zoe's voice was of silvery softness, and she too sang with exquisite taste, — a taste that was all the more apparent from the utter absence of affectation. When Lord Octavian, after having sat by Zoe's side at the supper-table, returned at two in the morning to his own lodgings, he thought to himself that never did Miss Armytage appear so ravishingly beautiful and so charmingly fascinating in his eyes, so that he mentally ejaculated, "After all, I think I can love her."

On the following day he paid the usual visit of courtesy which follows an evening's entertainment, and on this occasion he remained an hour and a half with Zoe, her father having at the time, or pretending to have, a very pressing appointment with some great nobleman, whom he of course spoke of as his very particular and intimate friend. After this visit Lord Octavian said confidently to himself, "I not only can love her, but I do already love her."

Yet an image rose up before him, and a sigh came up into his very throat. He hurried his pace through the Regent's Park as if to escape from the image; he stifled the sigh ere giving it vent, and then he endeavoured to persuade himself that it was all nothing, that the fair unknown had really no hold upon his affections, that it was a mere passing whim or caprice excited by a pretty face and a sylphid figure, — and besides, that it was perfectly ridiculous to entertain a serious thought of one to whom he had never spoken in his life, and whom he might never see again. Still there was a secret voice speaking with its silent eloquence in the depth of his soul, which told him that he was reasoning not as the truth really was, but according as he wished it to be, and

this time the deep-drawn sigh could not be altogether stifled.

However, the next day beheld him again a visitor at Mr. Armytage's house. How could he help going thither on this occasion? He had a piece of new music of which he had spoken on the preceding day, and which he had volunteered to bring Zoe. It was a duet, and as Mr. Armytage was present in the drawing-room when Octavian was ushered thither, there was no impropriety in his offering to sing it with the young lady. They did sing it. Octavian thought that never had Miss Armytage displayed her musical accomplishments with so fine an effect, never had her loveliness appeared more angelically charming. When he took his leave after this visit, he had far less difficulty in putting aside the image of the beauteous unknown, or in suppressing the rising sigh, than he had experienced on the preceding day. On the following day he called upon Zoe again, and for nearly each successive day for the ensuing six weeks. On every occasion he became, or fancied that he became, more profoundly enamoured of Miss Armytage; he saw himself received with a gradually increasing cordiality on the part of the father, and with an unchanging affability on that of the daughter. He seldom thought now of the beauteous unknown; less seldom did he find himself sighing when her image did happen to rise up to his mental vision. But did Zoe herself love him? Was he indeed not indifferent to her? Or did she regard him merely as a visitor with whom a sort of intellectual friendship had sprung up? This question puzzled him; he had never seen on Zoe's part the slightest betrayal of any tender partiality toward him. What if he were to offer and to be refused? Such a catastrophe would be terribly humiliating to his manly pride, and in this frame of mind, hovering between hope and uncertainty, it was by no means difficult for Octavian Meredith to persuade himself that he loved Miss Armytage to a degree that his very happiness depended upon their alliance. To do him ample justice, the more he had seen of her and the more he had felt himself attracted toward her, the less he had thought of the pecuniary advantages to be derived from such a marriage. The naturally noble feelings of his disposition, by inducing him to scorn the thought of mere selfish interest, led him to believe that his sentiment toward Zoe was now altogether a disinterested

and a legitimate one. So easy is it, under certain circumstances, to hug as a positively settled belief that which we really wish to believe in; so facile is it to cheat at times our own higher intelligence and regard our hopes and our wishes as actual and unmistakable convictions! There are more false fanaticisms and delusions of the mind than even the most experienced of men are always willing to admit unto themselves.

Six weeks, as we have said, had passed since that day on which we first introduced Zoe to our readers, and one afternoon Octavian Meredith called at a somewhat earlier hour than usual. He found Zoe alone in the drawing-room, and as he entered, she put down a book which she had been reading.

"May I see," he inquired, after the usual compliments had passed, "what is the subject of your recreative study?"

"Oh, certainly," responded the young lady, with her usual affable smile. "It is one of my favourite authors."

"Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village,'" said Octavian, as he took up the book. "Miss Armytage, there must be times when, with your intelligence, you view with a feeling which borders on disgust the frivolities of fashionable life. I confess candidly that I do. I am convinced that where there is no intellect there is no heart, but that if the head be hollow, the place where the heart should be is likewise a void."

"I know not, my lord," replied Zoe, "that I would go altogether to such an extreme conclusion —"

"No, because were you to admit it," he exclaimed, with irrepressible enthusiasm, "you would be as it were proclaiming that you are all heart, because you are all intelligence. Ah, Miss Armytage," he added, "were I possessed of a fortune, I should sink down upon my knees to lay it at your feet."

Zoe averted her countenance, where the colour went and came in rapid transitions. It was evident that she knew not how to reply, and Meredith was not altogether sure whether she were offended or pleased by this sort of avowal he had just made. But that she experienced one or the other of those feelings, he had no doubt, for indifferent and unruffled she assuredly was not.

"If I have offended you, Miss Armytage," he went on to

say, speaking tremulously, "I should be bitterly irritated against myself. Tell me, have I offended you?"

"No, my lord," she answered, but in accents that were scarcely audible, while the transient glance which she threw upon the young nobleman conveyed the first revelation he had ever yet obtained in respect to the real feeling with which the young lady regarded him.

"Then if I have not offended you," he said, "I may hope that I am not altogether indifferent to you? I have no fortune, Miss Armytage, to lay at your feet, but I have a loving and affectionate heart to offer you. Will you accept it?" and he sank upon his knees before her.

Zoe, with her countenance still averted, and with the colour still coming and going rapidly upon her beautiful cheeks, made no verbal answer, but proffered him her hand. He took it, and conveyed it to his lips. But scarcely had those lips touched it, when she gently but firmly disengaged it, and rising from her seat, said, in a low but clear voice, "My lord, I must now refer you to my father — Perhaps I ought to have done so in the first instance," she added, more gently still.

Octavian had started up from his knees, smitten with the apprehension that he had been too bold in kissing the beautiful white hand which was proffered him, and that the young lady was offended, but he saw by her looks that it was not so. Her conduct was merely that of maiden dignity and of filial obedience, so that all in a moment she rose a thousand times higher in his estimation, if possible, than she had previously stood, highly as he had esteemed her before.

"But I may tell Mr. Armytage," he said, gazing tenderly upon her, "that your consent is already obtained, if his be vouchsafed?"

"It would be on my part, my lord, a ridiculous affectation," responded Zoe, in a voice that was tremulously clear, but yet she spoke with downcast eyes and with a modest confusion bashfully blending with her firmness, — "an affectation insulting, too, to the minds of both of us, were I to declare that you are an object of indifference to me. You have my consent, if you obtain my father's. And think not, my lord, that I fail to appreciate the honour which you confer upon me, — the perhaps too flattering compliment which you pay me —"

"Zoe, dearest Zoe," exclaimed Octavian, "never did you seem more charming in my eyes. Never was your conduct more admirable than at this moment. If your father will consent to our union, I swear that your happiness shall henceforth prove the study of my life."

Again he took her hand, again he pressed it to his lips, and it was not withdrawn, but then he retained it only for a single instant, and bending upon the lovely blushing girl a look of tenderness, he issued from the room. The moment the door closed behind him, Zoe sank upon the sofa whence she had risen up, murmuring to herself with a sensation of holy rapture, "He loves me. He loves me."

Yes, Octavian Meredith had all along been the object of Zoe's secret and hidden affection, and thus the designs of her father were, by an extraordinary coincidence, forwarded by her own feelings. We denominate it extraordinary, because let the reader reflect how seldom it is in real life that where a parent has from selfish or sordid motives fixed upon a particular individual to become his son-in-law, the daughter's own heart has the whole time been acquiescing in the choice. It was, however, so on the present occasion, and though Miss Armytage was not of a disposition to abandon herself to a feverish and unnatural excitement, though her mind was too strong and her temperament too placid for such inordinate agitation, yet it would be wrong to imagine, and would indeed be stamping her as deficient in the softness of feminine feeling, if we were to say that her heart fluttered not at all. It did palpitate with a considerable degree of suspense, but her emotions betrayed themselves not outwardly with much violence; yet it was not through any habitual dissimulation nor studied hypocrisy that they were concealed. No, she was all guileless innocence and unsophisticated ingenuousness, but her disposition, as already stated, was naturally calm, her feelings sank deep down and bubbled up but little to the surface, and they were the purer, the more genuine, and the more lasting on that very account.

She was not kept long in a state of uncertainty. In about half an hour the door opened, and Octavian hastened into her presence again, his countenance beaming with rapture and delight, not unmingled with astonishment. The result of his interview with Mr. Armytage was thus at once pro-

claimed, even before a single syllable fell from his lips, and now Zoe no longer withdrew her hand when he sought to retain it, nor did she with a prudish affectation hold back her countenance from the kiss which her accepted lover imprinted on her pure chaste forehead.

Octavian might well be astonished at the assent which he had received from Mr. Armytage, for notwithstanding the reasoning of the Duke of Marchmont, he had scarcely anticipated that a man whom he knew to be so worldly-minded as Zoe's father would with a comparative readiness afford his acquiescence to the suit of a portionless lover. But then Mr. Armytage had given an affirmative response in that specious manner which he was so proficient in adopting. He had thrown out a hint to the effect that he had never sought for his daughter an alliance with mere rank, but had hoped that she would become the wife of some individual more in her own sphere.

"However," he had gone on to observe, "Zoe is an only child, and I am too fondly devoted to her to thwart her happiness in a single respect. You say, my lord, that she loves you, and therefore you have my concurrence. All my earthly aims are concentrated in the ensurance of my beloved Zoe's felicity. Without being considered guilty of too much paternal pride, I may safely assert that I bestow upon you a veritable treasure. See that you treat her kindly, my lord; show me that you appreciate the precious gift which I now declare to be yours, and I shall know how to express my gratitude."

Lord Octavian made suitable acknowledgments, and he was completely deceived by the specious language used by Mr. Armytage on this occasion, so that he thought to himself that Zoe's father must in reality possess an excellent heart notwithstanding his worldly-minded pursuits. Before he and Mr. Armytage separated on that occasion, the latter gave the young nobleman to understand the amount of the dowry he purposed to give his daughter, the mode of its settlement, and the allowance that would be made to Octavian himself. To all these proposals Meredith assented with a readiness which originated from his own earnest straining to convince himself as well as others, that he was unbiassed by interested views in the matter. Then Mr. Armytage hinted that if the young nobleman had any debts they

should at once be liquidated, but to this offer Octavian was enabled to give a proud negative, he having no pecuniary liabilities. We do not mean that the pride of that response was of an aristocratic nature; it was the pride of one who felt that he might assume a manly dignity in proclaiming the rectitude of his conduct, which had been proof against all the temptations to extravagance by which he had of late been surrounded.

But if Octavian went away from that interview in astonishment at the apparently frank, noble-minded, and fondly paternal behaviour of Mr. Armytage, not the less astonished was Mr. Armytage himself to learn that Zoe loved her noble suitor. However, he did not waste much time in pondering upon this matter; it was sufficient for him that Zoe had thus by her own conduct fallen into the views which he had entertained on her behalf, and he sped away to Belgrave Square, to inform the Duke of Marchmont of all that had just taken place.

A month afterward — namely, at the end of August, 1847 — the bridal took place. Mr. Armytage insisted that it should be solemnized with all possible circumstances of splendour, and immense therefore were the preparations made for the occasion. Zoe would gladly have gone to the altar under circumstances far less ostentatious, but she had never been in the habit of disputing her sire's will, and she was by no means likely to do so while entertaining the belief that he had put all selfish considerations aside through a fond regard for her happiness wholly and solely. She accordingly suffered the arrangements to progress without the slightest remonstrance on her part, reserving to herself the privilege of settling the precise details of her toilet, which she was resolved should be characterized by that elegant simplicity which was most congenial to her taste and disposition. The wedding-breakfast was to be a perfect banquet, and as if Mr. Armytage did not already possess plate sufficient, he expended two or three thousand pounds in the purchase of additional table ornaments to be used on the occasion. The invitations were likewise more numerous than Zoe would have preferred, if left to her own choice, but herein again she quietly let her father have his own way. The Duke of Marchmont faithfully promised to attend at the wedding-breakfast, and Mr. Armytage, satisfied with this pledge,

readily excused his Grace from accompanying the bridal party to the church.

On the eve of the day fixed for the ceremony, Mr. Armytage was seized with a violent fit of the gout, and his physicians positively forbade him from attempting to stir out-of-doors. Zoe, deeply afflicted at this circumstance, besought her sire to postpone the wedding, but he would not listen to it. All the preparations were fully made, and he was determined that the ceremony should take place. Zoe still renewed her entreaties, but in the midst of this discussion Octavian Meredith himself arrived, his countenance beaming with the satisfaction of one who had good intelligence to impart. He was, however, for a moment saddened on perceiving Mr. Armytage sitting in an easy chair with one of his legs hugely bandaged up, — saddened too, likewise, because he beheld the tears trickling down Zoe's cheeks. The intelligence he had to communicate was to the effect that the invitations, which as a matter of courtesy had been forwarded to his father and his two brothers, were all accepted, and he himself had brought the written replies, addressed to Mr. Armytage. They were couched in courteous terms, and Octavian explained that he was now completely reconciled to his relatives. If any circumstance had been wanting to support the resolution of Mr. Armytage that the bridal should take place on the morrow, notwithstanding his own indisposition, it was the intelligence Octavian had just imparted. Zoe, perceiving further remonstrance to be vain, yielded to her sire's will, and her grief at his illness was mitigated not only by the assurance that he should be enabled to preside at the wedding-breakfast, but also by the satisfaction which he and she alike experienced at Octavian's reconciliation with his family.

On the following morning the bridal was celebrated. The Marquis of Penshurst, — a tall, thin, pale old man, — accompanied by his two elder sons, arrived at the mansion at an early hour, and though they were but little more than coldly courteous to Mr. Armytage, they were on the other hand exceedingly affable and cordial toward Zoe, whose beauty and inobtrusive manners made an immediate impression upon them. The Marquis of Penshurst gave Mr. Armytage to understand that he had converted the allowance of five hundred a year made to Octavian, into a permanent

settlement, and that he had moreover presented the young bridegroom with a thousand guineas, duly paid over to his account at the bankers'.

Two young ladies of rank acted as bridesmaids, and an earl undertook to give the bride away, as her father was unable to proceed to the church. The ceremony was solemnized at All Souls, in the fashionable quarter of Langham Place, and we must content ourselves with observing that the bride looked ravishingly beautiful as well as sweetly interesting. The wedding-breakfast fulfilled, in its sumptuous display of plate and in its profusion of all the choicest delicacies, the intents and wishes of the ostentatious Mr. Armytage; the Duke of Marchmont, faithful to his promise, was amongst the guests, who were described in the newspaper-paragraphs of the following morning as being "the élite of the fashionable world." When the repast was over, Zoe — having taken an affectionate and tearful leave of her parent — was handed by the bridegroom to the handsome carriage presented to the young couple by the bride's father, and they set off to spend the honeymoon at some watering-place, where a suitable house had been already engaged for their reception.

CHAPTER XII

CHRISTINA

SIX weeks had elapsed since the bridal ceremony; it was now the middle of October, and the young couple, having returned to London, took possession of a house in Regent's Park, on the side exactly facing the abode of Mr. Armytage. Zoe naturally wished to be near her father, whom she might thus see daily, or at least very often, and Lord Octavian Meredith, having no particular choice as to the place of his residence, cheerfully carried out the wishes of his beauteous bride. During the honeymoon he had found no reason to be disappointed in the estimate which he had previously formed of Zoe's intellect, temper, and disposition. All the excellent traits of her mind — and she had no bad ones — developed themselves in a manner full well calculated to rivet her husband's affections, if they were susceptible of such adhesion unto her. She was all gentleness and amiability, candour and truthfulness, ingenuousness and innocence. Her love, being crowned by happiness, appeared to render her beauty more angelically fascinating, if indeed there had been any room for such enhancement of her charms. In short, Lord Octavian Meredith had every reason to be the happiest and most contented of men.

One afternoon, a few days after the return of the young couple from the watering-place, Lord Octavian had occasion to call upon Mr. Armytage on some little business connected with the settlement of Zoe's dowry. We should observe that during the interval since the marriage, Mr. Armytage had entirely recovered from his attack of gout, and had become as bustling and active as ever. The business between himself and his son-in-law was speedily concluded, and Octavian took his leave, to retrace his way on foot across the park to his own

dwelling. He was walking along that road which, diverging from the main one near the Colosseum, leads to the inner circle, when his attention was suddenly drawn to a scene that was taking place a little way ahead. A gentleman, having caught the hand of a young female genteelly but simply dressed, was endeavouring to retain it against her will, and was doubtless addressing her in a style of language which excited her virtuous indignation, for as she struggled to release her hand from his grasp, her ejaculations of angered remonstrance reached Octavian's ear. But, ah, that figure! He recognized it in a moment, and darting forward, reached the spot swift as an arrow shot from a bow. The gentleman — a gentleman in name only, but not in conduct — was at once stricken to the ground by the chivalrous and indignant Meredith, for it is only fair to observe that if the young person who was the object of the genteel ruffian's outrage had been an utter stranger to him, he would have acted in precisely the same manner.

The discomfited individual started up from the ground in a furious rage, exclaiming, "By Heaven, sir! whoever you are, you shall give me satisfaction for this insult."

"It is you who have perpetrated the insult against a well-behaved young lady," was Octavian's coldly dignified response, "and you have received your punishment. If in addition to this chastisement, you require any other, depend upon it you shall receive it at my hands. Here is my card."

"Very good," responded the other, without even glancing at the card which Octavian handed him. "You shall hear from me," and with these words, he walked hastily away, brushing off the dust from the sleeve of his coat.

Let us pause for a few minutes to describe the young female whom Meredith had thus delivered from the stranger's audacious conduct, and in whom he recognized the beautiful unknown who has been before alluded to. Beautiful she indeed was, as the reader has been prepared to learn; youthful, too, for she did not appear to be more than sixteen or seventeen years of age. Though slender in figure, the symmetry of her proportions constituted a rare model of developing charms. Her countenance was pale, but it was the paleness of beauty and of health; not the dull dead whiteness of the skin, but the purest complexion with a vital animation upon it. Her eyes were large and dark; their

naturally lustrous beaming was somewhat subdued by an innate modest bashfulness, and partially veiled by the long ebon lashes that fringed them. Her hair was of the very darkest shade, — not that of dull lustreless jet, but that of the shining glossiness of the raven's plumage. It was not merely luxuriant, but of silken softness, and it fell not in ringlets, but in more massive tresses on either side of her beautiful countenance. The rosy hue of the lips set off teeth of a dazzling polish and faultlessly even. When beheld in her quiet moments — for she was now naturally excited by the scene which we have just described — there was a stamp of so much guileless truthfulness and virginal innocence about her that it was a wonder even the most daring libertine could for a single instant have been so thoroughly mistaken in her character and disposition as to suppose that she would listen to his overtures. Still speaking of her in her tranquil moments, we may add that there was a slight settled shade of melancholy, or perhaps rather of pensiveness, on her beautiful countenance; yet this, in no way detracting from the charms which invested her, only perhaps undefinably enhanced them. We have already said that she was plainly but neatly dressed, and there was a natural grace in every movement and in every gesture of this sweet girl. Her eyes, though bright, had none of passion's fire in them; on the contrary, there was something of dovelike mildness in her looks, if such an expression can be applied to the darkest eyes as well as to those of blue. The outline of her countenance was purely Grecian, and the upper lip had that short rich curl which with some women is the type of high birth, with others an evidence of that instinctive feminine dignity which disdains falsehood and is incapable of guile.

Such was the interesting creature with whom Lord Octavian Meredith now suddenly found himself alone. At the instant that he had rushed up to the spot, her countenance was crimsoned with indignation and a sense of outraged virtue; the next moment, when the audacious libertine was stricken down to the earth, the colour fled from her cheeks, leaving them marble pale. She staggered against the railings which skirted the pathway of the road, and endeavoured to compose herself, so as to make suitable acknowledgments to her deliverer, but when she heard the

libertine who had insulted her, using threatening terms, talking of satisfaction, and declaring that her defender should hear from him, the proceeding assumed a significancy which, inexperienced as the young girl was in the ways of the world, nevertheless sent the thought flashing into her mind that a duel would possibly be the result of the occurrence. A mortal terror accordingly seized upon her, for to this innocent and pure-minded being it seemed shocking to a degree that two human lives should be thus risked on her account, and one of them the life of her gallant deliverer.

Lord Octavian Meredith turned toward the beautiful stranger, and expressed his hope that she was now recovering from the terror into which the incident had plunged her.

"A thousand thanks to you, sir," she answered, in a tremulously murmuring voice, "for your generous behaviour. But did I rightly interpret the words which that rude person uttered? Oh, sir," she continued, an expression of more than grief, for it amounted to a positive anguish, appearing upon her countenance as she raised her fine dark eyes toward Octavian Meredith, "I beseech — I implore that no life may be risked —"

"Tranquillize your fears," interrupted the young nobleman, in the gentlest and most soothing tones of his naturally harmonious voice. "The man who could thus insult such a one as you must be in his heart a coward, and even should he, through fear of the world's scorn, dare me to a duel, rest assured that I will chastise him."

"Good heavens," murmured the young girl, all her worst fears being thus frightfully confirmed; "you will risk your life!"

"Is it indeed a matter of interest to you that I should take heed of my own safety?" and in putting this question Octavian Meredith was irresistibly carried away by those feelings which he had originally experienced toward the lovely unknown, and which were now resuscitated more vividly than ever.

"Can you ask me, sir," she said, still speaking murmuringly and tremulously, and with affliction in her looks, — "can you ask me if it be a subject of consequence whether lives are to be hazarded? Oh, the bare thought is shocking!" and under the influence of overpowering feelings, she laid her hand upon Meredith's arm, gazing up entreatingly into his

countenance as she exclaimed, "For Heaven's sake, accept not the defiance of that man whose conduct has placed him utterly beneath your notice!"

The touch of that beautiful girl's hand — light though it were, and gloved though the hand itself was — sent a thrill of unknown pleasure through the entire form of Octavian Meredith. He experienced feelings such as he had never experienced in respect to Zoe; so that with the rapidity of lightning did the conviction flash to his mind that he had deceived himself as to his real sentiments in respect to her who had become his wife, and that he loved her not as he now felt he loved the dark-eyed, raven-haired being who was before him. This conviction caused him to experience a strong sensation of anguish, which instantaneously followed upon the thrill of pleasure the light touch of her hand had sent with electrifying effect through his entire being. He comprehended all in a moment that his happiness was wrecked by the circumstance of having wedded another, and in a paroxysm of irrepressible emotion, he raised his hand to his brow.

"Ah! you yourself, sir, are smitten with horror at the thought of being placed in a position to take the life of a fellow creature," and the young girl, thus very naturally mistaking the cause of his excitement, clasped her hands entreatingly as she went on to exclaim, "Tell me that you will not accept that bad man's defiance. Pardon this importunity on my part, but believe me, it would make me very, very wretched indeed."

The nature of this colloquy, the close contact into which it brought Meredith and the lovely stranger, the variations of feeling and emotion which the circumstances developed on her part, all contributed to display her beauty in different lights, and to afford him a reading into the innocence, the generosity, and the kindness of her soul. If he had felt himself attracted toward her on those few occasions when he had casually passed her in the street, when he had neither spoken to her nor heard the sound of her voice, and had only obtained transient glimpses of her charms, how much more deeply was he interested in her now that she was there close to him, that he could look into the depths of her fine dark eyes, that he beheld the pearly whiteness of her teeth, that he had leisure to examine every feature of her beauteous face,

and that a glance rapidly wandering over her figure confirmed his previous impression of its exquisite symmetry, promising admirable developments, and when, too, her pure breath fanned his very cheek, as under the influence of her feelings she besought him to abstain from the threatened duel. Zoe was forgotten, or if not absolutely forgotten, remembered only as one to whom he had indissolubly linked himself, and who thus stood as a barrier in the way of the crowning happiness of the real love which he experienced. Then too flashed to the mind of the young man the sickening conviction that despite all his sophistical reasonings at the time, he had literally and actually sold himself for Armytage's wealth; whereas, on the other hand, he felt that he could have been content to inhabit the humblest residence, if it were shared by this beautiful being who was now before him.

Such were the feelings and thoughts conjured up all in a moment in the mind of Lord Octavian Meredith, as the charming stranger continued her appeals. For an instant he had flattered himself that these appeals arose from a tender interest which she herself experienced in him, but he had quickly seen, by her answer to that question which he had put, that her entreaties arose merely from a sense of duty and gratitude toward a fellow creature who had behaved nobly on her behalf.

"Will you not promise me," she said, "that this menaced duel shall not take place?"

"Yes, yes, I promise you," he responded; quickly, in order to tranquillize her fears, though without having the intention of keeping the pledge if the threatened satisfaction should be demanded.

"Ah, sir," persisted the young girl, who, artless and unsophisticated though she were, was nevertheless not to be deceived by an assurance which was belied by her deliverer's look and manner, "you only tell me this to set my mind at ease. Oh, I understand," she exclaimed, a light suddenly breaking in upon her soul; "you will be forced to obey those false and unnatural laws which society denominates the code of honour! But it shall not be so," she added, abruptly regaining a degree of firmness, and her countenance expressing a promptly taken resolution. "You have acted generously toward me; I will perform my duty toward you."

“What do you mean?” cried Meredith, in astonishment.

“Will you let me know, sir,” inquired the young girl, timidly and bashfully, “the name of him to whom I am under such deep obligations?”

Octavian now understood her in a moment. She purposed to give the proper authorities notice that a duel was to take place, and she hoped that by adopting this course, she would prevent it without suffering his own honour to be compromised. But in the first place, Octavian was no coward, and indeed thought lightly of the prospect of the impending duel, and in the second place he saw that if the authorities were to interfere to prevent it, the worst construction would be put on such a result by his antagonist, who would doubtless proclaim to the world that Meredith himself had deliberately prompted the young girl to give private intimation to the magistrate. So rapidly did all these thoughts flash through his mind that there was no apparent interval of hesitation or reflection on his part, ere he replied to the query she had put, by saying in a collected offhand manner, “My name is Richard Percival.”

“Then, Mr. Percival,” immediately added the young girl, “accept my gratitude for your generous conduct toward me.”

With a graceful inclination of the head, she was hastening away, but Octavian was almost immediately by her side, saying, “Will you not suffer me to learn who it is to whom I have been enabled to render the service which is deemed deserving of thanks?”

The young girl stopped short, and reflected gravely for a few moments. It was evident enough that she was deliberating whether she should tell her name; it was also evident that she feared it would savour of ingratitude and actual rudeness to decline, for she at length observed, slowly, “You have a right to ask this question, sir. My name is Christina Ashton.”

“Then, Miss Ashton,” at once responded Lord Octavian Meredith, “you will permit me to escort you to your own residence, for fear lest you should again encounter any individual who, wearing the garb of a gentleman, possesses the attributes of a ruffian, and is unable to appreciate the innocence and the respectability which ought to be a sufficient shield against such treatment as you ere now experienced.”

"I should be sorry, Mr. Percival," answered the maiden, "to engross any more of your time. Pray suffer me to continue my way alone."

"Miss Ashton, I have read your thoughts — I have fathomed your intentions," exclaimed Meredith. "You are going straight hence to a magistrate. Now, if I promise faithfully that I will not engage in a duel —"

"Alas, sir," said Christina, "you cannot dispose of your own actions in this matter. I have read in books of that false code of honour which, belonging to a bygone barbarism, has been engrafted upon our modern civilization —"

"Miss Ashton, I entreat you not to take the step which you meditate," interrupted Octavian. "Do you know that you would expose me to something far worse than the hazard of losing my life? You would expose me to that of losing my honour. The world would call me coward, and I swear unto you that in spite of all the magisterial and police authority, I would vindicate my reputation and my character."

"Ah, is it so?" murmured Christina, mournfully, for she was smitten with the truth of what her deliverer had just said.

"You see therefore, Miss Ashton," resumed Octavian, "that if actually challenged by that person, I must go out with him. I will no longer attempt to deceive you, for such is the real truth. Do not however be alarmed on my account. If mortally wounded, I should in my last moments be rejoiced to think that I had rendered a service to an amiable young lady such as you are."

The tears started into Christina's eyes at the bare thought of a fellow creature's existence — perhaps a most valuable one — being jeopardized or lost on her account, and moreover, for a naturally sensitive disposition and for a feeling heart, there was something irresistibly touching in the tone and manner in which Octavian had last addressed her. She still lingered, forgetful in the agitation of her mind that the interview had already been too much prolonged, considering that she was standing there conversing with one who was almost a total stranger to her, for we should state that though she herself had on former occasions been noticed by Meredith, she had never observed him. Indeed, so far as she was concerned, she did not recollect having ever seen him before the present occasion.

“ You perceive, therefore, Miss Ashton,” continued Meredith, “ that you really must suffer this matter to take its course, and that you would be doing me a positive injury by any direct interference. At the same time, I fully appreciate the generosity of your motives, and I feel myself bound to offer that you shall be made acquainted with the result. If I fall in the impending duel, some friend of mine shall wait upon you with the intelligence, but if I survive, I will do myself the pleasure of calling, to convince you personally of my safety.”

Had Christina Ashton been less inexperienced than she was in the ways of the world, she would have penetrated this somewhat insidious and perhaps not altogether handsome endeavour to draw from her lips an avowal of the place of her abode, but artless and guileless herself, she was unsuspecting of underhand dealings on the part of others. The same motive which had prompted her to mention her name now at once instigated her to mention her address, and having hastily done so, she again bowed and continued her way.

Meredith had no longer the faintest shadow of an excuse for detaining her, though he would gladly have gone on lingering in conversation with a being whose beauty had made such a deep impression upon his heart. We must observe that these scenes had taken place in a portion of the Regent's Park which is seldom much frequented by persons either on foot or on horseback, even when the park itself serves as a fashionable resort; but in the autumn season of the year the fashionable world were for the most part out of town, the parks were well-nigh deserted, and the particular spot where these incidents occurred had not at the time a single individual passing that way, save and except Meredith, Christina, and the impudent libertine who had insulted her.

Octavian continued his way slowly toward his own house. On arriving there, he found the carriage in readiness, as he had promised to accompany Zoe for a drive. His first impulse was to make some excuse, as he wished to be alone with his own thoughts, but his natural generosity would not permit him to do this. He felt that he had no right to deprive his wife of his company, in consequence of any new or altered feelings which might have arisen within him, but that on the

contrary, it was his duty to crush and stifle those feelings. This he earnestly resolved to do. He accompanied Zoe for the drive, and the various little evidences of the exquisite sweetness of her temper and the amiability of her disposition, which even the mere tenor of the conversation developed, filled him with remorseful feelings as he remembered all that had passed through his mind while he was with Christina. He forced himself to appear gay, and the unsuspecting Zoe fancied not that there was in reality an abstraction and a preoccupation beneath that cheerful surface. He said nothing to her relative to the adventure which might probably lead to a duel. In the first place, a husband seldom or never imparts to a wife the chance of such a casualty, and in the second place, Octavian felt that he could not touch upon the subject without betraying some emotion while speaking of Christina.

At about nine o'clock in the evening, as Lord and Lady Octavian Meredith were sitting together in their drawing-room, taking their coffee, a servant entered, and presenting a card to his master, intimated that the gentleman whose name it bore requested to see him.

"Ah, Captain Whitby," said Octavian, with an air of assumed carelessness, so as to prevent his wife from suspecting there was anything wrong. "I will come down to him at once," and when the footman had left the room, he observed, in the same easy, indifferent manner, "The captain has come to inquire into the character of a man I had with me previous to our marriage."

Octavian then descended to the dining-room, where Captain Whitby was waiting to see him. The gallant officer had called on behalf of the Honourable Wilson Stanhope, which it appeared was the name of the individual from whose libertine outrage Octavian had rescued Miss Ashton. Meredith penned a hasty note to the Duke of Marchmont, requesting him to act as his second, and this note he begged Captain Whitby to bear to his Grace, who would arrange all preliminaries.

"I have named time and place in my letter, Captain Whitby," added Meredith, "and as a matter of course, all parties engaged will observe the strictest secrecy with regard to the proceedings."

"Such is also Mr. Stanhope's wish," responded the cap-

tain. "Mr. Stanhope frankly confesses that under the influence of a champagne breakfast, he behaved rudely to the girl, and therefore, my lord, a single word of apology on your part for the blow you struck will prevent this hostile meeting."

"And that word, Captain Whitby, will not be spoken by my lips," rejoined Meredith.

The captain bowed and took his leave, while Octavian rejoined Zoe, who still saw nothing in his look or manner to create in her mind the slightest suspicion of what was going on.

It is not our purpose to give a detailed description of the duel. Suffice it to say that Octavian rose at an earlier hour than usual, alleging that the fineness of the morning tempted him to a ride on horseback before breakfast, and having embraced Zoe, he took his departure. Mounted on his steed, and having dispensed with the attendance of his groom, he galloped to the place of meeting, where the Duke of Marchmont arrived at the same moment. A few minutes afterward the Honourable Wilson Stanhope and Captain Whitby appeared upon the ground. They had brought a surgeon with them, but he remained in their carriage at a little distance. Shots were exchanged, neither party receiving any injury, and Mr. Stanhope declared that he was satisfied. The two principals then shook hands in the approved manner, and thus in five minutes all was over. Ere separating, it was agreed by those concerned that the utmost secrecy should be observed in respect to the affair, and thus not even a whisper transpired to reach a reporter's ears and engender a paragraph in the public journals.

Lord Octavian Meredith reached home at the usual breakfast-hour, and Zoe still remained without the slightest suspicion that her dearly beloved husband's life had been risked in a duel. We may add, ere closing this chapter, that Meredith had been compelled to inform his friend the Duke of Marchmont of the name and address of Miss Ashton, so that in case he had fallen, his promise might be kept, and the intelligence conveyed to the young lady. But Octavian had not chosen to confess that this Miss Ashton was the very selfsame beauteous unknown of whom he had made mention when consulting the duke in regard to his prospects, as described in a previous chapter.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LODGING - HOUSE

IN Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square, a respectable lodging-house was kept by a widow woman named Macaulay. She was about fifty years of age, short and stout, yet bustling and active; very untidy and dirty in her appearance during all the earlier part of the day, but dressed out in a very fine style for the afternoon and evening. She was a Scotch woman, exceedingly thrifty, and bent upon saving a penny here and a penny there to the utmost of her power. She therefore assisted the servants in the housework and the kitchen; hence her morning's untidiness. But when the onerous duties of the day were over, Mrs. Macaulay sported her silk gown, her cap with pink ribbons, her gold watch and chain, and seated herself in her neat little ground floor parlour, ready to receive any of her neighbours who might chance to drop in for a chat. Though parsimonious even to meanness, — beating down her drudges of servants to the lowest possible amount of wages, — she was an honest woman in her way, and made as little free with her lodgers' tea and sugar, butter, and other comestibles, as the most conscientious of her class. Neither did she altogether possess a bad heart, though it was steeled with many defences against accessibility with regard to money matters. She would not mind sitting up all night long to nurse a sick lodger, but she would not at all like to hear the lodger, when rent-day came around, make an excuse for non-payment. Her landlord came to her regularly for his rent, and she therefore must have hers. The tax-gatherers were equally exact in their periodical visits, and she was compelled, as she alleged, to require a corresponding punctuality on the part of her tenants. Such was Mrs. Macaulay, — a woman with

whom lodgers were certain to remain on the best possible terms so long as their weekly bills were settled with regularity.

The ground floor, consisting of two rooms, was occupied by herself, — the front being her parlour, the back her bed-chamber. The first floor was very handsomely furnished, and was sure to be “well let,” as Mrs. Macaulay termed it, in the season, perhaps to a member of Parliament, whose regular residence was in the country. The second floor was far more plainly appointed, but still comfortable enough, and above were the chambers of the servants, with a spare one in case the first-floor lodger should have a servant of his own.

It was about ten o'clock in the forenoon on the very day that the duel took place, that a tall man, of gentlemanly appearance, and well though plainly dressed, — that is to say, his apparel was genteel and of good materials, but without pretension, — passed slowly along Mortimer Street, and observing a card in a window, announcing a first floor to let ready furnished, he knocked at the door. On one of the servants answering it, he requested to look at the rooms, and he was in the first instance shown into Mrs. Macaulay's parlour, while that respectable female “tidied herself up a bit,” to use her own phrase. Having washed her face and hands, slipped on her silk gown and her cap with pink ribbons, Mrs. Macaulay entered the parlour, with a simpering mien and a half-curtesy. She prided herself upon being an excellent physiognomist, for she always scrutinized well every applicant for her lodgings, so that she might calculate the chances of being paid her rent, or of having her tenants decamp suddenly some fine day. As a matter of course such disagreeable incidents as these had been within the range of her experience, and by treasuring up in her mind the countenances of the delinquents, she regarded them as criterions for the formation of her judgment in future. Therefore, on entering into the presence of the gentleman to whom we have alluded, she studied him with all the keenness of her perception, yet without appearing to do so.

As we have said, he was of tall stature; we may add that he was of commanding aspect. His hair, which was of an iron gray, was worn much away from above the forehead,

and was thin upon the crown. His whiskers, which were large, were a shade darker, yet quite gray at the roots. Handsome he might be considered, so far as the profile was concerned, but he had a cold, stern look that was almost saturnine, and which chilled the beholder. His complexion appeared to be made up of sallowness bronzed with the sun. As for his age, it was by no means easy to fix it; he might be fifty, — he might even be several years younger or older, but that which might have led to the former inference was that he possessed a fine set of teeth which were well preserved. He was dressed in black, and over his shoulders there hung loosely a dark blue cloak. Though it was only the middle of October, the weather was still warmly genial, and the landlady therefore concluded he was an invalid or had lately been one, and thus sought to protect himself against the chance of taking cold. From the result of her survey, she could not exactly make up her mind as to whether she liked his appearance or not. He had the air of a gentleman, but then that cold, severe, stern look of his troubled and bewildered her. Besides, was not the Polish count with an awful long name, and who turned out to be no count at all, but only a wild Irish adventurer, and who had run away five pounds in her debt, — was not he a very gentlemanly man? While, on the other hand, did she not decline to receive as a lodger an elderly person, merely on account of his haughtily stern look, and had not this very individual lived for the last ten years with Mrs. Sifkin over the way, paying his rent as regularly as clockwork, and never venturing a hint that his tea and sugar disappeared rapidly, or that somehow or another something was always wanted, though a store of it had been laid in only a day or two back? Therefore, it was no wonder if worthy Mrs. Macaulay was puzzled how to act in the present instance, and that the tall gentleman's countenance was one which seemed to defy her skill as a physiognomist.

“I see that you have apartments to let,” he said, and the mildness of his voice, rich however in its sonorous harmony, and tinctured with a deep mournfulness, almost made her start, for she had expected that nought but the sternest accents could issue from those lips.

“Yes, sir,” she responded, cheering up considerably, and again putting on the invariable simper of an obliging

landlady, "I think you will find them excellent apartments. Is it for yourself and lady — or —"

"For myself only," replied the stranger, and he made a motion toward the door, as if impatient to view the apartments without further delay or discourse.

"I will show you the rooms, sir," continued Mrs. Macaulay, and as she led the way up the stairs, she muttered to herself, "Heavens! there's a broom where a broom should not be," and then as she reached the landing, she suddenly opened a closet-door and thrust a pail into it, still muttering, "That slut Betsy! what can she be thinking of?"

The apartments were duly shown; the stranger merely flung a single glance around the drawing-room and the bedchamber, which were on the same level, and expressed himself satisfied.

"The rent, sir, is four guineas a week, of course including attendance," said Mrs. Macaulay, "but for this sum you have a chamber up-stairs, in case you keep a servant of your own."

"I have none, and do not mean to keep any," answered the gentleman.

"Very good, sir, just as you think fit," exclaimed Mrs. Macaulay. "You will find mine a very quiet house, and I need not say," she added, drawing herself up, "that it is of first-rate respectability. When should you like to come in, sir?"

"A word or two first, if you please," responded the stranger. "I am somewhat of an invalid, and seek quiet apartments. Have you any other lodgers in the house?"

"The floor above is let, sir, but to the nicest, quietest young people that you could wish to see."

"Have they children?" asked the stranger.

"They are brother and sister, sir," rejoined Mrs. Macaulay, "quite young folks, and highly respectable, for they have never once missed paying their rent since they have been here, which is upward of six months. They go up and down stairs as quiet as mice —"

"And you have no other lodgers?"

"None, sir. If you take these rooms, my lodgings will be all occupied. I only let out these two floors."

"Then I will take the apartments," said the gentleman,

“and I shall come hither at once. My trunk is at an hotel hard by; I will go and send it — ”

“Perhaps, sir,” interposed Mrs. Macaulay, as the stranger was advancing to the door, and she spoke in a mild tone of subdued deprecation, as much as to imply that he must not take offence at what she was about to say, “perhaps you will favour me with a reference?”

“I have none to give. I am acquainted with no one in London; I am a total stranger here. But whatsoever sum in advance you require, you may have,” and as the stranger thus spoke, he drew forth a well-filled purse.

“That is not exactly, sir, the same thing,” observed Mrs. Macaulay, for she thought to herself, “Did not the gentleman with the red hair, who was no gentleman after all, pay me a fortnight in advance, and then manage to run into my debt ten pounds, in spite of all I could do? And when I asked him for a settlement, did he not run away with my plated coffee-pot and six silver spoons?” So as the worthy landlady hastily reviewed these circumstances in her past experience, she was resolved to take warning therefrom in her present dealings.

“I am not offended,” replied the stranger, in his mild, gentlemanly voice, “that you should seek guarantees for the respectability of those who take apartments beneath your roof. Your conduct is in itself a guarantee that your house is a respectable one. I tell you again that I am a perfect stranger in London, but if you will call at the great bankers’ in the Strand,” and he named the firm to which he alluded, “they will, I think, give you every satisfactory information. The apartments suit me, and as I have taken the trouble to look at them, and have given you the trouble to show them, I have no inclination to go searching elsewhere.”

“I am very much obliged, sir,” answered Mrs. Macaulay, now cheering up once more; “such a reference will be highly satisfactory. What name, if you please, sir?”

“Make your inquiries relative to Mr. Redcliffe,” rejoined the gentleman, and he thereupon took his departure.

Mrs. Macaulay lost not a moment in proceeding to the bankers’, and on putting the inquiry to one of the clerks at the counter, she was referred to a gentleman in an inner room. She did not much like this, and again her spirits

fell, for she thought that if her would-be lodger had an account at the bank, the clerks must all be prepared to answer any inquiries. However, she put her question to the gentleman to whom she was thus introduced in the private room, and he, having listened to her, gravely turned over the leaves of a huge book which lay open before him.

"I know nothing of Mr. Redcliffe," he at length said.

"Then I am robbed of my time, and should have been swindled out of my rent," ejaculated the irate Mrs. Macaulay. "Who knows but that he would have walked off with another coffee-pot and another six silver spoons?"

"Stop, stop, my good woman," interrupted the banker, with an imperious wave of his pen; "you should have patience. I was going to say that I know nothing of Mr. Redcliffe personally, nor who he is, nor what he is. But this I do know, that I have upwards of one hundred thousand pounds in my hands, to the account of that gentleman."

"Ah, dear me!" said Mrs. Macaulay, scarcely able to speak through utter amazement. "A hundred thousand pounds, and I who was afraid of my plated coffee-pot and my silver spoons."

"I think, ma'am," resumed the banker, "that if you have Mr. Redcliffe as a lodger, — always supposing him to be the same Clement Redcliffe whose name figures in my book, — you run no risk of losing your coffee-pot or your silver spoons."

The banker then bowed slightly, but with the unmistakable air of a man who had no more to say, and whose time was precious. Mrs. Macaulay thereupon took her leave, and entering an omnibus, was borne in the direction of her own residence. But during the ride fresh misgivings gradually arose in the mind of this very cautious and indeed suspicious woman. What if after all the individual who had taken her apartments was not the real Clement Redcliffe? What if he were some swindler, who having learned that a gentleman of such a name had money at the bank, but was not known there, had availed himself of such information to pass himself off as the veritable Mr. Redcliffe? She worked herself up to such a pitch of suspicion and mistrust that she was half-inclined to refuse to receive the gentleman. She thought it so odd that a man worth up-

wards of one hundred thousand pounds should be without a single acquaintance in London. She could scarcely believe it was so, and therefore regarded it as an excuse on the part of an impostor for not giving any other reference than the one to the banker. But then, as she entered Mortimer Street, glanced at Mrs. Sifkins's over the way, and thought of how she had overreached herself by her suspicions in respect to the old gentleman who had taken her rival's lodgings, had lived there for years, had paid his rent regularly, and never looked into his tea-caddy, she endeavoured to reason herself against her present mistrust. In short, the result was that she decided in the gentleman's favour, though not without a lingering apprehension in her mind that she was doing wrong and that he would turn out a swindler after all. The new lodger's luggage presently arrived from the neighbouring hotel, and as Mrs. Macaulay was on the lookout for the porter who brought it, she beckoned the man into her parlour, gave him a glass of gin, — not forgetting to take one herself likewise, — and began to question him.

“ Who is this Mr. Redcliffe? ” she inquired.

“ Don't know, ma'am, nothink about the gentleman, only that he has paid all the servants in a wery 'andsome manner.”

“ How long has he been at your hotel? ”

“ Why, he come fust of all a matter of six or seven weeks back, I should think, as near as I can recollect. But he only stayed a few days, and was shut up in his room looking over all the old files of newspapers he could possibly get hold of. We have filed the *Times* at our place for the last twenty year, and, bless me! if I don't think he must have read it all through, for he was always poring over it from morning to night. The head waiter said as how he thought the gentleman was either a politician studying politics, or else fancied hisself to be the heir at law of a fortune, and was looking out for the advertisements to the next of kin, or else that he must have been abroad a many years, and on coming home wanted to see what had took place in his absence.”

“ How strange! ” said Mrs. Macaulay; then as her own ideas always settled on money matters, she added, “ I will be bound it was the advertisements he was looking after, and that he has got his fortune, and that's the money that

has been paid into the bankers'. Well, but you say he only stayed with you a few days first of all?"

"No more he did," responded the hotel porter, "and he set off one day into the country with only a little carpet-bag, observing that he should be back in a short time. He did not pay his bill when he went away, but seemed desperate hurried. Five or six weeks passed, and the governor" — meaning the landlord — "began to think he was gammoned, and that the gentleman's great big trunk might only have brickbats and straw in it arter all, and that he had took away his shirts and what-not in the carpet-bag."

"And a very reasonable suspicion too," observed Mrs. Macaulay. "I should have entertained it long before the six weeks were up. But go on."

"Well, ma'am, it was on'y yesterday morning," continued the porter, "that the governor, finding his customer didn't come back, decided on breaking open the trunk, and he calls me to get a jimmy — that's a crowbar, you know, ma'am — to do it. So, just as I was going up-stairs with the jimmy, a cab stops at the door, and who the deuce should walk in but Mr. Redcliffe, followed by the jarvey with the carpet-bag. So I slips the jimmy up my back, under my coat, and makes my bow as Mr. Redcliffe passes. Wasn't the governor glad that he hadn't come a few minutes later? for if he had, the trunk would have been opened as sure as a gun."

"I know I should have opened it at the end of the first week," interjected Mrs. Macaulay. "Well, what next?"

"Why, ma'am, just now — about an hour back — Mr. Redcliffe rings and orders his bill. Now, don't you see, his trunk had been standing in his bedroom for the whole six weeks he had been absent, so of course the governor charges him for the use of the room the whole time. The waiter didn't much like taking up the bill, though he's got plenty of brass, that selfsame waiter has. But Mr. Redcliffe just glanced at the amount, threw down some bank-notes, and paid the bill without an instant's hesitation."

"That's just what I like," ejaculated Mrs. Macaulay, resolving that her own bills should not be stinted in items, and with a quick mental glance perceiving in a moment how a few little extras could easily be stuck on.

"And I'm blessed, ma'am," continued the hotel porter,

“if Mr. Redcliffe didn't pay all the servants just as though he had been stopping at the hotel the whole six weeks.”

“Take another glass of Hollands,” exclaimed Mrs. Macaulay, becoming bounteous in her exuberant glee at having such a lodger, and in finding all her suspicions most completely allayed.

The man quaffed the strong waters, carried the huge trunk up-stairs, and then took his departure. Shortly afterward Mr. Redcliffe made his appearance, and at once took possession of his apartments, Mrs. Macaulay having in the meantime put on her Sunday apparel, including a new cap with pink ribbons, in order to give him the best welcome possible.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TWINS

AT the same time that Mr. Redcliffe thus arrived at his new lodging, the occupants of the second floor, to whom Mrs. Macaulay had alluded, were seated together at a table, on which were books and needlework. The room was tolerably well furnished for a second floor, and was at least quite comfortable. The two inmates were a brother and a sister, and even a superficial observer would have seen that they were twins. We need not enter into any lengthy description of the sister, inasmuch as we have already described her, for she was none other than that same Christina Ashton on whose account Lord Octavian Meredith fought a duel. We may however remind the reader that she appeared to be between sixteen and seventeen years of age, and that she was exquisitely beautiful.

Christina's brother was an exceedingly prepossessing youth; he had large dark eyes, similar to those of his sister, and though perhaps his hair was not of the same intense darkness, it nevertheless had an almost equally fine natural gloss upon it. Like herself, he possessed a superb set of teeth, and his countenance was pale, not with a sickly pallor, but with that absence of a florid hue which is usually characteristic of youthful faces when set off by dark hair and eyes. Christina's figure had as yet all the slenderness and willowy elasticity of her tender youthfulness, — at the same time promising to expand, as she approached more nearly to womanhood, into rich developments. The bust had already its nascent contours, carefully concealed by the modest apparel which ascended to the very throat, — and that throat, how sweetly beautiful, how transparently white! The youth's figure was likewise slender, symmetric-

ally formed, and promising as his own years also advanced to be of well-knit, manly proportions. There was a remarkable similitude between this brother and sister, — not only in respect to personal appearance, but also with regard to their minds and dispositions. They had been well educated; they were naturally intelligent, and they had intellectual tastes. They were devoted to each other, and thus, when the sister was occupied with her needlework, the brother read to her from some book which was calculated to instruct as well as to amuse.

Over the countenances of both there was the slightest possible shade of pensiveness, which at times even deepened into melancholy, but when they caught this profounder expression on each other's face, they would instantaneously brighten up, as if it were a tacit consent between them that they should avoid mutually saddening influences. There is always something interesting about twins; there is sure to be a deep affection existing between them, and most generally a strong physical similitude; their tastes, too, and the casts of their minds, generally have much about them that is identical, but perhaps in no case were all these characteristics so profoundly stamped, so marked, so visible, as in that of which we are speaking. Very interesting therefore was this youthful pair; and as if nothing should be wanting to sustain the impression of their twin condition, an identity of name had been observed with regard to them so far as the difference of the sex would permit, for the brother was denominated Christian, and the reader is already aware that the sister was called Christina.

We introduce them in the afternoon of the day following Christina Ashton's adventure in the Regent Park, and therefore the same on which the duel had been fought in the morning. Christina had of course told her brother every particular, for they had no secrets from each other; and now, when occasionally glancing up from his book, he perceived that she was evidently somewhat restless and uneasy, he could full well divine the cause thereof. At first he forbore allusion to it, fearing to rivet her thoughts too completely upon the subject; but when he observed her restlessness increasing, he laid down his book, and said, in a plaintive voice, "I wish, dearest sister, that you were relieved from this anxiety."

“It is a dreadful thing, Christian,” she responded mournfully, as the tears started into her beautiful dark eyes, “to reflect that lives have possibly been risked, and even lost, by this time, and entirely on my account.”

“But did not Mr. Percival promise that you should be made acquainted with the result?” asked the brother; “and depend upon it, that if anything fatal had occurred we should know it by this time. Mr. Percival did not tell you where he resided, I think, — for if he had, I would go and make some inquiry in his neighbourhood.”

“No,” responded Christina, “he suspected that I purposed to inform the authorities and prevent the duel.”

“Ah, my dear sister,” exclaimed Christian, “it was the first time you ever went out alone during the whole six months we have been in London, and it shall be the last.”

“You were so occupied with your drawing, you know, Christian,” answered his sister, “that I did not like to take you away from it; and as the Regent’s Park is so near, I thought there was no harm for me to go alone as far as Mr. Preston’s. Besides, you had forgotten that it was the day for receiving our monthly money, and so you were not ready dressed to go out. The hour had arrived when the money was to be called for, and you are aware how severe and particular — indeed, how cross and stern Mr. Preston is, and how particular he was in enjoining us always to come to the very day and to the very hour, otherwise he should be offended.”

“Well, my dear sister, another time,” responded Christian, “I will be sure to recollect when pay-day comes around, and I will be ready to go out with you to the very hour. But I forgot to ask you, did Mr. Preston prove more communicative —”

“Than on former occasions?” asked Christina. “No, not at all. He was abrupt and hurried as he always is, — curt enough, without being absolutely rude. I lingered with the intention of asking him a few questions, but he quickly bowed me out, and the servant was in readiness to open the front door.”

“How I dislike all this mystery!” exclaimed Christian, the natural sweetness of his temper being for a moment ruffled by a vexation which may be understood from the

remarks he went on to make. "I cannot lead a life of idleness. I long to be placed in some position that will enable me to earn something. If it be charity we are dependent upon, the sooner we escape from such a humiliating position the better; but if it be that our dear deceased uncle, on dying so suddenly, left us some property, and that this Mr. Preston is his executor, and, so to speak, our guardian, I wish he would tell us exactly how we are situated and what we have to rely upon, much or little. I am determined, Christina, that when the monthly pay-day comes around again, I will ask firmly, but of course respectfully, for some little information on these points."

"Yes, you shall do so, Christian," was the sister's response. "It was a year last Monday," she added, with a sigh, "that our dear uncle was smitten with death in so shocking a manner, and only last Monday, therefore, that we put off the mourning we had worn for him."

"And during all this time," added Christian, "we have learned no more of the circumstances in which we were left by Mr. Ashton than we knew on the very day of his demise, unless it be that Mr. Preston became in some way or another interested in our behalf. Ah, I hoped when, six months back, he sent for us to come up from our own pleasant little village to this great metropolis, that it was to do something for me, to give me a profession or an employment, to put me in a way to carve out for myself some career suitable to my tastes. But no, nothing of the sort. Here we have been six months in these lodgings, and I am no farther advanced in my hopes than I was on the day of our arrival. But, ah, I must not repine; it is perhaps wicked in me to do so, for we have enough to support us comfortably, and our wants being limited, twelve guineas a month are a little fortune."

"I am not sorry, dearest brother, to hear you speak now and then in a way which proves that you possess proper manly aspirations," and as Christina uttered these words, her looks were bent with inexpressible fondness, mingled with a sisterly admiration, upon Christian.

At this moment one of the servants of the household entered the room, and said, "Please, miss, here's a gentleman inquiring for you. He says he is Mr. Percival."

"Then he is safe!" murmured Christina, with a look of

profound thankfulness, while her brother bade the servant show the gentleman up.

But while Lord Octavian Meredith is ascending the stairs, we must avail ourselves of the opportunity to describe under what circumstances he still preserved his feigned name of Percival, and meant to retain it while visiting Christina. The reader already knows that he had all along been deeply enamoured of the young girl while she was still to him only "his fair unknown," and that he had deluded himself in respect to the real nature of the sentiments which he experienced toward Zoe. That unexpected meeting with Christina in the park had torn the veil from his eyes, and had cleared his mental vision to the full perception of the grievous mistake he had made. In short, he could not conceal from himself that he was deeply attached to Christina Ashton, that he loved her with an enthusiasm it was impossible for him to restrain; and though his duty toward Zoe and his duty toward Christina herself should have led him to avoid the dangers of another interview, he had not the moral courage, he had not, indeed, sufficient control over himself, to resist the temptation of calling upon the object of his passion. To do the young nobleman justice, the idea of a deliberate seduction had not for a single instant entered his head. In his infatuation he thought of nothing but the pleasure of beholding Christina again, of contemplating her beauty, of listening to the sweet music of her voice. Yet there was a whisper in his soul that this visit which he was now paying would not be the last, for he could not possibly make up his mind to the bold and resolute step of avoiding her in future. Yet to announce his real name, to proclaim himself Lord Octavian Meredith, would be to furnish her with the means of ascertaining that he was already married, — a circumstance which an accident at any moment might bring to her knowledge. And if the truth did thus come to her ears, he could not again hope to be received by her; whereas, if disguised under the name of Percival, he might entertain the hope of being occasionally permitted to call in Mortimer Street. Thus it was without any deliberately wicked plan, without any positively settled design against the virtue of the young girl, but merely in obedience to an infatuation which he could not possibly control, Lord Octavian Meredith secured

to himself the advantage which his feigned name gave him in the matter.

It was not until Meredith entered the young people's sitting-room that he entertained any particular idea of whom he should find with Christina, — whether she was living with parents or relatives, nor, indeed, in what circumstances she was placed, — save and except that he knew she had a brother, with whom he had seen her walking on a few occasions, as he had stated to the Duke of Marchmont. He had longed to ask the servant who opened the door some few questions; but he was fearful that such curiosity, on being reported to those whom it concerned, would act prejudicially against him, and therefore he had abstained.

“According to my promise, Miss Ashton,” he said, as he entered the apartment, “I am here to make you aware of my safety.”

He extended his hand toward the young girl, who gave him hers, with an ingenuous frankness, for she felt that she lay under a deep obligation to one who had delivered her from a gross insult, and who, by the very words which had just fallen from his lips, had evidently been compelled to risk his life on her account.

In the same artless manner she renewed her thanks for his chivalrous conduct, and timidly but sincerely expressed her delight that no serious consequences had ensued.

“None, Miss Ashton,” answered Meredith. “I went out with Mr. Stanhope, — for that is the name of the gentleman who insulted you, — and no harm was done. I need not ask if this be your brother,” and thus speaking he turned toward Christian, to whom he with well-bred affability proffered his hand, which was accepted with all the frankness of unsuspecting youth.

Octavian sat down, and began conversing with the twins upon a variety of topics. He learned from them that they had been six months in the metropolis, that their parents had been long dead, that they were brought up by an uncle, a gentleman of some little property, who dwelt in a remote village in the northern part of England, and that they possessed not, to their knowledge, any relatives now upon the face of the earth. These little pieces of information came out during the discourse, but the twins did not mention

whence their present resources were derived, and Lord Octavian did not seek by any insidious dexterity to fathom the matter. He saw that they were all ingenuousness, frankness, and inexperience, and he was fearful of shocking the delicate fibres of their minds by the display of aught savouring of undue curiosity. On rising to take his leave, he requested permission to call occasionally when he might happen to be passing that way. Christina gave no response, but Christian, delighted at what he considered a display of the kindest and friendliest feeling, cheerfully proclaimed his assent.

Lord Octavian Meredith had not taken his departure many minutes — and the twins were in the midst of self-congratulations that the duel had resulted without injury to either party — when Mrs. Macaulay burst somewhat suddenly into the room, with a visible consternation depicted upon her countenance. The brother and sister both surveyed her in alarm, and she hastened to exclaim, “Have I not heard you say, my dear young gentleman and lady, that Mr. Preston, of the Regent’s Park, is your friend, or guardian, or something of the sort?”

A quick affirmative burst from the lips of the twins; and it was with increased suspense, mingled even with terror, that they surveyed Mrs. Macaulay, for they were smitten with the presentiment that something serious had happened.

“Do tell me,” she went on to exclaim, “has Mr. Preston got much money of yours in his hands?”

“We do not know,” was Christian’s response. “Indeed, we are utterly uninformed on the subject. But what has occurred?”

“I am really very much afraid it will be a sad blow for you,” she said. “Now, don’t alarm yourselves — I mean, don’t excite yourselves too much, though I dare say it will be exciting enough —”

“But what has occurred?” asked Christina, almost goaded to torture with anxiety. “Do not keep us in suspense.”

“Mr. Preston has run away,” responded Mrs. Macaulay. “He has committed forgeries to an immense amount. Placards are posted up offering a reward for his apprehension, — I have just seen one, — and as the name struck me,

I was fearful it might be your Mr. Preston. And it is, too, there is no doubt. Joseph Preston, of Cambridge Terrace?"

Yes, it was the same, and this announcement came like a thunderbolt upon the brother and sister. For upwards of a minute they stood contemplating Mrs. Macaulay in blank dismay; then, as if simultaneously smitten by the same sentiment, which prompted them to seek consolation from each other, they locked themselves in a fond embrace. Mrs. Macaulay's worst fears were confirmed from the effect which her intelligence had produced upon the twins. We have already said that she did not positively possess a bad heart, but her better feelings were almost completely overruled by her love of gain and her fear of loss, so that while, on the one hand, she really pitied the orphans, yet on the other she was already wondering to herself whether they could possibly think of keeping on their lodgings, and whether the rental of twenty-five shillings a week would be thenceforth safe.

"Don't you think you had better go at once," she suggested, "to Mr. Preston's house? I dare say the police are in possession of it; and you can at all events find out whether he has left behind him any papers regarding yourselves."

Christian and Christina were at once struck by the excellence of this advice, and by the necessity of immediately following it. Mrs. Macaulay slowly retired from the room, and the twins, having again embraced each other, and whispered words of hope and consolation in each other's ears, hastened to their respective chambers to dress for going out. In a few minutes they were ready, and they sallied forth together. As they proceeded along, arm in arm, toward the Regent's Park, they spoke but little, yet they were constantly turning their handsome dark eyes upon each other, to infuse mutual encouragement by their looks. Each strove to assume an air of as much cheerfulness as possible, for the sake of the other, but both in their hearts entertained deep misgivings lest the crimes of Mr. Preston should prove ruinous to themselves. Many a passenger in the street lingered to gaze upon that interesting pair, — that young damsel with the sylphid form, that youth with the slender, graceful shape, both endowed with so high an order of beauty, and their twin condition being at a glance recognizable. But they saw not that they were thus the

objects of such interest, — an interest all the deeper inasmuch as there was trouble but too evident in their countenances, despite all their efforts to conceal it.

We may here pause to observe that the Mr. Preston who has been mentioned was a man of about fifty, short and slight, of exceeding bustling habits, and with a thorough businesslike air. He had possessed a counting-house in the City, and his private residence was one of the mansions on Cambridge Terrace in the Regent's Park. He had ever been reputed a rich man, but, unlike Mr. Armytage, he had cared little or nothing for brilliant society, and had never courted it. Perhaps if his affairs had long been failing, he might have located himself in the Regent's Park with the hope of sustaining the impression that he was really wealthy, rather than for the purpose of mingling in the fashionable world. He was unmarried and childless, and thus, fortunately, he had no close connections to be involved in his ruin and disgraced by it.

Christian and Christina reached Cambridge Terrace, and their summons at the front door was answered by a police constable. From him they learned that Mr. Preston had committed forgeries to the amount of thirty thousand pounds, as already ascertained, and that it was suspected there were other cases which were yet to transpire. It was only at an early hour in the morning of this same day that the forgeries were discovered by some gentleman in the financial world, and when the police, on receiving the information, had arrived at Cambridge Terrace to apprehend the culprit, they found that he had absconded during the past night. In addition to these particulars, Christian and Christina learned that no papers of any consequence at all had been discovered either at the dwelling in Regent's Park or at the office in the City, but that in Mr. Preston's bedroom at the former there were traces of a considerable number of documents having been purposely burned in the grate.

Such were the particulars gleaned from the police constable, and the twins passed away from the mansion, slowly and in silence. They walked some distance before they even dared to glance toward each other; they felt that their ruin had been accomplished. At length their looks met, tears filled the eyes of both, and they would have flung themselves

into each other's arms were it not a public place and people were proceeding hither and thither.

"Let us not despond, dearest sister," said Christian, suddenly wiping his eyes. "That which Mr. Preston did not do for me I must now endeavour to achieve for myself. I will seek for a situation that may enable me to earn at least something, and I will work hard, dear Christina, to keep us both in respectability."

"And I too will work, Christian," replied the sister. "No, we will not despond. We have the advantage of a good education, and it will be hard indeed if we cannot earn our bread by our industry."

The brother and sister were inspired with courage by the resolve to which they had thus come. The tears no longer stood in their eyes, their hearts were no longer smitten with sadness. They had a fond reliance upon each other; they had faith in Heaven. Youth, moreover, is not the age which is prone to despair, and thus they were even happy. As they proceeded homeward they discussed the plans which they should immediately pursue. They agreed that it would be no longer prudent to occupy a lodging at twenty-five shillings a week, and they decided on speaking at once to Mrs. Macaulay about giving it up. When they reached Mortimer Street, their landlady, who was somewhat anxiously on the lookout for them, hastened to open the front door, and invited them into her own parlour. They frankly explained their position, expressed their desire to remove as speedily as possible into a cheaper lodging, and with equal candour informed Mrs. Macaulay that they were now entirely dependent on themselves. They possessed a good stock of clothes, and they had some fourteen or fifteen pounds in hand, besides a few articles of jewelry of some little value.

"Well, my poor children," said Mrs. Macaulay, "I am sure I am exceedingly sorry for you, and if there is anything in the world I can do to help you, it shall be done. I know a very worthy widow woman who lives in a small house in Park Street, Camden Town, and I happen to be aware that her lodgings are at this very moment to let. You would get two nice rooms for ten shillings a week, and you may give me as a reference. As for your lodgings here, I won't be hard upon you, considering how you are situated.

You have just entered a new week, besides which I am entitled to another clear week's notice, but we will say nothing about the notice, and therefore if you pay me the week I shall be satisfied. I should however advise you to leave as soon as you can, — not, my dear children, that I want to get rid of you, but because the sooner you begin to economize in every way, the better for yourselves. And so, miss, you would like to get needlework? Well, and very praiseworthy, too. I should recommend you to apply to Mr. Samuel Emanuel, the great clothier in the City. Any one will tell you where it is, and you are certain to get employment there. But as for you, Master Ashton, I really am at a loss what to suggest. If I hear of anything, I will let you know. And now let me offer you each a glass of wine and a piece of cake, and then you had better go and see Mrs. Giles in Park Street at once."

Mrs. Macaulay was gratefully thanked for all the advice she had tendered, but the proffered refreshments were declined, as the twins were resolved to delay not a moment in carrying out their new plans. They accordingly set off again through the Regent's Park to Camden Town, and when they were gone, Mrs. Macaulay, who never let the grass grow under her feet, put up in her window a card announcing "Furnished Lodgings to Let." She experienced a slight twinge of conscience at having bargained for the twenty-five shillings for the rent of the current week, seeing that it was only just entered upon, and that the orphans would most likely move away in the evening or early on the morrow, so that she would have the chance of letting her rooms again at once. But she tranquillized that remorseful feeling by the reflection that she might have demanded a clear week's notice, or, in default thereof, an additional sum of twenty-five shillings. And then, too, the offer of the cake and wine was another salve for her conscience. It was true that it had been declined, but it was the young people's lookout, the offer had not been the less made, and she was enabled to congratulate herself on her own generosity. So, altogether, Mrs. Macaulay came to the conclusion that she had acted kindly rather than with harshness, and she proceeded to regale herself with the good things which had been refused by the orphans.

In about a couple of hours they returned, having made

arrangements with Mrs. Giles, and they began to pack up their things for the purpose of removing that very same evening.

It was about nine o'clock, their boxes were all in readiness, and a cab was at the door to receive the luggage and bear the orphans away to their new and much humbler home. They flung a last look around the apartments which they were now quitting, to assure themselves that they were leaving nothing of their own behind, and as their eyes met, a sentiment of sadness simultaneously smote them both, — an identity of feeling to the effect that it seemed as if they were suddenly going down in the world, or, at all events, that the battle of life was now about to commence. But they embraced each other, and again were they cheered by that profound fondness which inspired mutual trustfulness and reliance, and hand in hand they issued forth from the sitting-room. They descended the stairs, and just as they reached the landing of the first floor, the door of the front apartment opened, and Mr. Redcliffe, enveloped in his cloak, and with his hat on his head, appeared upon the threshold, he being about to go forth. His dark eyes were at once riveted upon the brother and sister, and there was something about them which immediately inspired him with a strong interest on their behalf.

“ I presume,” he said, “ that you are my fellow lodgers, of whom the landlady spoke to me this morning in such pleasing terms? ”

Christian answered to the effect that he and his sister had hitherto lodged in the house, but that now they were about to remove elsewhere.

“ Indeed! ” said Mr. Redcliffe, in a melancholy tone. “ I am sorry for that. It would have pleased me to form your acquaintance.”

But having thus spoken, he bowed, and hurrying abruptly down the stairs, issued forth from the house. Yet the bow was one of well-bred courtesy, accompanied by a melancholy smile, and with a look plainly showing the interest which even in a few swift brief minutes had been inspired in him by the appearance of the twins.

“ He is a strange man, a very strange man,” said Mrs. Macaulay, who, standing at the foot of the stairs at the time to bid the orphans good-bye, had overheard what just passed.

“ He is enormously rich, however, and that is a great consolation, for I am not usually fond of eccentric people. And now farewell, my young friends; and whenever you happen to be passing, do just drop in and tell me how you are getting on. But mind and don't forget Mr. Samuel Emanuel, Miss Ashton.”

The orphans took their leave of Mrs. Macaulay, entered the cab, and were driven away toward their new home.

CHAPTER XV

THE EASTERN LADY

THE scene changes to a small but exceedingly neat villa residence in the neighbourhood of Notting Hill. It stood considerably apart from the other dwellings that were nearest, and in the midst of a somewhat spacious garden, which was surrounded by a wall, with the exception of that part which fronted the road, and where there were iron railings. But within these railings the evergreens and shrubs were so thickly grouped and were so high as to form as complete a barrier against observation from passers-by as if the wall itself had been continued there. Two iron gates opened upon a semicircular carriage-sweep; the lawn, the gardens, and the gravel walks were in excellent order. On one side of the house were the stables, on the other side a large conservatory, filled with rare exotics. The windows of the dwelling had all Venetian blinds, and these, especially in the drawing and dining rooms, were usually kept closed throughout the day as well as the night. The villa was approached by a by-road leading out of the main one which intersects Notting Hill, and from which the villa itself was about half a mile distant. So few were the persons who ever passed along that by-road — unless it were labourers to and from their work — that Shrubbery Villa, as the place was called, was in a comparatively perfect seclusion on that particular outskirts of the multitudinous metropolis. Thus the occupants were sufficiently far removed from the observation of any curious neighbours, and for any one courting such seclusion, it was the very place to enjoy it.

We have spoken of it as it might be seen in the daytime, but it is in the evening, when the veil of darkness was upon the earth, that we are about to introduce our readers to a portion of its interior.

An apartment on the first floor, at the back of the drawing-room, and therefore looking on the garden in the rear, was fitted up in the most exquisite style. This style was altogether Oriental, for, instead of chairs, there was a continuous range of ottomans against the walls, interrupted only by the doorway in one direction and by the casement in another. The Venetian blinds were closed outside that casement, and within, heavy folds of the richest crimson drapery kept out the slightest current of air. A lamp, suspended to the ceiling, shed a soft roseate light through the transparent medium of a pink-tinted globe of glass. The atmosphere was warm and perfumed, but neither heated nor sickly. It was just such a warmth as was grateful on an October evening, and such a perfume as was refreshing, for it exhaled from flowers artistically arranged in costly vases. Some of those flowers were of that rare exotic kind which are seldom seen in this country, and then only in the conservatories of wealthy mansions. The mantelpiece was covered with superb ornaments, all of an Oriental kind; the central table displayed the most curious as well as the most costly luxuries of Eastern art.

But who was the occupant of this apartment at once so sumptuous and so elegant? Whose form was it that sat half-reclined upon the crimson draperies of an ottoman? A female, the reader may be assured, for nought save feminine taste could preside over the appointments of that charming retreat. She was a lady of about thirty years of age, and though the duskiness of her complexion indicated her Oriental origin, yet the warm, languid clime to which she belonged had not in any way marred or impaired the dazzling grandeur of her beauty. Her costume was of extraordinary richness, and well fitted for the place in which we find her. It was in some respects a fanciful dress, for those who are best acquainted with the apparel of different nations could scarcely ascribe it to any one in particular. The taste of the wearer had evidently studied to blend all those details of costume which, belonging to different parts of the East, were most elegant and becoming in such combination. And that same taste, too, had so exquisitely presided over these arrangements that there was nothing incongruous in the general effect.

A sort of caftan, of purple velvet, jewelled and em-

broidered, formed the upper garment, coming up nearly to the throat and reaching down almost to the knees, confined at the waist with a diamond clasp of incalculable price, and again fastened by a similar though smaller brooch at the throat itself. The interval remaining open would have left the bosom almost completely bare, were it not for an undergarment of embroidered blue silk, which reached up to the middle of the bust, but still left revealed to the eye no inconsiderable portion of those superb contours. The arms were bare to the shoulder, and they might have been thought somewhat too robust were it not for their faultless sculptural modelling. They were circled with bracelets studded with gems, and of the most curious workmanship. The hands of this lady were of extraordinary beauty in respect to their chiseling: the fingers were long and tapering, the nails exquisitely almond-shaped, and of a pellucid pink.

But we must continue with the costume. She wore satin trousers of a pale pink, covered with the richest lace. They were full, in the Oriental style, and were tied just below the swell of the leg, bulging out so as to conceal the robust proportions of the limbs, but the admirable symmetry thereof might be judged by the faultless modelling of the ankles and the feet. Those ankles were bare, for she wore no stockings, and the feet were thrust into delicate red morocco slippers, braided, and ornamented with pearls. The first glance at this lady, as she lounged half-reclining against the flocculent massiveness of the crimson-coloured cushions, would show the most superficial observer that no corset imprisoned her fine form. But then, no observer who had the good fortune to be admitted into her presence could possibly be a superficial one; he would survey her until his eyes had embraced every fanciful peculiarity of her garb and every charm of her person. He would see, therefore, that if she wore no corset, neither did she require any. No artificial support was needed for those contours which remained, in their richness and firmness, where nature had placed them, like those of a sculptured effigy, yet with the rising and sinking which denoted the animation of the living form. Neither did she need the accessories of art to set off the rounded and flowing outlines of her figure; its own symmetrical proportions imparted the finest shapeliness to the dress, which in its turn so well became them and sat them off

to such advantage. She was not above the middle height of woman, and yet she appeared taller on account of her remarkably well-modelled figure and her apparel, as well as from the statuesque elegance and graceful majesty of her gait and carriage.

Thus far have we described the occupant of that room of Oriental luxury. But we must endeavour to render equal justice, by means of minutest detail, to the gorgeous splendour of her personal charms. We have already said that her complexion was of Eastern duskiness, but yet it had nought of gipsy swarthinness; it might be better likened to that of the Spaniard or Italian when in its darkest shade of bistre, yet with a skin perfectly transparent, and the warm blood showing through as it mantled with richest carnation tint upon the cheeks. Perhaps the hue of her complexion would be even still better understood if we describe it as a clear pale brown, for it had in it none of the sallowness which blends with the olive skin, and the skin itself had all the fineness and polish of a youthful freshness still adhering to a mature and voluptuous womanhood. The reader may have expected to learn that she wore an Oriental turban upon her head, but it was not so. A golden network, curiously interwoven with diamonds and pearls, — the entire ornament itself constituting a fortune, — rested lightly upon that head, but the hair was not gathered up beneath the network; it was parted in the middle with a careful exactitude, and flowed down in long, heavy tresses upon her shoulders and her back. Dark as night was that hair, black as jet, too, with no gloss upon it; yet was it neither harsh nor coarse, but as soft as silk, without wave or curl, save and except toward the extremity of the luxuriant tresses, and there the curl was rich and natural. Her forehead was not high, but yet expansive enough to give dignity to the countenance; the nose was perfectly straight, the nostrils of the tint of the rose-leaf. The upper lip was short, and both lips appeared to have been cut by the sculptor's chisel into their classical perfection; the shape of the mouth, when the whole face was in a state of repose or of seriousness, was that of Cupid's bow. The chin was delicately rounded and the countenance formed a complete oval. The eyes were large and dark, full of a languishing lustre, the orbs set in whites of that bluish tint which seems like mother-of-pearl. The eyebrows were

magnificently arched, — the lashes of exceeding length, and forming the richest fringes that ever shaded those orbs which are at once the mirror and the artillery of woman's soul. When the mouth, which was so exquisitely formed, parted its rich red lips, teeth were disclosed which were whiter than ivory and faultlessly even. If the hand of this superb creature disturbed the luxuriant masses of hair on either side of her head, a small well-folded ear would be revealed, and thus in every respect was she a perfect model of Oriental splendour and loveliness, combined in that one female form.

It was between nine and ten o'clock in the evening — as we have already stated — that we introduce our readers to the occupant of that elegantly furnished apartment within the walls of Shrubbery Villa. The lady herself seemed to be profoundly pensive at one interval, then somewhat excited and anxious at another. Several times in the space of a quarter of an hour did she consult an elegant watch, set around with diamonds, and which being retained by a massive gold chain, she took from within the bosom of her caftan. Every now and then, too, her eyes — usually of so melting and languid a lustre — would flash with sudden fires, as if reflecting an inward impatience of the soul; and once when she had consulted her watch, she murmured, in some Oriental tongue, “Time passes, and he comes not.”

But the voice in which she spoke these few words, and so lowly to herself, was of a rich flutelike harmony that would have given a charm to any language, even the harshest and the most discordant. It was a voice which, once heard, never could be forgotten, — one of those feminine voices which sink down into the very soul like the last notes of a strain of music, leaving rapture and ecstasy behind, yet half-subdued and kept under by the hope of catching the delicious sound again.

Presently this lady agitated a silver bell which lay near her, and a Hindu ayah, or female dependent, entered the room. This woman was about five and twenty, tall, slender, and beautifully formed, with the well-knit symmetry and the lithe elasticity of a bayadere. Her countenance, too, — though many, many shades darker than the complexion of her mistress, — was exceedingly handsome. Her eyes were so full of fire that they literally appeared to burn, so that it was pain as well as pleasure to gaze upon those magnificent

orbs. Her lips were thin, of a vivid scarlet, and revealing teeth which though somewhat large were of the same polished whiteness and admirable evenness as those of the lady herself. Her features were small and regular; her hair was of jettiest blackness, without the slightest gloss, without natural wave or curl, and falling in long straight masses upon her shoulders and her back. Yet there was nothing ungraceful, much less ugly, in the effect produced by that straight hair. She was dressed in the usual white linen garb which properly belonged to her sex and position, or we might say, to her caste. But she had no covering upon her head beyond the natural one of her coal-black hair. Like her mistress, she wore no stay nor corset; nor needed she any. Upright as a dart, every movement, as she walked, was characterized by a willowy elasticity, with ease and lightness. Her arms and the lower part of her legs were bare; the former were circled with plain gold bracelets, the latter with anklets of the same material and fashion. Her feet were thrust into plain Oriental slippers, and so light was her tread that those feet scarcely seemed to sink into the rich thickness of the carpet.

Entering the room with downcast eyes, and with an air of such profound respect as a slave might be expected to exhibit toward a queen, yet with that complete drawing-up of the loosely attired untrammelled form, which was habitual, she advanced toward her mistress, who spoke a few words, and the ayah, with a graceful inclination of the head, glided out of the room. In a few minutes she returned, carrying a massive silver salver, on which was an exquisitely cut glass containing some refreshing beverage, such as lemonade or sherbet. This she presented, with one knee bent down, to her mistress, who drank the contents of the glass at a draught, for she was evidently parched with the effect of internal agitation. From the same cause she felt heated, and on another word being spoken, the Hindu woman proffered the lady a fan made of the richly coloured plumage of Oriental birds, and the handle of which was studded with gems.

“It is near ten o’clock, Sagoonah?” said the lady, inquiringly, “or does my watch err?” but we should observe that her conversation with the ayah was in an Eastern tongue.

“It is near ten o’clock, may it please your Highness,” was the dependent’s response.

"Hush! no Highness here," said the princess, for such indeed she was; then with a gracious smile she added, "But I forgot that we were speaking in our own native language. Tell me, Sagoonah, how like you this strange country?"

"I have seen so little of it," was the response given by the ayah, and this time she was cautious not to address her mistress in a manner becoming her rank, "that it would perhaps be wrong to pronounce an opinion. But I like any country where it suits you to dwell, and so long as I remain with you it is immaterial where."

"Yet you must have already formed an opinion," resumed the princess, "relative to this country of the great English people. Tell me frankly, apart from any feeling of devotion toward myself, to what conclusion it is that you have thus come?"

Sagoonah reflected for a few moments, and with downcast eyes; then suddenly raising those brilliant orbs, she said, decisively, "Yes, I like England now."

At this moment a knock and ring were heard at the front door; the princess started perceptibly, and made a hasty sign to Sagoonah, who again glided from the apartment. The moment the door closed behind her, the princess experienced a still stronger access of trouble than she had previously displayed; something like a shiver of anxiety and suspense passed over her, but the next instant her magnificent countenance brightened up with hope and joyous expectation. The door opened, and Mr. Redcliffe was ushered into that apartment.

The princess made a movement as if she would have risen from the ottoman where she was seated, and would have flown toward him, but she repressed that evident inclination, she remained where she was, and with her head partially bent down, she surveyed the visitor with a look that was full of fondness as well as mournful deprecation, and which likewise seemed to implore pardon and mercy at his hands. And he, on his side, remained standing for nearly a minute close by the door, his tall form enveloped in his ample cloak, — that form which was so upright, so well knit, and so commanding. His dark eyes were fixed half-severely, half-reproachfully upon the princess, but it was evident that there was the influence of constraint upon both, and that neither knew how to begin addressing the other.

“ At length we meet again,” said the princess, in a low, tremulous voice. “ You received my summons, and you have come.”

“ Summons! ” echoed Mr. Redcliffe, for a moment drawing himself up haughtily. “ Remember, Princess Indora, that you are not now in a country where you can coerce or command. If you behold me here, it is that I have come voluntarily, and in obedience to no power save that of my own will.”

“ You perhaps have a right to upbraid me,” said Indora, in a voice that was tremulous and mournful, “ but it would be generous if you were to abstain.”

“ I will do so,” rejoined Redcliffe, speaking more gently, and even as if he regretted the sort of half-rebuke which he had just now administered, “ because, if I experienced some evil at the hands of your royal father and yourself, I likewise received some kindness.”

The Princess Indora made a sign for him to sit down. He slowly put off his cloak, and placed himself upon the ottoman, but at such a distance from the lady that she flung upon him a rapid glance of tender reproach.

We must observe that the conversation which we have just recorded had passed in the same language in which Indora had discoursed with Sagoonah, and that Redcliffe spoke it with proficient ease and fluency.

“ Is it possible,” he went on to ask, “ that your Highness has come to England for the sole purpose described in the letter which I received at my new lodging this afternoon? ”

“ For what other purpose could I come? ” asked the princess. “ Yes, it is true, Clement Redcliffe, that I have followed you to your own native land for the object described in my letter. I speak frankly. Love has made me bold before; it renders me not a coward now, — for I glory in that love which I feel for you. Do you require any additional proof than those words which I addressed to you, those offers which I made to you, and the whole tenor of my conduct toward you, when far away in my native land? You have that proof in the fact that I have undertaken and accomplished this long, long journey, that I have travelled under a feigned name, veiling my princely rank beneath a semblance of mediocrity and obscurity; I have come with but three faithful dependents, and I was resolved never to rest

until I discovered you. Accident made me acquainted with the circumstance that you had been living at a particular hotel; this day I learned that you had returned thither, but that you had removed elsewhere."

Redcliffe had listened with visible pain to this speech, which was delivered with an admixture of mournfulness and enthusiasm, — mournfulness at the coldness of his demeanour when they had met, and exultation at all that she had accomplished for the love that she bore him. And on his side, he was pained because his soul was naturally too generous not to compassionate the woman who had thus formed so extraordinary a passion for him, — a passion which he however could not reciprocate, and he knew not in what terms to convey a decision which should dash to the ground all the hopes she had entertained.

"You do not speak to me," she went on to say; "you are cold and distant. I half-feared that it would be so; yet I endeavoured to persuade myself to the contrary. I reasoned that you could not fail to be touched by these last proofs of love which I have given you, and that a feeling of sympathy might possibly beget a softer and deeper sentiment."

"Indora," responded Redcliffe, in the mildest tones of his rich, sonorous voice, "this is an infatuation which is truly incomprehensible. I have no vanity that can possibly be flattered," he added, with some degree of bitterness, "and therefore I deceive not myself when I look in the mirror; nor would the adulation of the veriest sycophant — if I were a king, like your father, to-morrow — have power to deceive me. I know what I am, — a man prematurely old, my hair turning gray, baldness coming, my complexion sallowed by illness and bronzed by the torrid sun of your native clime —"

"Speak not thus," interrupted Indora, gazing upon Redcliffe with a look of genuine and ineffable tenderness. "Even if you be as you describe yourself, you are not so in my eyes. Were your hair white, were your face wrinkled, were your form bowed with age, I should still love you as fondly and as well. Yes, I should still behold you only as you were when first I saw you long years back, in my girlhood, and therefore should I love you. Nor is it only that the image of your personal beauty of that time is so indelibly impressed upon

my heart; it is that the brilliancy of your intellect filled me with admiration, your manners charmed me, your knowledge enlightened me."

She ceased for a moment, and then, with a sudden transition from one language to another, she went on to speak, but now in the English tongue, and with a fluency, an eloquence, a precision of accent, and a correctness of idiom that were truly remarkable.

"For all these reasons, Clement Redcliffe, do I love you. My happiness now depends upon the next word which must fall from your lips. Ponder well ere you speak that word, if it be to cause the wreck of a fellow creature's happiness. Ah! there was another reason which made me love you, and if I forgot to mention it ere now, it notwithstanding is far from being the least. It is that you taught me the sublime doctrines of your own religion, that you weaned me from paganism and raised me up to be a Christian. You eradicated from my mind all the detestable prejudices with which it had been imbued; you reclaimed me from a condition of mental darkness; you guided me into the paths of light. And think you that the gratitude wherewith you inspired me was not certain to expand and deepen into love? Yes, and more. You taught me your own native language, — that language in which I am now addressing you."

"Princess," responded Redcliffe, now also speaking in the English language, "it cuts me to the very soul to hear all these things flow from your lips, for I am not naturally stern, cruel, and pitiless, and yet there is a word that must be spoken, but to which I tremble to give utterance."

"No, no, breathe it not," ejaculated Indora, with a sudden start and with dilating eyes; "breathe it not, I entreat you! It would be my death-blow. Think on all that I have done for your sake, — my native land abandoned, a strange and far-off clime willingly and gladly sought, — think of all this, I say, — and give me some hope, some encouragement, I beseech and implore you."

"Indora," answered Redcliffe, now summoning all his fortitude to his aid, and endeavouring to crush the more generous feelings of his nature beneath the iron heel of his own strong will, "it is for your own sake that I must speak promptly and decisively. I would not insult you — I would not wound you, by returning a written response to your own

letter; I therefore resolved to come personally, though foreseeing that the interview would be a painful one. Now, arm yourself with all that courage which is naturally your own, call to your aid all that strength of mind with which Providence has endowed you. In loving me, you have fixed your affections on one who cannot love you in return; would you have me, then, proclaim the contrary? It would be a falsehood."

"If you love me not," answered Indora, sadly and softly, "and you have often, too often told me this much before, at least you may have compassion upon me. My own love might inspire you with sympathy, and sympathy is a tender feeling, akin to love itself."

"Indora, the truth must indeed be spoken, stern though it may be, pitiless though it may appear. I cannot — I dare not marry you. And now, I beseech and implore that you will summon all Christian fortitude and resignation to your aid."

The superb head of the Indian princess drooped slowly down upon her bosom, and her arms, with the hands clasped, drooped likewise languidly over her magnificent dress. It seemed as if she had sunk into despair, and that all sense of the possibility of earthly happiness had left her. Redcliffe was evidently moved; from the very bottom of his soul he pitied her, and whatsoever sense remained in his memory of that past evil sustained at her hands, and to which he had alluded, it all died away within him. He was too magnanimous at that moment to entertain any other feeling than one of profound compassion. He lingered; he thought that he was bound to say something more, — something soul-strengthening if not hopefully cheering, something mentally fortifying, if not tenderly encouraging. But all in an instant smitten with the conviction that the scene ought to end as speedily as possible, he abruptly threw on his cloak, and exclaiming, "Farewell, Indora! may you be happy yet," was hastening to leave the room.

"No, one word ere we part," cried the princess, springing toward him, and her exquisitely shaped hand grasped his arm. "One word, Clement Redcliffe, for we cannot separate thus."

"What would you say?" asked Redcliffe, with averted looks, and with visible impatience to take his departure.

“ Only this,” she responded: “ that you will give yet one week’s grave and serious reflection to that subject whereon you have ere now pronounced a decision. For one week let that decision be recalled. It is only a delay of seven poor days which I ask — ”

“ And which can effect no change, princess, in my sentiments,” added Redcliffe, mournfully but firmly.

“ Interrupt me not,” ejaculated Indora, almost with vehemence, “ but listen to what I have to say. One week’s grace I demand at your hands. Pledge yourself that on the eighth evening hence you will return to me at the same hour, and that you will then pronounce your decision. Whatever it be, I will respect it.”

“ You promise to respect it?” exclaimed Redcliffe, now turning his eyes inquiringly upon Indora’s countenance.

“ I will respect it,” she answered, and at the same moment her long taper fingers were withdrawn from the grasp which had tightened upon his arm, so that he was now free to depart, without violently disengaging himself from her hand.

“ Then I will come,” he said, and the next instant the door of the room closed behind him.

He traversed the landing, which was filled with costly vases exhaling perfumes, he sped down the richly carpeted staircase, he reached the hall, where the ayah Sagoonah was waiting to afford him egress. He snatched up his hat from the hall-table, and as he turned toward the door, his looks suddenly encountered those of the Hindu woman. For an instant he was struck with a strange unknown sensation, mysterious amazement blending with a sort of vague terror, as he caught the wondrous brilliancy of those regards which flashed upon him for an instant, and the next were withdrawn. He knew Sagoonah well,—had known her indeed for years in her own native clime, but never did he recollect that she had looked at him in that way before.

He said not a word, but hastened forth from the house, and as he proceeded along the by-road, there was a certain trouble in his mind while thinking of those burning looks which had been flung upon him like a spell, and which now appeared to haunt him. He quickened his pace, as if to outstrip the various painful and conflicting thoughts which were agitating in his brain; he reached the main road, he

proceeded onward in the direction of the metropolis. He soon came within the sphere of brilliant gas-lamps, but brighter than all — and ominous too — was the impression left upon his soul by Sagoonah's haunting eyes.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. SAMUEL EMANUEL

IN one of the principal streets of that perfect maze or network of thoroughfares, so narrow and so crowded, which constitute the City of London, stood the immense establishment of Mr. Samuel Emanuel, the great clothier.

The reader will not require to be informed that this individual was of the Hebrew race; nor, if we be compelled to say anything to his disparagement, must it be presumed that we are holding him up as an invariable type of his nation. It is nothing of the sort. We yield to no one, we may without vanity affirm, in enlightened opinions with respect to the Jews, and we have the conviction that there are many excellent persons amongst them, as well as many admirable traits in their national character. But there are good and bad of all kinds and species in this world, — good and bad Christians, good and bad Mussulmans, good and bad Buddhists, and therefore why not bad Israelites as well as good ones? We will even go farther, and we will affirm that within the range of our own experience we have met persons professing Christianity, of a viler stamp of rascality, and capable of more unmitigated scoundrelism, than ever we discovered a Jew to be guilty of.

Mr. Samuel Emanuel was the proprietor, as we have said, of an immense clothing mart. He had spent thousands and thousands of pounds in advertising it, and had puffed himself up into an amazing notoriety. Not a wooden hoarding about London that was not covered with his placards. If you took your seat in an omnibus, a shower of little books, neatly stitched, would suddenly rain in upon you, and on picking one up, you immediately recognized the superb frontage of Mr. Samuel Emanuel's establishment in the form

of a woodcut upon the cover. If you went for a walk in the fields in the environs of London, your eye would catch the name, calling, and address of Mr. Samuel Emanuel upon every fence and on every dead wall. If you looked in the advertising columns of the newspapers, your eye would suddenly rest on a string of ill-measured lines, by courtesy called "poetry," and if you had the curiosity or patience to read the wretched doggerel, you would thence evolve a series of the most extravagant puffs of Mr. Samuel Emanuel's establishment. There could be no doubt in your mind that while Mr. Samuel Emanuel considered the sovereign to be the first personage in the realm, he entertained the pleasing conviction that he himself was the second. Talk of your first-rate authors, your eminent artists, or your great sculptors, talk of your renowned warriors by sea or by land, — what was any one of these in comparison with the far-famed Mr. Samuel Emanuel?

And yet, if you walked into his establishment and beheld this great personage, you would find him to be as unprepossessing a fellow as you could possibly meet in a day's walk. Scarcely of the middle height, ill made and ungainly, he sought to set himself off by all the accessories of his own tailoring craft. No trouser pattern in his own window would be more outrageous than the one selected for his pantaloons. He would wear a dress coat, with rich velvet collar and lapels, as early as eight o'clock in the morning, and his waistcoat would be of the gaudiest silk pattern. As for his neckerchief, it would be sure to correspond in its flaunting vulgarity with the rest of his attire, and would be fastened in front with some inconceivably outrageous breastpin, — perhaps an enormous carbuncle clutched in a golden fist. Festooning over his gaudy waistcoat there would be three or four watch-chains of different fashions and degrees of massiveness, and his dirty, stumpy, ill-shaped fingers, with very horrible nails, would be decorated with enough rings to fill a small tray, such as those whose contents purchasers are invited to inspect in jewelers' shops. As for his countenance, it had all the characteristics of his race, but with an expression of mingled hardness and meanness, of paltry cunning and avaricious greed, together with a faculty for the sudden assumption of a vulgar insolence, that might readily be supposed to characterize such an individual.

His wife was a perfect giantess, with large coarse features, an enormously stout shape, and an air of brazen effrontery which she seldom took the trouble to subdue. There was a certain showiness about her, — a sort of Flemish mare kind of handsomeness, which to some little extent was striking, and Mr. Emanuel considered her one of the finest specimens of the female sex. For this uxoriousness he was rather to be honoured than otherwise, and therefore we record it as no imputation to his detriment.

In respect to the establishment itself, we need only observe that it was splendidly fitted up, that the shop-windows were of the largest-sized plate glass, that the lamps were almost endlessly multiplied, and that as the show-rooms were crammed with goods, so the various shopmen were well-nigh countless in each particular department. But truth compels us to add that the garments which Mr. Samuel Emanuel had for sale were very much like himself, — dashing and fine, but intrinsically mean and trumpery. Indeed, the cheapest of his articles would prove the dearest bargain that a purchaser could possibly possess himself of; they were very much after the same description as Peter Pindar's razors, which were made to sell, and not to cut, for Mr. Emanuel's garments were made for disposal, and not for wear.

To this establishment was it that, at about eleven in the forenoon of the day after the twins' removal to their new lodging, Christina bent her way, in company with her brother. He however remained outside while she entered, but just within the door she stopped short, under the influence of a sudden timidity which seized upon her. At the same moment she heard voices speaking, but those who were thus engaged in conversation were concealed from her view, as she was hidden from theirs, by an array of gaudy dressing-gowns for gentlemen, hung upon frames so contrived as to show off the particular fit and appearance of the several garments. Christina could not for the life of her move another step forward at the instant; she was overwhelmed with bashfulness; there was a sickening sensation at her heart, for she felt as if she were there under almost mendicant circumstances. It was no wonder that the delicate sensibilities of the young girl were thus poignantly touched by the new position to which Mr. Preston's plight had reduced her, and tears starting into her eyes, she was compelled to linger where she was in

order to control and tranquillize her feelings. She thus unavoidably became a listener to some portion of the discourse which was going on behind the array of dressing-gowns.

"Well, Mr. Solomons," said a coarse masculine voice, speaking with the half-patronizing, half-stern accents of authority, "so far so good. But we must think of at least a hundred other means of keeping the emporium incessantly before the public. Ah! by the bye, have you seen about some ragged boy or wretched-looking woman, to fling a stone at the pane which got accidentally cracked yesterday?"

"Yes, sir, it is all right," answered Mr. Solomons, who, we may as well at once inform our readers, was Mr. Emanuel's principal and confidential clerk. "I succeeded yesterday in getting hold of the most pitiable object that ever was seen in female shape, and she will be in the street presently to bang a large brickbat right against the glass."

"Excellent," exclaimed Mr. Samuel Emanuel, chuckling with a coarse laugh. "The pane, you see, my dear, was cracked, and therefore we should be obliged to have a new one, so that we really lose nothing by getting it smashed completely for us."

"Oh, I understand, you cunning rogue!" cried Mrs. Emanuel, in a great, rough voice, as if it were a grenadier speaking. "But what will follow?—though I can pretty well guess."

"Please, ma'am," said Mr. Solomons, "I have arranged it all. The woman agrees to break the pane, and of course she is equally agreeable to be given into custody. She will go before the lord mayor, and whine out a piteous tale about distress having compelled her to do it, that she might get herself sent to prison, as she has such a dreadful horror of the workhouse."

"And then, you know, my dear," resumed Mr. Emanuel, taking up the thread of the explanations, "as I shall have to attend at the Mansion House to charge the woman, I shall of course appear to be very much affected at her tale; I shall express my regret that I gave her in charge, and I shall beg his lordship to let her off with a reprimand. The lord mayor of course will look grave and pompous, and will deliver himself of the usual tirade,—to the effect that persons can't be allowed to go smashing the windows of highly respectable tradesmen in the City of London, and he will send her to

prison for seven days. So then I shall beg leave to hand to his lordship a couple of guineas for the poor woman's use when she comes out of gaol, and I shall tell her that if she can do needlework, she is to call upon me, when I will give her plenty of employment at good wages."

"To be sure; that is the way to do it," said the obsequious Mr. Solomons. "But, beg pardon, sir, if you could possibly manage to squeeze out a tear —"

"I'll shed a dozen," exclaimed Mr. Emanuel. "And then, don't you see, my dear," he continued, again addressing his wife, "we shall have such a long report in all to-morrow's papers, and so nicely drawn up. Mr. Samuel Emanuel, the celebrated clothier, pane of plate glass smashed, value thirty pounds, Mr. Emanuel deeply affected, behaved most handsomely, two guineas, and promise of work, hum of applause in the court, which the usher did not attempt to repress, lord mayor himself much affected, not an unmoistened eye in the whole place. There, my dear, what do you think of that? Famous advertisement, and costs us nothing but the two guineas to the woman, and the five shillings I ordered Solomons to give as earnest-money when he made the arrangement."

"I took care to give it to her, sir," observed that confidential personage, "and I have no doubt the poor afflicted creature," he added, with a low ironical chuckle, "got amazingly drunk last night. But I have done more than this, sir; your orders about the boy who is to be run over by your advertising van are likewise carried out."

"Excellent," again cried the harsh voice of Mr. Emanuel. "Tell us all about it, Mr. Solomons."

"Well, sir, I made an arrangement with the boy's father, and agreed on the price for which his son's leg is to be broken, — a guinea down on the nail, five guineas after it is done, and the doctor's bill to be paid. He's a nice lad, about fourteen, very sharp, and soon understood the advantage of being run over, sir, by your advertising van."

"Of course," exclaimed Mr. Emanuel, "but the great advantage, though, will be reaped by us, I think. Another good puff, my dear, for the emporium, and better than all the advertisements in the world. Let me see? Shocking accident, poor boy run over by one of the numerous advertising vans of Mr. Samuel Emanuel, the eminent clothier, Mr.

Emanuel behaved in the handsomest manner, relieved the poor father's feelings to the utmost of his power, and has undertaken to provide for the boy for the rest of his life, — noble trait, that, in the character of Mr. Samuel Emanuel, the great clothier, outfitter for the colonies, army and navy tailor, etc."

"Yes, sir, these are the best ways of keeping yourself properly before the public," said Mr. Solomons.

"But what letter is it that you have got in your hand there," inquired the clothier's wife, "and which you were reading just now?"

"Oh, it's nothing, ma'am," replied Solomons. "Only a long rigmarole from that Mary Wright, you know —"

"Ah! the girl who worked so well, but who was in a consumption?" interjected Mrs. Emanuel. "And pray what does she want?"

"It's the old tale, ma'am," answered Solomons. "She declares she has worked herself to death in your service. She is now on her death-bed, without the necessaries of life, and begs and implores that you will — I think she says, for the love of God — send her a few shillings. She gives her address and courts inquiry into her case. Here it is! No. — Redcross Street."

"Ah! capital tale, no doubt," exclaimed Mr. Emanuel, with flippant coarseness, "but not a single penny will she get from us. Take no notice of the letter, Solomons."

"That is just the course, sir, I intended to adopt. Ah, by the bye, sir, I had nearly forgotten to mention that several of the slop-workers threaten to strike for an advance of wages. The women say they can't go on making shirts at three-half-pence apiece, finding their own needles and thread."

"What impudence," vociferated Mr. Emanuel; "let them strike and be hanged! There are plenty of others to take their place. Thank God there are thousands and thousands of poor devils of that class ever ready to come forward and fill up gaps. Ah! it's a blessed country to live in, where the laws keep the labour markets flooded with these pauperized wretches who are glad to work for any pittance. Deuce a bit! no rise in wages. Let them stick to their three-halfpence a shirt or go about their business. Ah! when I think of it. Solomons, write out a check for Malachi Lewis, for those six cases of champagne that came in yesterday."

“ Yes, sir. There is one thing more that I have to mention. It’s about Sarah Jones — ”

“ What! that pestering widow woman,” interjected Mrs. Emanuel, “ who always will come to the place with her three children, because she says she has no one in whose charge she can leave them, and though they are certainly kept tidy enough — ”

“ It’s the same woman, ma’am,” responded Solomons. “ She came here just now to confess that she had pawned those two shooting-jackets she had to make up. She says that distress compelled her to do it, and that her landlady was going to turn her children and herself out into the streets at eleven o’clock at night when it was pouring with rain.”

“ And she has pawned my shooting-jackets,” vociferated Mr. Emanuel, in a towering rage. “ Let her be given into custody at once, Solomons. And you must appear for me before the magistrate. Of course you will say that I feel it to be a duty which I owe to society, that I do it on public grounds alone, and all that sort of thing. And now go and see about it without delay.”

This conversation occupied in the delivery far less time than we have taken to record it. Christina had triumphed over her own peculiar sensibilities so far as they regarded herself, but only to have them most keenly awakened in respect to others. She had remained riveted to the spot by the discourse which she thus overheard. Its transitions from one subject to another had been successively fraught with a strange and fearful interest for the generous-hearted girl. The wretched woman whose misery and unscrupulousness were alike taken advantage of to procure the breaking of an already broken window, in order that the clothier might be paraded before the public, that poor boy whose very father had bargained in cold blood for him to sustain a serious injury, the dying girl who in working for the Emanuels had worked her own winding-sheet, and now vainly implored a pittance of relief, the unfortunate female slop-workers who were ground down to the very lowest infinitesimal fraction of wage, and who were to be remorselessly deprived of employment because they asked for a recompense at least a trifle above starvation-point, and last of all, the hapless widow woman who was to be given into custody and torn from the children, whom she evidently loved, for an offence

to which real penury had driven her, but for which the clothier experienced no sympathy because the case presented not any features which he could turn into an available mode of puffery for himself and his emporium, — all these cases, coming thickly one upon the other, had filled the heart of Christina with mingled horror, astonishment, pity, and disgust. Therefore, even when her own peculiar feelings were overruled, she was kept riveted to the spot, a most painfully interested listener to a discourse which revealed the wrongs and sufferings of others.

She now stepped forward, and was immediately confronted by Mr. and Mrs. Emanuel, who were turning away from the spot where they had been discoursing with their managing man. Though Christina was neatly dressed, and had not the slightest appearance of poverty about her, yet the clothier and his wife were so accustomed to receive applications for work from respectable young women in reduced circumstances that they at once anticipated the object of her visit. The next moment, however, they thought they must be wrong, for a second glance at Christina's countenance showed that there was a flush of indignation upon it, mingled with as much abhorrence as it was in her delicate nature to display. They therefore awaited until she should explain her own business.

“ I should be obliged to you,” she said, “ if you will give me the address of that poor widow woman of whom you have spoken, and I will at once hasten and furnish her with the means to set herself right toward you, so that you need not give her into custody.”

The Jew and Jewess exchanged looks of rapid meaning with each other, and then the former, with an insolent air, exclaimed, “ I suppose, young miss, you have been listening to what passed? ”

“ And pray,” demanded Mrs. Emanuel, “ what business have you to come sneaking into a place to play the eaves-dropper? ”

Christina's countenance became crimson; the flush of indignation previously upon it suddenly deepened into one of shame, as she was struck by her own imprudence in thus confessing that she had listened, but the avowal was inadvertently made in the strong excitement of feelings under which she was labouring at the moment.

“ I will tell you frankly,” she said, speedily recovering her presence of mind, “ that I called for a specific purpose, and it was scarcely my fault that I overheard any portion of your discourse.”

“ And that specific purpose?” exclaimed Mr. Emanuel, bending his looks with insolent menace upon the young girl.

“ I came to ask for work,” she responded, her eyes sinking beneath the coarse regards of the clothier.

“ Work, indeed!” he ejaculated with a sneering air and contemptuous chuckle; then leaning forward toward her, he added, with brutal insolence, “ You sha’n’t have any work from my establishment. I don’t encourage sneaking, prying listeners.”

“ Work indeed!” shouted Mrs. Emanuel, in her great masculine voice, and putting her hands upon her hips, she said, “ A pretty creature you are, to come gliding like a cat into a respectable house, just for all the world as if you meant to steal something. Who knows but that you have whipped up an article and have got it under your shawl?”

Christina’s eyes for a moment threw a glance of indignant innocence at the coarse Jewess, but the next moment she burst into tears, and staggered back as if about to faint.

“ Come, be off with you,” said Mr. Emanuel, in the most brutal tone. “ You are after no good here, and if you don’t make yourself scarce, I shall precious soon send for a policeman.”

Terrified by this threat, which she felt the cowardly ruffian was but too capable of carrying out, Miss Ashton issued forth from the shop, and on emerging into the street was instantaneously joined by her brother. Perceiving that she was in tears, and that she was much agitated, he naturally ascribed her emotions to disappointment in respect to that hope of obtaining work with which they had been flattering themselves, but when he came to learn everything that had passed, his indignation knew no bounds, his naturally fine spirit flamed up in a moment, and Christina experienced some difficulty in preventing him from going back to the emporium, to overwhelm the Jew and Jewess with reproaches for their brutal conduct toward his sister.

“ It is useless, my dear Christian,” she said, retaining him forcibly by the arm as they proceeded along the crowded street; “ you would only get yourself into some embarrass-

ment. I implore you to tranquillize your feelings. Alas, I begin to comprehend that the power of money is immense and irresistible in this country. It constitutes colossal strength, while poverty is in itself abject weakness. Christian," said the young girl, after a pause, "is there nothing which suggests itself to your mind?"

"Yes, dear Christina," he at once responded, as if the very look which his beautiful twin sister had bent upon him transfused in an instant to his mind what was passing in her own. "We must go and relieve the dire necessities of that poor perishing creature. It is fortunate that you heard her address mentioned. Would that we also knew where to find the poor widow, that we might succour her likewise. Alas, our own resources are now limited enough, but still — but still," added Christian, with a world of sincere feeling in his looks and his accents, "we must spare something for the assistance of our fellow creatures."

The twins were suddenly cheered by the prospect of doing good, as well as by having the means to accomplish it, small though their succour might be. They inquired their way to Redcross Street, and finding the house which Christina had heard mentioned at the emporium, they ascertained from an old, harsh-featured, sordid-looking woman, who announced herself as the landlady, that there was a young person of the name of Mary Wright lodging at the place, but that as she could not pay her rent, and was dying, the workhouse authorities had been applied to that very day.

"Let me see her," said Christina, while Christian hastily whispered to his sister that he would await her in the street.

The landlady — thinking by the appearance of the twins that they came for a charitable purpose, and that the arrears of rent due to her would probably be paid — suddenly grew mighty civil, and she conducted Christina up a dark and dirty staircase to the very top of the house. Opening an attic door, she gave the young girl to understand that this was Mary Wright's room.

Christina entered. The attic was of the smallest size, and its appearance of the meanest poverty. Stretched upon a wretched flock mattress, which lay upon the boards in one corner, and covered with the scantiest bed clothing, lay a young woman whose years could scarcely yet have numbered

one and twenty, in the very last stage of consumption. She was pale as a corpse, save and except with regard to a vivid hectic spot which seemed to burn upon either cheek. She was thin, — oh, so thin! It was complete emaciation; so that it appeared as if merely to raise that wasted, attenuated form would be to inflict excruciating pain, as the very bones might threaten to penetrate through the skin, for flesh upon them there was none. The attic was almost completely denuded of every necessary, and possessed not a single comfort. The dying creature was alone when Christina entered, — no relative, no nurse, no friendly female to attend upon her. Notwithstanding her frightful emaciation, notwithstanding the ravages which disease had worked upon her countenance, there were nevertheless sufficient traces of past beauty to indicate that she must have at one time possessed no ordinary degree of loveliness.

Christina gave her to understand that accident had made her acquainted with her condition, and that though her own means were limited (the generous girl said not how limited) she had come to proffer what little assistance she was enabled to afford. Mary Wright was for some time so suffocated by her emotions that she could not give utterance to a word, and the tears streamed from her eyes. At length she succeeded in expressing her deep gratitude, in a weak, dying voice and in broken accents, declaring that she had never expected to behold a friendly countenance gaze upon her again in this life.

Christina learned from her that about thirty shillings were owing to the landlady, and though the dying young woman proffered not the request in words, yet her plaintively appealing looks seemed to implore our heroine to save her from the threatened removal to the workhouse. This pledge Christina at once gave, and promising likewise to return in a few minutes, she hastened from the room.

The landlady was waiting upon the stairs, watching for Miss Ashton, in order to see what might turn up to her own advantage, and Christina at once liquidated from her slender purse the arrears of rent that were due. Then she continued her way down-stairs, and rejoined her brother in the street.

Christian had been waiting for her about a quarter of an hour, and during this interval a little incident had occurred which he had noticed, and which he presently mentioned

to Christina. While walking to and fro in the street, he had beheld a posse of ragged-looking creatures emerge from a narrow, dirty court. These individuals consisted of a man dressed like a dilapidated journeyman carpenter, with a paper cap on his head, a woman having the appearance of the wife of an impoverished artisan, and a whole tribe of children whose rags and tatters scarcely covered their nakedness. At the first apparition of this wretched-looking party, Christian's hand was thrust into his pocket to clutch the first coin which his fingers might happen to encounter, in order to transfer it to the poor family, when something which occurred at the moment made him drop the coin again in a sort of stupefied amazement.

"Now, Bet," said the man, "mind you look like an honest woman for once in your life, and turn that gin-drinking air of yours into a precious dolefulness. And you brats, you, if you don't put on as much misery as possible, I sha'n't get enough to pay your parents for the hiring of you. Mind, Bet, the dodge is that we walked all the way from Liverpool and can't get no work whatsoever."

These were the words which had produced a sudden revulsion of feeling on the part of Christian, and had so suddenly made him drop the coin again to the bottom of his pocket. He at once saw that it was a gang of unprincipled impostors whom he had been about to relieve. They did not immediately catch sight of him, when they were issuing from the court, nor did they suspect that he overheard the injunctions given by the man, for no sooner was he perceived by them, than he was surrounded by the ragged horde of children, imploring alms in a whining tone, while their dirty little paws were stretched out toward him. At the same instant the man began to snivel forth a miserable tale, of how he was a carpenter out of work, how he and his dear wife and eight children, four of whom were small ones, had tramped all the way from Liverpool, never once sleeping in a bed and enduring every possible privation. Then the woman took up the strain, in a canting, whining, lugubrious tone, telling Christian how she had been brought up by kind parents, how she had been a good wife and a fond mother, how she had borne her husband thirteen children, of which five lay under the turf, and then she stopped short and appeared to cry bitterly. Christian had found himself so com-

pletely hemmed in by the posse of impostors that he had some difficulty in getting from their midst, and in his indignation at being thus regarded as an object on whom to practise their deception, he let drop a few words to make them aware of what he had caught from the man's own lips. Then the posse — from the man himself down to the youngest child — levelled at him the coarsest, filthiest abuse, and as he retreated in one direction, they took another, bending their way into a neighbouring street.

Such was the narrative which Christian gave Christina, when the latter had described to him the spectacle that had met her own eyes in the wretched attic she had been visiting. They proceeded to the nearest pastry-cook's, where they purchased some jelly; they bought some articles at a grocer's, and they ordered bread from a baker's. Then they returned into Redcross Street, and while Christian again waited for his sister, the latter ascended to Mary Wright's chamber. She now learned a piteous tale from the poor dying creature's lips, — a tale of an early orphanage and of total friendlessness, — of dependence upon her own resources, of bitter poverty resignedly endured, and in defiance of all the temptations which her beauty had brought in her way, of the insidious advance of consumption, and of poignant miseries and privations suffered when she was no longer enabled to work.

“Yesterday,” said the poor creature in conclusion, “I exerted sufficient energy to write to those who had employed me, imploring assistance. It was in the direst despair that I thus addressed them, and with no real hope in my heart, for, alas! I know full well the hardness of their own hearts. They have not been moved toward me, but Heaven has sent me a ministering angel in the form of yourself.”

Christina did not choose to sadden the poor dying creature more deeply than she was already afflicted, by explaining that it had come to her knowledge that her appeal to the Emanuels was treated with brutal heartlessness. She remained upwards of an hour with Mary Wright, doing all she could to conduce to her comfort, and forcing her to partake of the food which was purchased for her use. She promised to return on the following day, and received the warmest, most heartfelt expressions of gratitude from the sufferer's lips. Ere quitting the house, she sought another interview with the

landlady, and putting some money into her hand, bade her show all possible attentions to the dying woman, — at the same time giving her the assurance that she should be rewarded in proportion as she obeyed these injunctions.

Christian was not wearied of waiting upwards of an hour for his sister's reappearance; he knew that she was engaged in a self-imposed task of true benevolence, and he would have cheerfully tarried ten times as long if it were necessary. Scarcely had Christina issued forth from the house, and just as she was taking her brother's arm, they both beheld a gentleman stop short and gaze upon them with an air of interest. He had evidently recognized them, and they too recognized him, for he was none other than Mr. Redcliffe. He at once perceived that there was sadness in Christina's looks, and that tears hung upon her long dark lashes, — the traces of that deep sorrow which she had experienced at the mournful narrative of Mary Wright.

“Wherefore are you thus depressed?” he inquired, somewhat abruptly, but with a courteous bow of recognition, as he glanced from one to the other.

“Because I have just left a scene which would move the hardest of hearts,” replied Christina. “A young woman, crushed down by overwhelming toil, in the last stage of consumption —”

“And it is a deserving case?” asked Mr. Redcliffe, interrupting the young girl, while he still continued to contemplate both herself and her brother with a deep and mournful interest.

“Oh, yes, sir. It is a deserving case; there can be no doubt of it,” exclaimed Christina, the tears gushing afresh from her eyes, as all she had seen and all she had heard sprang vividly up to her memory.

“Then it shall be inquired into,” answered Redcliffe, and with another courteous bow, he passed abruptly on his way.

The twins proceeded slowly along the street, and presently they looked back to see if Mr. Redcliffe had turned to call at the house, but he was just disappearing around the corner of another street, and the orphans knew not what to think, whether he had only said the case should be inquired into in order to cut short a tale which he cared not to hear, or whether the promise would be really fulfilled. As they continued their own way, Christina told her brother all that she

had learned from Mary Wright, and it was with a profound sympathy that the youth listened to his sister's narrative.

They had threaded several streets in their progress toward a point at which they purposed to take an omnibus, when Christian suddenly pressed his sister's arm, and as she looked in the same direction on which his regards were fixed, she at once comprehended his meaning. There was the posse of ragged impostors, singing at the very top of their voices. The man had his hands thrust into the pockets of his dilapidated trousers, and his face was screwed up to as piteous an air of misery as could be well conceived. The woman, with mouth wide open, was gazing up into the air, dragging along a ragged urchin by each hand. A girl clung to the coat tails of the man, who passed as her father, and to her dress a little half-naked boy, scarcely five years of age, was holding on. On the right of the front rank, an impudent-looking minx of a girl, with an old cotton handkerchief about her head was staring up at a window and proffering a box of matches. In the rear an older girl and a boy — both with villainously hangdog countenances — were likewise doing their best to excite compassion. It needed but a partially scrutinizing glance to perceive that this tribe of children could, with scarcely any degree of possibility, belong to those who were passing themselves off as their parents, for not between any two of them was the slightest family similitude.

There they were, slowly making their way along the street, singing at the top of their discordant voices; and when the song temporarily ceased, the man whined forth the same tale he had already told to Christian, with this trifling difference, however, that he happened to substitute Portsmouth for Liverpool as the place whence he and his family had tramped up. Halfpence from the windows rattled down into the street; these were quickly snatched up by the children, who scudded about in all directions for the purpose. The man prayed "that the Lord might bless the kind ladies and gentlemen who thus assisted a poor mechanic out of employ," the woman dropped divers low curtsseys, and the singing recommenced. It did not seem to strike the charitable donors as being at all strange that the poor family, though a few minutes before they had proclaimed themselves to be starving, did not at once rush off to the nearest baker's and buy

some bread. No such thing! They went on singing away in most frightful discord, until the sudden appearance of a policeman, who was advancing in a manner which plainly showed that he knew the arch-impostors full well, spread the utmost dismay and bewilderment in their ranks.

The singing ceased in a moment, and the man hurriedly said, "Come along, Bet, or that bluebottle will precious soon blow the gaff," and they made a rush toward the next street, dragging the youngest children hastily along with them.

Such was the spectacle which the twins beheld, and it certainly afforded no encouraging picture of London life. It shocked the pure minds of that youthful pair to think that such impostures should be practised under the guise of honest poverty, for they knew that the consciousness that that these things were done must often prevent the really charitably disposed from dispensing the alms which they would otherwise bestow, and that therefore the really deserving suffered very frequently and severely for the rascality of practised deceivers.

Early in the forenoon of the following day, Christian and Christina were again in Redcross Street, at the door of the house to which their benevolent purpose brought them. The landlady made her appearance, and the tale which she told was as gratifying to the twins as it was almost completely unexpected. It appeared that a tall gentleman, with a dark complexion, and wearing a cloak, had called at the house in the company of a medical practitioner from the neighbourhood, about two hours after Christina left on the preceding day. The medical attendant ascended to see the invalid, while the gentleman remained below to question the landlady. What followed, had evidently been prearranged, and was speedily accomplished. A hackney-coach was fetched, the dying young woman was placed in it, and was borne away to another house, somewhere in the suburbs of Islington. The landlady mentioned the address, and concluded by observing that the tall, dark gentleman did not accompany Mary Wright to her new abode, but sent the surgeon with her, placing in his hand a handful of money ere he hurried away.

The twins had no difficulty in recognizing Mr. Redcliffe in the tall, dark gentleman, and they experienced the utmost

delight at all the intelligence which they thus received. They repaired at once to the address named, and on arriving at the house, in an open, airy, and healthy part of Islington, they found that lodgings of the most cheerful and comfortable description had been taken for the poor sufferer, that a nurse had been provided for her, that ample funds had been placed for her benefit in the hands of the landlady, who was a kind, benevolent woman, and that poor Mary Wright herself had received Mr. Redcliffe's assurance, delivered through the medium of the worthy surgeon, that she need have no further care in respect to her maintenance, as she would be well provided for. Mary Wright had also learned that it was through Christina she had thus become the object of such noble charity, and we may add that she had not forgotten to inform the medical man of the kindness received from a beautiful young creature with dark hair and eyes, but whose name she had not learned.

CHAPTER XVII

INDORA

It was the eighth evening after that interview between Mr. Redcliffe and the Princess Indora which has been described in a recent chapter, and we must revisit the secluded abode of that Oriental lady. On this occasion we shall find her in the drawing-room, which was furnished with a mingled sumptuousness and elegance corresponding with the species of boudoir where we first beheld her. The draperies were of the costliest description; the sofas and ottomans were covered with a dark green velvet, of so rich a texture and with such a gloss, that it appeared almost a sin for a human form to press upon it. There were chairs in this room, made of some precious wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and having luxurious cushions of the same material as that which covered the ottomans. The ornaments upon the mantelpiece, the knickknacks upon the tables, the vases filled with flowers, or whence perfume exhaled their fragrance, were all of the costliest and most curious Eastern description. A mellowed lustre, but quite sufficient to flood the apartment, was thrown out by superb chandeliers; a fire burned cheerfully in the grate, and its blaze was shrouded from the eye by screens curiously painted, and the framework of which was elaborately as well as delicately carved. Fans, formed of the feathers of tropical birds, lay within the reach, wheresoever the princess might choose at the moment to seat herself, and a large cage, standing on a table near the window, contained within the sphere of its golden wires a dozen or so of birds of the most diminutive size, but in every variety of beautiful plumage.

The Princess Indora was reclining upon a sofa at about

the same hour on which, eight days previously, we first introduced her to the reader. She was apparelled in a similarly fanciful style, only that she wore another dress, but the colours of the separate garments were chosen with a most tasteful regard to the delicate duskiness of the complexion and the nature of the charms they had to set off. Supremely beautiful — eminently handsome indeed — was the Princess Indora, as she reposed, in her Oriental garb, upon the velvet sofa in that sumptuously furnished room. And as before, too, there were intervals when she was deeply pensive, other intervals when she experienced a nervous excitement, for, as the reader is aware, it was on this evening that she was to receive the final decision of the object of her love.

Presently the door opened, and Sagoonah made her appearance. She entered, bearing the massive silver salver on which was the cut glass containing sherbet, and which she presented on bended knee to the princess. The Hindu woman was clad in the same style as that which we have before described, and which was so admirably calculated to set off the lithe bayadere symmetry of her shape, and to leave her form and limbs completely free for every movement and gesture.

“ Within the hour that is passing, my faithful Sagoonah,” said the princess, when she had quaffed a portion of the sherbet, “ my fate will be sealed. The alternatives between which I am balancing are happiness and misery. Both are in extremes, and there is no medium in which I may take refuge. You, Sagoonah, who have been my confidante, you who have served me so faithfully, you who shrank not from accompanying me on my long, long journey to a strange clime, — you, I say, must feel some anxiety as to the result of this evening’s interview ? ”

“ I do, lady,” responded Sagoonah, and as she stood somewhat aside, her eyes suddenly flashed strange fires.

“ You know, Sagoonah,” continued the princess, “ how fondly, how devotedly I have for years loved that man. You know how godlike was his beauty when first he became my father’s prisoner — ”

“ I know it, princess,” responded Sagoonah. “ I was then a girl of about ten years of age.”

“ And I was fifteen,” observed the princess, in a low,

musings tone. "Yes, fifteen years have elapsed since the first day that I beheld Clement Redcliffe. He was the first Englishman that I had ever seen —"

"The first, too, your Highness, that I ever saw," interjected Sagoonah, and though her words were uttered with that profound respect which had become habitual to her, it was nevertheless with a slight air of abstraction that she thus spoke.

"Fifteen years — the most precious ones of my life," continued Indora, "have been passed in a love that has been all but hopeless. No, not hopeless, for if so, I could not have existed, but it is at least a love that has experienced no reciprocity. Yes, handsome as some being of a higher world was that Englishman when first we met. He tells me that he is changed now, and that the marks of age are coming thickly and rapidly upon him. If so, I behold them not, or scarcely. What to me is it if his form should change, when his mind still shines with the never dimming, imperishable light of one of these gems?" and her looks settled upon a bracelet studded with diamonds of the largest size and of the most dazzling brilliancy. "Methought," continued the princess, "that so long as he was a prisoner in my father's capital his proud soul would disdain to bend itself toward her who was the daughter of him who held him captive. Ay, and more than that, he learned by some means, I know not how, that when my father would have given him his liberty, it was in compliance with my secret promptings that he still retained him a prisoner. Yes, I did so prompt my father, for much as I loved Clement Redcliffe, deeply, deeply as I took his welfare to heart, I could not possibly bring myself to say the word which should make him free, and thus incur the risk of losing him for ever. He escaped. You are aware how; you know too how wild was my anguish, how bitter my grief, when I received the tidings of his flight. But then I thought to myself that perhaps now that he was free, he might no longer look upon me as one who was wronging him; he might forget the past, or at least pardon it, on account of all the love I bore him. I flattered myself, too, that this love so deep, so devoted, so imperishable, could scarcely fail to beget a kindred feeling. The eagle requires ample space for the play of his huge wings and the soaring of his ambitious flight, and so I thought that the

proud soul of Clement Redcliffe, when enjoying the freedom of the whole world's range, might look upon me with a different regard from that with which it was wont to survey me in the narrow circuit of my father's capital. Sagoonah, think you that this hope will be disappointed?"

"Princess," responded the Hindu dependent, "I am but little accustomed to read the human heart, and the heart of an Englishman appears to me as inscrutable as the mysteries of some forbidden book."

"True! You cannot judge it," observed the princess, in a low, musing tone. "And moreover, you have never loved, Sagoonah. No, you have never loved; you know not what love is. You have been attached to me from your childhood, and if you had experienced the slightest scintillation of that passion which I feel, you would have told me, or I should have discovered it. Is it not so, Sagoonah?" and the princess raised her large, lustrous eyes, dark as those of the gazelle, toward the countenance of her dependent.

"It is so, lady," responded Sagoonah, in a low but firm voice.

"I marvel that you never loved," proceeded Indora, still in that same musing manner as before. "It appears to me that a heart susceptible of love must be invariably associated with beauty of the person; it seems as if beauty, being formed to create love, ought to prove susceptible of the fire which it kindles. And you, my faithful Sagoonah, possess charms superior to any of your sex or caste, in your own native land. Yes, you are handsome — very handsome," and now the eyes of the princess wandered slowly, and with a certain degree of listless abstraction, over the bayadere-like form of her attendant.

Sagoonah stood perfectly motionless, her figure upright as a dart, her head somewhat inclined forward, like a flower upon its stalk, and yet in that uprightness there was neither ungraceful stiffness nor inelegant rigidity. She seemed to feel that, as a slave, she was bound to submit with all becoming respect to that survey on the part of her mistress. Had an observer been present, he could not have avoided thinking to himself that they were two of the most splendid specimens of Oriental beauty, of distinct shades of complexion.

“And have you never thought to yourself, Sagoonah,” asked the Princess Indora, “that you would like to know what love is? Have you never felt a craving to experience that sentiment which plays the chiefest part in all the affairs of this life? Has there been no curiosity in your soul to learn the joy, the delight, the happiness of love?”

The Hindu woman's cheek glowed as if with the purple flush of wine, — the rich red blood mantling through the transparency of her dusky skin, but the ruddy hue passed away as quickly as it rose up, and when the princess again slowly turned her eyes upon the countenance of Sagoonah, it had its wonted look and expression again.

“Yes, within the hour that is passing,” said Indora, suddenly reverting to that topic which was most vitally interesting to herself, and without observing that her dependent had not answered the questions which she had put to her, “my fate must be sealed.”

“And if the Englishman's decision be against your happiness, dear mistress of mine,” said Sagoonah, now sinking on one knee and looking with affectionate earnestness up into Indora's countenance, “what will your Highness do?”

“Ah, what will I do?” she murmured, as an expression of anguish at the bare thought flitted over her superb features. “What will I do, Sagoonah?” Then after a pause, during which she seemed to reflect profoundly, she added, in accents of mingled mournfulness and despair, “Heaven only knows what I shall do!”

“But yet, dear lady, you have every hope, have you not?” inquired Sagoonah, as she still knelt by the velvet-covered ottoman, and still gazed earnestly up into the countenance of Indora. “Do you not imagine, beloved princess, that the sense of obligation is greater than that of wrong in the mind of the Englishman? If your royal father kept him captive for so many, many years, he at least treated him with all becoming hospitality; he lodged him in his own palace, he gave him slaves to minister unto him, a guard of honour to attend upon him, and riches to dispose of as he thought fit.”

“Ay, but you understand not the proud soul of an Englishman,” replied the Princess Indora; “you comprehend not that however brilliant the circumstances of his captivity, it is captivity all the same. The chains may be

of gold, but they are still chains which he burns to throw off. Like the bird in his gilded cage, he is dazzled not by the sumptuousness of his dwelling, but pants for the fresh air of freedom, and so it was with Clement Redcliffe. He knew that the slaves were spies upon his actions, that the guards, though ostensibly appointed to do him honour, were nought else than gaolers and custodians, and that the riches heaped upon him were mere toys to render his captivity somewhat the less intolerable."

"And yet the Englishman bore himself courteously and well toward your royal father and your Highness's self," observed Sagoonah.

"It was with a cold courtesy," responded Indora, "and all that Clement Redcliffe did was doubtless for the purpose of conciliating my sire in the hope of obtaining his freedom all the more quickly. Besides, the natural pride of a civilized Englishman could not help feeling flattered by being placed in a position to smooth down the asperities of our own semibarbarism. Clement Redcliffe inculcated the arts of peace, and by his counsel enabled my father to amend those laws that were bad, and to promulgate new ones that were good, so as to forward the interests and promote the happiness of the people of Inderabad. But not one single suggestion in the art of war did Clement Redcliffe ever proffer; nor would he afford the slightest insight into the discipline of those English troops who have rendered themselves so formidable in our native clime. Do you comprehend wherefore he maintained so inexorable a reserve upon those points?"

"Doubtless, lady," answered Sagoonah, "he thought that the time might come when the English invaders would push their conquests to your royal parent's far-off kingdom, and therefore he would not put a weapon, even the smallest and the bluntest, in the hands of your august father's troops, for fear lest it should be used sooner or later against the armies of his own fellow countrymen."

"Yes, these were his motives," rejoined the princess, "and they rendered him all the more admirable, all the more noble, in my estimation. But I was ere now explaining how it was that Clement Redcliffe, while enduring his captivity, took a pride in propagating the arts of peace amongst us. Yet month after month and year after year did he demand

his freedom, and at length my father would have given it, but I, alas — ”

The princess stopped short, and Sagoonah, slowly rising from her kneeling position, retreated to a respectful distance, where she stood in her wonted attitude, her bayadere form upright, and her face inclining toward the splendidly modelled bust which the arrangements of her linen dress left more than half-revealed.

“ ’Twas strange,” proceeded Indora, after a brief pause, and again speaking in a musing manner, “ that my interference should have come to Clement Redcliffe’s knowledge, for my father would scarcely have spoken of it. Doubtless it was a surmise, though a correct one, on Redcliffe’s part, but how bitter were the reproaches which he levelled against me at the time. Ah, that was a scene of fearful excitement which I can never forget.”

“ Your Highness has suffered much for your love’s sake,” observed Sagoonah, gently.

“ Love is a rose with thorns,” answered Indora, in a mournful voice, “ and perhaps, my faithful Sagoonah, it is fortunate for you that you have never experienced that sentiment. To me it has proved a source of illimitable happiness and of almost overwhelming affliction, — the soul alternating between a paradise of bliss and Satan’s kingdom. No, Sagoonah, seek not to learn what love is; avoid it if you have the power. Happier, far happier are you than your unfortunate mistress.”

“ Is hope, then, at this instant dead within the bosom of your Highness? ” inquired the Hindu dependent.

“ Oh, how can I explain the exact nature of my own feelings? ” cried Indora, almost petulantly. “ When the ocean is agitated into mighty waves, the bark which is floating over it rises at one moment to the summit of a billow, and is the next plunged down into the abyss. So it is with my heart, — now at one instant elevated by hope, at another plunged into despair. For the vessel, when thus storm-tossed, beholds from the summit of the billows the beacon-light shining afar off and marking the entrance of the refuge harbour, but when borne down into the deep, deep trough of the sea, the mariner on board his vessel beholds nought save the dark, gloomy, menacing waters around him. And so, again, is it with my heart. Now,

Sagoonah, you comprehend all the mingled pleasures and pains, the ecstatic hopes and the intervals of blank despair, the thrilling joy and the deep despondency, the fervid expectations and the wildering apprehensions, which make up the sum of love. Seek not to know it, my faithful Sagoonah. Seek not to know it. It is your fond mistress who counsels you thus."

Having thus spoken, Indora made a hasty and somewhat impatient sign, and Sagoonah glided forth from the sumptuously furnished apartment.

Scarcely had the Hindu woman reached the foot of the staircase, when a knock and ring called her to the front door and on opening it, Mr. Redcliffe stepped across the threshold. He was, as usual, enveloped in his ample cloak, and his hat was drawn over his countenance, not as if, while coming hither, he had more than at any other time studied to avoid observation, but such appeared to be his invariable habit when moving about the streets of the mighty metropolis. As he placed his hat upon the hall-table, and put off his cloak, he flung a look upon Sagoonah, for the impression of her haunting eyes was still strong upon his mind, and he doubtless now regarded her to see whether she again looked at him in that same strange fashion which had sent a vague and unknown trouble into the depths of his soul. But it was not so. The Hindu woman, having closed the front door, stood in readiness to conduct Mr. Redcliffe into the presence of her mistress; her demeanour was that of an Oriental slave, — her looks cast down, and the brilliant lustre of her eyes veiled by the thick jetty fringes which formed such dark lines, so that the very duskiness of her complexion appeared pale and light in comparison therewith.

Another minute, and Mr. Redcliffe again stood before the Indian princess.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DECISION

It would be impossible to describe the feelings with which Indora became aware that this man who was the arbiter of her destiny was now once more in her presence. She rose to a sitting posture on the velvet-covered sofa, but she dared not throw a single glance toward him. Hope and despair were strangely agitating in her heart, — blending, too, although in confiction, paradoxical as the expression may seem. It was natural that she should seek to prolong this hope as much as possible, and that, on the other hand, she should not rush forward as it were to find herself face to face with despair, until imperiously compelled to envisage it. The colour went and came in rapid transitions upon her cheeks, blushing and disappearing through the transparency of her delicately dusky skin, while her bosom rose and sank with quick heavings.

“My promise is kept,” said Clement Redcliffe, speaking in his wonted accents of mournfulness, but in all the harmony of his rich, manly voice, “and your Highness will now probably explain wherefore you demanded this interval of eight days’ delay?”

Indora motioned Redcliffe to take a seat by her side, and now her eyes were turned slowly upon him. Hope and fear trembled in that glance; love and apprehension vibrated in that look. She dreaded what his decision might be, and yet she sought to put away from her own mind the contemplation of the very worst. The Englishman placed himself on the ottoman at a distance which was properly respectful toward a lady of her princely rank, but which was little calculated to encourage the hope that her loving heart sustained in conflict with the strength of despair.

“ Yes, I will explain myself,” said Indora, with a sudden sensation of delight that she was thus furnished by his very words with an opportunity of again appealing to the tenderest feelings of his nature. “ I besought this brief delay in the conviction that during the interval you would not fail to ponder well and profoundly upon the decision toward the proclamation of which each passing day brought you nearer and nearer. Then I thought to myself that every proof of my devoted love, every evidence of my imperishable affection, would present itself to your memory, and that the whole, accumulating with force and power, would rule your mind in my favour. I thought to myself that you would recollect how the mightiest princes of my own native clime sought my hand in marriage, but that I rejected every proposal for your sake. I thought, too, that you would bear in mind how by those refusals I drew down upon myself my father’s anger — ”

“ Your Highness had little to fear from the king’s indignation,” interrupted Redcliffe, “ for your influence over him was complete.”

“ The allusion is ungenerous,” observed Indora, softly, and half-reproachfully. “ It is meant to remind me that I stood as a barrier in the way of your freedom, and that I overruled my father’s favourable inclinations, when toward the end of your captivity he was about to yield to your often-repeated prayer to be liberated from it. Yes, it was a crime, — a dark, branding crime which I thus affixed upon myself — But, oh, I felt that it was death to part from you, and I had not the courage — deeply, devotedly as I loved you — to lay such suicidal hands upon myself.”

“ Oh, if you had given me my liberty,” exclaimed Redcliffe, “ I should have fallen at your feet and worshipped you as an angel. This is the hour for the fullest explanations, and I came prepared to give them. Think you, Indora, that when first becoming a captive in your father’s sovereign city, I yielded to his request to instruct your then youthful mind, for you were but fifteen years of age, — think you, I ask, that I accepted the duties of a preceptor from any love which I bore toward your father, who had deprived me of my freedom? Know you not that the king’s action was one which we Europeans regard as the basest and the vilest? I went to the Court of Inderabad as an

accredited emissary from the Anglo-Indian Government, and regardless of the laws of nations, your father held me captive. Reports were spread that I had perished, along with my suite, in one of your Indian jungles, and thus the authorities at Calcutta adopted no measures to procure my liberation. I found myself thrown entirely on my own resources, and methought that if I sedulously devoted myself to whatsoever tasks the king your father should prescribe unto me, and if they were honourable ones, he would be all the more speedily moved to compassion, and would give me my freedom. And then, too, I thought that if I aided in the expansion of your natural intelligence, if I taught you our European accomplishments, and by such inculcations as I was enabled to impart rendered you the most brilliant princess of all the northern and independent region of the great peninsula of Hindustan, you would experience a gratitude which would raise me up a friend to intercede with that king who held me in captivity. And perhaps, too, I was flattered somewhat — for I was much younger then — by finding myself placed in a position and furnished with an opportunity to carry European civilization into the midst of the Oriental barbarism of your father's kingdom, and therefore did I address myself readily, and even cheerfully, to the tasks that were allotted to me. But that gratitude, Indora, which I expected at your hands, I received it not."

"No, not gratitude," replied the Indian princess, suddenly starting with the enthusiasm of her feelings; "it was nought so cold as mere gratitude that I gave you, — it was my love."

"Ah, but that love was so far fatal to me," rejoined Redcliffe, "that it prolonged my captivity. Do you recollect, Indora, that on one occasion I even humbled myself at your very feet to implore my release from your father's capital?"

"I remember it, alas! but too well," responded the Eastern lady. "It was when an English traveller was found dead, slain by robbers in a wood near the city, and when the papers and documents he had about him were brought to the palace —"

"Yes," cried Redcliffe, with exceeding bitterness, and as a strange look that was akin to rage swept over his countenance, "for amongst those papers there was an English

journal which contained something that regarded myself. Yes, Indora, it was after reading that journal that I threw myself at your feet, and besought you to give that consent which your royal father had already vouchsafed, but which you had refused to second."

"I know it but too well," answered the princess, who had shrunk back in mournful dismay from the strange look which Redcliffe's countenance had transiently expressed, "and I repeat, it was a crime on my part, — a foul treachery, whereof I have since deeply and sincerely repented. But why all these reiterations? Why taunt me thus with what I have done? Heaven knows — and I speak of that heaven into the holy mysteries of which you yourself initiated me by the inculcation of the Christian creed, — Heaven knows, I say, that I erred through love, that I was guilty through my mad fondness for you. Oh, use not my conduct of that time as a pretext and as an excuse for proclaiming a decision which is to consign me to despair. There is no other misdeed with which you can reproach me, Clement Redcliffe. I was in my girlhood when first you knew me, for long years had you your eye ever upon me, and you know whether my life has been stainless and immaculate or not?"

"Indora," answered Redcliffe, now evidently much moved, "not for a single instant can I hesitate to do justice to your numerous virtues. I admitted, when we were together eight days back, that I had received much good as well as much evil at the hands of your father and yourself. The riches which I possess were conferred upon me by your sire, but I felt that I had earned them, or else not a single one of the priceless gems and the costly gifts which had been showered upon me should I have borne away with me when I at length succeeded in effecting my escape. Nevertheless, though I earned all that wealth by long years of devoted application to the tasks prescribed me by your father, I am not the less grateful to the source whence those riches emanated. All this I do not deny; on the contrary, I wish you to understand the precise feelings of my heart, for this is an occasion of no ordinary importance, inasmuch as I see, alas! that the happiness of a fellow creature is deeply involved."

"You pity me?" said Indora, and hope flashed in her fine dark eyes.

“ Yes, I pity you,” responded Redcliffe, “ if neither as a woman nor a princess you consider the avowal to be an insult. But I was about to declare that had you, Indora, behaved more generously toward me, had you frankly, and with that nobleness of heart for which I once gave you credit, consented to my freedom when your royal father had agreed thereto, it might have been — yes, it might have been — different now. I should have retained such a deep impression of gratitude toward you that whatsoever sacrifice of my own feelings it might have cost to ensure your happiness, the word — the affirmative syllable — might possibly have gone forth from my lips. Ah, Indora, think you that I can forget how I flung myself at your feet on the same day that I read in the English journal — it was two years ago — that which so nearly concerned myself? Think you that I can forget how I besought and entreated and wept, and all so vainly? And in the wildness of the language to which I gave vent, I even said enough to give you at least some faint insight into those reasons so urgent, so vitally important to myself, which had suddenly transpired to render me more than ever anxious to retain my liberty. And yet you refused.”

“ Clement,” responded Indora, the tears now gushing forth from her eyes, streaming down her cheeks, and trickling upon the bosom which palpitated as if it would burst, “ you yourself were a witness of the almost mortal anguish which it cost me to pronounce that refusal. I bade you abandon all thoughts of returning to a land which, from the few words you let drop, I saw but too well you had no reason to love. I offered you my hand. I, a great princess, humbled myself far more to you than you, with all your pride of an Englishman, could possibly humble yourself to me. I gave you the assurance that my father would consent to our union, that you yourself might become a prince, that at his death the diadem of Inderabad should descend upon your brows, and that you should sit upon a throne. But more than all this I offered you. I offered you the fondest, most devoted love which woman’s heart could entertain for man, and think you therefore, Clement Redcliffe, that when you refused all these proffers, I had no woman’s pride that was wounded, and that perhaps for a moment there was some transient shade of vindictiveness strangely commingling with the very

love that I bore you? Reflect upon all this. • You yourself have taught me how weak and feeble is human nature, how poor the human heart. Can you not therefore make allowances for all that I felt and for all that I did on the occasion of which you have spoken? Besides, you should not judge me according to the severe rules by which you would estimate the conduct of a woman of your own native clime. No, no; it were too cruel. I am too much to be pitied — and you are too just.”

“ You possess, Indora, too fine an intelligence, and feelings too delicately susceptible,” answered Redcliffe, “ to think that this last reason which you have urged is the best and most forceful of any which you have as yet advanced. Remember that you are not altogether of Hindu extraction. Your father is a native prince, but your mother was a Georgian, and hence the comparative fairness of your complexion. But we must not argue longer on the subject. You now understand me, Indora, much better perhaps than ever you did before, and I on the other hand am willing to believe that you yourself regret that portion of your conduct which must be but too well calculated to inspire such remorseful feeling. Therefore I appeal to your generosity, I appeal to that feminine delicacy which characterizes you, I appeal to all those good and virtuous principles which have rendered your life so stainless, — by all these I appeal that you will accept my decision as a final one, and this decision is, that we part now to meet no more.”

The Princess Indora pressed her hand to her brow, and a faint, half-stifled shriek burst from her lips. The next moment, in a paroxysm of indescribable agony, she threw herself upon her knees, and extending her clasped hands toward Redcliffe, cried, in a frantic voice, “ You are killing me! You are killing me! ”

“ For Heaven’s sake give not thus way to your feelings! ” and he hastened to raise her up.

It seemed as if she were about to faint; she clung to him, and her head drooped upon his breast. He was forced to sustain her, but he gently placed her upon the ottoman, and standing before her, he said, “ Indora, if you ever loved me, I beseech you to fulfil your promise and respect my decision! ”

She had for a moment covered her countenance with her

hands, and her entire form was shaken with a low, convulsive sob. Slowly now she removed those hands, and looking up toward the Englishman with such ineffable woe depicted upon her features that it made his very heart bleed to contemplate the spectacle, she said, in the profound voice of despair, "Yes, I will respect your decision."

Clement Redcliffe was about to extend his hand and bid the princess a last farewell, when a thought struck him, and he lingered, but still he knew not how to shape the request which he had to make, for a request it was.

"Indora," at length he said, "I will not ask if it is with a feeling of anger you are about to behold me go forth from your presence, because I know that from all you have been saying, you are no longer capable of experiencing the slightest vindictiveness toward me."

"No, Clement Redcliffe," she answered, solemnly, but at the same time with a visible effort keeping back an ebullition of the strongest feelings; "rather than do you an injury, I would lay down my life to serve you."

The Englishman was profoundly touched by this assurance. The reader has seen enough of him to be aware that he was naturally generous-hearted, — indeed of a fine, chivalrous character, notwithstanding that so large a portion of his life had been spent in captivity, and that this circumstance, as well as others, had tended to sour his mind and warp some of his better feelings. Yes, he was generous-hearted, and the assurance which the unfortunate princess had just given could not fail to touch him profoundly. Besides, he would have been something less or something more than man if he had remained altogether inaccessible to the impression which that fond woman's devoted love was so well calculated to make, — even though it were a love which he himself could not reciprocate. It therefore cut him to the very soul, it made his heart bleed, it awakened sensibilities which he had fancied crushed, or at least buried in eternal slumber. It staggered the very resolve which had ere now gone forth from his lips.

He resumed his seat on the sofa, perhaps a little nearer to the princess than he was placed during all the former part of the interview, and she followed him with her eyes, in which some faint gleam of hope glittered again, but yet so feebly, because she dared not allow herself to entertain it.

“Indora,” suddenly exclaimed Redcliffe, with almost passionate vehemence, and such a paroxysm of feeling was indeed most rare on his part, “it is impossible I can leave you thus. I regret having said anything that might seem to savour of reproach; I am sorry that I should have dwelt so long and so emphatically on your conduct in prolonging my captivity in India. But heavens! if you were aware of all the mischief which was thus entailed upon me, and you can in part comprehend it, from those words which I let drop on the memorable occasion when I knelt at your feet by the side of the marble fountain in the palace of Inderabad, oh, if you knew all you would pardon any bitterness that tinged my words!”

“It would be impossible, Clement,” answered the princess, mildly, almost meekly, “for you to give me offence. My unfortunate love has tamed my disposition; I no longer think and feel with the pride of a king’s daughter, but with the humility and the suffering of a poor weak woman!”

“Heavens!” ejaculated Redcliffe, visibly struggling with himself as the resolve which he had pronounced was more and more staggered by each successive proof of Indora’s illimitable devotion, “how can I endure to torture you, while you display so much goodness?”

He rose and paced the apartment with hurried and uneven steps. That man whose wont it was to be so mournfully grave and so coldly reserved — so shut up, as it were, in the secret sorrows of his own inscrutable heart — was now a prey to the profoundest agitation. Indora followed him with her eyes; that very agitation afflicted her on the one hand, while it partially seemed to encourage hope on the other, and the tears again streamed down her cheeks, again trickled upon the gorgeous bust which the open caftan and the low undergarment left half-revealed.

“Indora,” said Redcliffe, abruptly resuming his seat by her side, “I cannot leave you thus; my very nature revolts against it. And yet for Heaven’s sake buoy not up yourself with immediate hope, for that could not possibly be fulfilled at once. No, sternly and implacably should I refuse, even though you were at this moment at the point of death and an affirmative syllable from my lips could alone save you. But yet —”

He stopped short, and it was with breathless suspense, with

fixed eyes, dilated nostrils, lips apart, head bent forward, and bosom upheaved, that Indora sat in the attitude of one who awaits a sound which she expects to hear but which she is afraid may escape her.

“ Princess,” continued Redcliffe, “ allusion has been made more than once during our interview to those few words which I let drop from my lips when I knelt at your feet by the side of the marble fountain. To what precise extent the revelation contained in those words might have reached, I have no accurate remembrance; my thoughts were full of wildness at the time, my brain was distracted; the scene itself, when looked back upon, appears to be enveloped in a sort of misty dreaminess. However, that I did make some avowal, that I did let fall something in that unguarded moment, I recollect full well. I have now a request to make — ”

“ You need not give utterance to it,” responded the princess; “ I can read your thoughts. You desire that the seal of secrecy shall remain upon my lips. Good heavens, Clement! do you think that I would betray a syllable that was calculated to do you an injury? ”

“ And after that assurance,” exclaimed Redcliffe, “ I dare not — I must not prove altogether ungrateful. Listen to me, Indora. You comprehend sufficient from those words which I let fall — and the necessity of keeping which inviolably secret you seem fully to understand — that my presence in England is connected with a matter of vital importance to myself. Yes, I have a specific object to accomplish, and to that must all my thoughts and all my energies be devoted. It may be achieved quickly, or it may take years to be worked out, — Heaven alone can tell. But that same Heaven can by its own inscrutable ways further my objects and conduct them to a speedy and a successful issue. Until that issue be accomplished, I am not master of my own actions — I am not even able to dispose of myself. But this is what I have to say, Indora, that if when my purpose is achieved, and if circumstances should leave me a free agent, then will I be mindful of this devoted love of yours, and then you shall not vainly implore at my feet.”

“ Oh, is this possible? ” exclaimed the delighted princess, and sinking upon her knees, she took Redcliffe’s hand, pressing it in fervour to her lips.

“ Rise, Indora, rise. This suppliant posture must not be assumed to me.”

“ But you have given me hope — I am no longer miserable. I am happy, — oh, I am joyously happy!” and she sprang up to her feet, her magnificent countenance radiant with the altered feelings that were thus suddenly excited in her soul.

“ Cherish that hope if you will, Indora,” said the Englishman; “ cherish it if it will make you happy, and I swear to you that if circumstances permit, it shall be fulfilled. But until that time, think not to behold me again.”

“ Oh, I can endure separation so long as there is hope,” exclaimed the princess, in a tone of gushing enthusiasm. “ I have waited so long to receive from your lips a single syllable of hope that I can wait longer yet for that hope’s realization. But tell me, — you say when the time shall come — are you confident that it will come sooner or later? ”

“ Yes, it will come,” answered Redcliffe; “ it will come, rest assured, or there would be no justice in heaven itself.”

With these words he abruptly quitted the room, and Indora, sinking upon the ottoman, almost overcome with the joyousness of her feelings, murmured to herself, “ There is hope. There is hope.”

Notwithstanding the violent agitation which Clement Redcliffe had experienced toward the close of this interview, the instant the door of the drawing-room shut behind him, he regained his habitual air of mournful gravity, so that it would have been impossible for any observer to gather from his looks a single scintillation of what had been passing. He descended the staircase, and found Sagoonah waiting in the hall to afford him egress. He put on his cloak, took up his hat, and was turning toward the door with an abruptness of movement which he often unconsciously displayed, when again he caught the eyes of the Hindu woman fixed upon him with the strange burning brightness of their regards. He stopped short instinctively; those eyes were instantaneously veiled by their long jetty fringes, the intensity of the spell which had for a moment riveted him was thus as suddenly withdrawn, and in silence he hurried forth from Shrubbery Villa. But as he sped along the by-lane leading to the main road, he again felt as if he were under the incomprehensible spell-like influence of Sagoonah’s haunting eyes.

The Hindu woman, having closed the front door behind Mr. Redcliffe, ascended the stairs, and glided into the drawing-room with her wonted noiseless step. Sinking upon her knees at the feet of the princess, she looked up into her countenance, and at once read there an answer to the question which, as a slave, she scarcely dared ask. For an instant Sagoonah's eyes flashed brightly, and then they were cast down again.

"I understand you, my faithful dependent," said Indora, passing her beautifully modelled hand caressingly over the Hindu woman's jet black hair, so smoothly brushed. "The kind interest you feel in me renders you impatient to know the result. You have partially read it on my features, and your eyes glistened with a sensation of joy. Yes, Sagoonah, I am no longer in a state of uncertainty, — I am permitted to hope."

The Hindu woman took the princess's hand, and raised it to her lips. At the same time Indora felt a burning tear-drop fall upon that hand, and again caressing the dependent, she said, in a kind, soothing voice, "You weep for joy, my faithful Sagoonah, you weep for joy; and I love you for this fresh evidence of your devoted affection."

Sagoonah kissed her mistress's hand once more, and slowly rising from her kneeling posture, she retreated to a little distance, her tall, symmetrical shape drawn up as usual, so that it displayed the beautiful bend of the back, the straightness of all the limbs, and the sculptural modelling of all the contours. Her countenance was inclined (as was its wont when she was in that position) toward her bosom, and she remained motionless as a statue.

"Sagoonah," said the princess, after a long pause, during which she reflected profoundly, "tell Mark to come to me at once."

The dependent quitted the room, and in a few minutes a man servant made his appearance. He was dressed in plain clothes, — a neat suit of black, with a white cravat. He was of the middle age, quiet and sedate-looking, but with a certain honesty and frankness of countenance which would at once have prepossessed a beholder in his favour. He bowed low to Indora, and stood in silence to await her commands. We should observe that although he knew full well that she was of princely rank, yet he addressed her not,

when speaking, with the highest title properly belonging thereto, but with an inferior one, for in order to avoid unpleasant observation and gossiping curiosity, Indora passed not as a princess in England, but merely as a wealthy lady of Hindustan. Two female dependents (Sagoonah and another) together with a native male servant, had accompanied her from Inderabad. The Englishman, whose Christian name was Mark, had been hired by her at Calcutta to serve as her intendant, steward, and butler, — the comptroller, in short, of her little household. He therefore knew who she was, but Sagoonah alone of those who had accompanied her from India was acquainted with the real object of her Highness's visit to England. It was Mark who on the arrival in London had procured the villa for the princess's accommodation, and in all respects he had proved himself efficient and trustworthy. While we are speaking of the household, we may as well add that besides the domestics already mentioned, there was a groom and coachman, for the princess had at once bought a carriage and a pair of horses on settling at the villa. The coachman did not sleep in the house; the groom occupied an apartment over the stables, and these two last-named dependents were in total ignorance of the high rank of their mistress.

We may now continue the thread of our narrative, taking it up at the point where Mark had entered the drawing-room in pursuance of the summons sent by the princess through Sagoonah.

“Is it possible, Mark,” inquired Indora, “to obtain any English newspapers that go back for several years?”

“All English newspapers, please your ladyship,” was the domestic's response, “are filed at certain places in London, and it is even possible sometimes to purchase a complete set of any particular newspaper.”

“In that case,” resumed Indora, with satisfaction upon her countenance, “I must get you, the very first thing to-morrow, to procure me a file for the last twenty years. Do you think you can accomplish it? Spare not gold — ”

“Everything, please your ladyship, can be procured in this country by means of money. By noon to-morrow I pledge myself that your ladyship shall be in possession of a file of newspapers.”

The domestic then bowed and withdrew.

CHAPTER XIX

STRUGGLES

Two months had elapsed since the occurrences which we have been relating, and it now verged toward the close of December. During these two months poor Mary Wright had breathed her last, and was consigned to the grave. Almost daily did Christina visit the perishing creature, and for hours would she at times remain with her, assisting the nurse and the landlady of the house in their kind assiduities toward smoothing the progress of the victim to another world. Mr. Redcliffe called occasionally to inquire at the front door how the invalid was, but he never sought her presence; he did not choose to be thanked for all that he was doing for her. His purse, however, afforded ample proof of the generous sympathy which he experienced on her behalf, for she was not merely surrounded with comforts, but even with luxuries. Her benefactor's conduct in thus avoiding her presence may appear eccentric, but on the other hand, it was full of kindness and consideration. Frequently would the most delicious and expensive fruits be delivered at the house, — fruits that must have cost gold in Covent Garden Market, and there was no difficulty in conjecturing from whom they came. When she breathed her last, Mr. Redcliffe gave instructions that her remains were to be decently interred, and he liberally rewarded the nurse, the landlady, and the medical attendant.

He would have rewarded Christina likewise, only he knew not that she stood in need of succour, and he would have been afraid of insulting her by offering her any testimonial of his appreciation of her goodness toward the perished one. Well aware was he of this goodness; he had not merely learned in the first instance how Christina had behaved when she visited Mary Wright in Redcross Street, but he had also been

informed by the landlady of the house at Islington, of Miss Ashton's frequent visits there. But it so happened that whenever Mr. Redcliffe called, Christina never came up to the door at the same time; so that since that encounter in Redcross Street, Mr. Redcliffe and the twins had not once met. Christian was in the habit of seeing his sister as far as the house, it being at no very great distance from their own lodging at Camden Town, and then he would set off in search of a situation, returning at an hour previously appointed, to fetch his sister and conduct her home again.

But during these two months Christian had found no situation and Christina no work. They had both used every endeavour to procure such employment as was respectively fitted for each, and they had failed. There seemed at this period of the orphans' lives to be a kind of fatality which influenced them with its evil spell. We need not enter into particulars in respect to the numerous applications made by each in countless quarters, nor the nature of the refusals — sometimes rebuffs — which they had to encounter. They had called upon Mrs. Macaulay, but she was unable to give them any recommendations to particular quarters, and, as the reader is aware, they were in all other respects friendless — those two poor orphans — in the great metropolis. Mrs. Macaulay, having perceived several instances of Mr. Redcliffe's charitable disposition, had thought of mentioning to him the gloomy prospects of the twins, but somehow or another she always forgot to do so when she had an opportunity. These opportunities were indeed rare enough, for Mr. Redcliffe, soon discovering that she was of a gossiping character, invariably cut her short whenever she seemed to threaten him with a long discourse.

Never in the presence of Mary Wright, while she yet remained alive, did Christina drop the slightest allusion to her own position, though it had daily been becoming worse and worse, and many and many an hour did she give to the dying young woman, when, but for her, she would have been roaming about from place to place, wherever there appeared a chance of procuring needlework.

Before continuing the narrative, we must remark, in addition to the above explanations, that during the time which had elapsed since the orphans quitted Mrs. Macaulay's house, they had seen nothing more of Lord Octavian Meredith.

They had requested that Mrs. Macaulay would not mention their new abode to that Mr. Percival who had once called, if he should happen to call again. The twins had their own little pride as well as other people, and they did not choose to be visited in their more humble lodging by one who was evidently moving in the best sphere of society. Besides, Christina herself had felt that for other reasons, which her feminine delicacy naturally suggested, it would be better that such an acquaintance should be discontinued. Not, be it understood, that she knew or even suspected that under the name of Mr. Percival an aristocratic title was disguised, but a becoming sense of propriety made her comprehend that situated as she was, with no other protector than a brother of her own age, — a mere youth, — it were imprudent to receive the visits of a fashionable young gentleman of whom she knew comparatively nothing.

The reader will recollect that we glanced hurriedly at the resources possessed by the orphans when they left Mrs. Macaulay's; we stated that in addition to a good stock of clothes, they had some fourteen or fifteen pounds in money, besides a few articles of jewelry of some value. The outlay on Mary Wright's part had made a certain inroad upon the pecuniary portion of those resources; their lodgings were ten shillings a week, — they had now occupied them exactly nine weeks, — and therefore it is easy to calculate that by this time their money was exhausted. They had lived with all possible frugality, allowing themselves mere necessities; and as day by day went by, beholding the gradual decrease of their money-stock, until the very last sixpence was expended, — those same successive days bringing no brightening prospect in respect to the chances of obtaining employment, — the poor orphans naturally grew more and more dispirited.

And now at length the day came when they had no money left. What was to be done? To seek assistance of Mrs. Macaulay was out of the question. They did not altogether understand her mercenary disposition; they did not precisely expect a refusal, if they did address themselves to her, but they felt that they had no right to do so, that they had no claim upon her, and that even if they had, they saw no chance of fixing a date for the refunding of any loan which she might advance. The orphans deliberated mournfully and

tearfully. They embraced each other, they endeavoured to impart mutual consolation; but it was all in vain, for they had none to offer. Yet something must be done. Christina's mind was made up; she could suffer privations herself, but she could not endure the idea that her beloved brother should want bread. He himself was racked by the same thought on her behalf, and he was about to propose that he should go and do that which Christina herself had resolved upon doing. It was in the afternoon of a chill December day when this deliberation took place, and Christina, on a certain pretext, got her brother to go off to some distance. She spoke of a place where he had called a few days back to ask for employment as a clerk; he had received no decisive answer, though the evasive one was almost tantamount to a refusal, and his sister now suggested that he should go and apply once more. She knew, or at least she feared, that the walk would be an unavailing one, and it cut her to the quick to think that her poor brother's feelings were again to be wounded by a rebuff. But still she preferred that he should even endure this than have to experience that still deeper humiliation which in the love she bore him she now purposed to take upon herself.

Christian set out, and when he was gone, Christina unlocked her work-box, lifted out the upper part, and drew forth a small packet tied around with tape. She unfastened the tape, she opened the packet, and tears trickled down her lovely pale cheeks, as she contemplated the articles therein contained. One was a long tress of raven hair, — a tress that must have constituted part of a luxuriant mass which might have formed the glory of a queen, ay, or the envy of one. This tress the poor girl placed to her lips, and kissed it reverently, devoutly, and, oh, how sadly, while the tears trickled faster and faster down her cheeks.

“Oh, my mother!” she murmured to herself; “you whom I never knew, you who were snatched away from us long ere we had intelligence to appreciate your loss, you who must be a saint in heaven, look down and compassionate your poor orphans who have already commenced their hard struggle with the world.”

Christina's bosom was convulsed with sobs, as she thus mentally apostrophized the authoress of her being, and through the tears that dimmed her eyes, she gazed stead-

fastly upon that long dark tress which she held in her hand. It was one which seemed as if it might have belonged to her own head, of such raven darkness was it, and of such silky fineness. She replaced it in her work-box, carefully enveloped however in a piece of tissue-paper, and then she drew forth a watch from the packet which she had opened. It was a beautiful gold watch, of delicate fashion and exquisite workmanship, and fitted for a lady. Many, many pounds might have been raised upon it, — at least many, many pounds in the estimation of those who were penniless, and Christina was already calculating that the produce of this watch would enable her brother and herself to subsist for many, many weeks, when a compunctious thought smote her, and she laid it down. Then she took up two rings, and these also she contemplated with a deep and mournful interest. One was a wedding-ring, the other, likewise a lady's, of no considerable value but of exquisite workmanship. Again did the compunctious feeling strike the sensitive girl, and as the tears now rained down her cheeks, she murmured, "No, mother! we will starve; we will perish, sooner than part with these memorials which we possess of you."

The watch and the two rings were replaced in the packet, which was folded up and carefully tied, and the work-box was locked again. Then Christina went to her own trunk, and selecting her best dress and shawl, she enveloped them in a handkerchief and issued forth from the lodging-house. The poor girl bent her way to the nearest pawnbroker's shop. It was now completely dusk. The gas was lighted inside; the plate and jewelry in the window shone with resplendence. Christina lingered for a few moments at the shop-door, but she had not the courage to enter, and she passed along the street. Again did the tears stream from her eyes at the thought of the distressing position to which her brother and herself were reduced. Then she recollected that he would return presently, fatigued with his walk, hungry, too, as he had gone forth, and that there was not a morsel of bread at the lodging for him to eat. She abruptly turned back, wiped the tears from her eyes, and mustering up all her courage, sped in the direction of the pawnbroker's shop. A loutish-looking boy was gazing in at the window, devouring all the fine things with his eyes, but as Miss

Ashton approached the door, he suddenly looked around, and with a coarse grin said, "Ah, young o'oman! it's easier to take things there than to git 'em out agin."

It was not that the fellow ill-naturedly intended to wound the poor girl's feelings, but his words had that effect, piercing indeed like a barbed arrow into her heart, for she was in that desponding, almost wretched state of mind, when any incident of this sort suddenly assumes the aspect of an ominous prediction to be fearfully fulfilled. With almost a preter-human effort she kept back the tears that were again ready to start forth from her beauteous black eyes, and in a fit of desperation she rushed into the shop.

The pawnbroker, with spectacles upon his nose and pen stuck behind his ear, bent a scrutinizing glance upon the young girl, so as to assure himself, as far as such survey would, that she had not stolen the articles she came to pledge, and then he examined them. She was ready to sink with shame during the process, and all the more so, as in the middle of it a couple of ill-looking half-tipsy women came in, with brazen effrontery in their looks, for they were not humiliated at the thought of being seen in such a place. The pawnbroker asked her how much she required upon the articles, but she was so confused that she was unable to utter a word. The man's experience in such matters at once enabled him to detect the difference between shrinking bashfulness and conscious dishonesty; he therefore received the pledges, handed her over thirty shillings, together with a small ticket, and Christina hurried out of the shop, infinitely relieved at escaping from the coarse looks and jeering whispers of the two women.

She purchased provisions, and reëntered the lodging. When her brother returned from his unavailing errand, his eyes instantaneously glanced from the food which was spread upon the table, toward his sister, and he burst into tears. He comprehended in a moment the generosity of her purpose in sending him temporarily out of the way, and he embraced her fervently. But then a painful idea smote him, and through his tears he again glanced — but now with anxious inquiry — toward Christina. She comprehended what he meant, and at once reassured him by explaining what she had done, and that the little memorials which they possessed of their long dead mother had not been touched. They sat

down to eat, but it was with no small degree of bitterness that they partook of the food obtained by money raised from such a source.

Christian rose very early on the following morning, and told his sister that he should renew his inquiries after a place, notwithstanding the disappointments he had already experienced. She replied that she also should go about to solicit work, and begged her brother to return in a few hours to escort her for the purpose. He promised that he would, and he sallied forth. Repairing to a neighbouring coffee-house, he carefully inspected the advertising columns of the newspapers, and his eyes settled upon an announcement to the effect that a young man of intelligence, and who wrote a gentlemanly hand, was required by a nobleman as an amanuensis, or private secretary. Application was to be made at a particular address in Piccadilly. Off set Christian in that direction; we cannot exactly say with hope in his heart, because he had already experienced so many disappointments and rebuffs, but at least he was determined not to lose the opportunity for want of following it up. On arriving in Piccadilly and reaching the particular address indicated, he found that it was a jeweller's shop. He thought there must be some mistake, but as the number of the house was precisely that specified in the newspaper advertisement, he resolved to inquire. Entering the shop, he addressed himself to one of the serving-men, and on naming his business, was at once informed that it was the proper place at which to apply in the first instance. Then the shopman gave Christian a card, and recommended him to go at once, as there had already been several applicants for the situation.

The youth felt that the advice given was somewhat cheering, inasmuch as it appeared to promise that he would not be considered too young for the employment which he sought. He looked at the card, and found that it was that of the Duke of Marchmont, whose residence was in Belgrave Square. Christian had never, to his knowledge, heard the name mentioned before, and he was stricken with timidity at the thought of appearing as a candidate for a situation with a nobleman of so lofty a rank; but he was not to be deterred by any such feeling from making the attempt, and he was soon in Belgrave Square. The Duke of Marchmont was at home, and when Christian mentioned his business, one of

the numerous powdered and liveried lackeys who were lounging in the hall conducted the youth to a sumptuously furnished apartment, where his Grace, enveloped in a splendid silk morning-gown, was lounging on a sofa, reading the newspapers, for it was yet early in the forenoon.

We must observe that Christian took great care of his clothes; he was neatly dressed, and from the description already given of him, we need scarcely add that he was not merely respectable-looking, but of an unsurpassable gentility. The duke, slowly turning his head without raising himself up, and lazily depositing the newspaper by his side, surveyed Christian attentively, and then said, "So you have come after the situation of amanuensis?"

"Yes, my lord," was the youth's response, and he trembled with the nervous anxiety of mingled hope and fear.

"First of all," said the duke, "before we speak another word upon the matter, sit down at the table and give me a specimen of your writing."

His Grace then took up the newspaper again, and continued the reading of an article in the midst of which he had left off. Christian sat down, and now that the duke's eyes were no longer upon him, he felt much less embarrassed than at first. He took up a pen, opened a book which lay near, and began to copy on a sheet of paper a portion of its contents. His hand trembled as he first took up that pen, but when he thought of all that was at stake, of how much seemed to depend on this initiative test of his capacities, of his beloved sister Christina, and how she had parted with her raiment on the preceding evening, when he thought, too, of how joyous his heart would be if he were enabled to return and tell her that he had succeeded at length in procuring a situation, he was suddenly inspired with a fortitude which surprised himself, and his hand trembled no more.

"That's enough, I dare say, for me to judge by," exclaimed the duke, at the expiration of about five minutes, and Christian hastened to proffer the paper on which he had been writing. "This is excellent," cried Marchmont; "the very thing! A most gentlemanly hand. I suppose, my lad, you have been well educated?"

Christian replied, with a becoming modesty, that he had certainly been at a good school, and that he hoped he had profited by that opportunity for instructing himself.

"It's the very sort of handwriting that I wanted," proceeded the duke, — "a gentleman's, and not a clerk's. I have had three or four applications this morning, and none would suit. There was one fellow who covered a sheet of paper with as many flourishes as a writing-master, so that my letters would have had the air of so many tradesmen's circulars. You see, young man, I have a great number of letters of various sorts to answer, and as I dislike the trouble of it, my correspondence gets confoundedly into arrear. So I have resolved to take an amanuensis, who will sometimes write to my dictation, and at others make out a good letter from the passing hints I may give him, and from the nature of the correspondence which will in itself be suggestive of the proper response. Now, do you think you can manage this?"

"I should not hesitate, my lord, to undertake it with confidence," answered Christian, hope rising still higher in his soul. "But if your Grace would give me some letter to put my capacity to a further test —"

"No, no, I don't think it is necessary," interrupted the duke. "You are well spoken, and genteel, which last is another great recommendation in your favour. I think that I may safely give you a trial. The terms I propose are fifty guineas a year, and as you will live in the house, you will of course have nothing to find except your clothes."

"Live in the house, my lord," murmured Christian, hope sinking again to the very bottom of his heart, where it became well-nigh extinguished, for the thought of separating from Christina was not to be endured.

"Oh, yes," said the duke, carelessly, "you must live in the house, so that you may always be at hand; because it is not to be supposed that I can ever be ready at stated hours to attend to my correspondence."

"My lord, I am exceedingly sorry — I deeply regret — the situation would have pleased me so — but, but —" and the tears came into the poor youth's eyes.

"Why, what's the matter?" demanded Marchmont, sharply. "If it don't suit you, you can retire, and there's an end of the business."

"Oh, my lord, it suits me — it would be the saving of me!" exclaimed Christian, with much feeling. "But I have

a sister dependent on me. We are orphans — I could not separate from her — ”

“ A sister? ” observed the duke, and it immediately struck him that if she were as beautiful as Christian himself was handsome, he should have no objection to become acquainted with her. “ And pray how old is your sister? ”

“ My own age, my lord; we are twins.”

“ Twins, eh? ” ejaculated Marchmont, more and more interested, for now he felt convinced that there must be a great similitude between the brother and sister, and therefore no doubt remained as to the beauty of the latter. “ And pray, how old are you? ”

“ Seventeen and a half, my lord,” replied Christian.

“ And what is your name? ” inquired Marchmont.

“ Christian Ashton,” was the response.

The duke was somewhat struck by the name; he thought he had heard it before; he reflected for a few moments, and all of a sudden it occurred to him that Lord Octavian Meredith had mentioned the name of Ashton as that of the beautiful creature for whom he had fought the duel with Mr. Stanhope. But the duke did not suffer Christian to perceive that he was in any way struck by the name, and after a pause, he quietly asked, “ Where do you live? ”

The youth named the address in Park Street, Camden Town, and Marchmont recollected that it was not the same mentioned to him by Lord Octavian as that where his Grace was to call in the event of Meredith succumbing in the duel. But all in a moment another thought flashed to Marchmont’s mind. Octavian had represented his “ fair unknown ” as having been seen walking with a youth whom by the striking likeness he knew to be her brother. Putting two and two together, the duke, who was cunning enough in such matters, began to surmise that Miss Ashton must have been Octavian’s “ fair unknown.” But still there was the discrepancy in regard to the address, and this was to be cleared up, in order to prove that Christian’s sister was really the same Miss Ashton who had caused the duel, and whose identity with the “ fair unknown ” the duke more than half-suspected.

“ Have you lived long in Park Street, Camden Town? ” he inquired, as if in a careless manner.

“ Between nine and ten weeks, my lord. Previously to our removal thither,” continued Christian, ingenuously giving

his explanations with all becoming candour and frankness, "we dwelt in Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square."

The duke's uncertainty was now completely dissipated, and his mind was made up to take Christian into his service.

"Well, my lad," he said, "I should much rather that you would come and live in the house, but if you object, it shall not stand as a barrier in the way of an arrangement. You appear to suit me in every other respect, and therefore it is a bargain. Go and consult your sister, but I think that if you were wise, you would make up your mind to dwell beneath my roof, and your sister could occupy a lodging somewhere in the neighbourhood, so that you might often be with her when not engaged in writing. I don't suppose you will have more than a couple of hours' work every day, and you would therefore have ample time to pass with your sister. But take your choice; return to me to-morrow morning at this same hour, and let me know your decision. The place is yours, whichever way it may be; I promise you that much."

Christian issued forth from the presence of the Duke of Marchmont. He could scarcely restrain his joy as he crossed the spacious landing ornamented with vases and sculptures, as he descended the superb marble staircase, as he traversed the hall where the livery servants were lounging about, and where an old porter of corpulent form and jolly countenance sat in his great leathern chair, reading a newspaper. But when Christian had cleared the threshold of the palatial portals, his heart swelled with such exultation that tears of bliss started from his eyes. He was happy; never had he felt so happy. It was a species of intoxication of the brain that he experienced. To think that when his hopes were at the very lowest, he should thus have procured a situation that was higher than his most ambitious soarings. He sped through the square, he ran along the streets, he leaped into the first omnibus that would take him near to his destination. It seemed as if no journey was ever so long; he was so anxious to reach his humble home, and impart the joyous intelligence to his dearly beloved twin sister.

But before Christian reaches the lodging, let us see what Christina herself has been doing in the interval. Her brother had gone out early, as the reader will recollect, and had promised to return in a few hours to escort his sister in her

search for needlework. Christina hastened to put their two little chambers into becoming order, and when she had done this, she descended to the landlady's own parlour, and began to consult her in respect to her position. Mrs. Giles was a good-natured woman, kind-hearted and benevolent, and considerably different from her acquaintance, Mrs. Macaulay. She had suspected for some little time past that the twins were not very comfortable in their circumstances, and she often had it on the tip of her tongue to speak some sympathizing words, or to proffer advice if she were enabled to afford any. But Christian and Christina had a certain pride of their own — a very natural one too — which prompted them to keep up their respectability as well as they could in the eyes of their landlady; and though they were most courteous and affable toward her, they had never thrown themselves in the way of any lengthy discourse. Now, however, Christina had laid aside all that sense of shame which had hitherto kept her silent; she frankly told Mrs. Giles how her brother and herself were situated, and expressed her fears that they must surrender up their present lodging and betake themselves to a still cheaper one.

“My dear young lady,” answered Mrs. Giles, “you need not vex and annoy yourself about your rent. Remain here as long as you like, and pay me when you can.”

Christina expressed her deep gratitude to the worthy woman, but declared that neither she nor her brother would wilfully contract a debt which they had no immediate prospect of liquidating.

“I am not at all surprised,” said the landlady, “that both yourself and your brother have failed in procuring such employments as you have sought. Master Ashton is too genteel to go and apply for a clerk's place, because, being so young, he could only expect small remuneration, and an employer would fancy that he could not make a hard-working drudge of such an elegant gentlemanly young man who carries his fine spirit in his very countenance. As for needlework, my dear Miss Ashton, there are so many thousands and thousands of poor creatures scrambling to get whatever there is to do in that way, that a great many must of course go without.”

“Yes, I feel that it is so,” answered Christina, with a profound sigh. “I would do anything,” she added, bursting

into tears, "to earn bread for myself and my brother. I had intended to go again into the City presently, and inquire at some of the clothing marts for work, but a thought just now struck me, and I made up my mind to consult you on the subject. Do you think that I could possibly procure the situation of companion to some lady, or even the situation of maid, — anything, in short, that would relieve my mind from the dreadful anxiety which now fills it. It would be hard, oh, very hard, to separate from my brother. I used to feel how hard it was when, as boy and girl, we parted to go to our respective schools after the holidays. But it would be harder still to see that poor brother of mine want bread; and indeed I cannot bear the thought that day after day he runs about in weariness, seeking for employment, humbling himself to purse-proud men, and meeting rebuffs which cut him to the very soul and pierce mine also."

Christina wept; indeed for a few minutes she sobbed convulsively, Mrs. Giles saying all she possibly could to cheer and console her.

"Ah! now I think of it," suddenly exclaimed the worthy woman, with joy upon her countenance, "I do really believe there is an opening for you."

The young girl hastily wiped away her tears, and listened with eager suspense.

"My daughter," continued Mrs. Giles, "is housemaid in a nobleman's family close by here, in the Regent's Park. Jessy — that's my daughter's name, — and a good girl she is, too, though I say it — was here last evening, and she told me that her ladyship wanted a companion, some nice, genteel young person, — in a word, I am sure, Miss Ashtôn, that you would suit in every particular. And her ladyship is so amiable and good and kind, and his lordship is such a nice man. They have not long been married —"

"Oh, if it were possible," exclaimed Christina, joy expanding in her heart, "that I could obtain such a situation!"

"I really think you will obtain it, miss," answered the landlady, "and though I should be sorry to lose you as a lodger, I should nevertheless be well pleased to know that you were comfortably situated. You had better go about it at once."

"I will," cried the young girl, "and a thousand thanks

to you for the intelligence you have given me and the kind wishes you have expressed."

Christina hastened up to her own chamber, put on the best apparel which she could command, and descended to Mrs. Giles's room again, to inquire the address to which she was to proceed. The landlady had already written it down for her, and Christina, with renewed thanks, issued forth from the house. As she entered the Regent's Park, she suddenly recollected the insulting conduct she had experienced on a former occasion, and she almost repented that she had not awaited her brother's return to escort her. But then, what happiness would it be for her if, when he came back to the lodging, she should be enabled to give him the assurance that thenceforth they would both have bread. The idea of separation was the only drawback to the happiness which Christina felt she should experience if her present mission proved successful, but still she argued with herself that when persons are enmeshed in difficulties, it is almost invariably necessary to make certain sacrifices in order to escape from them. Thus reflecting, she continued her way, she crossed the Regent's Park without experiencing any fresh insult, and she at length knocked at the door of a house, of very genteel appearance, though not of very spacious dimensions.

To her inquiry whether Lady Octavian Meredith was at home and could be seen at such an early hour in the forenoon, she received an affirmative response, and was at once conducted to a parlour where Zoe, in a morning *déshabillé*, was seated upon a sofa. Christina was already prepossessed, by what Mrs. Giles had said, in favour of Lady Octavian Meredith, but her good opinion was enhanced at the very first glance which she flung upon Mr. Armytage's daughter. It was not so much that the exquisite beauty of Zoe interested the young girl, as that the goodness and sweetness depicted on Lady Octavian Meredith's lovely countenance were well calculated to inspire confidence and hope. The dark velvet covering of the sofa threw out Zoe's form in admirable relief, arrayed as it was in a light morning garb; her hair, without any ornament, showered in ringlets upon her shoulders, and it was with a gracious encouraging smile that Zoe, on learning Christina's business, bade her sit down. Lady Octavian Meredith herself was struck with the extraor-

dinary beauty of Christina, — a beauty which was in such perfect contrast with her own, inasmuch as Miss Ashton's hair and eyes were dark, while those of her ladyship were of a light, angelic style. But it would have been difficult for an observer to decide which was the more beautiful of the two, although perhaps Christina might have carried off the palm.

There was no shade of jealousy, no, not even the slightest tinge thereof, in Zoe's disposition, and therefore when Miss Ashton announced the object of her visit, it did not for a single moment occur to Lady Octavian Meredith that there might possibly be some danger in introducing so transcendently beautiful a creature into the house. Besides, in the same way that Christina was interested by Zoe's appearance, so was the latter at once prepossessed with regard to the former; and Lady Octavian Meredith found herself inwardly expressing the hope that the applicant would prove a suitable candidate for the position she had come to seek.

“It is perfectly true,” said Zoe, in her sweet, musical voice, “that I wish to enter into an engagement with a young lady who will live with me as a friend,” for she could not utter the word companion, which in that particular sense might convey the offensive significancy of a toady. “Lord Octavian Meredith is, as a matter of course, frequently out; it is natural that he should seek those companions with whom his position enables him to associate, and I occasionally feel myself somewhat dull and lonely. You are aware that in what is called the fashionable world, visits are not paid until late in the afternoon, and then they are mere flying ones, and I am fain to confess that the conversation is usually frivolous and unsatisfactory. Thus I am many hours alone, and I cannot always while away the time with my books, my music, or my work. Therefore I seek the friendship of a young lady of amiable manners, of intellectual acquirements, and of certain accomplishments. She may rely upon kind treatment; she shall never find herself in a false position; she shall be as one of the family, subject to no restraint nor coercion, and to be regarded as on a perfect equality with myself. I have been thus candid and frank, thus lengthy in my explanations, so that you may understand, Miss Ashton, my requirement and all its circumstances.”

The reader must bear in mind that Zoe was utterly ignorant of the acquaintance of her husband with Christina, equally unaware of the adventure in the park nine weeks back, equally unaware also of the duel which had followed. On the other hand, Christina was as completely ignorant that accident had brought her to the house belonging to him whom she only knew as Mr. Percival, and of course equally ignorant that she was in the presence of that individual's wife.

"I thank your ladyship," answered Miss Ashton, "for the explanations you have given me, and I fully appreciate the delicate terms in which they have been conveyed. With equal frankness will I place before your ladyship the humble claims which I have to submit to your notice. I was well educated, and was instructed in some few accomplishments, though I am not vain enough to say that I possess any. I am fond of music, I love drawing in water colours or with pencil, I am equally attached to a certain style of reading, — chiefly history, biography, books of travel, and such instructive works. I have every disposition to render myself agreeable and useful, and I may confidently add that I shall repay with gratitude whatsoever kindness is shown me. My position is somewhat a painful one. I have a twin brother, and we are orphans. We are likewise friendless. A recent calamity has deprived us of the resources which we previously possessed — I allude to the sudden flight of a person who lived on the other side of the Regent's Park —"

"Do you mean Mr. Preston?" inquired Zoe, with some degree of surprise.

"The same, my lady," answered Christina.

"And it was my own father, Mr. Armytage," rejoined Zoe, "who first discovered that man's delinquencies, and I regret to say that he too has suffered by them. Is he a relation of yours?"

"Oh, no, my lady!" responded Christina; "we have not to our knowledge any relations in the world. Our parents died when we were quite young; we were brought up by an uncle, who was a widower, and to him were we indebted for the good education we received. He died suddenly, and immediately after the funeral, Mr. Preston announced himself to us as the person to whom we had thenceforth to look for supplies of money. It was by his desire that we came

up to London, and he regularly furnished us with an income until the period of his flight. Since then we have experienced troubles and afflictions — ”

Here Christina stopped short and burst into tears. Lady Octavian Meredith was much affected by the orphan girl's narrative, and she spoke in a kind, soothing manner. Christina, when again able to speak, informed her ladyship that she and her brother had resided six months at Mrs. Macaulay's, and upwards of two months at Mrs. Giles's, both of whom could speak as to their characters and conduct.

“Mrs. Giles is a most respectable woman,” observed Zoe, “and I am very certain that she would not recommend you to me unless perfectly assured that there was propriety in so doing. Forgive me if for a moment I have alluded to such matters as recommendations and so forth — ”

“It is necessary, my lady, and it is better,” replied Christina. “If I have the good fortune to please your ladyship, I should wish to enter your house in the fullest confidence that you are satisfied with me.”

“I am already satisfied, from everything which you have told me,” rejoined Lady Octavian Meredith, “and I will request my husband to use his interest to procure some suitable situation for your brother. I can understand, from all you have said, that it would be painful for you to separate from that brother, but you have my free permission to receive him as often as he may choose to call upon you, — the oftener the better, for it will do me good to behold you happy and contented. I am already much interested in you, Miss Ashton, and I am grateful that Mrs. Giles should have counselled you to visit my house to-day.”

Christina expressed her warmest thanks for all these kind assurances, and Lady Octavian Meredith proceeded, in the most delicate and considerate manner, to intimate the terms which she proposed to offer any young lady whom she might select as her friend. In a word, the compact was formed, and Christina promised to remove to her ladyship's house on the morrow.

“I shall take the liberty of requesting Mrs. Giles,” said Christina, when rising to depart, “to call upon your ladyship in the course of the day, that she may confirm, so far as she knows me, the representations that I have made, and as she is acquainted with my former landlady, she can give

your ladyship such assurances as Mrs. Macaulay herself would impart if referred to."

"It is by no means necessary," answered Zoe, "but inasmuch as I see that it will satisfy you, Miss Ashton, you can bid Mrs. Giles call upon me presently."

Zoe rose from her seat, and extended her hand with sweetest affability to Christina, who, with renewed thanks and with joy in her heart, took her leave. Thus, while Christina was retracing her way across the Regent's Park, Christian, having alighted from the omnibus, was speeding along Albany Street, also in a homeward direction. Neither had the faintest suspicion of the good fortune which had suddenly smiled upon the other; each heart was full of joy on the other's account. But that of Christina was somewhat shaded, because in her case it was settled that she must separate from her brother; whereas in Christian's case it had been left by the Duke of Marchmont to his own option as to whether he should live at the mansion in Belgrave Square, or still continue to reside with his sister.

Christina reached the lodging first, and at once informed Mrs. Giles of the success of her visit to Lady Octavian Meredith. She likewise requested the worthy woman to call upon her ladyship in the course of the day.

"That I shall do with pleasure," was the response cheerfully given; "indeed I shall set off at once, and you may depend upon it, my dear young lady, I shall say everything in your favour which you so fully deserve."

Christina hastened up-stairs, and scarcely had she put off her walking apparel, when Christian came rushing up as if he were wild. He burst into the room, and folding his sister in a warm embrace, cried, "Joy, joy, darling Christina. I have succeeded at length."

"And I too, my beloved brother, have succeeded in something," she responded, with an almost equal exultation.

Christian contemplated her with surprise, and mutual explanations were speedily given. But Christian was now saddened at the idea of separating from his sister.

"His Grace," he said, mournfully, "left it to me to decide whether I would live at his mansion, or continue to dwell with you, and I had arranged in my mind such a nice little plan of removing into the neighbourhood of Belgrave Square, so that we might be together —"

“But, my dear brother,” interrupted Christina, though with tears in her eyes, “we must resign ourselves to this separation. From what you have told me, the Duke of Marchmont offers you fifty guineas a year, — a most liberal sum, if you dwell in his mansion, but it would instantly become a small one if you resided in lodgings and had to support me. Lady Octavian Meredith offers me sixty guineas a year, and I am to dwell with her. We can both save considerably from our incomes, and perhaps, my dear brother, in the course of time our economies will enable us to reside together again. Besides, Lady Octavian assures me that the oftener you call upon me the better she shall be pleased, and the Duke of Marchmont has informed you that you will have plenty of time at your own disposal. We may see each other daily, or nearly every day; we may walk out together — Oh, indeed, dear Christian, we shall make ourselves happy! And remember what a change these few brief hours have suddenly worked for us. Last night we ate the bread of bitterness; to-day we shall eat the bread of happiness. This morning we rose in mournfulness from our respective beds; to-night we shall lay ourselves upon our pillows with hope, consolation, and thankfulness in our hearts. We shall close our eyes in slumber without the dread of the morrow’s awakening.”

Christian could offer no remonstrances against this reasoning on his sister’s part, and the arrangements were therefore to the effect that he should return in the course of the day to the Duke of Marchmont to state the decision to which he had come, so that on the morrow he might remove to his Grace’s mansion, at the same time that his sister took up her residence with Lady Octavian Meredith.

In the course of a couple of hours Mrs. Giles returned from her visit to Zoe, and she now learned the good fortune which had simultaneously overtaken Christian. She congratulated the twins with the most genuine sincerity, and placing an envelope in Christina’s hand, said, “Lady Octavian Meredith is already so deeply interested in you, and is so fearful of losing you, that she has desired me to tender you this as a ratification of the compact.”

Mrs. Giles then hastened from the room, and Christina, on opening the envelope, found that it contained a bank-note for twenty pounds. The orphans were deeply touched

by this proof of Lady Octavian's generosity and kindness, and all the more so on account of the delicate manner in which the succour was conveyed.

Christian hastened off again to the Duke of Marchmont's residence, and when it was dusk, Christina went forth to redeem her wearing apparel from the pawnbroker's. With very different feelings from those which she had experienced on the previous evening was it that she now entered the place, and she returned with a light heart to the lodging, to prepare a comfortable meal against her brother's reappearance. And it was the bread of happiness which the twins ate that night, scarcely saddened by the idea of separation, because they felt it was for their mutual good.

But when the morrow came and the hour for separation arrived, they wept and renewed again and again the farewell embrace ere they tore themselves asunder.

CHAPTER XX

THE BURKER

THE scene which we are about to describe occurred on the same evening as Christina's visit to the pawnbroker.

It was between nine and ten o'clock that a man of most ill-favoured appearance emerged from one of the low courts opening from the New Cut, Lambeth, and bent his way in the direction of the maze of densely populated streets and alleys which lie between the lower parts of the Waterloo and Westminster Roads. This man was about forty years of age, and it would be impossible to conceive a human exterior so repulsive, or so fearfully calculated to make the blood of a beholder curdle in the veins. There are some physiognomies which impress one with a capacity for particular sorts of mischief; there are features, for instance, which indicate low cunning, others denote violent passions, and there are others which reveal an instinctive thirst for blood. But all the most terrible attributes of the human mind were concentrated in the expression of that man's countenance. He had a small snub nose, which appeared to have been stuck on to his face as if it were an afterthought of nature; his mouth was large, and was furnished with a set of sharp pointed sharklike teeth, which being naturally white, and remaining so in defiance of neglect, glittered horribly between his coarse, thick lips. His eyes were of the dark colour and expression of a reptile's, and the brows, by being traced irregularly, — or else being brought down by an habitual lowering regard, — added to the shuddering sensation produced by a look from those horrible eyes. His hair — of a light brown, and already turning gray — was completely matted; his whiskers, of a darker colour, were equally ragged and unkempt. He was dressed in a loose drab

upper garment that appeared to be a coachman's greatcoat with a portion of the skirts cut off. A dirty cotton handkerchief was tied negligently about his neck, and his trousers, of a dingy gray, hung loose as if he wore no braces. His hands were thrust into the pockets on the outer side of the coat, and under one arm he held a short stick, which, however, might be more aptly denominated a club. From beneath the leathern front of his well-worn cap his looks were flung hastily around when he emerged from the court, as if his conscience were not altogether so clear as to place his personal freedom beyond the possibility of inconvenient molestation.

Continuing his way, and passing rapidly through several streets, — evidently with a settled purpose in view, — he at length relaxed his pace near a house in the midst of that maze of lanes, alleys, and courts to which we have already alluded. It was a house that had a small dissenting chapel on one side, and a beer shop on the other, and it must be observed that next to the chapel there was a narrow alley with a low arched entrance. The house to which we are particularly alluding, and which stood between the chapel and the beer shop, was a small one, for it was a poor street, but there was nothing in its exterior to detract from its air of humble respectability. A small brass plate on the front door indicated that it was occupied by a person named John Smedley, whose calling was that of gold-beater. This was further illustrated by a gilt arm, the fist clutching a hammer, which appeared over the ground-floor window. That window had green blinds, and if a passer-by peeped over them, he would look into a little parlour that was furnished neatly enough. The two windows of the first floor front had dark moreen curtains, for this floor was let to a lodger. When unoccupied, a neatly written card, conveying the intimation of "Lodgings to let," would be seen in the lower window, but the ticket was not there now, inasmuch as the apartments referred to had a tenant.

Mr. and Mrs. Smedley had the reputation in the neighbourhood of being respectable people enough, although whispering rumour declared that the wife was somewhat attached to strong waters; but on the other hand, the husband was regular in his attendance at the dissenting chapel next door, so that the minister regarded him as one of his

“choicest and most savoury vessels.” He was a man of about eight and thirty, with a mean, insignificant countenance, in the expression of which it was difficult to find an index of his real character or disposition. A very close observer, if experienced in reading the human heart, would have had some misgivings relative to the sincerity of Mr. Smedley’s religious devotion, and might perhaps have caught the glitter of hypocritical cunning underneath the gloss of sanctimoniousness which he habitually wore. His wife was a tall and rather well-made woman, with large features, and a look that indicated decision of character. She had dark hair and eyes, and somewhat a gipsy cast of countenance, which was enhanced by her olive complexion. She generally wore her hair floating over her shoulders, and though there was a certain bold hardihood in her looks, yet the neighbours were acquainted with nothing prejudicial to her reputation as a wife. She was three or four years younger than her husband, but kept him under the completest control.

The Smedleys had no children, but they had a companion and an assistant in the person of Mrs. Smedley’s mother. She was a woman of about sixty, with the same style of features as her daughter, though more angular and prominent with the effects of age, and there was certainly something sinister, if not actually repulsive, in her looks. She aided her daughter in the household work, and especially attended upon the lodger who occupied the apartments on the first floor. It was rumoured that Mrs. Webber — for that was the old woman’s name — possessed some little means of her own, and this opinion appeared to be confirmed from the fact that the Smedleys were tolerably comfortable in their circumstances, and lived in a better style than either the gold-beating avocation or that of letting a portion of their house to a lodger could possibly warrant. Indeed, John Smedley did not appear to be overburdened with work, for he was often sauntering about the neighbourhood, either for his recreation or else to distribute tracts amongst those whom he denominated his “benighted brethren and sisters.” As for Mrs. Smedley and the mother they seldom stirred out of the house, except on a Sunday, when they sometimes accompanied the gold-beater to chapel, but they were not by any means so regular in their attendance as he himself was.

The ill-favoured man whom we introduced at the beginning of this chapter was named Barnes, but was more familiarly called Barney by his intimates, and sometimes he was spoken of, though never addressed to his face, as Barney the Burker; it having been suspected that some years previously to the time of which we are writing he had been connected with the diabolical gang whose wholesale murders produced consternation throughout the country. But as we have just hinted, it was by no means safe to throw out the imputation to Barnes's face, for the savage vindictiveness of his character and his implacable ferocity would have at once prompted him to inflict a terrible chastisement on whomsoever he might regard as giving him offence.

Relaxing his pace, as we have said, when he drew near the gold-beater's house, he flung his looks hastily around, evidently to assure himself that he was not observed, and then he made a sudden dive under the low arch which led into the alley by the side of the chapel. This alley had an opening at the farther extremity, communicating with a small vacant space behind the chapel, and which was separated by a low wall from the yard at the rear of the Smedleys' house. Over this wall Barney the Burker at once clambered, and alighting in the yard, he without ceremony entered the dwelling by the back door. Though it was dark within, he evidently knew the premises well, for he immediately began to descend a flight of steps, and thus reached an underground place, which being behind the kitchen might be described as the scullery. Here a light burned upon a small deal table, at which the Smedleys and Mrs. Webber were seated, with bottles and glasses before them. A massive door on one side communicated with a cellar, and another door led into the front kitchen.

It may possibly be wondered wherefore the Smedleys and the old woman were enjoying themselves on the present occasion in so damp, gloomy, and dungeon-like a place as the scullery, where there was no grate, and consequently no fire, and this too being the cold winter season. But they had business of a particular nature to discuss, and a particular visitor to receive. They did not therefore choose to sit in the parlour, lest passers-by should peep in through the crevices of the shutters, or stand to listen to what was being said; and as there was an iron grating over the front kitchen

window, down which anybody might look if lights were burning there, they had similar reasons for avoiding that place. There were certainly other rooms in which they might have met, — such for instance as the back parlour on the ground floor, which served as John Smedley's workshop when he had any work to do, but then there was the fear of the lodger overhearing anything that was said, and thus was it that the scullery served as the most convenient part of the house for the business that was in hand. What this business was will soon transpire, but the reader has already seen that Barney the Burker was the visitor who was expected.

He made his appearance with the air of one who was no stranger, but on the contrary was on exceedingly good terms with the gold-beater and the two women. Just nodding familiarly to them all three, he took a seat, dropped his club on one side, and his cap on the other, and then proceeded to help himself to a stiff glass of gin and water.

"Well, this is a night for blue ruin, hot and strong," he said, grinning so as to display his sharklike teeth, and speaking in a voice that was of habitual hoarseness. "It's uncommon cold, and I wonder you ain't quaking all over with the shivers in this here well of a place."

"You see, my good fellow," replied Smedley, "that it answers very well as a council-room —"

"Come, let's to business," interrupted Mrs. Smedley, sharply, as she bent a peremptory look upon her husband to silence him, for he was fond of talking, but she was not fond of listening to him.

"My dear Bab, don't be so fast upon one," rejoined Smedley, in a deprecating manner, and here we may observe that his wife's name was Barbara, for which Bab was used as a diminutive.

"Well, what's in the wind now?" asked the Burker. "I got your message, Jack," he continued, thus addressing Smedley, "which you sent by Tim Scott this arternoon —"

"Ah, Tim Scott is a sharp lad," interjected the old woman, "and I think he's indebted to you, Barney, for his edication."

"Well, ma'am," replied the Burker, "I certainly have done summut in that way for Tim Scott. But he don't come up to his big brother Bill in artfulness — not by no

manner of means. Howsomever, he'll get on in time, and then let me tell yer there won't be two such rare fellers in all London as them Scotts, — chaps arter my own heart."

"To be sure," said Mrs. Smedley, with an approving look. "You require such instruments."

"You're right enow there," exclaimed the Burker, with a terrible imprecation. "To get a livin' nowadays, a man ought to have a dozen hands and arms, and them too always at work, and he ought to have a dozen pair of eyes, to see which way the wind blows, — ay, by jingo! and a dozen pair of legs, too, to run away from them bluebottle rascals, or the sneaking detectives, when there's a hue and cry arter him. I tell yer what it is, them as has the power is making the country one that ain't fit to live in, what with their new-fangled laws and so on. Why, if I only stand a minute or two in the street, just to take a look at what is going on, up comes a bluebottle and stares at me fust of all as if there was threats of treadmills in his eyes, and then he bids me move off just as if his tongue had borrowed its tones from the knocker of Newgate. But if I happen to look rayther hard at some swell cove passing along, and chance to foller in the same direction, then, by jingo! I'd better cut and run for it; or else up afore the beak, no one to speak to my character, all in wain to say I'm a honest 'ard-working man, but off to the stone jug, and six weeks on the everlasting staircase as a rogue and wagabone."

Mr. Barnes the Burker's language increased in vehemence and bitterness as he thus enumerated his wrongs, and when he had finished, he struck the table so violently with his fist that the bottles, jugs, and glasses appeared as if they were dancing a reel. Then, after a pause, during which the injured man looked slowly around upon his listeners to ascertain the effect which his words had produced, he added, doggedly, "And all that's called justice."

"I'm afraid times have been as bad with you lately," said Mrs. Smedley, "as they have with us. For a matter of ten months we had no lodger —"

"Till this present one come," observed the Burker. "Well, and what do you make out of him? for I suppose it's about that you sent up the message to me to-day by young Tim Scott."

“Right enough, Barney,” exclaimed Smedley. “He’s a queer file, that old fellow up-stairs —”

“Old indeed!” said Mrs. Webber, who was herself sixty, and therefore she spoke with some degree of indignation; “he is not more than fifty, and I am sure I call that quite young.”

“Nonsense, mother,” interposed Bab Smedley, with her usual sharpness. “Don’t waste time about such silly trifles;” then lowering her voice to a mysterious whisper, she said to the Burker, “We mean to do it.”

“And right enow, too,” he answered; “if so be you’ve made sure it’s worth while.”

“Trust us for that,” responded Bab. “My mother, though she is so silly in some respects, is precious sharp in others, and she has wormed herself into the lodger’s good graces —”

“What’s his name again?” inquired Barney.

“Smith,” responded Bab; “but of course we knew very well, the moment he came to the house, that it wasn’t his right name. He looked so wild and frightened, and seemed glad to be able to hide himself anywhere, and when I had showed him the lodgings, told him what the price was, and asked for a reference, he said he couldn’t give any, but he would pay his rent in advance. And then I asked him his name, and he seemed to hesitate for a minute whether he should call himself Brown, Jones, Thompson, or Smith.”

“And he has never once been out since he came here,” observed Smedley, taking up the tale; “never once crossed the threshold of the front door.”

“And he has been all of a nervous fidget the whole time,” said Mrs. Webber. “Ah! and how he has altered too. I shouldn’t have thought that a matter of a little more than two months could have made such a change in a human being. But that’s why you, Jack,” she added, turning to her son-in-law, “call him old. His face is as thin and as pale as a ghost’s; he wasn’t very fat when he first came, but he has so shrunk away that his clothes hang on him just as if they were never made for him at all.”

“But has he got the ready?” demanded Barney; “for that’s the principal thing we have got to look at.”

“We know he has got some money,” responded Bab, “and I will tell you how we found it out. It was only the

first thing this morning that we discovered it, but we all along suspected that he had a hoard, though he did come without anything but a small carpet-bag — ”

“ Well, but about the money? ” asked the Burker, mixing himself another glass of hot spirits and water.

“ Why, you see, ” resumed Bab, “ my mother went up as usual this morning to ask him about his dinner, and she gave him his weekly bill to pay. So — ”

“ Let me tell the story, Bab, ” interrupted the old woman. “ You must know, Barney, that he’s always in a constant tremble, and every time the door is opened, he looks as frightened as if he expected to see the constables walk in. Well, when I gave him his bill, he put his hand into his pocket, and in his agitation, instead of one purse, he drew out two. Then he got terribly confused, and shoved one of the purses back again, but not before I had time to see that it was well filled with gold at one end, and I rather think, but of course I can’t be sure, with banknotes at the other. He got into conversation, and talked more familiar than he had ever done before, telling me that he had a deal of trouble on his mind, that he didn’t think he should get over it, and then he stopped short, looked very hard at me, and seemed as if he was sorry for letting out so much as he had done. I told him I thought he was ill and wanted the doctor, but I only said that just to try and draw him out further, for I can tell easy enough he has something on his mind. ”

“ I shouldn’t wonder, ” observed Barney, “ if he has run away from his place of employment, or summut of that sort, perhaps bolted off with the contents of the cash-box. But go on, Mrs. Webber. ”

“ Well, ” continued the old woman, “ Mr. Smith said he didn’t want no doctor; he wouldn’t see any one, but he thought he should go on the Continent for change of air — ”

“ He won’t, though, ” said the Burker, with a look of savage ferocity, “ if he has got all that gold in his purse. I’m rayther hard up just at this moment. All my togs, you see, is in Queer Street, ” and he looked slowly down at his coarse, sordid apparel.

“ Now you know as much of him as we do, ” remarked Bab Smedley, taking up the thread of the discourse. “ So, when mother told us all that, — how she had seen the second

purse, and how he had hinted about going away, we thought the best thing we could do was to send up to you at once, to tell you to come down this evening and talk over the business. But hark! the up-stairs bell has just rung. Go, mother, quick, and see what he wants."

Mrs. Webber accordingly bustled up the flight of steps, and having remained absent for five minutes, she reappeared in the scullery.

"He has made up his mind to leave," she said, in a mysterious whisper, and with still more ominously mysterious looks. "He says he shall go the day after to-morrow, and he asked if I could get somebody who might be trusted to deliver a letter to-morrow —"

"To be sure," interjected the Burker, with a significant leer. "You said yes, of course?"

"Of course I did," responded the old woman, almost indignantly, as if she thought that it was an insult to doubt the nature of the reply she had given. "Who knows but that the letter may be a full confession of all the wrong he has done? Perhaps it will be to the people he has robbed, for that he has done something of the sort, there can't be the slightest uncertainty."

"Not a bit of it," said Bab, assentingly. "But under present circumstances, we won't do anything to-night; we will wait till to-morrow night. We will read the letter that he wants to send, and maybe it will put him so much in our power that we may be able to make him give up to us all he has got, and so save us the necessity of — you know what," and with a darkly sinister look, she glanced down to that part of the floor where the table stood upon a small square piece of drugget.

"Ay," said the Burker, "that's the best plan. If as how we can get it by fair means, well and good, and if not, then —"

And lifting up his club, he shook it in a significant manner, his countenance at the same time becoming so diabolically ferocious that even his accomplices in crime could not prevent themselves from shuddering.

"That place has seen one or two go down," observed Jack Smedley, "and may be it will see another before we are much older."

"Yes, you and me have done a little business together

in our time, Jack," responded the Burker, as if the antecedents just alluded to were a subject for satisfactory retrospection. "So, may our friendship never be less," and with this sentiment the ruffian nodded to his three accomplices as he raised the glass to his lips.

"Good heavens! that the burning alcohol did not choke the miscreant whose tongue had thus impiously perverted the sacred name of friendship, and had made it the illustration of his own horrible ideas of fellowship and intimacy. For it was a frightful friendship, if the word can be so used, which linked him with that man and with those two women, — a friendship which held them together for the sake of crimes the darkest and the deepest, a terrible intimacy, that was cemented with blood, a fellowship such as that which may be supposed to prevail in pandemonium. Yet those wretches dared look each other in the face, and if three of them shuddered for an instant at the frightful expression which appeared upon the countenance of the fourth, it was not that they were stricken with remorse for past misdeeds, nor with loathing for their associate, but merely that there was an instinctive recoil from a physical ugliness which the reflex of a blood-stained soul at the instant rendered intolerable for any eyes to gaze upon.

"Ah! it's an uncommon convenient place, isn't it, Barney?" observed Jack Smedley, after a pause which had followed the ruffian's sentiment, and the gold-beater, as he thus spoke, looked down upon the drugget as his wife had previously done. "Now, what things do go on in London. Who would suspect —"

"Don't be so silly, Jack," interrupted Bab. "One would think you were going to moralize on the secrets that this house could reveal if it liked. I am always afraid of your tongue —"

"No, you needn't be afraid," interrupted the Burker. "I've knowed Jack Smedley long enough to be sure that he's as downy as the knocker at Newgate, and as safe and tight as the stone jug itself. Why, let me see, it's a matter of ten year you've been in this house, and you've kept up a good name the whole time."

"It was my dodge, the joining in with the chaps next door," observed Smedley, with a triumphant grin expanding over his mean-looking countenance, "and let me tell you it's

the very best dodge that ever was. They take me for as snivelling and sanctimonious a fellow as themselves."

"To be sure they do," ejaculated Barney, "and it's a dodge you must keep up. I thought of taking to it myself, only when I peep in the glass I can't bring my mind to the belief that my looks is the wery best that's suited for putting on a psalm-singing mug. No, that gammon won't do for me; I must stick to what I am. Besides, I shall make summut of them two Scots soon. But I'll tell you what's wanted."

"And what's that?" inquired Bab Smedley.

"Just to look on such a business as we may perhaps have here to-morrow night," answered the Burker. "There's no use for chaps like the Scotts to think of launching theirselves regular in the profession till they've see summut of that sort. They've got mischief enow in 'em, but they want hardenin'. I understand it right well enow. I know what human nature is. One must be deep in for it, as the sayin' is, before one is at all times ready to go the whole hog. The feelin's must be blunted. Bless you! it's experience as does it all. Why should we be a-sitting here and talking so cool over a little affair of this sort, if we hadn't gone through it all afore? To be sure not," and as if to clench the argument, the Burker again struck his fist forcibly upon the table.

"Hush," said Bab Smedley, "not so loud! The old man up-stairs may hear you."

"I suppose he hasn't no suspicion?" asked Barney.

"Not a bit," ejaculated Mrs. Webber. "He takes me for a nice, good-natured, comfortable matron that tries to do all she can for him, and he thinks that Jack is everything that all the neighbours think him. As for Bab, he one day said to me that my son-in-law ought to be proud of such a fine, handsome wife —"

"And so he ought," exclaimed Mrs. Smedley, flinging upon her husband a look which was as much as to reproach him for not glorifying himself sufficiently in the possession of his spouse.

"Well," said the Burker, "I think I'll be jogging now, and I'll look down to-morrow night, betwixt nine and ten o'clock, to see what has been done or what is to be done."

He rose from his seat, drained his glass, nodded familiarly to his three accomplices, stole gently up the flight of steps, and issued forth into the back yard. Having clambered

over the wall again, he passed out of the narrow alley, and betook himself toward his own dwelling. This, as already stated, was in a court leading out of the New Cut, which is a large thoroughfare connecting the Waterloo and Blackfriars Roads. Entering a house in this dark court, — the atmosphere of which, although in the winter-time, appeared to breathe infection, feculence, and filth, — Barney the Burker ascended to a back room, where two lads were seated at a table playing a game of dominoes. The room was wretchedly furnished, and had two beds spread upon the floor. One was the couch of the Burker; the other was for the use of the brothers.

Bill Scott, the elder, was a most singular-looking being: his ugliness was sufficiently ludicrous to provoke laughter, were it not that the entire expression of his countenance denoted deep innate villainy. He was not above eighteen years of age, and his face seemed that of an old man. It was pale and haggard, and even prematurely wrinkled, with the effects of a career of dissipation commenced early and continuously pursued. The very hair had left all the upper part of his forehead, and where it remained on the rest of the head, it was thin and lanky; being too of a light flaxen colour, it might at the first glance be taken for gray, thus adding to the aged appearance of his countenance. He had large goggle eyes, a little snub nose, very much resembling that of his precious preceptor in the ways of wickedness, immense ears, and a mouth of commensurate proportions. In shape he was almost as thin as a skeleton, and his voice, in its weakness, showed that it had suffered beneath the same attenuating influences which had caused the waste and premature decay of his physical being. His brother Tim was about fifteen, of somewhat stunted growth, short, stout, and thick-set. He also had light hair, which was as matted as that of the Burker himself. There was a certain degree of similitude between the brothers, with the exception of that air of old age, haggardness, and ghastly pallor which characterized the elder one. In addition to their game of dominoes, they were recreating themselves with a quart of porter, to which, however, Bill Scott most frequently paid his addresses.

“ So you’ve come in, have you? ” said the Burker, as he entered the room. “ And now what luck, boys? ”

“ Here’s a reader, with a flimsy and a quid in it,” answered the elder brother, producing a pocketbook containing a five-pound note and a sovereign, and his horrible countenance lighted up with pride and satisfaction as if he had performed the noblest of exploits.

“ Well, that’s good, my lad,” exclaimed the Burker, his own hideous features expanding into a grin. “ Better than you have done for the last six weeks! Now, Tim, what’s your luck? ”

“ A yack, a blue billy,* and a wedge-feeder,” responded the younger thief, producing the results of his own day’s work in the shape of a watch, a silk handkerchief (with white spots on a blue ground), and a silver spoon.

“ Good again,” cried the Burker. “ Things is looking up and we mustn’t say that trade’s been dull or business flat to-day. There’s been a good deal doing, seemingly, in the prig’s market. So we’ll have a jolly good blowout for supper. We’ll spend this yaller boy,” added the villain, taking up the sovereign, “ and to-morrow I’ll change the finnip ” — meaning the bank-note — “ and spout the yack and the feeder. As for the fogle,” thus illustrating the handkerchief, “ you two shall play a game of dominoes for it, and the winner shall have it.”

Having thus settled matters to his own special satisfaction, and to the perfect contentment of the two lads, the respectable Mr. Barnes sent the younger one forth to purchase a quantity of commodities, eatable and drinkable, for the evening’s repast, while he lighted his pipe, therewith to recreate himself until the serving up of the proposed banquet.

CHAPTER XXI

CHRISTINA AND LORD OCTAVIAN

It was, as already stated, a sorrowful thing for Christian and Christina to separate from each other; nevertheless there were many circumstances to alleviate the bitterness of the pangs thus felt. Each had obtained an excellent situation, and this good fortune had overtaken them both suddenly, at a period when their circumstances were wearing the most deplorable aspect. Besides, youth is not the time when hearts sink irreclaimably into despondency, and moreover, the twins had the solace of knowing that they should meet frequently, and [that in a day or two their first interview after their separation might take place.

Thus, by the time that Christina reached her destination in the cab which bore her thither, her tears were dried, and she had composed herself in order to appear with at least a placid if not a cheerful look in the presence of Lady Octavian Meredith. His lordship was not at home when she arrived; indeed he was out purposely. For the reader may conceive with what astonishment, mingled with trepidation, it was that he learned on the preceding day how accident had led his wife to engage none other than the beautiful Christina Ashton as her companion. His first impulse had been to start an objection, but a second thought had shown him that he could not. He had already cheerfully given the amiable Zoe permission to have such a companion; he dared not now confess to her everything that had passed in respect to himself, Christina, and the duel, and without giving some such explanations, it would appear simply whimsical and capricious in him to remonstrate against the special choice which his wife had made. He was therefore constrained to leave matters as they thus stood, but to devise some means

for preventing Christina from being taken by surprise through a sudden recognition, and from giving vent to ejaculations that would reveal past incidents to his wife.

Lord Octavian was therefore purposely out when Christina arrived at his mansion in the forenoon. He knew that Zoe had promised to take luncheon with her father that day, between one and two o'clock, and he calculated that she would not on this occasion take Christina with her, but would leave her new friend to settle herself in the chamber allotted to her, and become somewhat acquainted with the habitation which was now her home. Indeed, that Zoe would act thus, Octavian had partially gleaned from a remark which she made at the breakfast-table. Therefore, when Lord Octavian thought that his wife had gone across the park to her father at the appointed time, he returned to his own dwelling.

Meanwhile Christina had been most cordially welcomed by Zoe, and was at once conducted by the amiable lady to the elegantly furnished apartment which she was to occupy. Zoe at first insisted that one of the maid servants should unpack Christina's boxes and arrange all her things for her in the wardrobe and drawers, but Miss Ashton was not the being to assume the airs of a fine lady, when conscious of her own dependent position, and Zoe was compelled to let her have her own way in this respect. Christina's conduct enhanced her considerably in the good opinion which Lady Octavian Meredith had already formed of her.

When Miss Ashton had finished her little arrangements in her own chamber, she and Zoe passed an hour or two in agreeable conversation, and shortly after one o'clock the lady said, "I am now going to leave you to amuse yourself until three or four. I have promised to visit my father, who has been much chagrined by the heavy loss he sustained through that same Mr. Preston whose conduct was so distressing to yourself. I shall not therefore propose to take you with me to-day, but on another occasion shall be proud and happy to introduce you to Mr. Armytage."

Zoe set out on her visit, and Christina remained alone in the drawing-room. She practised on the splendid pianoforte, and finding that the instrument was a magnificent one, she derived a species of enthusiastic inspiration from the flow of that harmony which she could thus modulate to

grandeur or to pathos beneath her delicate fingers. She sang beautifully, and had a sweet, melodious voice, so that having tested the capacities of the instrument, she presently began to accompany herself in some air.

But scarcely had she commenced the song, when Lord Octavian Meredith reached the drawing-room door. Those strains floated on his ears, he recognized Christina's voice, he stopped to listen. Himself passionately fond of music, it was with a growing rapture that he thus drank in those delicious sounds, in which the most exquisite vocal and instrumental harmonies were blended. His rapture amounted almost to an ecstasy, his pulses thrilled with delight; it appeared as if he had been suddenly borne to the very threshold of Elysium itself. Noiselessly he turned the handle of the door, as gently and cautiously did he open it, and as he looked in, he beheld Christina seated at the piano, her back toward him. She, totally unconscious of his presence, totally unsuspecting of the opening of the door, continued her music and her delicious warbling, all the ecstatic effects of which were enhanced in Lord Octavian's estimation now that he was enabled to contemplate her sylphid figure as she was seated there. Her raven tresses were floating over her shoulders; every now and then he caught a vanishing glimpse of her faultless Grecian profile; every gesture and movement on her part seemed characterized by grace and elegance, and fairer than the piano's ivory keys themselves were the delicate hands that passed over them. Now did those sweetly tapered fingers appear to skip as it were with almost lightning celerity from note to note; now they rested for a few seconds on some particular keys, while the voice of song continued to blend in ravishing harmony with the music which those fingers made. And that shape, too, — how beautifully modelled was it. Even if he had never seen her countenance before, Meredith could have staked his existence that the loveliest face must belong to so charming a figure. The song ceased, the last sounds of the music were vibrating tremulously through the apartment as Octavian closed the door, and Christina started up from her seat.

"Mr. Percival," she exclaimed, her first feeling being one of grateful joy, though mingled with surprise thus to encounter the chivalrous individual who had perilled his life in a duel for her sake.

Octavian advanced, took her hand, and as he pressed it warmly, the rapture of his feelings continued to permeate the looks with which he gazed upon Christina. There was nothing insolent in those regards, no libertine effrontery to shock her pure mind, but nevertheless a degree of fervid admiration which she could not possibly help observing, and which made her withdraw her hand somewhat abruptly as the colour mounted to her cheeks and her eyes were cast down.

"Miss Ashton," said Octavian, "you have delighted me with your musical skill, but, may I add, still more with the exquisite beauty of your voice."

This compliment, delivered in tones that were almost as impassioned as Octavian's looks, completed Christina's confusion; the crimson deepened on her cheeks, and her sweet black eyes, which she had for a moment raised again, were as rapidly bent down once more.

"I hope that I have not offended you," said Octavian, in a soft voice; "not for worlds would I do so."

"Oh, I believe you, sir," exclaimed Christina with artless warmth, for it immediately struck her that the man who had rescued her from insult, and had risked his life as the consequence, could not possibly mean himself to insult her. "But frankly speaking," she added, now looking at him with the full ingenuousness of her large clear dark eyes, and she smiled modestly too as she thus spoke, revealing teeth white as Oriental pearls, "I am so little accustomed to be complimented that perhaps I betray too much awkward embarrassment —"

"No, not too much," ejaculated Octavian, and it was on the very tip of his tongue to add, "I adore you as you are. Your very innocence is the greatest of all your charms," but with a sudden effort he held the words back, and taking her hand, conducted her to a seat.

"Neither Lord nor Lady Octavian Meredith is at home," said Christina, little thinking that she was addressing one of those of whom she spoke. "Her ladyship will not return for two hours —"

"But Lord Octavian himself is in the house," observed Meredith.

"I will ring and inquire," said Christina, and she was rising from her seat, when the expression of Meredith's

countenance struck her as so peculiar that she stopped short.

“No, Miss Ashton,” he said, “you need not make any such inquiry. Pardon me for a little deceit which was practised on you; forgive me — listen to me — ”

“Ah!” ejaculated Christina, with a faint shriek, but instantaneously recovering herself, she said, somewhat coldly, “You, then, are Lord Octavian Meredith?”

“I am,” he responded. “Pray resume your seat, and suffer me to give you those explanations which are requisite.”

Christina hesitated. There was in her mind a vague sense of impropriety in remaining alone with the young nobleman who had deceived her, and yet she felt that it was a duty both to herself and to him to listen to whatsoever he might have to say. She accordingly sat down again, but spoke not a word, and her look was still cold, but with a certain tremulousness in it.

“You will remember, Miss Ashton,” proceeded Meredith, speaking in the most respectful tone, and with a corresponding look, for he felt that he had an exceedingly difficult part to perform, — “you will remember that on the day I had the satisfaction of rendering you a trifling service, I penetrated your motives in asking my name. You saw that a duel was probable, nay, more, that it was inevitable, and with the most generous of purposes you intended to give information to a magistrate. But my honour was at stake, and I was bound to meet that antagonist whom circumstances had suddenly raised up. Therefore, to prevent your generous intentions from being carried out, I gave a false name — ”

“True,” murmured Christina, as all the circumstances flashed vividly back to her mind.

“That duel,” continued Meredith, “took place, as you are aware, but as no injury was the result, it was so completely hushed up that it never reached Lady Octavian’s ears. I trust to your generosity that it shall continue a secret in respect to her. But to continue my explanations. I promised you, Miss Ashton, that you should be made acquainted with the result of that duel, that if I fell, my second should wait upon you with the intelligence, but that if I escaped unhurt, I would personally call to convince you of my safety. I did call — I sent up the name by which you already knew

me; it was, however, my intention to reveal myself fully to your knowledge. But when I beheld the simple tastes and pursuits of your brother and yourself — pardon me for thus speaking — I thought that the frank and affable manner in which I was received, and the friendly feeling which your brother specially exhibited toward me, might receive a check if I proclaimed myself to be of titled rank. In my estimation that rank is nothing, but I know full well that as the world goes, as society is constituted, and as prejudices have their influence, an aristocratic name has a certain prestige — In a word, I saw enough of you both to wish to become your friend, and I feared that as Lord Octavian Meredith I might not experience the same frank and open-hearted reception which was already given to Mr. Percival.”

Meredith ceased, but Christina did not immediately answer him. As a matter of course the explanation was entirely satisfactory up to the point where it treated of the visit to the lodgings after the duel, but from that point to the end it was less satisfactory. Miss Ashton was too artless, ingenuous, and unsophisticated herself, to penetrate the subtleties of the human soul, but on the other hand, she was too intelligent and right-minded not to entertain a certain misgiving as to the young nobleman's complete self-exculpation. A vague idea that the latter portion of his speech had some sophistry in it floated in her imagination, but yet she could scarcely explain the feeling to herself, from the simple reason that she could not possibly suppose Meredith to have been smitten with her beauty.

“My lord,” she at length said, speaking gravely and seriously, “I thank you for the explanations which you have given me, but I do not see how it is possible for me to withhold from her ladyship the circumstance that we have met before.”

“You have not as yet uttered a word to Zoe about that duel?” inquired Octavian, hastily. “I know you did not yesterday, but to-day?”

“I have never spoken of it to a soul except my brother,” responded Christina. “But I really cannot comprehend, my lord, wherefore you should object to her ladyship becoming acquainted with a generous deed which you performed. The danger, thank Heaven! has long been over —”

“Miss Ashton,” interrupted Meredith, “your own good

sense will tell you that it can be no welcome intelligence for a wife to learn that her husband has for more than two months treasured up a secret from her. Proclaim the truth, if you will, to Zoe, but pardon me for saying that you will be guilty of an act of unkindness toward myself, inasmuch as my wife would never put confidence in me again. If I happened to rise at an earlier hour than usual in the morning, or if I were detained out later than is my wont at night, she would torture herself with all possible anxieties; she would picture to herself her husband involved in some cruel dilemma the imminence of which he had carefully concealed from her — ”

“ Yes, my lord,” interrupted Christina, “ all that you say is but too true. Nevertheless, I feel that I cannot be guilty of a deception toward an amiable lady who has received me in the kindest manner — No, I cannot! I will say nothing of past events, but I will withdraw from the house at once. Yes, whatsoever construction may be put on this step — ”

“ Miss Ashton,” exclaimed Octavian Meredith, “ I would rather ten thousand times that you should tell Zoe everything. What could she possibly think if you withdrew yourself thus abruptly? She would either imagine that you had received some insult from me, and were too generous to mention it, or on the other hand that you were conscious of some unworthiness of your own which you were afraid of transpiring. Against the former suspicion how could I possibly vindicate myself when all appearances would be in my disfavour? and as for the latter suspicion, sooner than that you should suffer one tittle in the estimation of Zoe, I would proclaim everything.”

Christina beheld all the truth and none of the sophistry — for there was a blending of both — contained in these arguments. She was bewildered how to act. Not for the world would she bring mischief into a house the lady of which had received her with open arms, but on the other hand she could not bear the idea of harbouring a secret which to her pure mind savoured so much of a deception.

“ Now, Miss Ashton, you must decide upon the course which you intend to pursue,” resumed Lord Octavian, and it was with the greatest difficulty he could conceal the anxiety and suspense which he experienced. “ There are

but two alternatives for your choice: the one is that her ladyship shall be made acquainted with everything, and her confidence in me be thereby destroyed, or that she shall remain in total ignorance of the past, and her happiness continue undisturbed."

"If those be the alternatives, my lord," responded Christina, "I cannot for another moment hesitate between them. It shall be as you wish."

"Thank you, Miss Ashton," answered Meredith, but he was now so completely on his guard that he did not suffer his looks to betray the joy that he felt at the decision to which the beautiful Christina had just come; nor did he speak in tones, nor bend such looks upon her, which might again cover her with confusion, and perhaps engender in her mind a suspicion of the love with which she had inspired him, but of the existence of which she was as yet evidently altogether ignorant.

Scarcely was this understanding arrived at, and just as Christina was about to rise from her seat and retire to her own apartment, the door was thrown open, and the footman announced the Duke of Marchmont.

"My dear Meredith," said his Grace, advancing into the room with a well-bred air of easy familiarity, "it is an age since we met."

His quick eye had at once caught sight of Christina; at once, too, had he recognized in her the sister of his young secretary, by the similitude existing between them, but he preserved the completest control over his looks, — at first affecting not to perceive her at all, and then bowing with the air of a man who has nothing peculiar in his mind when in the presence of some one whom he sees for the first time.

"Permit me, my lord," said Meredith, "to introduce you to Miss Ashton, a friend of Lady Octavian's."

"Delighted to have the honour of Miss Ashton's acquaintance," said the duke, again bowing, and then for the first time appearing to be struck by anything in reference to her, he ejaculated, "Dear me, how strange. I have a young gentleman with me, bearing the same name, and — pardon the observation — but the resemblance is so striking."

"And no wonder, my lord," exclaimed Meredith, with a good-humoured air, "for the young gentleman to whom you allude is this young lady's brother."

“I am more than ever glad to form Miss Ashton’s acquaintance,” said the duke, with another courteous bow, “for I have taken a very great fancy to young Mr. Ashton, and I am sure that he and I shall be excellent friends. We have not had above a dozen words of conversation this morning, — indeed he has only been a few hours at Marchmont House, — and therefore I had no opportunity of learning from his lips that his sister was here. The pleasure of meeting Miss Ashton is therefore all the greater, on account of being so completely unexpected.”

The Duke of Marchmont had been telling a great falsehood. He had learned from Christian where his sister was now located, and in his anxiety to behold that being who he felt persuaded was Octavian’s “fair unknown” of some little time past, he had paid the present visit. He did not remain above a quarter of an hour, and neither by look nor word did he suffer Octavian to perceive that he had fathomed the secret, and that in Christina he felt convinced he did behold that fair unknown. As for Miss Ashton herself, she was about to leave the room at the expiration of a few minutes, but both Meredith and Marchmont assured her that they had no private business to converse upon, and for courtesy’s sake she was compelled to remain. When however the duke had taken his leave, she at once ascended to her own chamber, where she tarried until Lady Octavian returned from her father’s house. Then she reappeared in the drawing-room, and to her great relief found that Meredith was not there. He did not reënter the dwelling until a quarter of an hour before dinner-time, when Zoe was in her own chamber, preparing her evening toilet. Christina had therefore ample leisure to throw off any embarrassment which Lord Octavian’s presence occasioned her before Zoe joined them in the drawing-room, and her ladyship saw nothing in the countenance of either to lead her to suspect that they had met before this day.

CHAPTER XXII

CHRISTIAN'S FIRST DAY AT MARCHMONT HOUSE

HAVING thus seen Christina Ashton installed in the situation which she had accepted, let us follow her brother to the mansion of the Duke and Duchess of Marchmont. On arriving there, he was requested by a footman to follow him to the housekeeper's room, and in a few minutes he was introduced to that important female functionary.

We may here as well observe that the steward and housekeeper were husband and wife, and that their name was Calvert. They were an elderly couple, — Mr. Calvert of spare figure, sedate countenance, and remarkable precision both of speech and manners; his wife a stout, matronly, comfortable-looking dame, always exceedingly neat in her apparel, and priding herself highly on the regularity and good discipline which her husband and herself maintained in the domestic department of the household. They were excessively strict, but at the same time straightforward and right-principled. They exercised no overbearing despotism themselves, and allowed no petty tyrannies to be practised by the superior servants toward the inferior ones. They had their own parlour, where they usually took their meals together; but of a Sunday they generally invited the butler, the lady's-maids, and one or two of the upper servants — such as his Grace's valets — to feast at their dining-table.

It was to this comfortable little parlour that Christian Ashton was conducted by the gorgeously dressed footman, and there he found Mr. and Mrs. Calvert seated together. Both were looking over accounts, and in front of each was a goodly pile of money in bank-notes, gold, and silver. When the footman announced Mr. Ashton, they both desisted from

their occupation, and rose to receive the young gentleman. The steward bowed primly, the housekeeper proffered the youth her hand; he was invited to sit down, and then did the explanations commence in respect to the arrangements which had been made for his comfort at Marchmont House.

“I have ordered a nice cheerful little bedchamber to be prepared for you,” said Mrs. Calvert, “and I will show you to it presently. His Grace has suggested, if you have no objection, that you should take your meals with us —”

“And we have no objection,” interposed Mr. Calvert, in a half-patronizing manner, which was nevertheless both kind and respectful, “for you appear to be a young gentleman whose company will be agreeable to us.”

“And I am sure,” resumed Mrs. Calvert, “we will do all we can to render you comfortable. One thing we must beg to observe, which is that we are very regular in our meals: breakfast at nine, dinner at two, tea at six, and supper at nine. But of course, if at any time you wish for refreshment, you have only to signify such a desire, and it shall be instantaneously complied with.”

“While thanking you for your assurances of making me comfortable,” answered Christian, “I can safely promise that I shall conform to your regulations.”

“His Grace desired me to tell you,” said the steward, after a brief pause, “that you are welcome to use the library as much as you think fit when his Grace is elsewhere; and on those occasions when it suits his lordship to be alone there, you can make our parlour your sitting-room. Or there is a little cabinet near the library, which Mrs. Calvert will show you presently, where you are welcome to sit when you choose to be alone. In short, I have not the slightest doubt you will soon fall into the regular routine of the household, and that you will speedily find yourself at home.”

Christian again expressed his thanks for the kind assurances thus given him, and the forethought which had dictated all those suggestions for his comfort and well-being.

“And now,” said Mrs. Calvert, “would you like a piece of cake and a glass of wine, or a leetle drop of cherry brandy, for the weather is uncommonly cold,” and as the worthy matron thus spoke, she repaired to a cupboard of considerable dimensions, and the shelves of which were crowded with pots of preserves, cakes, biscuits, bottles of wine, spirits, and

liqueurs, and all those little luxuries which are invariably to be found in a housekeeper's room in a wealthy mansion.

Christian, however, declined the proffered refreshment, for it was still early in the forenoon, and, moreover, his heart was full at being separated from his beloved sister.

"Well, then, Mr. Ashton," said the dame, "let me show you at once to your quarters, and when you have arranged the contents of your boxes, you can report your arrival to the duke."

Mrs. Calvert accordingly conducted the young secretary up a back staircase to a chamber, which, though on one of the upper stories, was nevertheless a most comfortable little apartment, looking upon a small garden that there was at the back of the mansion. She then led him along a corridor, down the upper flights of the principal staircase, as far as the first floor, and there she showed him the entrance to the picture-gallery, assuring him that he was perfectly welcome to lounge in there and amuse himself whensoever he might think fit. Descending thence into the entrance-hall, Mrs. Calvert conducted Christian to the library, which was on the ground floor, and the windows of which looked upon the garden. It was a spacious apartment, containing handsome mahogany cases, the shelves of which were crowded with elegantly bound volumes, all protected by glass doors. By the side of the library was a little parlour, — a narrow slip indeed, — with one window, also looking on the garden, and this was denominated the cabinet, the free use of which was placed at Christian's disposal.

Having thus far initiated him into the geography of the mansion, Mrs. Calvert returned to her own sitting-room, while Christian ascended to his chamber to unpack his boxes and arrange his clothes in the drawers. He then made himself look as neat as possible, and descending to the entrance-hall, requested a footman to announce his arrival to the duke. In a few minutes Christian was desired to attend his Grace in the library, and thither he accordingly repaired.

"Well," said Marchmont, with a half-smile, "so you made up your mind to come and live in the house?"

"Your Grace was kind enough to leave me to my own choice in the matter," replied the youth; "and having consulted with my sister, I called yesterday afternoon —"

"Yes, yes, your message was delivered to me," said the

duke. "You intimated your intention to come and take up your abode here to-day, and you have doubtless already found that arrangements have been made to ensure your comfort?"

"For which I sincerely thank your Grace," rejoined Christian.

"Nothing to thank me for," said Marchmont, carelessly. Then, after a pause, during which he had motioned Christian to take a seat, he observed, as if still in the same careless, indifferent manner, "And what is your sister going to do? Coming to live in the neighbourhood, I suppose, so that you may see each other often?"

"No, my lord," replied Christian. "Fortunately my sister obtained a situation at the very same hour yesterday forenoon that I was so happy as to satisfy your Grace's requirements."

"Ah, indeed, a situation?" said Marchmont. "And what is it?"

"Companion, my lord, to a lady living in Regent's Park."

"An elderly lady, I presume? Perhaps a widow — or an old maid?"

"No, my lord," responded Christian, flattering himself, in the ingenuousness of his mind, that the duke was demonstrating considerable interest, and that of a very kind nature, too, in the affairs of himself and his sister. "Christina has become the companion of a young lady — Lady Octavian Meredith."

The duke could scarcely repress a start at this announcement, for, being convinced in his own mind that Christian's sister was Lord Octavian's fair unknown, it at once struck him that Octavian himself had manœuvred in some way or another to get the young girl beneath his own roof. He even suspected for an instant that there must already be some sort of an understanding between Christian's sister and Octavian Meredith, — an understanding which the young lady had perhaps kept altogether unknown from her artless-minded brother; for it needed but a glance on the part of such a thorough man of the world as the Duke of Marchmont to discern how really unsophisticated his young secretary was.

"And pray," he inquired, "how was your sister fortunate enough to obtain that situation?"

“Through the recommendation of the landlady with whom we lived, my lord, and whose daughter is in service at Lady Octavian Meredith’s.”

The Duke of Marchmont now felt more and more assured that it was all a concocted arrangement on Meredith’s part to get Miss Ashton into his house, and that the landlady just alluded to had lent herself to the scheme, even if Christina herself had not.

“Cunning dog, that Octavian!” he thought to himself; “but perhaps I will outwit him yet.” And then he said, speaking aloud, “I am well acquainted with Lord Octavian Meredith. Ah, by the bye, now I bethink me, it was on account of a Miss Ashton that he fought a duel some little time back, and I was his second on the occasion.”

“Lord Octavian Meredith!” ejaculated Christian, opening wide his fine dark eyes in bewildered astonishment at this intelligence. “No, my lord, there is some mistake. It was a Mr. Percival.”

“Cunning dog, that Octavian!” again thought the duke to himself, for it immediately struck him that the young nobleman had concealed his aristocratic rank under a feigned name, and perhaps represented himself as an unmarried man, the better to carry on a love siege against the heart of the beautiful Christina. Then again speaking aloud, Marchmont said, “I am afraid I have let out a secret, for it assuredly was Lord Octavian Meredith who fought on your sister’s behalf. About twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, very good-looking, slender shape, brown hair and moustache —”

“The same, my lord!” cried Christian, more and more bewildered.

“Don’t look so astonished,” said the duke, smiling. “It is perfectly intelligible that Lord Octavian should have taken a feigned name. By the bye, I recollect that he told me so, and that his reason was the fear that your sister would go and take steps to prevent the duel. But I suppose he called upon you afterward?”

“Once, my lord, and only once,” responded Christian.

“And you were present?”

“The whole time. He only remained a short while, and that very same evening we removed to other lodgings. We never saw Lord Octavian again. What a singular coin-

cidence that my sister should have obtained a situation with his lordship's wife!"

"Very singular," observed the duke, convinced that the lad was speaking in the genuine sincerity of his unsophisticated heart.

A little more conversation took place, and by means of farther questioning, but all conducted in such a way as to prevent Christian from suspecting that the duke had any ulterior object in view, his Grace obtained a sufficient insight into the character of Christina and the recent mode of life of the twins as to bring him to the conclusion that Miss Ashton was really a most virtuous and well-conducted girl, and that it was through no secret understanding on her own part that she had entered Lord Octavian's household. On the contrary, Marchmont felt convinced that up to the very moment of her proceeding thither, she had no idea of the identity of Lord Octavian and Mr. Percival.

"Should you happen to fall in with Lord Octavian," said the duke, "you had better not tell him that it was from my lips you learned the little secret that the name of Percival was an assumed one. Of course your sister will tell you, and you need not appear to have known it in any other way."

"Certainly, my lord, your advice shall be followed," answered Christian, who saw no harm and suspected no evil in all these things.

"We have no letters to write to-day," remarked the duke, presently, "and therefore you may amuse yourself in becoming better acquainted with your new home."

With these words the duke rose and sauntered out of the library, fully determined to call in the course of the afternoon at Lord Octavian Meredith's, and obtain a glimpse, if possible, of the beautiful Miss Ashton. That this design was carried into effect the reader has already seen, and the result of the interview was that the Duke of Marchmont felt himself as much enamoured of the charming girl as such a dissipated individual could possibly be.

While ascending to his own chamber in the course of the afternoon, Christian encountered on the stairs a beautiful lady, attended by a maid, and whom he at once conceived to be the duchess. She was in her thirty-second year, tall, finely formed, and with lustrous masses of auburn hair floating over her shoulders. There was something more

than beautiful in her countenance, — a touching pensiveness bordering upon melancholy, which rendered her eminently interesting; and as Christian stood respectfully aside to make way for her, and bowed courteously as he did so, she stopped and spoke.

“Are you the young gentleman,” she inquired, in a soft, musical voice, and with her benignant look, “whom his Grace has engaged as his private secretary?”

Christian bowed again, and replied in the affirmative.

“I hope you will be happy and comfortable at Marchmont House,” proceeded her ladyship; and then, with an ill-subdued sigh, she continued her way down the stairs.

In the evening, after supper, as Christian was amusing himself in the library, looking at some of the elegantly bound books, and making notes of the titles of those which he thought he should like to peruse at his leisure, he happened to take down a volume from between the leaves of which a piece of paper fell upon the carpet. He picked it up, and found that it was a column cut out of an old newspaper. It was dingy with age, though the print was perfectly legible; and the date at the top showed him that the journal of which it had once formed a part belonged to a period of more than eighteen years back. Christian was about to return the slip to the book from which it had fallen, when his eye caught the name of Marchmont, and a closer scrutiny showed him that it was a report of a coroner's inquest upon the body of a murdered duke bearing that title. Naturally interested in the circumstance, from being in the service of the present duke, Christian sat down to read the account; and thus for the first time did he become acquainted with some of those facts which have been related in the earlier chapters of our narrative. He thereby discovered that the present Duke of Marchmont had succeeded to the title of his murdered uncle, that the murder itself had been brought home by unquestionable evidence to the existing duke's brother, the Honourable Mr. Bertram Vivian, and that there was an equal amount of evidence to prove a criminal intercourse between Bertram Vivian and the wife of the murdered duke. The young lad shuddered as he read the catalogue of iniquities thus circumstantially narrated.

Replacing the newspaper fragment between the leaves of the book, and returning the book to the shelf, Christian

sat down to ponder over all he had just read. He thought to himself what a kind-hearted man the present duke must be to have endeavoured to shield his brother from the dreadful imputation which rested against him at the time; for that Hugh had made such endeavour was duly recorded in the proceedings of the inquest. While Christian was thus giving way to his reflections, wondering too what had ultimately become of Bertram and Eliza, an imperceptible drowsiness stole over him, — a drowsiness which blended, as it were, with his reverie, imparting a dreaminess to the tenor of his thoughts. If he had been reading at the time, he would no doubt have endeavoured to shake it off; but as he was reclining back in a cushioned armchair, with no occupation for his eyes, but, on the contrary, his outward vision being turned inwardly, so to speak, in the contemplation of the incidents of the past, he made no attempt to struggle against that insidiously stealing drowsiness. It deepened, and in a few minutes the youth was wrapped in profound slumber. That sleep should thus have come over him was scarcely to be wondered at, for on the previous day as well as on that of which we are writing he had undergone considerable excitement of the mind on account of the change which had taken place in the condition of his sister and himself. However, be the cause whatsoever it might, Christian slumbered in that large armchair, and this occurred a little after ten o'clock in the evening.

How long he slept he could not immediately tell, but he gradually wakened up to the knowledge that the place was involved in pitchy darkness, and that voices were speaking there. His first sensation was one of physical cold, blended with mental alarm. Lamp and fire had both gone out, hence the chill which he naturally experienced in his limbs; and his alarm was occasioned by the fact that he could not immediately recollect where he was. This dimness and bewilderment of the mind's perception was, however, transient, and at the very instant that he remembered how he had fallen asleep in the Duke of Marchmont's library, he recognized the voice of the duke himself.

“What nonsense! Are you afraid to be in the dark? I tell you there is no one here. It is impossible. Why, man, it is past midnight, and all the household are in bed, except the hall porter who let us in, and my valet, whom, as you

heard, I ordered to retire at once. We have but a few words to say, and may as well say them here as anywhere else."

"Afraid, my lord?" said the other voice, and which was totally unfamiliar to Christian's ears. "What can I be afraid of? But your Grace will confess that it is a somewhat strange proceeding to drag a man almost by force into a dark room, shut the door, and then tell him that it is on a most important business —"

The Duke of Marchmont interrupted the speaker with a loud laugh, exclaiming, "Why, my dear Stanhope, a man who was brave enough to go out and fight a duel cannot care for being a little while in the dark!"

"And I tell your Grace that I do not," replied the individual, who, it appeared, was Mr. Stanhope. "But still —"

"But still — but still — you do not much relish it?" continued the duke, laughing, and yet there was something curiously unnatural and forced in that laugh of his.

"You opened another door," said Mr. Stanhope, "ere you brought me in hither? Pray speak seriously."

"Well, I will," rejoined the duke. "Now, the fact is, my dear fellow, the door that I opened first of all was that of a little cabinet where the servants are accustomed to leave a light, together with wine and spirits and so forth, when I come in very late at night; but, as you yourself saw, there was no light there. Sometimes the light and the refreshments are placed here, in the library, and that was the reason I led you from one door to another. But, however, there is no light here any more than there is in the cabinet, and as we are here, we may as well talk. Candidly speaking, I have something important to say, and don't want to go up into the drawing-room because that valet of mine may not have retired to bed as yet, and I would not have him overhear our discourse."

"But may it not be also possible, my lord," inquired Stanhope, "that we shall be overheard here?"

"No, for the inner green-baize door hermetically seals the entrance against eavesdroppers. Now, Stanhope, are you prepared to hear me?"

"I am, my lord. Go on."

"You have this night lost twelve thousand pounds to me at the gaming-table," continued the Duke of Marchmont, speaking with a certain tone of resoluteness, as if he felt

himself to be in the position of one who could dictate and command.

“And I have frankly told your Grace,” replied Stanhope, “that I have not twelve thousand shillings at this present moment.”

“True,” remarked the duke, curtly. “You admit, therefore, that you are in my power?”

“So completely in your Grace’s power that if you expose me to the world, I have no alternative but to place the muzzle of a pistol in my mouth and pull the trigger valiantly, or else take a drop of prussic acid and yield up my life as if it were a lightning-flash passing out of me,” and it was in a singular but horrible tone of mingled irony and desperation that the Honourable Mr. Stanhope thus spoke.

“I have given you to understand,” replied the duke, “that to neither of these agreeable alternatives need you have recourse, provided —”

“Ah, — provided!” ejaculated Stanhope. “Then there is a condition — a condition beyond the mere one of giving your Grace some security for eventual payment? But, my lord, is it possible that this condition is of such a character that you dare not look me in the face while explaining it, and that for this reason you have brought me into a room where the darkness is as deep as that of the grave?”

“Would you have me give you credit for being overnice and particular?” asked the duke, in a somewhat sneering tone. “Now, look you, Mr. Stanhope, you and I have not known each other for much more than a couple of months or so, — ten weeks, at the very outside. It was the duel which first rendered us acquainted —”

“It was, my lord. Go on.”

“During these ten weeks if indeed our acquaintance has been so long — I have seen quite enough of you, and have learned perhaps still more —”

“I can anticipate what your Grace would say,” interrupted Stanhope, coldly, yet somewhat bitterly. “You know that I am a gambler, and that already an almost princely fortune has gone into the hands of a set of harpies — Maledictions upon them! the bare thought of it is enough to make a man forswear cards and dice for evermore. You know, too, that I am dissipated, fond of pleasure, having a certain position in society which it were death to lose, having also a certain

appearance to keep up, to fail in which were to carry me at once to the necessity of suicide. Well, my lord, all these things you know, and, what is more still, you feel that my cursed ill luck of the last three hours has left me entirely at your mercy. Judging of my habits, and taking my desperate condition into account, you regard me as a suitable instrument for some purpose you have in hand. Is it not so? ”

“ It is,” responded the Duke of Marchmont.

“ Then your lordship might have said so at first, without any unnecessary circumlocution; and you might likewise say so within the sphere of a lamp’s light and over a glass of wine.”

“ Not so,” rejoined the duke. “ As we are here in the dark, so will we remain until our conference be ended. As for the wine, it all depends upon the understanding to which we come whether we adjourn to the dining-room and empty a decanter ere we part — ”

“ It may be as well if I inform your Grace at once that I am not exceedingly particular in what I do to save myself from ruin. A man,” continued Mr. Stanhope, “ who has found himself compelled to contemplate suicide, and to talk of it, is not likely to stick at a trifle or two if it will enable him to live. To live — yes, but in his usual manner, I mean, with gold at his command, the means of pleasure at his bidding — ”

“ And all these shall be within your reach,” interrupted Marchmont. “ Now, look you, my dear fellow, — for circumstances are rendering you and me closely intimate. Indeed, I wish you to become intimate with me, I wish you to call at the house every day, to dine with me three or four times a week; and for that purpose I will dine at home on the occasions when you are coming. I wish you to call in the afternoon and lounge in the drawing-room in conversation with the duchess, I wish you to pay your court to her, to make yourself agreeable to her Grace, to pass around to her box when she is at the theatre or at the opera — ”

“ And what in the devil’s name,” cried Stanhope, with accents of unfeigned amazement, “ does your Grace purpose by all this? ”

“ You owe me twelve thousand pounds, which you cannot pay,” responded the duke, “ and I have no doubt that it

would be an agreeable thing if this twelve thousand pounds were not merely forgiven you, but that a like sum were handed over to you as a testimonial of my esteem — all private, secret, and confidential, you know, and entirely between ourselves.”

“It must be a tremendous service which your Grace demands for such a colossal reward,” and Stanhope spoke gravely and seriously.

“It is an immense service which you will be rendering me,” replied the duke, “but one which you can perform with few scruples of conscience; while, on the other hand, there is great *éclat* to be obtained thereby.”

“I am as completely in the dark with respect to your Grace’s meaning,” said Mr. Stanhope, “as I am in the place where we are now talking. Can you not come to the point? Frankly speaking, I infinitely dislike this round-about manner which your Grace is adopting —”

“Then, in a few words,” interrupted the duke, “I will explain myself. You are to become intimate with me, you are to pay your court, as I have already said, to the duchess, you will be a constant visitor here, you will literally besiege her Grace. Then the world will begin to talk. No matter! I shall see nothing that is going on, and if the world choose to consider me blind, be it so. But at length I shall awaken all of a sudden, something will occur to fill me with suspicion — an intercepted letter, for instance, — a letter, you comprehend, from yourself to her Grace, — in which you will speak of the love subsisting between you. Ay, and you will even go farther, you will leave no doubt as to the criminal nature of that love —”

“But suppose that nothing of all this does really take place,” interrupted Stanhope. “Suppose that her Grace conceives a hatred for me?”

“And very likely she will,” observed the duke, coolly, “but what has that got to do with your incessant visits, and with the letter which in a few months’ time you will write and which you will take care that I shall intercept? May I not play the part of a dishonoured and outraged husband? Will not you stand the brunt of an action for crim. con., when you know perfectly well that I shall never call upon you to pay such damages as may be awarded? And may I not, upon such foundation as the jury’s verdict affords,

sue for a divorce against a woman whom I hate and detest? May not, I ask, all these things take place, and if you get as good as twenty-four thousand pounds for rendering me this service, will not you be a gainer as well as I? Besides, only think of the honour and credit of having the reputation of intriguing with a duchess! Why, my good fellow, it will make your fortune in more ways than one, it will be to you better than all that fortune which you have lost at the gambling-table. The whole fashionable world will at once vote you their lion, their star, their phoenix, their cynosure. The men will burst with envy and with jealousy, when with a half-smile upon your countenance you stroll jauntily into the brilliant saloons of patrician mansions; the ladies will tap you with their fans and call you the naughty creature — ”

“ A truce to this bantering! ” interrupted Stanhope, sharply, almost sternly. “ It is true that I am in your Grace’s power, but I am not for that reason to be rendered your laughing-stock. It is impossible that you can mean what you say. ”

“ I never was more serious in my life, ” answered the Duke of Marchmont.

“ By Heaven, my lord, it is a matter wherein I cannot give you credit for the seriousness you speak of, unless you prove it. How know I but that it is some snare, though incomprehensible, some pitfall, though unaccountable, wherein you seek to entrap me? And this dark room, too — ”

“ Perdition take your constant recurrence to the darkness of the room! ” interrupted the duke, impatiently. “ You demand proof? It is difficult to give. And yet in many circumstances may you recognize such proof. For upwards of fifteen years have I been married to Lavinia, and she has given me no heir. Think you that I, bearing one of the proudest titles in all Christendom, and that title, too, associated with immense wealth, think you, I ask, that I do not yearn to possess an heir to my distinctions and to my riches? The estates are strictly entailed; think you, therefore, that it is a pleasurable thing for me to reflect that at my death some far-removed relative, some remote connection whose very existence is at present unknown to me, may spring up, possibly from amidst the dregs of society, for the highest families may be found to have connections,

though very distant ones, in the lowest sphere, — think you, I ask, that it is agreeable for me to reflect that some such dirty claimant may arise when I am gone and prove his right to the coronet which I wear, the estates over which I now lord it, and the mansions which my taste has embellished? Now, Stanhope, have I given proofs of my sincerity in seeking a divorce from her who presents me with no heir? ”

There was a profound silence in the library for upwards of a minute, at the expiration of which Mr. Stanhope slowly said, “ Yes, I now believe your Grace to be sincere.”

“ Oh, it is well that I have succeeded in convincing you at last,” observed the duke.

“ I believe you sincere in wishing for an heir,” continued Stanhope, “ but in the extreme measure which your Grace proposes — ”

“ That regards me,” interrupted the duke. “ It is for you to consider whether you will enter into my project, and carry it out in the way that I have suggested, or with such variations as circumstances may render advisable, always keeping the one grand aim in view.”

“ I will!” answered Stanhope. “ Yes, my necessities compel me, I will do it.”

“ Then there is no more to be said at present,” observed the duke. “ There is a light in the hall, we will repair to the dining-room. I cannot promise you a fire — ”

“ My blood,” interrupted Stanhope, “ has not yet cooled down from the terrific fever-heat produced by the excitement of the gaming-table. Let us have the bottle of wine; the fire may be dispensed with.”

“ Come,” answered the duke, “ we will have the wine.”

Christian then heard the double doors of the library open; the light from the hall gleamed in for a moment, and showed him the two forms as they passed the threshold. Then the doors were closed again, and again was the youth entombed in utter darkness.

But let us explain how it was that he had continued so silent and so still throughout this discourse which he had overheard. When first he became aware that voices were speaking in the library, he was seized, as we have stated, with a certain degree of alarm, and this he could not all in a moment shake off. Called out of his sleep in such a manner,

finding himself in the dark, not immediately recollecting where he was, and hearing those voices, he thought he must be in a dream; and the terror which he felt, as well as the numbing cold, completely paralyzed him. When his consciousness became complete, he learned from the duke's words that it was long past midnight, and that the household had retired to rest. The thought instantaneously struck him that if he were found there, sitting up at such an hour, he should be chided, perhaps dismissed from the situation which he had only entered in the morning. This idea appalled him, he was bewildered how to act, and while in this terrible state of uncertainty, not daring to move, scarcely to breathe, the conversation progressed rapidly between the duke and Mr. Stanhope. As the reader has seen, it soon became of a nature which the duke would not for the world have had anybody overhear, and thus Christian saw that his position was becoming every instant more and more difficult. When the discourse had got to a certain extent, he dared not suddenly raise his voice and proclaim that there was a listener present. The natural question would be, wherefore he had remained to listen at all? So he continued motionless and silent, in the hope that the duke and his companion would speedily pass away from the library. But as the discourse progressed, it assumed a complexion so astounding, so startling indeed, if Christian had dared to start at all, it grew so engrossing in its terrible interest, that, forgetting every other circumstance, he drank in the whole with his amazed sense of hearing. Thus did he tarry there until the end, and even after the double doors had closed behind the duke and Mr. Stanhope, it was a long time ere Christian could venture to draw a breath freely.

Good heavens, what a tale had he heard! What a diabolical conspiracy had become revealed to his knowledge! In what a fearful light was the character of his employer suddenly presented to his comprehension! But was it not natural that the youth should say to himself, "It is Providence that placed me here on this occasion, to learn the deeply plotted scheme of villainy, and to become the divine instrument in frustrating it."

His first impulse was now to rush to the dining-room, proclaim to the two conspirators that their horrible machinations had come to his knowledge, rush forth in disgust from

the house, and on the morrow reveal everything to a magistrate, or to the relatives of the duchess, if he could find out who they were. This, we say, was his first impulse; and he was starting from his seat to obey it, when a thought struck him, and he sat down again. If he were to carry out such a plan, would it succeed, should he be believed, would not the duke and Stanhope indignantly deny the imputation and denounce it as the raving of a madman or the odious calumny of a miserable impostor? And would not the world give its faith to the bold denial of those two men of high social position rather than to the unsupported testimony of an obscure individual? Might not such conduct on Christian's part be even attributed to a vindictive feeling toward the man who had recently insulted his sister? All these considerations induced Christian to pause. Then, what course should he pursue? His mind was far too unsettled, his thoughts were too much excited, to allow him to come to any conclusion on the present occasion. He accordingly stole forth from the library, groped his way along a passage to the back staircase, and succeeded in reaching his chamber without disturbing any one.

We should here observe that when the household had retired to rest, Mr. and Mrs. Calvert fancied that the young secretary had already sought his own room, little dreaming that he had fallen asleep in the library and was continuing to slumber there while lamp and fire went out.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN ADVISER

CHRISTIAN awoke after a few hours of troubled repose, and it was still dusk on that cold wintry morning. He did not therefore immediately get up, but began to arrange all his confused ideas, so as to convince himself that what was uppermost in his thoughts was not merely the recollection of a dream. His convictions told him that it was indeed all too true, and he perceived the necessity of deciding on the course which he should adopt.

For the various reasons which had occurred to him on the preceding night, and which we have detailed at the close of the last chapter, he felt how impossible it was to proclaim to the world all he knew. Yet how could he remain in the employment of a man whom he had thus discovered to be the most black-hearted of villains? On the other hand, if he were to withdraw from the house, how could he serve the duchess and frustrate the satanic plot which was in embryo for her destruction? No, he must remain beneath that roof, for once more did the thought revert to his mind that Heaven itself had willed him to become its own instrument for the salvation of an innocent lady and the confusion of her foes. Should he speak to the duchess upon the subject? No, not for a single moment could he hope or expect that she would believe him. If she had known him for years, it would be different, but he was an utter stranger to her, he had only been in the house a few hours, she had seen him but for a few moments, and it would be the height of madness to expect that she would give credit to a tale so horribly damnatory to her husband's character. He must remain quiet for the present, he must watch the progress of events, and he must act accordingly.

But how could he assume a placid and respectful demeanour in the presence of the duke? How could he maintain a becoming deportment before one whom he now knew to be a detestable miscreant? Christian abominated dissimulation, he was high-minded and well principled, his soul was imbued with the loftiest notions of honour and integrity, he was as truthful, for one of his own sex, as his sister was for a being of the feminine race. And yet if Christian remained at Marchmont House, he must dissimulate, he must to a certain extent play the hypocrite, he must treat the Duke of Marchmont as if he knew nought to his detriment, he must wear a contented, if not a smiling and cheerful countenance, — in a word, he must play a part which he despised, loathed, and abhorred. It was difficult indeed for Christian Ashton to bend himself to this necessity, and yet for the sake of the duchess he resolved to do so. He felt that any sacrifice of feeling must be made on his own part in order to save an innocent lady from the atrocious machinations which had been devised for her destruction.

At about ten o'clock he attended the duke in the library, and his Grace bade him sit down to answer the letters which had come by that morning's post. These were chiefly on business matters from the bailiffs of the duke's provincial estates, from tenants soliciting renewals of leases, or requesting forbearance in respect to arrears of rent, from country gentlemen earnestly begging the duke's interest to procure government situations for their sons or other relatives, and so forth. On the backs of the greater portion of these documents, the duke noted the replies which were to be transmitted, and Christian proceeded to execute his work to the best of his ability. As each responsive letter was finished, he handed it across the table to the Duke of Marchmont, who was evidently well satisfied with the manner in which his young secretary acquitted himself of his duties. Thus nearly two hours were passed, and it was about noon when a footman entered and presented to his Grace a card upon a massive and exquisitely wrought silver salver.

"Ah, Mr. Hyde," said the duke, as he glanced at the card. "I sent for him yesterday. Let him come in."

The footman withdrew, and Christian, thinking that the business might be private, rose from his seat and was about to retire also, but the duke made a motion for him to remain,

observing, "There is no necessity for you to leave. On the contrary, I wish you to pay attention to what is about to take place, so that immediately after Mr. Hyde has departed, you may make notes of our conversation. He is a slippery kind of fellow, and I must nail him to his pledges, or else never again shall he represent a pocket-borough of mine." Then, after a brief pause, the duke observed for the information of his secretary, "This Mr. Hyde, you must know, is a Member of Parliament."

The door opened, and the footman announced the visitor in a loud voice. Mr. Fenwick Finnikin Hyde, M.P. for the borough of Viviandale, was a gentleman about forty, of middle height and spare figure, affected in his looks and speech, smirking and obsequious in his manners. He was exquisitely dressed, in a blue surtout coat, a figured silk waistcoat, black pantaloons, and patent leather boots. His cravat was tied in a most unexceptionable manner, a massive gold chain festooned over his waistcoat, and his kid gloves fitted so tightly that he had some difficulty in drawing off the one from the right hand, as with divers bowings and scrapings he extended that same right hand in the evident expectation that it would be taken by the duke, toward whom he advanced with a sort of skipping, mincing gait. He was by no means good-looking, notwithstanding all the pains lavished upon his toilet, the wavy curls of his long dark hair, and the artificial gloss of his whiskers. He was every inch the time-server and the parasite, feeling himself to be dependent upon the breath of the great man to whose presence he was thus summoned, yet endeavouring to carry off the consciousness of his servile condition by a jaunty air of smirking familiarity, which would doubtless impress an inexperienced stranger with the idea that he felt himself to be on a tolerably friendly if not altogether equal footing with his Grace.

But the Duke of Marchmont, bowing distantly, affected not to perceive Fenwick Finnikin Hyde's outstretched hand, and coldly motioned to a seat, which that gentleman, endeavouring to look surprised at this reception, at once took. Then, as he held his well-brushed glossy hat upon his knees, he said, in a weak, affected voice, "Glad to see your Grace looking so well. Never saw your Grace looking better. Quite astonishing, 'pon my honour."

The duke simply inclined his head in acknowledgment of these compliments, and then observed, in a cold, severe voice, "I requested you to call upon me, Mr. Hyde, that you may give some little explanations —"

"Quite right, my lord. Always glad to wait upon your Grace to explain what is going forward in the political world. But —" and he glanced toward Christian.

"This young gentleman is my private secretary," said the duke, "and we may speak in his presence. Indeed, he will not pay any attention to what we may have to say, for, as you perceive, he is busy in answering letters."

"Oh, very good, my lord," exclaimed Mr. Fenwick Finnikin Hyde, bestowing a patronizing smile upon Christian. "Of course, if your Grace has no objection to the young gentleman being present, I can have none. Seen this morning's papers, my lord? Astonishing how they are turning against the Ministry, — astonishing, 'pon my honour."

"And I could wish, Mr. Hyde," said the duke, with a voice and look of severe meaning, "that certain gentlemen belonging to the House of Commons would be equally firm in their opposition to that same most despicable Cabinet. I think, Mr. Hyde, that you addressed your constituents at Viviandale a few days back?"

"Quite right, my lord," exclaimed the honourable gentleman. "Public dinner given to me by the free and independent electors, — exceedingly sorry that your Grace was not in the chair. Astonishing enthusiasm nevertheless, — astonishing, 'pon my honour," and Mr. Fenwick Finnikin Hyde caressed his whiskers with an assumed look of complaisance, though a very close observer might have seen that he was sitting somewhat uneasily on his chair, like a schoolboy who has committed a fault, and being summoned into the presence of his master is dreading the moment when he will be charged therewith.

"Yes, Mr. Hyde," resumed Marchmont, still speaking severely, "you did attend a public dinner at Viviandale, — a dinner, sir, at which there were one hundred and thirty-three electors present, — being the Tory majority of the two hundred and nine freemen of the borough. And that Tory majority as a matter of course looks to me as the lord and master of their opinions, their consciences, and their souls. There is no mistake about the matter, Mr. Hyde;

the borough is mine, and no gentleman can continue to represent it if once he forfeits my confidence."

"Quite right, my lord, certainly not," ejaculated the Member for Viviandale, and then he smiled with a forced complacency, as if he meant it to be inferred that he had not by any means forfeited his ducal patron's confidence.

"If you consider that I am right, Mr. Hyde," proceeded Marchmont, "you will not be astonished if I frankly intimate that unless your conduct undergoes a change, you will at the next general election cease to be the representative of Viviandale. There were passages in your speech, sir, which unmistakably indicated a tendency toward what is generally known as ratting —"

"Astonishing, quite astonishing, 'pon my honour," cried the honourable gentleman, holding up his hands in amazement. "Really, my lord, if your Grace had only heard the cheers which my speech elicited —"

"I care nothing for the cheers, sir," interrupted Marchmont, haughtily. "There may perhaps be some few of my tenant farmers as well as of the tradesmen of Viviandale who are infected with revolutionary notions, and who in their hearts rebel against my authority. They may therefore cheer, sir, what are called liberal sentiments, although they dare not fly in my face and give their votes in the same sense. But I tell you that I care nothing for the cheers so long as the votes are always of the right sort. Your speech, Mr. Hyde, savoured of treachery, and there is positively a rumour afloat — I must speak out plainly — that you have sold yourself to the Whigs."

"Astonishing, quite astonishing, 'pon my honour," ejaculated the honourable gentleman. "Really, my lord, I am surprised that your Grace should give credit to such rumours."

"Take care that they do not prove true, Mr. Hyde. Remember the understanding on which you were first brought in for Viviandale, the conditions on which I paid your electioneering expenses, the terms on which for three Parliaments you have represented my borough. By Heaven, sir, if you deceive me, you shall be turned out next time, and I will put in my steward or my butler, — ay, or even one of my footmen, rather than stand the chance of being turned around upon. You solemnly pledged yourself to stand by Church and State in all things, to denounce the people

generally as a base, ignorant mob, to hold up the working classes in particular as an unwashed rabble, to oppose everything in the shape of progress, to support all aristocratic privileges, — in a word, to conduct yourself as a staunch Tory in all questions where there could be no doubt as to the course you were to pursue, while in all dubious matters you were to vote precisely according to my dictation. Now, Mr. Hyde, during the last session you did not act up entirely to these pledges, but I then said nothing on the subject. Your recent speech at Viviandale has, however, enhanced my misgivings, and the rumours which are afloat almost seem to confirm them. What am I to understand, sir? And what am I to expect? ”

“ Understand, my lord, nothing against me. Expect, my lord, that I shall serve your Grace in all things. But the fact is,” continued Mr. Fenwick Finnikin Hyde, with a smile half-blandly complacent and half-smirkingly sycophantic, “ a man must now and then make a show of independence — ”

“ Stuff and nonsense,” exclaimed the duke, indignantly. “ The borough of Viviandale is my own, as well as those of Rottentown and Mongerville, and depend upon it I shall do as I like with my own. Independence, indeed; it is ridiculous. The five seats which those boroughs have in the House of Commons are mine, and I mean that the occupants of them shall do my bidding. What will become of our blessed Constitution if the proprietors of pocket-boroughs were to allow independence? No such thing, sir. But the fact is you have been coquetting with the Whigs, you have been endeavouring to sell yourself, they would not buy you at your own price, and now you wish to get back into my favour. Pledge yourself, that henceforth you will fulfil your compacts and I will pardon you.”

“ Your Grace is really too hard upon me,” said Mr. Hyde, simpering and smiling, but unable to prevent himself from looking foolish. “ It is astonishing how false rumours do get about, — astonishing, ’pon my honour. However, as your Grace proposes to stretch forth the hand of friendship, pray suffer me to take it.”

“ And at the opening of the session,” observed Marchmont, “ you will take the earliest opportunity to make such

a speech as shall neutralize the evil effect of the one you delivered the other day to my voters at Viviandale? ”

“ Oh, certainly, my lord,” cried the honourable gentleman. “ I will make a speech that shall put matters all to rights, ’pon my honour.”

“ And I, Mr. Hyde, shall send you in good time a few strong sentences which you will take care to deliver against the Ministry. When I have leisure I will write down what I think you ought to say on the occasion — ”

“ Pray do so, my lord; I shall be delighted to profit by your Grace’s inspirations. It is astonishing how keen is your Grace’s perception, how shrewd your Grace’s judgment in respect to the leading topics of the day, — astonishing, ’pon my honour.”

Hereupon Mr. Fenwick Finnikin Hyde rose from his seat; the duke’s hand was now stretched out to him, the honourable gentleman pressed it with every appearance of enthusiastic devotion, and obsequiously bowed himself out.

“ You will note down the heads of this conversation,” said the Duke of Marchmont to Christian, when the door had closed behind the Member for Viviandale. “ I am now going out, and when you have taken the notes I speak of, the remainder of the day is at your own disposal.”

With these words the Duke of Marchmont quitted the library, leaving Christian in a state of no ordinary amazement at the scene which he had just witnessed. He had hitherto fancied that Great Britain was the freest country on the face of the earth, and that the House of Commons was composed of an independent set of men, honestly, fairly, and impartially representing the whole people. He had now learned a lesson to the contrary, and he was astonished at the corruption of the system which allowed the Duke of Marchmont the control of those boroughs, enabling him to bestow them upon his own creatures. Not less was Christian surprised and disgusted at the abject servility with which one of those creatures had just abnegated all political independence, though faintly making a show to the contrary. When the young secretary had committed to paper the notes of the conversation at which he had been present, he issued forth to take a walk, intending to call upon Christina.

He was proceeding through Hyde Park on his way toward Regent’s Park, pondering on the character of the Duke of

Marchmont, and in no very comfortable mood reflecting on the scene of the preceding night, when he beheld a tall gentleman approaching. He was enveloped in a cloak, and Christian immediately knew him to be Mr. Redcliffe. The youth was walking slowly in one direction; Redcliffe was advancing as slowly from the other. The latter was evidently absorbed in thought, as was the former. The air was chill; his mantle was closely wrapped around him, the collar reached high up, indeed almost to his cheek-bones, and his hat was drawn somewhat over the upper part of his countenance. He did not at first see Christian, and was about to pass him, but the youth addressed Mr. Redcliffe in courteously becoming terms.

“ Ah, I did not perceive you,” said this gentleman; “ and I am glad you spoke.” At the same time he proffered the youth his hand. “ It is a long while since we last met.”

“ It is nearly ten weeks, sir,” replied Christian.

“ I recollect,” observed Redcliffe. “ It was when you and your sister had been performing a generous act of charity toward that poor creature — ”

“ Whose rapid pathway to the grave was smoothed by your bounties,” added Christian, who experienced an illimitable admiration for the character of Mr. Redcliffe.

“ And where are you living now?” inquired this gentleman, with his characteristic abruptness. “ How is your amiable sister? I have thought of you both sometimes, and indeed have been going to ask Mrs. Macaulay concerning you, but something has always occurred to put it out of my head.”

“ I am grateful, sir,” answered Christian, “ to learn that my sister and myself have enjoyed your consideration. Christina is living with Lady Octavian Meredith — ”

“ Ah, then you no longer dwell together, — you and your sister?” exclaimed Mr. Redcliffe, now surveying the youth with an increasing interest.

“ No, sir; circumstances compelled us to separate. We have to earn our own living, but, thank Heaven! my sister is comfortably provided for.”

“ And you?” asked Redcliffe.

“ I am for the present private secretary to the Duke of Marchmont,” responded Christian.

“ Ah!” ejaculated Mr. Redcliffe, and then he hastily

observed, "But why do you speak as if your sister only was comfortably situated, and you were not? Is it because you feel your present position to be a mere temporary one?"

"Yes, sir, for that and another reason —"

But then Christian stopped short, sorry even that he had said so much.

"Has the Duke of Marchmont cause to be dissatisfied with you? Has he given you notice to leave him?"

"Oh, no, sir," exclaimed Christian, speaking with a sort of ardour, in the consciousness that he was giving complete satisfaction to his ducal employer, and that the tenure of his office depended entirely upon himself.

"Perhaps you are dissatisfied with your situation?" said Mr. Redcliffe inquiringly, and Christian perceived that his dark eyes were fixed keenly upon him.

"Frankly speaking, sir," responded the youth, "I am not well pleased with the post which I occupy, and though for a time I may keep it —"

But here again he stopped suddenly short, as the idea flashed to him that possibly Mr. Redcliffe might be acquainted with the duke, in which case it would be the height of imprudence for him (Christian) to enter into any explanations with regard to the point whereon he had begun to touch.

"You need not be afraid to speak frankly and candidly to me," observed Redcliffe, who seemed at once to fathom the motive of the youth's hesitation. "I have not the slightest acquaintance with the Duke of Marchmont, and even if it were otherwise, I should not betray anything that you might in confidence reveal to me. I experience an interest in you, and if you think fit to regard me as a friend, you shall find me deserving of the title. If I remember right I have learned that you and your sister are twins, and that you are orphans; your own words just now gave me to understand that you are both dependent on yourselves for your support. In this case you may need the advice of a friend, even if at the moment you require no more substantial succour, but both should be cheerfully given by me."

Christian expressed his gratitude for these assurances, and he experienced a profound pleasure at thus becoming the object of proffered friendship on the part of one whose character he already so much admired.

“Think not, young gentleman,” continued Mr. Redcliffe, “that I am inspired by any impertinent curiosity in seeking your confidence —”

“Oh, no, sir! Not for a moment,” exclaimed Christian, “could I entertain an idea so injurious toward you.”

“Listen,” proceeded Redcliffe. “A youth of your age — thrown upon his own resources, and abroad as it were in the wide world — must inevitably on various occasions need suitable counsel and advice from older and more experienced heads. If I err not, you are at this present moment in some such position. Your sister is well provided for, and I rejoice to hear it, but you yourself appear to be less satisfactorily situated. In a word, you are not happy at the Duke of Marchmont’s, or else something has occurred —”

“Something has indeed occurred,” said Christian, in a mournful voice, and after a few instants’ reflection, he added, slowly and thoughtfully, “Yes, I do indeed require the counsel of some one who is enabled to give it. I feel that I am placed in a situation of considerable embarrassment, that I have a duty to perform toward an innocent lady whose destruction is resolved upon, but yet that in the performance of this duty I must play the hypocrite —”

“All this, Christian Ashton, is most serious,” observed Mr. Redcliffe. “Let us walk to a more secluded place where we can converse together. I see that you will give me your confidence, and again I assure you that you shall never repent it.”

Mr. Redcliffe and the youth diverged away together from the neighbourhood of Park Lane where their encounter had taken place, and they rambled slowly across the wide open field of the park. During this walk Christian explained to Mr. Redcliffe how he had happened to fall asleep in the library on the preceding night, how he had overheard the conversation between the Duke of Marchmont and the Honourable Mr. Stanhope, how, after serious deliberation with himself, he had resolved to dissemble his looks in the presence of his Grace, and retain his situation in the hope of frustrating the diabolical scheme which had been initiated against the duchess, but how when once this object should have been achieved, he was determined to seek his livelihood elsewhere.

Mr. Redcliffe listened in profound silence. He spoke not

a single syllable throughout Christian's narrative; he walked slowly by the youth's side, with his eyes bent down, and when the tale was ended, upwards of a minute elapsed ere he breathed a word of comment.

"This is indeed most serious," at length observed Mr. Redcliffe, speaking slowly and deliberately, and also in subdued accents. "The views which you have entertained in connection therewith are all just and intelligent. You cannot proclaim the conspiracy aloud to the world, for the world would not believe you, while its laws would punish you as a slanderer and a calumniator. You cannot — at least for the present — warn the Duchess of Marchmont of her danger; or at all events it must not be done by words from your lips. Yet you must remain in your present situation, you must keep a strict watch upon all the Duke of Marchmont's proceedings, — yes, all of them. You must not hesitate — with false compunctions or overnice scruples — to listen, when opportunity serves, to conversations between the duke and his villainous accomplice Stanhope. Everything that comes to your knowledge must you report to me, and in me shall you find a faithful adviser as well as a sincere friend. Henceforth you will regard me as such, and you must never hesitate to seek my abode, no matter how often or at what hour. You possess feelings, Christian Ashton, which do you honour, and I experience a lively interest in your welfare. You need have no care for the future, for when the time shall come that you must leave a service which is evidently distasteful to you, it shall be my care and my pleasure to procure you another and a better situation. Farewell for the present."

With these words Mr. Redcliffe grasped Christian's hand cordially, and they separated. The youth felt infinitely relieved at having made a confidant of one in whom he had also found a friend, and he proceeded with a much lighter heart toward the Regent's Park. He saw his sister, and affectionate was the embrace in which the twins held each other. Christian mentioned the circumstance of his being already aware that Lord Octavian and Mr. Percival were one and the same person, and Christina frankly told him all the conversation which had taken place between herself and his lordship on the preceding day, — thus describing the motives which had induced her to conceal from Zoe the fact that

she was previously acquainted with Octavian. Christian fully appreciated those motives, and expressed his belief that his sister had acted as she was bound to do under the circumstances. Christina then remarked that the Duke of Marchmont had called on the preceding day, adding, "He seems a very nice nobleman, and spoke in kind terms of you."

Christian had already made up his mind not to reveal to his sister those circumstances of which he had been speaking to Mr. Redcliffe, for he knew full well that Christina would only be afflicted at the thought of her brother being compelled to remain in a position which was distasteful to him. That observation of hers, so artlessly eulogistic of the duke, would have thrown Christian into considerable embarrassment, had not Zoe at the moment entered the room where this interview was taking place, and she welcomed the youth to the house in the most cordial manner. He walked out with his sister for an hour or two in the Regent's Park, and then returned to Belgrave Square.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CRIME

It was between nine and ten o'clock in the evening of that day of which we have been writing in the preceding chapter, that three persons were advancing in three different directions toward the gold-beater's house in the midst of that maze of buildings lying between the lower parts of the Waterloo and Westminster Roads. One of those individuals was Barney the Burker, the second was Bill Scott, the third was his brother Tim. The two lads had been informed by Barnes that if they joined him at the Smedleys', they would probably be able to render some little assistance in a particular business which was then in hand, but beyond these few words the Burker gave no special explanations.

The night was dark and cold, not with the fine frosty weather which properly belonged to that December season of the year, but with a raw mistiness that damped the garments and collected on the hair and whiskers. It was an evening when those who were well clad would wrap their upper coats or their shawls, as the case might be, more closely around them, and when the scantily apparelled and the ragged children of poverty would hurry on with a continuous shivering of the frame which no acceleration of speed could however mitigate. Even the very baked-potato man would shudder visibly as he bawled out "All hot!" in a lustier voice than usual, and there was no need for naked-footed mendicants to affect a quivering misery of the form as they huddled up in doorways or hung upon the track of passers-by, imploring alms, for the reality of their half-perished state was keen enough. The street-lamps appeared to burn mistily, and the jets of gas at the butcher's shops

and the coal sheds threw forth a less vivid glare than usual. Barney the Burker raised the collar of his coat over his ears, and pulled his greasy comforter up to his lips, at the same time diving both his hands into the capacious pockets of his coat, as he sped briskly along. The Scotts respectively pursued their own shivering ways, without the advantage of either upper coat or comforter, for the good luck which they had experienced in their predatory exploits the evening but one before had led to no improvement of their costume, inasmuch as Barney the Burker purposely kept them in this impoverished and half-ragged state that they might have the appearance of mendicants and thus all the more easily conduct their operations on the pockets of the unwary.

Barney was the first to reach the Smedleys' house, which he entered by means of the alley leading by the side of the chapel, and in a few minutes he was followed by the elder Scott. At the expiration of a few more minutes the younger lad joined them, and they were all three soon seated in the scullery in company with the Smedleys and Mrs. Webber. Liquor and glasses were upon the table, and supplies of hot grog were mixed, while the conversation commenced.

"Well, so nuffin was done yesterday?" said the Burker, after a few indifferent remarks had been exchanged. "I should have looked down last night accordin' to appointment, if it hadn't been for the message you, Jack, sent to the contrary by Tim Scott when you happened to meet him."

"Don't you remember," said Mrs. Smedley, "it was agreed upon we should get hold of that letter which Mr. Smith was going to send off —"

"Ay, to be sure," remarked the Burker, "and so I suppose he didn't send no letter at all?"

"Not yesterday," replied Mrs. Smedley; "he said he should put it off till to-day."

"And he was in a worse tremble than ever when he said so," added the old mother.

"Quite narvous, eh?" said the Burker, and then he took a long draught of spirits and water. "There's nothing like this for the narves, and I do raly think that a genelman could go as a genelman ought to Tuck up Fair, and cut his last fling in an exceedin' dashin' style, if he was only well primed with lush. But come, what about this here letter?"

"It's nothing particular after all," said Jack Smedley. "But here it is — No, you have got it, Bab, and you can let Barney read it for himself."

"If the writing's at all queer," responded the Burker, "it's of no more use to ask me to read it than to tell a pig to dance a hornpipe on stilts. My larning might all be put into a thimble, and then leave room for the young lady which is accustomed to use it to put her forefinger in."

"Well, the writing isn't so trembling and shaky as one might expect to find it," said Bab Smedley, "and so you may read it for yourself."

With these words, she drew forth the intercepted letter, which she handed to Barney the Burker, who, having imbibed another draught from his tumbler, proceeded to peruse it in a cool and deliberate manner.

"No, there's nuffin here that's of any consequence to us," he observed, when he reached the end, "and so I suppose I may just as well light a pipe with it."

"No such thing," exclaimed Bab, snatching the letter out of the fellow's hand. "I mean to keep it — I have a fancy for doing so. Who knows but what some day or another it may be of use?"

"Ah, well, do just as you like," said the Burker, "but of course you don't mean to seal up the letter again and deliver it to-morrow morning at the place it's directed to?"

"Not quite such a fool," rejoined Mrs. Smedley.

"To be sure not," observed Barnes; "for him or her who took it to the house might be knowed again on any future occasion by the servant, or by them to which it is addressed, and then if any stir was made about the disappearance of a partickler individual — though by the bye, he doesn't give no name and no address in that there letter —"

"But he says enough," cried Jack Smedley, "to prove that he has been a jolly rogue in his way."

"How would it be," asked Mrs. Webber, "to make free with his purse before his very face; take it in a bold manner, I mean, and tell him to do his worst, for that we have found out all about him —"

"No," interrupted Bab Smedley, "that will not do. How do we know that he has really done sufficient to make him so terribly afraid of the law as we may think that he

has? It is little better than surmise on our part, for that letter doesn't prove much, and is so vague."

"No, no, ma'am," said the Burker, addressing himself to Mrs. Webber, "it would never do to go on a mere wentur'. Whatsomever this Smith may have done, the loss of his purse might make him uproarious, raise the neighbourhood and send us all to limbo. The work must be done in quite another way."

"To be sure," said Bab Smedley, after a little reflection; "Barney is right. Smith may have been, and no doubt is, a great rogue —"

"And so let him be punished for his vickedness," interjected the Burker; then fixing his horrible eyes upon Bab Smedley, whom he evidently regarded as the supreme authority in that house, he said, "Well, I s'pose your mind's made up, and it's for to-night?"

"It must be for to-night if it is to be at all," responded Bab, "for he said he was going away to-morrow."

"And I am sure he will too, if he is alive to do it," said Mrs. Webber, "for he was packing up his few things in his carpet-bag when I went to his room with the supper-tray."

"Now then, you two fellers," said the Burker, as he filled himself another glass and thus addressed the Scotts, "you've already got to thank me for having done a blessed sight more to keep you on with your edication than ever your own parents would have done if they was alive to take care of yer. And so as you've got on so well in what one may call the rudiments of your larnin', I'm going to put you up into a higher class to-night and teach you another lesson. That was the reason I told you to come here on this partiklar occasion, and p'raps it is as well that there should be as much help as possible."

The two lads said not a word, but they seemed to have a perfect idea that some darker and deeper wickedness than any they had been yet acquainted with was about to be perpetrated. Bill Scott's large goggle eyes stared in a sort of glassy admiration upon the Burker, whom he evidently regarded as a very fine fellow, while his brother Tim leered with a horrible knowingness upon the same individual, — thus not merely indicating that he comprehended the nature of the deed that was to be done, but that he was all too ready to bear a part in it.

The Burker and Bab Smedley conversed together for some minutes in whispers; then whispered remarks were also interchanged betwixt them, the woman's husband, and her mother, and in a short time the plan of proceeding was duly settled. Soon afterward — it being now about half-past ten o'clock — Mrs. Webber lighted a chamber candle, and quitted the scullery. In a few minutes she returned, and having carefully closed the door, she observed, "I have been up to ask him if he wants anything more; he says no, for that he is going to bed."

"And you didn't tell him," asked the Burker, with a horrible grin, "that you had some friends here which would presently bring him up his gruel?"

"He told me to call him early," continued the old woman, not heeding the interjected remark which was so replete with a revolting levity in its allusion to the dreadful crime that had been determined upon. "I asked him at what hour, and he said at six o'clock, as he wanted to get off before daylight, for now that his mind was made up for departure, he says, he has a very great way to go."

"His departur', I rayther think," said Barnes, pursuing his vein of hideous, horrible jocularity, "will take place sooner than he suspects, and the way he has to go will be a precious deal longer than he has bargained for."

"He says he is going upon the Continent," added Mrs. Webber.

"Well, if he likes to give that there name to the place where old Nick lives, he is verry welcome," observed Barney.

"I left him, and he locked the door, as he always does," said Mrs. Webber.

"I've got my tools with me," exclaimed the Burker. "There's as tidy a lot of skellingtons as ever was seen," and as he thus spoke, he produced an old cotton pocket-handkerchief in which the skeleton keys thus alluded to were so wrapped up as to prevent them from rattling or chinking as he walked.

"I am afraid your tools will be of no good, Barney," said Mrs. Webber, "for the lodger always leaves the key in the lock. The door must not be forced open with any degree of violence; he would raise the whole neighbourhood with his cries and yells in no time."

“What should prevent us from getting in at the window?” asked Jack Smedley. “It looks on the back yard —”

“Winders be hanged!” ejaculated the Burker. “If he sleeps light, he would be sure and hear the noise of the winder lifting up, and if so be it’s fastened, there’s the chance of smashing the glass in cutting out a hole with the glazier’s di’mond to thrust one’s fist in and unfasten it. No, no, that’s not the dodge. Don’t be afeard, ma’am,” continued the ruffian, addressing himself specially to Mrs. Webber, “I’ll soon have the key out of the lock, and no mistake.”

“How?” inquired Jack Smedley.

“Never do you mind; you’ll see all about it byme bye. But we must do nuffin for an hour or so, till the covy’s fast locked in the arms of Murphy. So now for a booze and blowing a cloud.”

An hour and a half were passed in drinking on the part of all, combined with smoking on that of the male portion of the miscreant gang, and when the kitchen clock had proclaimed midnight, the Burker knocked the ashes out of his pipe and drained his glass.

“Now for business,” he said, rising from his seat, “Come, Jack, you will go along with me; so let’s take off our boots. You,” he added, turning to Mrs. Smedley, “must come to hold the candle. You, ma’am, — and you two lads, — must wait down here till you’re wanted?”

Barney and Jack Smedley took off their boots, and Mrs. Smedley, with the chamber candle in her hand, led the way from the scullery. Noiselessly and cautiously did the three wretches ascend to the first floor, — the old woman and the two lads remaining below. With such stealthiness did the Burker and the Smedleys mount the stairs, that not a board creaked, and Bab was careful that her garments should not even rustle against the wall. On reaching the landing, the Burker bade Mrs. Smedley hold the candle near the keyhole, but so shade it with her hand that the light should not penetrate through into the chamber. He then applied his ear to the keyhole, and listened with breathless attention. Perhaps a person less experienced than the ruffian was in such matters would scarcely have succeeded in ascertaining that the inmate of the chamber slept, but Barney had made all these sorts of things a particular study, and there was no detail requisite for the working out of a successful iniquity,

which he had not carefully practised. Slowly withdrawing his head from the vicinage of the keyhole at the expiration of a minute, he gave his accomplices to understand by a significant nod that their intended victim slept. Yes, he slept at the midnight hour, when the ruthless miscreants were bent upon his destruction.

The key, as Mrs. Webber had represented, was in the lock, and Barney now ascertained that it was turned around in such a way that it could not be pushed straight into the room, even if he had entertained the notion of adopting a course which by being certain to make it fall on the boards within, would stand the chance of startling the lodger. The end of the key projected out a very little way from the hole, on the exterior side of the door, and the Burker, having directed Bab to hold the light in a particular manner, proceeded with his operations. He drew forth from his pocket a stout piece of wire, and this he fastened around the end of the key. It was now easy to turn the key in such a way that it could be thrust out of the lock on the inner side of the door; while the wire not merely prevented it from falling on the boards, but likewise held it pendent at a sufficient distance from the door itself so as to preclude the possibility of its knocking against the panels. A skeleton key was now introduced into the lock thus skilfully cleared, and in a few minutes the door was opened.

Barney made a sign for Bab to stand back, so that not a single gleam of light should penetrate into the room, and again he listened attentively. All of a sudden he closed the door, and made another sign, to indicate that the lodger was awakening. A panic-terror seized upon Jack Smedley, and clutching the Burker with one hand, and his wife with the other, he endeavoured to drag them both away from the spot. Bab herself was irresolute how to act; the Burker, ferociously determined, shook Smedley off, and made fierce gesticulations to the effect that the work must be finished, for that they had gone too far to recede. But Jack Smedley was no longer master of himself; he was trembling all over, his countenance was as pale as death, and the infection of his own terrors was being rapidly communicated to his wife. The Burker continued to gesticulate in a menacing manner, and his looks denoted supreme disgust and contempt for Jack Smedley.

“No, no! the whole neighbourhood will be alarmed,” whispered this individual, as he once more clutched the Burker by the arm.

“Ah! what’s this?” cried a voice from within, at the same instant that the handle of the door was heard to turn, and the key pendent to the wire knocked against the panel.

Barney dashed the door violently open, and a heavy fall was heard, instantaneously followed by a cry for help. Then the Burker dealt a tremendous blow with the butt end of a pistol which he snatched forth from his pocket, and Bab Smedley, suddenly recalling all her courage, rushed in with the light. The lodger lay upon the floor, low moans escaping from his lips, but those quickly ceased, as the remorseless Burker dealt him another terrific blow with his weapon, — a blow which beat in the unfortunate victim’s forehead. It was done, the murder was accomplished, and that victim was no more.

It was evident that being disturbed by the noise at the door, he had got out of bed to ascertain what was the matter; he had huddled on his pantaloons, and he was about to open the door to listen whether all was quiet, or whether there were indeed anything wrong going on in the house, when the circumstance of his hand encountering the wire and the key had confirmed his terror and had caused an ejaculation to fall from his lips. There he now lay upon the floor, a corpse, with his forehead battered in.

“Come, you fool,” said Bab Smedley to her husband, “don’t stand like a coward there —”

“No coward, Bab. That feeling is gone,” interrupted Jack, whose courage now likewise returned, the fear of danger being suddenly passed. “Let’s look after the swag.”

“Ay, that’s it,” said the Burker, “and dispose of the stiff’un arterward. Well, the job was done neat enough arter all, though I tell you what, Master Jack, no thanks to you if we didn’t make a mess of the whole affair. You and me has done two or three things in our lifetime, but I never see you get so chicken-hearted afore.”

“It wasn’t the thing itself I was afraid of,” answered Smedley, by no means relishing these taunts; “it was the fear of having the whole neighbourhood roused.”

“And so you would, if it hadn’t been for me,” rejoined

the Burker in a savage tone. "Howsumever, it's all over now — Ah, and here's the blunt!"

For while the ruffian was giving utterance to those words, he stooped down and felt in the pockets of the murdered man's pantaloons. He drew forth two purses, and a hasty examination of the contents showed him that though one contained but a trifle of money, the contents of the other amounted to about five hundred pounds. This was an infinitely greater treasure than any of the wretches expected to acquire by their deed of turpitude, and their spirits rose to the highest point of horrible exultation.

"Now let Mrs. Webber come and mop up them boards at vunce," said the Burker, "or else there'll be marks on 'em as will tell tales. And you, Bab, can stop with the lads to get the trap-door up, while me and Jack brings down the stiff'un. The sooner all's put to rights the better."

Mrs. Smedley, placing the light upon a chest of drawers, hastily descended the stairs, and in a few minutes the old woman made her appearance in the chamber, with a pail of hot water and a flannel. But little blood had flowed on the floor, and none had reached the carpet, of which there was only a slip by the side of the bed. The vile woman showed no more feeling than that which a slight shudder expressed, as her first glance was flung upon the corpse, and this arose merely from a swiftly transient sense of recoil from the spectacle of the battered forehead, but certainly not from any compunction at the atrocious deed itself. The floor was soon cleansed with the flannel, and then, as the old woman held the light, the Burker and Jack Smedley, raising the body between them, began to carry it down the stairs.

The scullery was reached, and now the two lads for the first time looked upon a form whence murder had expelled the breath of life, — for the first time did they behold a corpse which was made so by the black turpitude of assassination. An instant — and only for an instant — did they shrink back from the spectacle; a moment, too, — and only for a moment, — did their minds appear to receive a shock, and then their brutal, savage self-possession was regained; the fierceness of their instincts appeared to triumph over any latent glimmering of their better feelings. The Burker contemplated them both from the corners of his eyes; he saw full well what was passing within them, and a devilish expression of satis-

faction appeared upon his hideous countenance, as he felt that they were now more than ever bound fast in the trammels which he had cast around them, and by means of which he rendered them ductile and pliant to all his purposes of evil.

The table was moved away from the middle of the scullery, the square piece of carpet on which it was wont to stand was likewise taken up, and a trap-door was raised. This trap-door revealed a considerable aperture; it was the mouth of a pit, whence a disagreeable earthy smell came up. There were steps leading down into the abyss, and to that depth was the corpse conveyed by Barney the Burker and Jack Smedley. The two women and the two lads stood close by the trap-door, gazing upon the scene which the light of the candle illuminated with a sufficiency to throw out its most hideous and ghastly features. And horrible indeed was that scene, — horrible the face of the miscreant Burker, bending over the rigid and blood-stained countenance of the murdered man, — that countenance, too, on the upper part of which there appeared so frightful a wound.

“Hush,” said Bab Smedley, suddenly breaking the silence which prevailed. “I do believe there is some one in the passage up-stairs.”

“Nonsense,” growled the Burker, “if all the doors is shut, how can there be any one in the house? And if there is, we’ll sarve him as we’ve done the stiff’un here.”

“Do be quiet,” whispered Mrs. Smedley, with affrighted impatience. “I am certain there are footsteps.”

The woman spoke so confidently that all did now remain perfectly quiet, with suspended breath, but no sound met their ears, and Mrs. Smedley yielded to the conclusion that it was only fancy on her part. But all of a sudden there was a strange rushing noise in the passage above; the body fell from the Burker’s grasp, and Jack Smedley, who was lower down the steps, sustaining the feet of the murdered man, fell backward with considerable violence, the corpse rolling upon him. It was in the bottom of the vault that this horrible incident took place, and a cry of terror ascended from that depth. Then the next moment the gold-beater was seen rushing up the steps as if he were demented, his hair standing on end, his countenance ghastly pale, his lips white, his eyes rolling with horror.

"You fool, you!" muttered his wife, clutching him violently by the arm, and giving him a savage shake; "you'll make yourself heard yet before you have done."

It must be observed that Barney the Burker had not let the corpse fall through any access of panic-terror, but merely that he might rush up-stairs and ascertain the cause of that strange sweeping sound which had reached the ears of those in the scullery. But on opening the door and listening, he found that all was still.

"Give me a light," he said, "and I'll go over the house just for your saytisfaction; 'cos why, none of you seem able to do it for yourselves."

A candle was immediately supplied him by one of the lads, and the instant he appeared in the ground-floor passage with that light, the rushing sound was heard again, and an enormous cat which had been crouching on the mat sprang up the stairs to the higher stories. The Burker gave a chuckling laugh, and descending to the scullery, closed the door, saying, "It's on'y a great big black cat that's got into the house."

"It's the people's at the beer shop," exclaimed Bab Smedley.

"But isn't it strange," asked the gold-beater, who was shuddering all over, "that the brute should cut about the house like that? Doesn't it seem as if it knew what had been done?" and with his haggard eyes he glanced toward the mouth of the vault.

"Well, I des say there's summut like instink in the affair," said the Burker, coolly, "but as cats can't speak, they can't tell no tales, and so we needn't bother ourselves any more about the matter. Come, Jack, take a drop of brandy, and don't make such a fool of yourself as you seem to be doing. Why, I can't make out what's come over you all on a sudden, that you have got so precious chicken-hearted. It isn't a verry good example you're setting them lads. Where's the quicklime?"

"All ready down below," responded Bab Smedley; then addressing herself to her husband, she said, savagely, "There, toss off that brandy, and be a man. I'm ashamed of you."

The gold-beater drank the raw spirit which his wife handed him, and his courage speedily revived again.

"Come now, my boys, and lend a hand below," said the

Burker; "you must 'custom yerselves to get familiar with stiff'uns. You come too, Jack."

The gold-beater and the Burker descended into the vault, with a candle, — the two Scotts following with readiness and alacrity. A spade and pickaxe were in the pit, a hole was speedily dug, sufficiently large to receive the corpse, a quantity of quicklime was thrown upon it, the earth was shovelled back, it was well flattened down, so as to make the bottom of the subterranean level, and thus the work was accomplished.

The trap-door was closed, the carpet was drawn over it, the table was restored to its place, quantities of spirits and water were mixed, and the wretches caroused above the spot to which their victim had been consigned. The Burker and Bab Smedley ascended to the chamber where the deed was accomplished; they ransacked the contents of the carpet-bag, but they found no papers of any kind, no further hoard of money. But on the drawers was a very handsome repeater-watch, together with a gold pencil-case and two or three rings. These valuables were of course taken possession of, and the two wretches descended to rejoin their companions. A division of the booty now took place, more grog was drunk, and it was past two in the morning when the Burker and the Scotts took their departure, at intervals of a few minutes, by means of the back part of the premises and the narrow alley by the side of the chapel.

"You behaved like a fool to-night," said Bab Smedley to her husband, when they were at length alone together in their own chamber.

"I can't tell what it was that came over me when we were all three together at his door," said the gold-beater. "And then the affair in the vault was horrible enough. To have that corpse come tumbling down upon one was sufficient to make the hair stand on end. And mind you, Bab, you were not altogether yourself to-night; you were frightened up at the door, and you were frightened again too by the noise of that cursed cat."

"Well, there's enough of it," said the woman sharply, for her husband had spoken truly, and she herself had been more accessible to terror on this particular night than on the occasion of any previous deed of iniquity.

"I tell you what, Bab," said the gold-beater, looking

somewhat nervously around the room, and speaking in the half-hushed voice which denoted a certain inward appalled feeling, "I don't like that affair of the cat. There was something superstitious in it. It was the animal's instinct."

"Now, will you have done?" demanded Bab Smedley, turning with sudden fierceness around upon her husband, but her own face was as ghastly pale as his was, and as their eyes met he saw that she was under the same superstitious terror as that which was awing and appalling his own soul.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LISTENER

A WEEK had elapsed since the occurrences just related, and during this interval the Honourable Wilson Stanhope had called three or four times, and had dined twice at Marchmont House.

He was a man of about five and thirty years of age, handsome, though with a somewhat dissipated and rakish look. He had been for some years in the Horse Guards, and although his necessities had compelled him to sell his commission, he still affected to a certain degree a military appearance; that is to say, he continued to wear his moustache. His features were regular, but somewhat bold and prominent; the expression of his countenance was decidedly sensuous. His hair was light; his eyes were large, and had a look of bold hardihood when contemplating females, — thus indicating the thorough libertine. Though of profligate habits, a confirmed gamester, a spendthrift, and an unprincipled seducer, yet he had done nothing to cause his expulsion from fashionable society. A man may cheat a thousand creditors if they be only tradesmen, without losing his caste, but if he fail to pay a single debt contracted on the race-course or at the gaming-table, he at once forfeits his rank and consideration as a gentleman. He may beguile credulous women by myriads of dishonourable artifices, and yet he can still hold his head high and proclaim himself an honourable man. But if he forfeit his word in the slightest degree to any individual in his own sphere, his honour is instantaneously considered as lost. Such are the usages, rules, and customs of the fashionable world, and therefore a man like Mr. Stanhope, though saturated with all vices, may continue to look everybody in the face, and no one

will dream of excluding him from the sphere in which he moves.

Such was the individual who was leagued with the Duke of Marchmont to accomplish the destruction of the duchess. During the week which had elapsed since the infamous compact was made, he had already been admitted to a footing of intimacy in the duke's mansion, and the duchess had received him with a becoming courtesy. She herself was ignorant of his profligate habits; she might perhaps have heard it whispered "that he was a little gay," but though herself a thoroughly well principled and right-minded woman, she nevertheless knew that if she were to look coldly upon all the male portion of her visitors who bore a similar reputation to that of Mr. Stanhope, she would have to debar herself from society altogether. Besides, she was docile to the will of her husband; it was not in her nature to rebel against him. She was already unhappy enough on account of his neglect to be careful not to aggravate it into downright hatred, for she knew not the full extent of that feeling of bitterness which he entertained toward her. His friends became her friends; it was sufficient for Lavinia that her husband wished her to receive any particular individuals with cordiality, to ensure that hospitable welcome on her part, and thus was she giving her hand to the villain who was secretly pledged to the accomplishment of her destruction.

In order that the reader may properly understand the scene which we are about to relate, it is necessary to give some little description of that cabinet which joined the library. It has already been described as a sort of slip, containing only one window, and commodious enough for a person to lounge in by himself, or for a couple of friends to indulge in a confidential chat or discuss a bottle of wine. It seemed to have been intended by the architect who built the mansion to serve as a little retiring-room from the library itself, for in addition to the door opening from the passage, there was another door of communication between the cabinet and the library. But on taking possession of that mansion, the Duke of Marchmont had completely cut off the cabinet from the library, by having the door fastened up and book-shelves arranged against it in the library itself. The fact was, his Grace had purchased more books than the

original conveniences of the library could well contain. Not that he himself had purposed at the time to plunge headlong into all those intellectual treasures; his reading was limited enough, — the newspapers and new novels, with perhaps a few political pamphlets and Parliamentary Blue Books, constituting the range thereof. Those quantities of volumes therefore, so elegantly bound, were bought for ornament and show, just as were the vases which stood upon the landings, the specimens of sculpture on the staircases and in the passages, or the pictures which hung to the walls. He had purchased, then, — as we have said, — more books than could be conveniently stowed away in the cases originally provided for them, and not choosing to have them thrust into a cupboard or put anywhere out of sight, he had caused shelves to be arranged against the door opening into the cabinet.

Now, Christian had one day discovered, while sitting in the cabinet, that a conversation going on in the library could be overheard with very little difficulty by any one in the former place; that is to say, if such person chose to play the part of a regular eavesdropper and apply his ear to to the door which was fastened up. Be it well understood that Christian would under ordinary circumstances have scorned to become a willing and wilful eavesdropper, but he had been counselled by Mr. Redcliffe to keep the strictest watch on the proceedings and conduct of the Duke of Marchmont, and this advice, under those circumstances which are known to the reader, he was resolved to follow out.

One forenoon — at the expiration of that week to which we have alluded — Christian was seated with the Duke of Marchmont in the library, when a domestic entered to announce that Mr. Armytage solicited an immediate interview with his Grace. Christian perceived a strong expression of vexation and annoyance pass over the duke's countenance, — an expression indeed which was so extraordinary that, though it immediately passed away, it dwelt in the youth's mind. He of course knew that Mr. Armytage was Lady Octavian Meredith's father; he knew likewise that the Duke of Marchmont visited the Merediths, and he was therefore astonished that the announcement of the name of Zoe's sire should produce such an effect on his ducal employer.

More than all this, too, he had learned from his sister, in the course of conversation, that Mr. Armytage was many years back a dependent of the duke's in the form of land-steward, bailiff, or something of the kind, and that thence was the origin of his fortune. How was it, therefore, that his Grace should unwittingly evince such an antipathy to the mere mention of Mr. Armytage's name?

"You can retire," said the duke to Christian when the servant had withdrawn to introduce Mr. Armytage. "There is no more correspondence requiring my attention to-day, and your time is therefore now your own."

Christian bowed and issued from the library, but he was irresistibly led to enter the cabinet, where upon the table lay two or three books which he had selected for perusal and which he had left there. It can be easily understood how, in the circumstances in which young Ashton was placed, everything that seemed at all mysterious or unaccountable in respect to the Duke of Marchmont should have become a matter of deep importance to himself. And then, too, the counsel he had received from Mr. Redcliffe was continuously uppermost in his mind, — to keep a watch on all the duke's proceedings, and to report everything to the said Clement Redcliffe. He had the highest confidence in this gentleman's sagacity and good intentions, and without at all foreseeing the means which Mr. Redcliffe might recommend for contravening the diabolical plot that was now in full progress against the honour and well-being of the duchess, Christian felt assured that the more facts he could glean in respect to the duke's proceedings, the greater would become the resources and the easier the plans by which Mr. Redcliffe would accomplish the salvation of the duchess and the discomfiture of her foes. All these considerations decided Christian to listen to what was about to take place between Marchmont and Mr. Armytage.

"Your Grace will excuse me for intruding thus early upon your privacy," said Armytage, as he was ushered into the library, "but when I explain myself —"

"You don't mean to say," interrupted the duke, "that you have any fresh favour to ask at my hands, any new demand to make upon me?"

"Indeed, my lord," replied Armytage, "I come to you for that purpose."

“And what is it?” asked the duke. “Why, it is but six or seven months ago since I did all you required me in a certain matter,” thus significantly alluding to the impulse which he had given to the courtship of Octavian Meredith in respect to the beautiful Zoe.

“I am perfectly sensible, my lord,” responded Armytage, “of all your great kindness on that occasion, and I can assure you that nothing but the sternest necessity would bring me hither as a suppliant for an additional proof of your generosity and friendship.”

“On my soul, this language of yours, Armytage,” said the duke, curtly, “is foreboding of a demand of no ordinary magnitude.”

“It is an affair of magnitude to myself,” rejoined Zoe’s father, “but of very trifling consideration to your Grace.”

“Well, hasten and come to the point,” said the duke, “for I have business to attend to elsewhere.”

“This, then, is the point, my lord,” resumed Armytage. “I am in immediate need of fifty thousand pounds.”

“Fifty thousand pounds?” echoed Marchmont, and his voice, to Christian’s ears, sounded as if it were expressive of a perfect consternation.

“Nothing more nor less, my lord,” responded Armytage, with a decisiveness which was far more astonishing to young Ashton.

“But this is ridiculous,” cried the duke. “You — a rich man —”

“Have the kindness to hear me, my lord,” interrupted the speculator. “Some three months back — or nearly so — a certain person in whom I had the utmost faith decamped suddenly, leaving his own affairs in such a frightful condition that a fiat of bankruptcy was issued against him. He has not surrendered to that fiat; indeed he has never since been heard of, and so completely ruined was he — or else so effectually did he realize his available funds, and thereby defraud his creditors — that there is not a shilling in the pound to divide amongst them. But this is not all. He committed forgeries to the amount of thirty thousand pounds, and unfortunately all those forged bills have passed through my hands. My name is upon them; they will be due to-morrow, and the holders will look to me for the liquidation thereof. But in addition to those forged bills,

I am a sufferer to the extent of an additional twenty thousand pounds by this Mr. Preston — ”

“ Preston — Preston? ” said the duke, in a musing tone. “ What — he who lived — ”

“ Not far from me, in the Regent's Park.”

“ Ah, to be sure. The Ashtons — ”

“ I know it, my lord,” said Armytage. “ That young lady who is staying with my daughter, and her brother, who is in your lordship's household, suffered in some way or another by that man's flight.”

“ And is it possible that you are really hampered? ” demanded the duke, in a tone of voice which showed how little agreeable to him was Armytage's request for a loan.

“ I have told your Grace precisely how I am situated,” replied Mr. Armytage, “ and every moment that we expend in conversation is so much time unnecessarily thrown away.”

“ But fifty thousand pounds,” said the duke; “ it is an enormous sum. I do not exceed my income, but I live close up to it, and positively I cannot lay my hands at a moment's warning on a quarter of that amount. Indeed I question whether I have ten thousand at my banker's at this present instant.”

“ The Duke of Marchmont's name is good at his banker's for one hundred thousand, if that were all,” responded Armytage, with the tone of a man who was by no means inclined to take a refusal, nor to hear difficulties started without overruling them.

“ Yes, but one does not always like to borrow of one's banker,” continued the duke.

“ Then I will introduce your Grace to a person in the City — ”

“ What! a money-lender? ” ejaculated Marchmont, as if in deep indignation and disgust.

“ I do not think,” responded Armytage, “ that it would be the first time your lordship had come in contact with usurers. When simply Lord Clandon — ”

“ Enough, Travers, enough,” exclaimed the duke, sternly and curtly.

“ Ah, my lord,” quickly interjected Armytage, “ you have let slip a name which I have long ceased to bear.”

“ Did I? I noticed it not,” said the duke. “ But really,

my dear Armytage, you must raise this money in some other way — ”

“Impossible, my lord. I cannot do it with my own resources. If I went to a money-lender to ask for a loan on my own account, it would be whispered abroad, and I should be ruined. But if your Grace will not borrow of your banker, and if you also have an insuperable objection against applying to a usurer, you may give me your bill or your bond, and with such a security I can at once obtain the funds I require.”

“And about the repayment?” asked the duke. “Consider, Armytage; fifty thousand pounds is no small debt to contract.”

“I am aware of it,” responded Zoe’s father, “but I have no fear in respect to my ability to refund it in due time. I have numerous sums to receive from noblemen and gentlemen in the course of the year — ”

“Then wherefore not render those securities available for your purpose?” ejaculated Marchmont, clutching greedily at the idea which he hoped might save him from having to yield to Armytage’s demand.

“Because, my lord,” was the reply, “if I were to part with those securities, I should lose my clients. The money-lenders into whose hands they fell would take away my patrons from me.”

“But really, Travers — ”

“That name again,” ejaculated Armytage.

“Well, well, you have yourself to blame for it, inasmuch as you ere now recalled those times when you bore that name, and when you were very differently situated from what you are now. Consider all I have done for you — ”

“In one word, my lord,” interrupted Armytage, “am I to have this money? or am I not?”

“And if I say that I cannot possibly accommodate you?” inquired the duke.

“Then I am a ruined man, and I blow my brains out,” was the unhesitating rejoinder given by Zoe’s father. “But, my lord, in such an extreme and frightful case,” he added, in a voice so low that his words only just reached Christian’s ears, “I should not pass out of the world without leaving behind me a written history of my life, and all my experiences of whatsoever sort they may have been.”

There was a long pause in the discourse, and it was at

length broken by the Duke of Marchmont, who said, "At what time to-day must you have this money?"

"It should all be paid into my banker's hands by five o'clock this evening," responded Armytage.

"It shall be there," said the duke, and almost immediately afterward Zoe's father took his departure.

Christian instantaneously quitted the cabinet, for fear lest the duke should happen to look into that room, and he at once ascended to his own chamber. There he sat down to reflect upon what he had heard. He was sorry that he had listened: remorseful feelings arose within him, inasmuch as none of the discourse which had thus reached his ears bore the slightest reference to the horrible conspiracy in progress against the peace and reputation of the Duchess of Marchmont. Christian could not hide from himself the fact that he had done an unhandsome thing; in sooth, he was ashamed of his own conduct. He did not know whether to report all he had learned to Mr. Redcliffe, or not. But still he thought that as he had in the first instance set himself to listen with a special object, he had better communicate the results to that gentleman. And this reflection led him on to another, — which was that it was probable Mr. Redcliffe's plan of proceeding was to gain possession of some secrets in respect to the duke, for the purpose of wielding them as a means for compelling him to do justice to the unfortunate duchess.

"And if this be Mr. Redcliffe's aim," thought Christian to himself, "it is perhaps fortunate after all that I did listen to the conversation between his Grace and Mr. Armytage. I am fighting in a good cause and on the side of justice. The cause is that of an inoffensive, a virtuous, and an excellent lady, against whom the foulest of conspiracies is set on foot, and all weapons which Mr. Redcliffe and myself may use to frustrate the odious scheme are fair and legitimate."

These reflections cheered the youth's spirits, and immediately after dinner he repaired to Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square. He had never been there but once since he and Christina resigned their lodgings in the house, and that once was on the occasion when he and his sister called upon Mrs. Macaulay to inquire whether she could give them any advice toward extricating them from the difficulties wherein they were placed at the time.

Christian knocked at the door, which was speedily opened by Mrs. Macaulay in person, for she had seen him pass her parlour window. Perceiving that he was well dressed and was evidently in comfortable circumstances, the prudent landlady gave him a hearty welcome, which she could safely do, as his appearance relieved her of the idea that he was possibly coming to borrow money, in which case she had an excuse in readiness. She would have been extremely sorry, nothing would have given her greater pleasure, but she had only that very morning paid her rent, and what with this disbursement and her Christmas bills, she was drained quite dry. But fortunately Mrs. Macaulay was spared this tissue of falsehoods, inasmuch as Christian came for no money-hunting purpose whatsoever.

“And how do you do?” she exclaimed, shaking him by the hand, “and how is that dear sister of yours? I have often and often thought of you, and wondered why you never dropped in to take a friendly cup of tea. I had been thinking that I would call on Mrs. Giles to learn if you were still with her, and how you were getting on, but I have been so busy. For the rooms you used to occupy were let — immediately after you left — to an elderly couple. Though between you and me,” she added, lowering her voice to a whisper, and putting on a look of mysterious confidence, “they are no great shakes, for Mr. Johnson — that’s the name — locks up his wine and brandy, and Mrs. Johnson never by any accident leaves the key in the tea-caddy. Now isn’t that mean?”

While thus speaking, Mrs. Macaulay had led the way into her parlour, and Christian, in order to avoid giving an answer to the question with which she had so indignantly concluded her speech, inquired if Mr. Redcliffe was at home.

“No, but he will be in almost directly,” replied Mrs. Macaulay. “Do sit down and take a glass of wine.”

“No, I thank you, not in the middle of the day.”

“Well, and you are quite right,” exclaimed the landlady. “Never drink wine in the middle of the day. I never do, unless it is at a neighbour’s, or a lodger happens to leave a drop at the bottom of a bottle. Not that the Johnsons do. No, bless you! They even decant their port down to the very dregs, and that, you know, is so excessively mean. But what do you want with Mr. Redcliffe?”

"I met him about a week ago," answered Christian, "and he desired me to call upon him."

"He is a very excellent man, though eccentric," resumed Mrs. Macaulay. "I never had a better lodger. Whatever is left cold, he seems entirely to forget, and never asks to have it up. Now that is what I like. His maxim is evidently, 'Live and let live,' and so it should be. He gives very little trouble, and is a man of the fewest possible words that I ever knew. He receives no visitors, and likes to be alone. The other evening it struck me that he might possibly be dull — I recollect I had nothing in the house for my own supper that particular evening — However, that is not to the point. But at nine o'clock, when his supper-tray went up, I followed, and I said in the politest manner, 'Really, Mr. Redcliffe, I can't bear to know that you are always sitting alone, and I thought perhaps you would only deem it an act of courtesy if I just stepped up to have half an hour's chat with you.' But no! he assured me that he preferred being alone, and that he could not think of taking me away from my own domestic avocations. Well, I was obliged to leave him to eat his supper all by himself, and it was so provoking, for I had put on my best cap and gown on purpose, and had made myself look so smart. But isn't he an odd man?"

Christian could have said, if he had liked, that he really did not see anything so particularly odd in Mr. Redcliffe's conduct on the occasion referred to, but he did not choose to wound Mrs. Macaulay's feelings, and so he evaded the necessity of giving a direct reply by observing, "He is a very charitable and generous-hearted man."

"Perhaps then he has done something for you?" exclaimed Mrs. Macaulay, quickly.

"No, it was not necessary," rejoined Christian, — "at least not when I met him a week ago. Previously to then — as you are indeed somewhat aware — I and my poor sister had to encounter severe troubles, but the tide of ill fortune suddenly changed, and on the same day we both obtained situations, — Christina as companion to Lady Octavian Meredith, and I as private secretary to the Duke of Marchmont."

"Dear me, dear me!" ejaculated Mrs. Macaulay; "to think of your good luck. You had really better take a glass

of wine after your walk, and a nice bit of cake? And if my lodgings should happen to become vacant, you will have such opportunities, you know, to recommend them to a Member of Parliament, and you can speak an excellent word in my favour, for you recollect how good I always was to you both."

Christian certainly must have been troubled with a very short memory at the time, for he could not recollect any particular boon conferred upon himself and his sister by Mrs. Macaulay, unless indeed it were the recommendation to Mr. Samuel Emanuel, which, however well-meant, had nevertheless entailed upon his sister nothing but insult. As she continued to press the refreshment of wine and cake, — both, be it understood, having descended from Mr. Redcliffe's apartments, — he again declined the offer, but with a becoming courtesy.

"And so you are secretary to a duke?" she exclaimed, surveying Christian with as much admiration as if he were some rare animal just brought over from distant parts and lodged in the Zoölogical Gardens, "and you must therefore sit alone with his Grace for hours and hours. Well, I never spoke to a duke in my life, and I don't think I ever saw a live one, — at least not to my knowledge. But I saw a dead duke once. It was in Edinburgh, during poor dear Mr. Macaulay's time, for to tell you the truth, he was an undertaker, and I went with him when he measured the body for the coffin. And your sister is companion to Lady Octavian Meredith? and I suppose her ladyship makes much of your dear Christina? Well, I am delighted to find that you have got on so well in the world. You will make your fortunes. Ah! I never shall forget how I cried that time when you came and told me how Mr. Emanuel acted. I didn't choose to shed tears in your presence, because I was afraid it would dispirit you both, but when you were gone, I sat down and did have a good cry, and that's the truth of it. Dear me, to think of those Emanuels. Why, I knew Samuel Emanuel when he was an orange boy, selling his fruit to the passengers that went off by the coaches from the White Horse, Piccadilly. Then he took to selling knives with twenty-four blades, not one of which, between you and me, would even cut so much as your nail. Next I found Mr. Samuel Emanuel going about with a bag at his back,

and Heaven only knows how many hats piled up on the top of his head, so that he looked like a walking stack of chimneys with a number of black chimney-pots stuck one above the other. Next I remember him standing in front of a little, poking, beggarly, second-hand clothes' shop in Holywell Street, his wife a dirty drab, looking all greasy and oily, and his children playing in the gutter. Then he moved to his present house, which has grown by rapid degrees into — what does he call it? Oh, an emporium! And now he rides in his carriage, and I suppose that if I happened to meet his wife, I must curtsy to her. Ah, what a world this is!”

And then, as if almost overcome by the feelings which this pathetic moral reflection conjured up, Mrs. Macaulay moved in an abstracted manner toward her cupboard, where she poured out and drank off the glass of wine which she had so recently been pressing upon Christian. At this moment there was a double knock at the front door, and the worthy woman exclaimed, as she wiped her lips, “There’s Mr. Redcliffe.”

A few minutes afterward Christian was seated with that gentleman in the apartment on the first floor. Redcliffe received him in the kindest manner, but being a man of very few words, except when it was necessary to speak at length, he soon gave the youth an opportunity of explaining the motive of his visit. Christian told him all that had passed between the Duke of Marchmont and Mr. Armytage, and Redcliffe listened in silence to the narrative.

“I hope, sir,” said the youth, in conclusion, “that you will not think I have done wrong in listening to that discourse?”

“By no means, my young friend,” responded Redcliffe. “We may consider ourselves to be engaged in warfare on behalf of an oppressed lady, and we must not hesitate to avail ourselves of whatsoever weapons accident may put in our hands.”

“That is precisely the view which I took of the matter,” exclaimed Christian, delighted that there should be such an identity of thought on the part of himself and Clement Redcliffe. “Ah, by the bye, I forgot to mention something,” he cried, as a recollection struck him. “Twice during the conversation did the Duke of Marchmont address Mr. Armytage by the name of Travers.”

“Travers?” said Mr. Redcliffe.

“Yes, and it would appear,” continued Christian, “that this was the name which Mr. Armytage formerly bore, when he was not so high up in the world.”

Mr. Redcliffe reflected profoundly for some minutes, and at length he said, with an abruptness which he often displayed, “No, Christian Ashton, you have not done wrong in listening to what took place with those persons. Continue to watch the duke’s movements, gather up whatsoever you may hear passing around you at Marchmont House, store all words and facts in your memory, no matter how trivial they may at the moment appear, and from time to time make your report to me. Rest assured that we will baffle the conspirators, and that the injured duchess shall issue triumphant from amidst the perils which environ her. You will then have done a noble deed, and for whatsoever trouble it may have cost you, you will experience an ample reward in the luxury of your own feelings.”

“Rest assured, sir,” answered Christian, “that I shall follow your advice in all things. Ah! I ought to have mentioned that it is rumoured in the household that we are all going down to the duke’s Hampshire estate of Oaklands in a few days, to remain there until the opening of Parliament in February.”

“And perhaps Mr. Stanhope will be of the party,” observed Redcliffe. “This is no doubt a portion of the plot, — a cunning device for the purpose of throwing the villain Stanhope and the duchess more frequently together. You must let me know when the day of departure is fixed.”

“Ah, sir,” Christian remarked, “the name of Oaklands must be memorable in the Marchmont family, and ominous for the welfare of the duchess.”

“What do you mean?” inquired Redcliffe.

“Have you never heard, sir, of the dreadful tragedy which took place there, about eighteen years ago, and in which the name of a Duchess of Marchmont was so painfully mixed up? I was reading about it the other evening — ”

“But we must take care,” said Redcliffe, with that abruptness which we have before noticed as being to a certain degree characteristic of him, “that another duchess shall not be painfully associated with the name of Oaklands.

Now go, my young friend, I have business to attend to, — letters to write.”

Mr. Redcliffe shook Christian warmly by the hand, and the youth thereupon took his departure.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE EMPTY HOUSE

EVERY day since the night of the fearful murder at the Smedleys' abode, either Bill Scott or his brother passed two or three times along Cambridge Terrace in the Regent's Park, and looked up at a particular house, but on each occasion the observer went away with the air of one who continued to be disappointed in something that he expected to take place. At length, one morning, Bill Scott beheld placards in the windows of that particular house, announcing that the stock of furniture was to be disposed of on the following day, according to the orders of the official assignee in the case of the bankruptcy of Joseph Preston. Bill Scott hastened homeward, and imparted this intelligence to the Burker.

"That's right, my boy," said Barnes, who was smoking a pipe and discussing a pot of porter at the time, "I knowed the bills couldn't be very long afore they was posted up. But you're sure that you and your brother hav'n't dropped a word to them Smedleys about my setting you to watch that partickler house?"

"We hav'n't seen nuffin of the Smedleys ever since the business of t'other night," was Bill Scott's response, "and so we couldn't ha' talked if so be we had wished to do it, which we didn't."

"You are clever chaps, both of you," said the Burker approvingly, though the younger of his two adjutants was not present at the time to receive and acknowledge the compliment. "What a blessed thing it is for you fellers to have a chap like me which is as good as a father to you. When I think that I spent five pounds to give you each a bran-new suit of toggery, bought second-hand at an old

clothes' shop, for you to turn out swell on Sundays, I'm lost in admiration at my own generosity."

"But you make us stick to the rags, though, during the week-days," observed Bill Scott, glancing somewhat sullenly down at his dirty and tattered attire.

"Well, and don't I stick to my own seedy togs during the week?" demanded the Burker, indignantly, and then, as if to compose his feelings, he imbibed half the contents of the pewter pot, having done which, he handed the vessel to Bill Scott. "I tell you what it is, young feller, if we was all three to turn out every day into Swell Street, it would regularly spile us for useful work. There's no gammon about the business; we hav'n't the gentility of cut that makes a chap fit for the swell mob. So we must continue to work on as we does. Look how I have blowed your hides out with good things ever since that affair of last veek; I hav'n't stinted my share of the blunt, I hope. Coffee, hot rolls, and black puddings for breakfast, roast weal or pork, or else biled beef, carrots, and taters, from the slap-bang shop for dinner, sassengers or eel-pies, and baked taters, for supper, with no end of malt and blue-ruin by way of lush. Now that's what I call living, and if the lord mayor and all his aldermen can beat it, then I'm a Dutchman, which I verry well know I ain't, 'cos why my father was a out an' out true-bred Englishman. Ah, Bill, he was a highly respectable man, — he was. I've a right to be proud of his name, and I revere his memory. He was in the priggin' line for a matter of forty year, wisited foreign parts for the good of his country, and died there. Ah, he knowed what Botany Bay and Norfolk Island was. I tell yer what, Bill, he was like the monkey that had seen the world which you read of in the fable-book."

"And who was your mother?" asked Bill Scott. "I never heerd you speak a word about her."

"Well, she was respectable in her way, too," answered the Burker, when he had refilled and lighted his pipe. "She took in washing and stolen goods, and the latter was a precious sight more lucrative than the former. When my father got lagged — which in plain English he did, so it cost him nuffin, you understand, to go abroad and see the world —"

"Well, when he was lagged, what then?" asked Bill Scott.

“ Why, my mother took on so that what with gin and grief she turned up her toes one fine morning, and the parish was so uncommon kind and had such a respect for her memory that it purvided her with a funeral free gratis for nuffin. But my grandfather — he was the chap, Bill. He could turn his hand to anythink. I’ve heerd my father sit for hours and speak in admiration of his father afore him. That was the great Mr. Barnes, that was — the pride of the family. He was a horse-stealer.”

“ And a wery good thing too,” said Bill Scott.

“ Yes, but that warn’t all. He was a coiner into the bargain,” continued Barney the Burker, as he thus eulogized his ancestors, “ and what’s more, he was the smasher of his own manufactured blunt. When times was bad in that way, and the markets got glutted with base coin, he took to another perfession. That was thimble-rigging, and he thought nuffin of making his ten-pun’ note in a day at a country fair or market, or on a race-course. And then he was a perfect genelman in his habits, went to bed drunk every night of his life as reglar as clockwork.”

“ And how did he end?” asked Bill Scott.

“ As a genelman should,” responded the Burker; “ he went out of this life in the least possible space of time when St. Sepulchre’s clock struck eight one serene morning in May, and he didn’t struggle more than half a minute as he danced on nuffin in the presence of five thousand genelmen and ladies which had collected together to do him honour. Now that’s what I call being a great man, and I may be excoused if I appear rayther wain of that ancestor of mine, the great Mr. Barnes.”

“ Ah, I should rayther think so,” said Bill Scott, admiringly.

“ Why, you see,” continued the Burker, as he smoked his pipe in a leisurely manner, “ it’s the natur’ of human beings to be proud of their ancestors. Wasn’t we reading in a veekly paper t’other day that there’s some great dukes — I forget their names again — which is as proud as peacocks ’cos why their great, great, great-grandmothers was what they call ladies of easy wirtue in the time of King Charles. So with the glorious example of the aristocracy afore my eyes, I may be allowed, I hope, to have a nat’ral pride in my own ancestors.”

"To be sure," said Bill Scott, approvingly, "but perhaps you will tell me why you've sent either me or Tim every day for the last week up into the Regent's Park to have a look whether the furnitur' is still in that there house, or whether there's bills up to say it's all to be sold by auction."

"'Cos why it come to my knowledge — never mind how," answered the Burker, "that the chap which used to live in that house was made a bankrupt some time ago, and so I knowed wery well that as the things wasn't yet sold off, they would be soon, and that's the reason I set you fellers to watch and see."

"Well, but what has all that got to do with you?" asked Bill Scott. "I suppose you ain't a-going to take the house and set up in business as a genelman."

"No, I ain't a-going to retire from my perfession yet awhile," answered the Burker. "I haven't made my fortune."

"But you got a jolly lot of swag t'other night, though," observed the youthful thief, — "a matter of a hundred and twenty pounds for yourself. Them Smedleys ought to have let me and Tim go shears."

"Not a bit on't," said the Burker, sternly. "You wos only sarving an apprenticeship on that particklar night, and we ought to thank the Smedleys and old Mother Webber that they didn't make me fork out summat on your account as a premium on your indenturs'."

"Now, do you know what I would have done if I'd been you?" asked Bill Scott, after a pause.

"How can I know unless you tell me? What?"

"I'd have kept the whole of that there swag for myself," returned the youth, with dogged dryness; "I'd have stuck to the blunt, s'elp me tater."

"Then you would have done a thing which would have kivered you with shame and disgrace," rejoined the Burker, with a tone and look of surly indignation. "Haven't you larned that wery excellent maxim, 'Honour amung thieves?' If not, I had better punch it into your great thick head at once," and Barney looked very much as if he intended to suit the action to the word.

"Come, none of that," exclaimed Scott, shrinking back in terror at the ferocious ruffian. "I didn't mean no harm."

"Then don't go for to start such immoral notions again,"

said Mr. Barnes, sternly, and contenting himself with this warning, he spared his youthful and delectable pupil the punching process that had been menaced.

"You haven't told me what you mean to do about that there house on Cambridge Terrace," said Bill Scott, after another pause.

"And what's more, I don't mean to tell you," answered the Burker. "It's a little private business of my own, and you had better not go and blab about it, or I should precious soon sarve you as I did that chap down at the Smedleys' t'other night. You and Tim can amuse yourselves with cards or dominoes and a pot of porter after supper to-morrow night, till I come home, for I des say I shall have to be out an hour or two. You have had a veek's holiday, and you and Tim must get to business to-morrow. The blunt I got t'other night won't last for ever, and we must make hay while the sun shines."

It is not however necessary to record any more of the conversation which took place, on this particular occasion, between Barney the Burker and his worthy pupil, for we must pass on to the narration of other matters.

On the following day the sale took place at the house which Joseph Preston had inhabited on Cambridge Terrace, and by eight o'clock in the evening all the "lots" were cleared away, according to the terms duly specified in the catalogue, of which Barney the Burker had obtained a copy, so that he might judge whether the house would be left empty after the sale.

It was between ten and eleven o'clock at night that the ruffian issued from his lodgings, where he left the brothers Scott engaged in the manner which he had sketched forth on the preceding day. Barnes directed his steps toward the Regent's Park, and on arriving in the vicinage of Cambridge Terrace, he carefully scrutinized all the windows of the house where the sale had been. No lights were to be seen anywhere in the front, and Barney, passing around to the back of the terrace, examined the premises from that point. The result was the same; not a single light was visible in any of the windows. A bill was posted against the stable doors, and by the light of an adjacent lamp, Barney was enabled to read the large print thereon. It announced that the house was to be let on lease, applications to be made

to an auctioneer in Albany Street, or else to the official assignee under Joseph Preston's bankruptcy.

"That's all right," said the Burker to himself; "applications isn't to be made upon the premises, and that's a sign there's nobody left in charge of 'em. Sharp feller, that assignee. If once you puts a man and his wife into a house to show it, and lets 'em live there free gratis for nothin' until it's let, I'm blowed if it will ever let at all. They are sure to stall off the ladies and genelmen as comes to look at it, by saying the dreanage is bad. That's a rule as invariable as a judge pumping up his tears when he sentences a feller to death."

While making these very intellectual and erudite reflections, Barney the Burker was slowly passing away from the vicinage of the stables in order that he might have another look at the front part of the house, so as fully to make up his mind as to the particular point in which he should attempt an entry, for such was the object he had in view. It did not, however, appear very safe to operate on the front, because the shadow of a policeman was descried at the farther end of the terrace, and carriages were ever and anon proceeding in both directions, probably on account of soirées or parties being given at some of the adjacent dwellings. But on the other hand, the Burker had an almost equal objection to the attempt of a forcible entry by the rear of the premises, inasmuch as belated grooms connected with the adjoining stables might be about. So Barney went and took a walk in some secluded portion of the Regent's Park, to reflect upon the most prudential course to be pursued under existing circumstances, and likewise to while away the time until a later hour, when the carriages should have ceased to roll and the belated grooms should have retired to rest.

The church clock in Albany Street had proclaimed the hour of one in the morning, as Barney the Burker retraced his way to the rear of the premises, where he had decided upon making the attempt. The coast was clear, and a small crowbar, dexterously as well as powerfully used, speedily forced open the door of the coach-house. Entering that place, he carefully closed and bolted the door behind him. One of his capacious pockets furnished a dark lantern; this was quickly lighted by means of matches, with which

he was also provided, and he now took a survey of the premises. The stables were behind the coach-house, and thence there was no means of ingress to the yard or little garden, whichever it might be, in the rear of the empty house itself. He ascended a ladder into the upper story, which he found to be divided into two compartments, — one serving as a hay-loft, the other as a chamber for a groom or a coachman, and in this chamber there was a window looking into the yard which lay between the stabling premises and the back of the house itself.

The dark lantern was reconsigned to the Burker's pocket; he carefully and noiselessly opened the window, and by means of a rope which he likewise had with him lowered himself down into the yard. Creeping cautiously along the shade of the wall which separated that yard from the adjoining one, so that no light from the back windows of the neighbouring dwellings should reveal his form to any one who might chance to be looking forth from his bedchamber, Barnes reached the back door of the house, and this he opened by means of his crowbar, with but little difficulty and loss of time. He was now inside the house; his entry had been successfully and rapidly accomplished. He listened with suspended breath, for notwithstanding the inference he had so shrewdly drawn from the announcements of the printed placard, he knew it was still within the range of possibility that there might be some person left in charge of the premises. But all appeared to be as silent as the tomb.

"Let me see," thought the Burker to himself, "the front bedroom on the second floor. Them was the words."

He accordingly began to ascend the staircase in as noiseless a manner as possible, pausing every now and then to assure himself that all continued still. In a few minutes he reached the particular room which he sought, but we should observe that from time to time he drew forth his dark lantern and threw the light around for a moment, so as to make himself thoroughly aware of the topography of the premises.

The house was completely denuded of all its furniture, and occasionally the naked boards of the staircases and the landings creaked beneath the Burker's tread. Still no other sounds reached his ears, and he felt tolerably well assured

that he was the only human being at that moment inside the building. He reached, as we have said, the chamber which he sought; again his lantern was produced, but he was cautious where he threw the light, for fear lest it should be observed outside by the policeman on his beat. The shutters were however closed, and thus there was less danger of the rays penetrating forth. Barney held the lantern low down, and in such a manner that its light fell only upon the floor. Then he counted the boards from the left-hand side, until he had numbered eleven, and there he stopped. Drawing a brad-awl from his pocket, he stuck it as deep into the wood as the force of his hand could drive it without making any noise, and it served as a handle to lift up the plank, which was previously so firm and secure in its setting that no one, by merely treading over it, would by its oscillation or yielding have been led to suspect it was thus movable. The cross-beams formed so many different recesses, and these the Burker examined one after the other. But his countenance grew more and more blank, or, rather, expressive of a sullen, savage disappointment, as he found nothing.

"Well, I'm blowed," he said to himself, "if this isn't odd. One of three things must have happened. Either the chap lied in his letter, or else the Smedleys have been aforehand with me, or else the men which conducted the sale must have twigged the secret of the plank and got possession of what I'm searching arter."

But still fancying that he might have overlooked the object for which he had come, and which had cost him so much trouble, the Burker made a more careful scrutiny of the various recesses revealed by the extracted plank. Into each recess did he throw the light of his lantern; he thrust his hand in, and felt as far as he could reach on either side underneath the boards which still remained fastened down. For more than a quarter of an hour was he thus engaged, but he found nothing. With a low but terrible imprecation, he was compelled to give up the search, and without taking the trouble to restore the plank to its place, he issued from the chamber.

Descending the stairs as noiselessly as he had mounted them, he reached the hall, and on arriving there, he took out his lantern to throw a light around, for he had forgotten the precise geography of the place.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, as the beams fell upon the front door, "this is precious odd."

The Burker's surprise may be accounted for, when we inform the reader that the lantern had suddenly made him aware that the chain of the front door was hanging down, and that the lock had been wrenched off. He examined the door still more carefully; the bolts were drawn back, and it was only kept closed by the tightness with which it fitted into its setting.

"It's as clear as daylight," said the Burker to himself, with a deep concentration of fierce and savage feeling, "that some folks has been aforehand with me, and who could it be if not them Smedleys? Well, if this isn't a dirty shabby trick, I'm blowed!"

The respectable Mr. Barnes did not reflect that he on his side had been all along endeavouring to outwit the Smedleys in the object for which he himself had come, or at least that he had kept his design altogether secret from them. He considered himself deeply wronged, and hence that expression of his injured feelings.

"But how the deuce did they get in?" he said to himself, perfectly bewildered. "That they went out of this here door — if it was raly them — is as plain as a pikestaff, but how did they get in first of all? They didn't force the door. The lock was broken off by some one inside, where I'm standing now. Ah, I can guess!" he ejaculated to himself, as a sudden light flashed in unto his mind. "They must have hid theirselves inside the house arter the sale, — perhaps in the coal-cellar, or what-not. A deuced clever trick, by jingo! But I will see if I can't be even with them yet."

His angry feelings were the least thing appeased by the resolution to which he had just arrived, and returning the dark lantern to his pocket, he issued forth from the front door, closing it behind him by the aid of the brass handle, and hurried away, unseen by a single soul.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TWO NEIGHBOURING HOUSES

IN one of the finest streets at the West End of the town — but the name of which we suppress for reasons which will be presently obvious — there are an elegant milliner's establishment and a handsome tailor's shop next door to each other. The two houses, which are lofty, spacious, and of imposing appearance, belong to a uniform range, the white fronts and large windows of which, as well as the general style of architecture, produce the impression which is conveyed by the best streets of Paris.

Through the immense panes of plate glass in the milliner's shop may be seen an exquisite and elegant assortment of caps, bonnets, laces, veils, ribbons, silks, etc., and the *facia* over the shop front indicates that the establishment belongs to Madame Angelique. The same name is repeated, but in miniature letters, on a brass plate on the shop door. The exterior would lead the passer-by to imagine that a respectable as well as a thriving business is carried on by Madame Angelique, and everything seems to be done to render the appearance of the shop as imposing and as attractive as possible. Nowhere are the windows more transparently clean, nowhere the paint fresher, nowhere the brasswork on the lower part of the window and on the door so brilliantly resplendent. If you enter the establishment, the impression produced by the exterior is sustained and confirmed. The shelves are arranged with neat drab-coloured pasteboard boxes, edged with pink, and which are speedily taken down to display their exquisite contents of laces or costly silks, their caps or their gloves, their trimmings or artificial flowers, to the eyes of customers. The mahogany counter is scrupulously burnished, the chairs have crimson cushions, and in

the evening the shop is a blaze of gaslight. Sometimes it is Madame Angelique herself who attends upon her lady customers; at other times it is a genteel-looking deputy of a certain age, and who speaks French with the finest Parisian accent, but English with scarcely any describable accent at all. A glass door at the extremity of the spacious shop frequently stands half-open, and reveals some dozen of workwomen in a large room comfortably furnished, and where dresses are made up or caps and bonnets trimmed. A very handsome circular staircase, with bronze balustrades, and carpeted all over, leads up into the show-rooms, which occupy the whole of the first floor. These are sumptuously furnished; lustres, vases, and ormolu clocks embellish the marble mantelpieces, and are reflected in the immense mirrors with their massive gilt frames. Splendid chandeliers, all of the finest cut glass, hang to the ceiling, and these at dusk are lighted with wax candles, which flood the apartments with as brilliant a lustre as that which prevails in a West End saloon when a banquet or ball is given. The carpets in the show-rooms are so thick that the delicate feet of lady visitresses are completely lost in them; the patterns are of the richest description, and match well with the deep crimson paper of the walls and the general style of the furniture. The costliest as well as the most elegant dresses are to be seen in these apartments, and whichever way a visitress may turn, she finds her form reflected either in a mirror against the wall, or in an immense oval *psyche*. There are few chairs in these rooms, but numbers of sumptuous ottomans, covered with velvet, are ranged around. These ottomans are so many large chests or boxes, the lids of which are made to lift up, cushion and all, and from the mysterious depths of the interior Madame Angelique or the show women produce the newest elegancies of Parisian fashion, — such as bonnets, caps, and materials for ladies' dresses.

The show women themselves are middle-aged persons, but dressed with the utmost taste and neatness, of affable and obliging manners, and bearing the stamp of unquestionable respectability. Neither in the shop down-stairs, nor in the show-rooms, are any of the females very young or very good-looking; so that if a somewhat particular lady, or an uxorious husband accompanying his wife, pay a visit to Madame Angelique's establishment, nothing meets the

eye to induce a suspicion as to its perfect propriety. We should add that the young women themselves in the work-room seem to have been chosen as much for their absence of personal charms as, we may suppose, for their skilfulness with the needle, and perhaps the door of communication between that room and the shop is intentionally left open, to convince such straight-laced lady or particular husband accompanying his wife, as those whom we have alluded to, that in every possible department of Madame Angelique's business the females employed are of modest demeanour, as well as of an age and appearance which may defy the breath of scandal.

But then, Madame Angelique's house is a very large one, and there are floors higher than the show-rooms. Most of Madame Angelique's customers know that she is a widow, and that only two or three of her principal dependents live on the premises. What, then, does she do with all the upper part of her spacious house? If occasionally some curious old dowager or ingenuous young lady happens to put the question, Madame Angelique, with one of her most amiable smiles, speaks of the immense stock of goods which she is constantly compelled to keep on hand, and thus promptly attributes a use and a purpose to all the up-stairs rooms which are not occupied by herself, her principal women, and her domestics. In short, the establishment of which we are speaking has the appearance and the general reputation of being one of the most respectable, as it is assuredly one of the most fashionable and best frequented, *magasins des modes* to be found at the West End of London.

Before we pass away to a description of her neighbours, we must say a few words of Madame Angelique herself. She is about fifty years of age, of a comely and matronly appearance. She is a French woman, as her name, her manners, and her speech indicate. Somewhat stout, she is nevertheless bustling and active, and she thinks no trouble too great to bestow upon a customer. Indeed, her bearing is as urbane, her smile as complacent, and the expressions of her gratitude as great, toward a lady who merely drops in to buy a three and sixpenny ribbon or a half-guinea cap, as they are to another customer who leaves behind an order for a twenty-guinea dress. There is nothing obtrusive in her politeness; it is measured to the utmost nicety. She will

only press her goods to a certain point, and no farther; she will expatiate upon how much this or that article is sure to become the complexion of the particular customer with whom she is treating at the time, but she will not too persuasively force the said articles upon such customer. Thus she gives universal satisfaction, and as for her bills, she only sends them in once a year, about three months after Christmas, remaining perfectly satisfied if they be liquidated any time before the ensuing Christmas. It were almost needless to add that she herself dresses with the most unexceptionable taste, in a manner becoming to her years, with the slightest dash of a Parisian coquetry, but yet so far removed from being outré that it is impossible to make her look ridiculous. She uses rouge and pearl-powder with so much skill that only those ladies who are equally skilful in the mysteries of the toilet could discern how much her complexion is indebted to those accessories; and her smile reveals so admirable a set of teeth that even the wearers of false ones themselves would find it difficult to attribute Madame Angelique's to the succedaneous art of a renowned dentist in the same street.

The tailor's shop next door is as handsome in its own way as the *magasin* of Madame Angelique. It is the establishment of no cheap clothier; none of the exquisitely fashioned articles of raiment displayed in the window are vulgarized by ticketed prices. M. Bertin — for the tailor is a Frenchman, as Madame Angelique is a Frenchwoman — would scorn the idea of selling pantaloons at sixteen shillings, surtouts at two guineas, and paletots at two ten. No suit of clothes is sent out from his establishment under seven guineas. His name is in gilt letters over the shop front, in brass letters ingeniously stuck on to the middle pane of plate glass, and repeated on a brass plate on the shop door. Everything looks businesslike and respectable, — yes, and wealthy also, at M. Bertin's; and if a passer-by glances up at the windows on the drawing-room or higher floors he beholds rich draperies and the tops of gilt back chairs, all indicative of the sumptuous interior of M. Bertin's habitation. As for M. Bertin himself, he is a short, middle-aged man, very active and very obsequious, tolerably good-looking for his years, exquisitely dressed, making a large display of watch-chain festooning over his waistcoat, of diamond

studs to the cambric front of his shirt, and of rings upon his fingers. He speaks English tolerably well, but with a strong accent, and as he is amassing a fortune in this country, he loves it ten thousand times better than his own.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening that the Duke of Marchmont strolled into M. Bertin's shop, which, as well as his neighbour's, was brilliantly lighted with gas, and after exchanging a few words of little moment with the foreman who was behind the counter, his Grace passed through a side door into the private passage. He ascended the staircase with the air of one who was perfectly well acquainted with the geography of the premises, and who felt himself perfectly at home in this proceeding. Mounting to the second floor, he tapped gently at a door, which was immediately opened by a middle-aged and discreet-looking female domestic.

"The young ladies there, Annette?" inquired the duke, with a significant glance thrown across the room into which the door opened.

"Yes, my lord," was the woman's response.

"Disengaged?"

"Yes, my lord."

Without another word, Annette led the way across the room, which was handsomely furnished, and advanced straight up to a large mirror which seemed to be suspended in the usual manner against the solid wall, though reaching down to the carpet. It was however in reality a door, which opened by means of a secret spring, and the woman tapped at what appeared to be the back part of a closet thus revealed. That woodwork against which she knocked was speedily opened in the form of another door; the woman stood aside, and the duke passed in to the place whither these singular and mysterious means of communication led. A beautiful girl, elegantly dressed, held that inner door open to afford the duke admission, and when he had entered, she closed it again. It was an immense mirror, suspended like the one in the room from which he had emerged, and when the door which it formed was shut, no one, unless in the secret, could have possibly entertained the slightest suspicion that it was a door at all.

The reader has perhaps by this time comprehended that the Duke of Marchmont had passed from the tailor's house

into the milliner's; or if there be any such reader so obtuse of intellect as not to comprehend this fact, we now beg to announce it. Yes, his Grace of Marchmont was in one of the higher rooms of Madame Angelique's abode. It was splendidly furnished, with mirrors, draperies, pictures, and statues. But these were the least attractions there, in comparison with four lovely beings in female shape, who seemed to be the presiding deities of this luxurious apartment. One had opened the mysterious door, as already stated, to give the duke admission. She was a fine, well-grown, and exceedingly handsome young woman, of about two and twenty. Her glossy brown hair was arranged in bands, with an artificial flower like a camellia on one side of the head. Her dress, of fawn-coloured satin, was made very low in the body, revealing a gorgeous bust; the richest lace trimmed the upper part of the corsage, both back and front, and ribbons depended from the shoulders. Her arms were bare, and splendid arms they were, — a trifle too robust perhaps for statue-like symmetry, but plump, well rounded, and dazzlingly white. This young woman was a native of England, and she was known to the Duke of Marchmont, as well as perhaps to others, by the Christian name of Lettice, this being short for Letitia.

The second divinity of the place whom we must notice was a French girl, named Armantine, and who was of ravishing loveliness. Her features were delicately formed and faultlessly regular. Her hair, a shade darker than the English girl's, was arranged in a sort of Greek knot, and it shone with a rich gloss, all its own. She too was elegantly apparelled, — the light satin dress setting off the slender symmetry of her shape, and revealing much of the well-formed bust, which was less exuberant and more statuesque than the voluptuous contours of Miss Lettice.

The third female occupant of the room was a German girl, with masses of rich auburn hair clustering down upon her brilliantly white neck and shoulders. She too was eminently beautiful, but with a sensuously outlined profile, and large, languishing blue eyes. Her figure combined slenderness of shape with rich development of contours. Of the four she alone had not her arms bare; not that she had any reason to conceal them on account of defective modelling: it was simply a matter of taste that she wore

the elegant Parisian sleeves which at that time had just come into fashion. This German beauty was known to the Duke of Marchmont by the Christian name of Linda.

The fourth was a charming Irish girl, with mischievous eyes and piquant features, -- the dewy lips expressive of much feeling, and the form combining elegance of symmetry with lithe and willowy grace. She answered to the name of Eveleen. And now we may add, in respect to all four that they possessed teeth white as pearls, and that in this respect, if an apple of discord had been thrown amongst them, no Trojan umpire could have honestly and conscientiously awarded it to any one in particular. In short, Lettice, Armantine, Linda, and Eveleen were assuredly four of the loveliest specimens of the female sex that could possibly be found grouped together in the same apartment.

That the Duke of Marchmont was no stranger to them was evident by the manner in which they greeted him on his arrival. The restraint which his rank might elsewhere have imposed was here altogether lost sight of, as will be seen from the way in which the young females respectively addressed him.

"Is it you, my dear Marchmont?" exclaimed Lettice, the English woman, as she gave him admittance by means of the mysterious mirror-contrived doorway, and she spoke in a rich flutelike voice, which seemed quite appropriate to the fine, well-developed, and imposing style of her beauty.

"That wicked Marchmont, who always makes me drink so much champagne," exclaimed Mademoiselle Armantine, who spoke English with only just so much of a foreign accent as to render it interesting when floating on her soft, silvery tones.

"It is just why Marchmont is welcome," said Linda, the German girl, who also spoke English well, "because he is sure to give us champagne."

"Hold your tongues, you selfish creatures," cried Eveleen, the Irish girl, with that interesting intonation of voice which gives such a peculiar charm to the Hibernian accent upon the lip of a well-bred daughter of the Emerald Isle. "Let us welcome him in another way," and with sportive joyousness she wound her arms about the duke's neck, at the same time kissing him upon either cheek.

“Oh, if that is the sort of welcome you have in store for me,” said Marchmont, “pray let it be given at once.”

Thereupon Miss Lettice folded him in her embrace; Mademoiselle Armantine was the next to dispense her caresses, and though the German girl came last, yet she held him longest in her arms.

“And now, my fair ones,” exclaimed the duke, laughing with the air of a man who purposely sought this kind of society for the purpose of escaping from more serious, and perhaps unpleasant reflections, “let us have champagne and fruit, and we will pass a merry evening together. But first of all I must have a few words with Madame Angelique, and in private too. I have something of importance to speak to her about.”

“You know where to find her,” said Lettice; “she is in her own room at this moment. Go quick, Marchmont, and if you remain too long, we will all four come in a body, armed with champagne-bottles, and with forced fruit as missiles, to drive you back as our captive.”

“Chains of festooning flowers should not be omitted from the implements of your coercion,” answered the duke, forcing himself to speak in a gay manner, though, as he opened a door opposite the mysteriously contrived mirror, he could scarcely keep back a sigh which rose up into his very throat.

Closing the door behind him, he traversed the well-carpeted passage, and tapped at another door on the same story. The well-known voice of Madame Angelique bade him enter, and he found her seated at table with none other than her neighbour M. Bertin. There was an exquisite supper upon the table, — a repast consisting of succulent French delicacies, served up on silver plate, and flanked with bottles of champagne, Burgundy, and Bordeaux. The room was a small one, but furnished in the most luxurious manner. It was madame’s boudoir, and a door facing the one by which the duke had entered communicated with her bed-chamber. M. Bertin rose and bowed obsequiously, but Madame Angelique contented herself with a half-courteous, half-familiar smile, at the same time indicating a chair.

“I am sorry to disturb you, my dear madam, in the midst of so agreeable a *tête-à-tête*,” said the duke, speaking in the French tongue, with which he was perfectly conver-

sant, "but I have some business of importance to discuss with you. Shall I return presently?"

"By no means, my lord," answered Madame Angelique, in a most gracious manner, for she doubtless well knew that the duke's gold would indemnify her well for any little inconvenience she might experience on the score of the delicacies of the supper-table getting cold.

"And it just happens," said the discreet and obsequious M. Bertin, "that I have a couple of letters to write —"

"Which need not take you more than a quarter of an hour," observed the duke, thus indicating the interval that he wished the tailor to remain absent from the milliner's boudoir.

M. Bertin bowed and withdrew, but so far from returning into his own house, or having any letters at all to write, he merely lounged away the prescribed quarter of an hour in an adjoining room. Meanwhile let us see what took place between the Duke of Marchmont and Madame Angelique.

"I believe, my excellent friend," said his Grace, "that you make all my wife's dresses?"

"I have for some years enjoyed the honour of her Grace's patronage," was the milliner's response.

"And mine, too, for that matter," exclaimed the duke, with a laugh. "But joking apart, have you made any dresses for her Grace recently?"

"At this very moment, my lord," answered Madame Angelique, "I have three or four in hand for the Duchess of Marchmont."

"Good," ejaculated the duke. "Of course you can make duplicates?"

"Make duplicates, my lord," cried the milliner, with a most genuine amazement.

"To be sure. Why not?"

"Oh, of course, if your Grace wishes it, I could make a dozen of precisely the same sort."

"Never mind the dozen," rejoined Marchmont; "a duplicate of each will answer all my purpose. But recollect, the work must be so well done and the resemblances so exact that her Grace's own maid, if appealed to upon the subject, could not possibly suspect that there were duplicates of her mistress's raiment."

"All this can be done, my lord," replied Madame Angelique, "and without for a single moment attempting to pry

impertinently into your Grace's reasons and objects, pardon me for expressing a hope that no evil consequences will redound to myself."

"I will take care of that," answered the duke. "When will these dresses be ready?"

"Her Grace tells me, my lord, that you are all going into the country the day after to-morrow, and the dresses which her Grace has ordered must consequently be sent home to-morrow night."

"And when can the counterparts be in readiness?" inquired Marchmont.

"It will take a good week, my lord —"

"A week? nonsense!" ejaculated Marchmont.

"I cannot possibly get them done in less time. Say on the sixth evening hence," added Madame Angelique, after a little reflection.

"Very good," replied the duke; "that must suffice."

"They shall be positively at Marchmont House by nine o'clock on the day named —"

"No, you must not send them direct to Marchmont House," exclaimed the duke; "that will never do. There must be no trace — But how can it be managed?"

"Shall I forward the dresses in a box to Oaklands, my lord?" asked the milliner.

"A box so light as that will be with nothing but woman's trumpery in it would seem suspicious if addressed to me. And then, too, it is absolutely necessary for my purpose that there should exist no possible clue — Ah, I recollect, I have an unsophisticated, unsuspecting, docile, and obedient young man in my service. Let me see? this is Wednesday. Well, on Tuesday evening next, at nine o'clock, this young man shall be in a cab at the door, and you must have the dresses delivered to him in a box by one of your most confidential women."

"They are all confidential, my lord," responded Madame Angelique, "or else I should not have been able to sustain my establishment unsuspected as I have done for so many years."

"Well, let this be the arrangement, then," resumed Marchmont. "At the hour and on the evening just agreed to, the name of Christian Ashton will be sent in to you, and

you will know what it means. But mind! he is not to know what the dresses are."

"Decidedly not, my lord," exclaimed the milliner. "Your Grace's commands shall be followed in every respect. Has your Grace any further instructions?"

"Yes, there is one thing more," proceeded the duke. "You will have to spare Lettice Rodney for a short time. I need her services. Do you consent? You know very well that you will be paid handsomely for all that you do to serve me."

"Your Grace can command in my house as well as if it were your own," responded Madame Angelique.

"Good," said Marchmont. "Then I will make my own arrangements with Lettice. You are convinced that she is perfectly trustworthy, that she is one to whom may be confided a task of no ordinary importance? Remember, she will be well paid, as you yourself will be —"

"I can rely upon her," exclaimed Madame Angelique. "Has she not been with me since she was fifteen? Does she not regard me as her own mother? Have I not done everything for her?"

"To be sure, to be sure!" ejaculated the duke. "But I have often wondered what the deuce you do with the girls when they begin to fade away and are wearing out."

"I give them money and send them abroad," answered the milliner. "Ah, your Grace little thinks how many I have supplied to a house in Paris. Change of air soon brings them around a bit, and they go on well for a few years in France, until at length they get down into the streets and end by dying in the hospitals. But what else can they expect?"

"What else indeed?" said the duke, and with this heartless assent to the vile woman's observation, he rose from his seat.

"By the bye, my lord," cried Madame Angelique, beckoning his Grace toward her with an air of mysterious confidence, "I have found out such an extraordinary thing. One of my spies — and your Grace knows that I always have several upon the lookout —"

"Well, what is it?" asked the duke. "Something new in the female line?"

"Something new indeed, my lord, if it is possible to get hold of them by any sort of inveigling —"

“Them?” cried the duke. “You speak of more than one.”

“I speak of two, my lord,” answered Madame Angelique. “It is just this: in a certain suburb of London there lives an Eastern lady of the most ravishing beauty, and she has in her household a Hindu woman as grandly handsome as herself, though of a different style. I have seen them both. They ride out occasionally in a carriage in their own neighbourhood, though for the most part they live quietly and unostentatiously, and what on earth they are doing in England, I cannot tell. The worst of it is, there are English servants in the establishment — ”

“The best of it, you mean,” ejaculated the duke, “because you can easily bribe those English servants to your purposes.”

“I fear not, my lord. My confidential agent,” continued Madame Angelique, “who first told me of these rare Oriental exotics, endeavoured to sound the steward or butler, or whatever he is, and he met with such a cold reception that it would not do to attempt anything farther through those means. Not that I despair of getting these Orientals by some means or another into my power, only of course I should run a great risk — ”

“Which is as much as to give me to understand,” interrupted Marchmont, with a smile, “that the reward must be commensurate. Well, my dear Madame Angelique, do not speak a syllable upon this subject to any others of your patrons, but prosecute your inquiries, prepare your plans, spread your nets, and wait till I return from Oaklands. You know that I can be liberal — ”

“Your Grace’s commands in this respect, as in all others, shall be paramount with me.”

“Ah, by the bye,” said the duke, “I had better give you a trifle on account of the affair of the dresses. How much have you there?” he asked, as he tossed a handful of bank-notes into the milliner’s lap.

“Two hundred pounds exactly, my lord,” was the response. “My best gratitude — ”

“Oh, never mind the gratitude,” cried Marchmont. “And now good night. I am going to pass a few hours with the young ladies. I have ordered champagne and other refreshments — ”

"Splendid forced fruit from Covent Garden to-day, my lord," said Madame Angelique. "Melons, pineapples, grapes —"

"Well, send up all you have got. And now I hope you will amuse yourself with our worthy friend Bertin, who is discretion personified. I am sure if it were not for you two, I don't know what gentlemen and ladies having pretty little intrigues to carry on could possibly do."

"Well, my lord, I do flatter myself that neighbour Bertin and I carry on the business with a discretion that is unparalleled. But then," continued the milliner, "so long as we have such excellent patrons as your Grace, we are rewarded for our trouble and anxiety."

The duke smiled at the thought of Madame Angelique's anxiety as he glanced at the well-spread table, and nodding her a familiar good night, he quitted the room. Returning to the luxuriously furnished apartment where he had left the four young ladies, he found a table spread with all kinds of wine, fruits, and other light refreshments. Nothing could be more sensuously refined than everything which met his view. The apartment flooded with light, the rich furniture, the crimson draperies, the brilliant mirrors, the wine sparkling in the decanters, the fruit in the dishes of cut glass and in china baskets, and the ravishing loveliness of the four young women who were to be his companions at the festival, — all combined to elevate his spirits and win him away from certain sombre reflections which had been hanging upon his soul ere he sought the present scene. The atmosphere of the apartment was warm and perfumed, but without a sickly oppressiveness. The brilliant light was reflected in the eyes of the four charmers; it made their teeth gleam like pearls, their lips have the vivid semblance of wet coral; it displayed the dazzling transparency of their complexions to the utmost advantage, it shed a richer gloss on their naturally shining hair.

"Come, my dear Marchmont," said Lettice, "and let me sit on one side of you."

"And I," said the young Irish girl, "on the other."

"But Marchmont loves to be at his ease," cried the sprightly Armantine, and she bounded from the room, in a few minutes returning with a costly flowered silk dressing-gown, the production of which elicited peals of merry laughter from herself and her companions.

“Come,” said Linda, the German girl, “off with the coat and on with the dressing-gown. It makes you look so much as if you felt yourself at home.”

“Have your own way,” said the duke. “And now to table, you merry romps.”

They sat down; the champagne quickly began to circulate, laughter pealed like silver bells around, the duke felt himself gay, he forget whatsoever cares had been troubling him, he plunged headlong as it were into the vortex of pleasure, in order to drown his recollections. Be it understood that the young women were not merely well educated, but accomplished likewise. They had belonged to genteel families, from whose bosom they were beguiled away by the infamous agents of the still more infamous Madame Angelique, and if there were at any time remorseful feelings in their souls, they were compelled to stifle them as well as they could, for they felt that they had entered upon a career whence there was no retrogression. But they were accomplished, we say; they all had good conversational powers, and the discourse became as sparkling as the wine which gave it zest. After awhile, when the whole party were exhilarated, they got up and danced, and the duke abandoned himself with a sort of wild frenzy to the hilarious proceeding. Were he a youth of eighteen or twenty, he could not have entered more completely into this fun and frolic. At length, when exhausted with waltzing and romping, he threw himself upon a chair, and the champagne glasses were filled again.

“Long live such gaiety as ours!” cried Marchmont, lifting up his glass in one hand, while the other arm encircled the splendid shape of the gorgeously handsome Lettice.

“Oh, for ever such gaiety as this,” exclaimed Linda, who had likewise thrown herself upon a seat, and as she held her glass up, she watched the sparkling of the wine ere she conveyed it to her sensuously breathing lips.

“That wicked Marchmont has whirled me around so,” cried the Irish girl, “that he has tired me out,” and she threw herself upon a footstool.

“Moisten your lips with fruit,” said Armantine, as she sped to the table, and quickly returning with a china basket containing melon, pineapple, oranges, apples,

pears, and grapes, she placed it on the carpet at the duke's feet.

Then, likewise seating herself upon a footstool, she listened while Marchmont and Lettice sang together a Bacchanalian English song. What a scene of luxurious enjoyment, blended with the ravishments of feminine beauty, was that for the pencil of an artist.

It was past one in the morning when Marchmont thought of taking his departure. He placed under one of the fruit dishes a sum of money in bank-notes, as a mark of his liberality toward the charming companions of his revel, and then he drew Lettice aside into a window recess, where he conversed with her for a few minutes in a low tone of voice. The other three girls chatted together at the opposite extremity of the room; they heard not what passed between Marchmont and Lettice Rodney, neither did they seek to catch a single word. They were all on the friendliest terms with one another; they had no jealousy. Their exquisite beauty ensured to them all an equal amount of favour on the part of their aristocratic patrons, and being girls of good education, feeling too at times their lost and degraded position, they knew how useless it was to aggravate it by petty contentions amongst themselves.

The conversation between the duke and Lettice terminated; the nobleman embraced all four one after another, and then took his departure.

CHAPTER XXVIII

COVENT GARDEN

ON the following day Christian Ashton was engaged, as usual, in the forenoon, attending to his ducal employer's correspondence, and when it was terminated, he rose to withdraw from the library, but Marchmont said, "Sit down again, Christian; I wish to speak to you."

The youth resumed his chair, and prepared to listen attentively to whatsoever might be addressed to him.

"I think, Christian," continued his Grace, "that you are happy and comfortable in your present situation, and that inasmuch as your welfare is looked after by me, you yourself are willing and anxious to give me every possible satisfaction."

"It is my duty, so long as I eat your Grace's bread," responded the youth, thus avoiding the necessity of telling a falsehood by the assertion that he was happy in the duke's employment.

"I expected no less from your lips," continued Marchmont. "There is a little service which you will have to render me. To-morrow I go with her Grace to Oaklands, but you will not follow until the early part of next week. You will thus have a little holiday, and plenty of opportunities to see your charming sister. Next Tuesday night at nine o'clock you will take a cab and repair to a particular address, which is written on this card," at the same time presenting one. "You will merely knock at the door and send in your own name. A large box will be given to you, of which you must take particular care. It contains things which I design as presents, and the truth is I wish to surprise those for whom the gifts are destined; hence this little degree of mystery which I am observing on the point.

You will leave London by the first coach on Wednesday morning, and you will bring the box amongst your own luggage. Put upon it a card with your own name, and when you arrive at Oaklands, let it be taken up, together with your other boxes, to the chamber which will be allotted to you there. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, my lord," responded Christian.

"And you will see the necessity of keeping the matter profoundly secret," rejoined the duke, "because, as I tell you, I mean to divert myself a little with the distribution of the presents which the box contains. I know that I can rely on your discretion and fidelity. Mr. Calvert will provide you with the requisite funds for your travelling expenses, and you must be sure to arrive at Oaklands in the course of next Wednesday."

Christian bowed, and quitted the library. Sallying forth, he proceeded at once to Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square, and communicated to Mr. Redcliffe everything that had just taken place between himself and the duke. The address of the house at which he had to call was Madame Angelique's, and Christian having purposely passed it by in his walk up to Mrs. Macaulay's was enabled to report that it was a milliner's establishment. Neither Redcliffe nor himself for a moment believed that Marchmont's explanation of certain intended gifts was otherwise than a pretext for some ulterior design; but what this design might be, young Ashton could not for the life of him conjecture, while Mr. Redcliffe volunteered no surmise.

"You must perform exactly, my young friend," he said, "the mission that is entrusted to you, but upon obtaining possession of the box, come direct hither to me before you take it to Marchmont House. I may then tell you how we will act. Besides, it is necessary that I should see you again ere your departure for Oaklands."

Christian promised to fulfil Mr. Redcliffe's instructions, and took his leave of this gentleman. He stepped into Mrs. Macaulay's parlour to shake hands with the widow, who bade him be sure and not forget to bring his sister to take a friendly cup of tea with her on the first convenient evening. He was about to depart, when Mrs. Macaulay beckoned him back, and in a tone of mysterious confidence, she said, "By the bye, I remember I have got a little party on Sat-

urday evening, and it's on rather a memorable occasion. The fact is, I and Mrs. Sifkin have not been on speaking terms with each other for the last ten years. Not that it was any fault of mine, you know, because I am quite incapable of giving offence even to a worm, much less a human being that walks upright on two legs. It was all owing to jealousy on Mrs. Sifkin's part. However she has made overtures through Mrs. Dumpling, a lady in the same street. She lets lodgings, too, does Mrs. Dumpling, and between you and me, wretched apartments they are. You wouldn't believe it, my dear Mr. Ashton," added Mrs. Macaulay, in a voice of awful mystery, "no, you never would believe it, but it is as true as I am a living woman."

"What's true?" asked Christian.

"Bugs, my young friend, — bugs, I can assure you," replied Mrs. Macaulay. "Nothing should induce me to say such a thing of a neighbour, if it wasn't the case. If they were fleas only, but bugs — dreadful!"

"Dreadful indeed," muttered Christian, with a sensation as if something disagreeable were creeping over him under his clothes.

"However," proceeded Mrs. Macaulay, "barring the bugs, Mrs. Dumpling is a very excellent neighbour, and a kind-hearted woman, though she does give nothing but that odious currant wine of hers and captain's biscuits, with maybe a stale tart or two, for supper when she has a little party. Still she is a good woman, and she went right across yesterday morning to Mrs. Sifkin, and told her her mind about her conduct toward me. I dare say that Mrs. Dumpling did come out rather strong, because I know that she had had a leetle drop of brandy beforehand, — in fact, it was out of a bottle that Mr. Redcliffe, poor dear soul! sent down from his room. However the long and short of it was that Mrs. Sifkin confessed the errors of her ways, and Mrs. Dumpling proposed that if Mrs. Sifkin would send me over an apology through her, I would give a party to clinch the reconciliation and celebrate the event. So I mean to do the thing nicely, and give a pretty spread on Saturday evening, and if you and your dear sister will favour me with your company, I shall be delighted."

"I cannot say how my sister may be engaged," answered Christian, "and I do not for a moment think that she will be

enabled to accept your kind invitation. But as for myself, I say yes with much pleasure."

"And you will be welcome," said Mrs. Macaulay. "But pray do bring your dear sister, if she can possibly manage to come."

Christian bade the woman good-bye, and hastened on to the Regent's Park to see Christina. He had not the least intention of bringing her in contact either with the amiable Mrs. Sifkin, or with Mrs. Dumpling who had bugs in her lodgings, but he had accepted the invitation for himself, not only because he fancied that he might be dull at Marchmont House while the family was away, but also because he had some little curiosity to see how the rival lodging-house keepers would get on together.

It was about two in the afternoon of the following day that Mr. Redcliffe — enveloped in his cloak as usual, and with his hat more or less slouched over his countenance — walked slowly down that fashionable street in which the adjoining establishments of Madame Angelique and M. Bertin were situated. Having well surveyed the milliner's premises, or, rather, their exterior, Redcliffe continued his way, and if the thoughts which were passing in his mind were reduced to words, they would have taken some such shape as the following:

"The establishment seems respectable enough, but yet the fairest exterior often veils the foulest corruptions. There is some deep mystery in connection with that box which is to come next Tuesday night from this house, and I must fathom it. Every incident, however trivial it may appear, is to me of momentous import. Who knows how it may serve as a link in that chain which I am endeavouring to follow up? The link may not for the moment seem to fit, but it must not on this account be discarded. Who can tell but that it will sooner or later find its appropriate place and help me on to the accomplishment of my aim?"

While thus meditating, Clement Redcliffe pursued his way, — at first without perceiving the direction he was taking, and without any specific object in view. But suddenly he bethought himself of a poor invalid old man whose case had become known to him in his wanderings about the metropolis, and whose last few weeks in this life he was soothing with that quiet, unostentatious benevolence which

he was wont to afford. The medical man whose services his purse had provided for this invalid had recommended certain little delicacies, cooling fruits, and so forth, and Redcliffe now continued his way toward Covent Garden Market, to make such purchases as under the circumstances he thought would be acceptable. Arrived in the arcade, his charitable intentions were speedily carried out, and on quitting the fruiterer's shop, he strolled up to the terrace on the roof of the market, where flowers are exhibited. Redcliffe was passionately fond of contemplating floral rarities, — a taste which was natural with his refined intelligence, and which had been strengthened by his long residence in an Oriental clime.

He was entering one of the conservatories, when he stepped back with a sudden sense of intrusion upon two individuals who were standing there in deep and earnest conversation, — a conversation so absorbing that they did not notice his presence. One was a lady the very first glance at whose appearance was sufficient to impress the beholder with an idea of rank and distinction. She was dressed with that simple elegance and exquisite refinement of taste which characterized the well-bred woman. The consciousness of high birth and the dignity of position blended sweetly and harmoniously with the perfect loveliness of her countenance and the flowing outlines of her symmetrical shape. Her features, perfect in their profile, had that classic sculptural finish which is so seldom seen; she was a creature of a magnificent beauty, — a beauty that fascinated more than it dazzled, and enthralled the soul more than it bewildered the imagination. Her age was about three and twenty; she was tall, with a shape of full developed contours, and yet faultlessly symmetrical in the tapering slenderness of the waist. Her hair was of the richest auburn, flowing in glossy lustrous tresses from beneath the elegant Parisian bonnet. Her eyes, of the clearest blue, were large and darkly fringed, the brows delicately pencilled and beautifully arched. One hand had the glove off, — a small white delicate hand it was too, and one of the tapering fingers wore the wedding-ring.

Her companion, who held that beautiful hand tenderly pressed between both his own, was a young man of perfect masculine beauty. He might have been about her own age,

and his appearance indicated a distinguished position, as we have already said that hers likewise did. But that he was not her husband, Clement Redcliffe saw at a glance, for though they were unconscious of his presence, yet there was something evidently stealthy in their meeting at that place. No husband would have held her hand as he did; no wife in the presence of a husband would have worn that expression which was visible in her deep blue brooding eyes, and in the passion-breathing lips, which, slightly apart, afforded a glimpse of the pearls within. And he was speaking in a low, murmuring voice, but with a tender persuasiveness of the look, as if he were pleading a cause whose only argument was love, and to which she could not yield with honour to herself. The rising and sinking of the shawl folded over her full and swelling bust denoted the agitation which reigned in her heart; though she stood otherwise perfectly still and motionless, with that fair white hand abandoned to her lover, and with the colour coming and going rapidly upon her beautiful damask cheeks.

Such was the spectacle which Clement Redcliffe beheld almost at the first glance, or at least within the few moments which he lingered upon the threshold of the conservatory. The man who had charge thereof was attending to a customer at a little distance on the terrace; that tender pair evidently thought themselves altogether alone and unperceived, snatching perhaps the quick stolen interview of a few minutes, but these few minutes constituting a period in which a whole world of heart's feelings became mutually expressed. Redcliffe caught the words, "Madame Angélique" and "M. Bertin," amidst the otherwise inaudible murmurings of the young man's voice, — inaudible however only to him, for the lady was evidently drinking in with mingled hope and fear — love's passion and alarm — every syllable that came from her companion's lips. Redcliffe turned abruptly away, but glancing through the glass of the conservatory, he saw that the tender couple still remained in precisely the same position, and that so far from their being startled by that movement on his part, his presence had continued utterly unperceived.

"That scene is but too intelligible," he thought to himself, as he proceeded to the conservatory at the other end of the terrace. "There is a young wife not yet lost, but

hovering upon the very verge of perdition, her love getting the better of her sense of duty, the enamoured tempter's persuasiveness proving stronger than her prudence. Would that I dared step between them to save her, and strengthen that lingering virtue which required so much tender pleading on his part to have its last barriers broken down. But no; it is not for me to intervene. There are good deeds which a philanthropist would fain perform, but which, as the world goes, he dares not even approach."

Then it struck Redcliffe as singular that at a moment when he had so little expected to hear it, the name of Madame Angelique should have been mentioned, and coupled too with that of the very person whom he had ere now noticed to be her neighbour. Was it possible that the young man was proposing an assignation, for the carrying out of which the milliner's and the tailor's establishments might be rendered available? Redcliffe was shrewd and intelligent; his experience of the world was too large not to enable him to draw rapid inferences from certain circumstances, and the question which he had just asked himself in respect to the lovers' assignation became a conviction in his mind. He descended from the terrace, and passed slowly along the arcade lined with those shops where the choicest fruits of English gardens and hothouses, as well as of tropical produce, are so profusely displayed. In a few minutes the lady whom he had seen in the conservatory passed him by. He at once recognized her by her dress; he glanced at her countenance, and saw that though calm to the superficial observer, yet that it was an assumed and unnatural serenity which to the experienced eye veiled not the agitation that lay beneath. A tall footman in a superb livery, and carrying a gold-headed cane, was lounging in the arcade, but the instant he beheld the beautiful lady approaching, he accosted her with a respectful salutation.

"Has the fruit been sent to the carriage?" she inquired, and Redcliffe, who heard what passed, perceived that there was a clouded tremulousness in her low, soft, musical voice.

"Yes, my lady," was the response given by the lackey.

"Are there any flowers which your ladyship has ordered?"

"None to-day," was her rejoinder. "I saw not any that pleased my fancy."

No wonder that this titled lady should have forgotten,

or else have neglected, her originally proposed purchase of nature's floral beauties, for a sweeter and more delicious flower — love, which is the rose of the soul — had absorbed all her thoughts and engrossed all her time upon the terrace above.

She continued her way through the market, the footman following at a short distance, and when near the end of the arcade, she was suddenly joined by an individual whose almost revolting ugliness formed a perfectly hideous contrast with her own bright and fascinating beauty. He was a man of at least sixty, with large, prominent features, — a disagreeable and repulsive look, and so totally different from the fair creature who had become the object of Redcliffe's interest that it was impossible even to believe that he was her father, though more than old enough to claim that title, and very nigh sufficiently so to be her grandfather. His figure was ungainly, and had scarcely the advantages of dress to improve it, for though his raiment was all of the best materials, it nevertheless fitted as if thrown on with a pitchfork. His coat was large and loose, his pantaloons narrow, short, and scanty, and he wore gaiters, which were put on in a slovenly manner. But on the other hand, it was evident that he was very particular and nice with his lavish display of snowy shirt-frill. Such was the individual who joined the lady near that extremity of the arcade which fronts St. Paul's Church.

"I hope I have not kept you waiting," she said, as she took his proffered arm.

"No, certainly not, my angel," he answered, endeavouring to torture his looks and his voice into the tenderest expression of which they were susceptible, — those looks which were so repulsive, and that voice which was so harsh and discordant. "I have been turning over all the books in Willis's shop for the last half-hour, without finding what I wanted. Indeed, I was fearful, my sweetest Emily, that I should keep you waiting. And now, are all your purchases sent to the carriage?"

"All," was the response given by the lady, and Redcliffe, who had followed the group, saw the footman hurry on in advance to give a brother lackey notice of the approach of their master and mistress, so that the door of the magnificent equipage was ready opened by the time they reached it.

The uxorious old husband — for in this light did he evidently stand toward that young and beautiful lady — handed her in, and when the door closed upon them, he gave the word, “Home.” The two footmen touched their hats, and sprang up behind, each with his gold-headed cane; the stout coachman — who seemed as if having once got on the box, he had grown to it and could never hope to get down again — just suffered the lash of his whip to touch the backs of the two splendid bay horses which were already pawing the ground, impatient of the delay, and off dashed the superb equipage, Redcliffe perceiving that an earl’s armorial bearings were blazoned on the panels.

He continued his way in deep thought, and returned to that fashionable street in which the neighbouring establishments of Madame Angelique and M. Bertin were situated. By the time he reached that street, the dusk was closing in, — for the reader will recollect that it is the month of January of which we are writing, — and both shops were now a blaze of gaslight. It seemed as if Redcliffe’s mind were already made up as to the course which he should pursue, for without the slightest hesitation, he at once turned into the tailor’s establishment. M. Bertin was behind the counter, and he received Mr. Redcliffe’s orders, which were for some new clothes.

“Have the goodness, sir,” said the obsequious Bertin, with his politest bowings and scrapings, “to walk this way,” and he conducted his new customer into a well-furnished back parlour, where he was wont to measure his distinguished patrons.

Redcliffe was exceedingly profuse in the orders which he gave to M. Bertin, and as a matter of course, he said not a syllable on the subject of price. His object was to make as favourable an impression as possible upon the tailor.

“What name and address, sir, shall I have the honour of entering in my book?” asked M. Bertin, when he had finished the measurement of his new customer, and he was all smiles and bows, for the liberality of Redcliffe’s order had won the admiration of the mercenary, money-loving Frenchman.

Redcliffe gave the necessary particulars, and then added, “Perhaps, as I am a total stranger to you, you will allow me to leave a cheque upon my banker for whatsoever amount you choose to name?”

"Oh, it is by no means necessary, I can assure you, sir," responded M. Bertin, with continued smilings and bowings. "I feel highly honoured, sir, in having your name upon my books, and hope long to see it there. Money in advance? Oh, no, sir, not for the world! Bills sent in every Christmas, sir; those are my terms."

"You will pardon me for having offered you other terms," said Mr. Redcliffe, "but I am comparatively a stranger in England. I have been many, many years abroad—in India," he added, as if quite in a careless manner, although he both foresaw and intended what the effect should be.

"Oh, indeed! in India, sir!" said M. Bertin, at once catching at the idea that his new customer must be a wealthy nabob. "Ah, sir, fortunes are rapidly made in India."

"Sometimes," observed Redcliffe, still with an air of assumed carelessness, but yet with a sufficient degree of significance to imply that it was so in his own case.

"Not been long in London, therefore, I presume, sir?" said M. Bertin.

"No, only a few months," was the response.

"Beg pardon, sir, but married, I suppose?" continued the tailor, who under a show of garrulity was always thus wont to fathom the affairs and circumstances of new customers so far as they themselves would allow him. "All rich gentlemen returning from India bring beautiful English wives with them, or else they find them at once on setting foot in their native land."

"Neither happens to be my case, M. Bertin," rejoined Redcliffe. "Indeed, I am completely a stranger—"

"Ah, sir, what a pity," cried the tailor. "Plenty of money, and don't know how to spend it? Beg your pardon, sir—it may seem a very great liberty—but I mean no offence," and then as Redcliffe forced his countenance to assume an air of interest in what Bertin was saying to him, the bustling Frenchman closed the parlour door.

"Pray speak candidly," observed Redcliffe, "you need not be afraid of giving me offence. I know that you fashionable tailors at the West End do not always confine your avocations to the mere cutting and fitting of garments, but that you sometimes considerably and kindly help the inexperienced to initiate themselves into the mysteries of London life. Are my ideas correct?"

“ Nothing could possibly be more accurate, sir,” responded Bertin. “ Your name is now upon my books where I have the honour of chronicling some of the first names of the British aristocracy. Of course, sir, noblemen and gentlemen will be gay now and then, but they have a thousand and one reasons for concealing their gaieties as much as possible.”

“ I understand you, M. Bertin,” answered Redcliffe, “ and to tell you the truth, I am rejoiced that accident should have led me to enter your establishment. It was the handsome exterior which drew my attention. Ah, by the way, there is an equally handsome establishment next door. I happened casually to notice it — ”

“ Madame Angelique’s, sir. An excellent neighbour of mine,” and M. Bertin bent a significant look upon Redcliffe.

“ Madame Angelique? ” said the latter, repeating the name with the air of one who thought he had heard it before. “ Surely that name is not altogether unfamiliar to me? Ah, I recollect! At a hotel where I was dining, I overheard two young gentlemen at a neighbouring table mention that name in a subdued tone. It did not particularly strike me at the time — ”

“ Very indiscreet of those two young gentlemen, whoever they were, — very indiscreet indeed,” said M. Bertin, with a look of annoyance, but instantaneously brightening up again, he added, “ Fortunately, however, their imprudent mention of that name was overheard by a gentleman of honour, a man of the world, too, such as I perceive that you are, sir — ”

“ Oh, I should not think of telling tales out of school, whatever they may be,” exclaimed Redcliffe. “ But frankly speaking, M. Bertin, I begin to be terribly wearied of the monotony of the existence I am leading, and if, as I think I understand, you have the power of giving me a few suggestions in respect to the means of pleasure pursuit, I shall not merely be grateful, but shall know how to reward you.”

The tailor gazed fixedly upon Redcliffe’s countenance for a few moments, and, satisfied with the survey, he said, “ At any time, sir, that you wish to be introduced into the most charming and agreeable female society, pray favour me with a call. You know what I mean, — female society of a certain class, but where intellect and elegance of manners, as well as

all drawing-room accomplishments, are blended with the most ravishing personal beauty."

"Not for a moment, M. Bertin, will I affect to misunderstand you," answered Redcliffe. "On the contrary, I do understand your meaning, and I shall avail myself of your offer. How will you be engaged this evening?"

"I shall be entirely at your orders, sir," responded the tailor, inwardly chuckling at the idea of having got hold of a wealthy nabob, who beneath a severe exterior concealed the passions and inclinations of a licentious libertine.

"At nine o'clock I will return to pay you a visit," said Mr. Redcliffe.

"You will find me here, sir," responded Bertin, "and then perhaps," he added, with a significant smile, "you shall know something more of Madame Angelique, or at least of the paradise of houris which is as mysteriously concealed within her establishment, as the happy valley of Rasselas was hidden in the midst of mountains."

Redcliffe smiled, nodded in a friendly way to the tailor, and took his departure.

CHAPTER XXIX

EVELEEN

PRECISELY at nine o'clock Mr. Redcliffe returned to the tailor's establishment, and found M. Bertin expecting him. The little Frenchman bowed and scraped in his very best style, when Redcliffe thrust a well-filled purse in his hand, and the recipient thought within himself that he was destined to turn a pretty penny by the wealthy Indian nabob.

"I will not insult you, sir," he said, as he conducted Redcliffe into his parlour, "by observing that the strictest honour and secrecy are required in respect to those mysteries into which you are about to be initiated. I flatter myself that I am rather skilful in forming opinions of persons at a first glance —"

"You need not be afraid, M. Bertin," interrupted Redcliffe, "that I shall go elsewhere to babble of whatsoever I may see at Madame Angelique's."

"To be sure not, sir! You and I know what the world is," rejoined the tailor, with a significant look, "and a gentleman of your travel and experience is well aware that such establishments as these are of the greatest convenience."

"The greatest convenience, indeed, I have not the slightest doubt," exclaimed Redcliffe, somewhat drily.

"Have the goodness, sir, to follow me," said M. Bertin, and he forthwith conducted his new patron up the well-carpeted staircase, to that room on the second story where Annette was always in attendance at certain hours for the reception of visitors.

This woman opened the mysterious mirror-contrived door, and tapped at the one inside, which was speedily unfolded, and Clement Redcliffe passed on into the luxuriously furnished saloon to which the reader has already been intro-

duced. The four young ladies were not, however, there at the moment; it was Madame Angelique who gave him admittance, and an introduction was effected by the obsequious tailor, who immediately afterward withdrew. But while passing by the milliner, he hurriedly whispered, "A purse with a hundred guineas as my fee. Make much of him."

Madame Angelique closed the mysterious door, having thus received an intimation of Redcliffe's liberality toward her accomplice the tailor, as well as a hint to the effect that she might, by playing her own cards well, feather her nest to her heart's content.

"Have the kindness to follow me, sir," she said, with her most amiable and winning smile, as she opened the door of the apartment.

Redcliffe, purposely assuming as much blandness of manner as he could possibly call to his aid, accompanied Madame Angelique to her own boudoir, to which she led him. She begged him to be seated, and taking a chair near, she began expressing her sense of the honour which she experienced in receiving a patron of whom her friend M. Bertin had spoken so highly. She went on to intimate that as gold was evidently no object to Mr. Redcliffe, she could introduce him to some of the most beautiful creatures in the metropolis, — not merely those who were dwelling beneath her own roof, but others with whom she was acquainted and to whom she had access.

"My friend M. Bertin hinted to me this evening previous to your arrival, sir," she continued, "that you have been a long time in India. I know not exactly how your taste may be, but I think that I might possibly introduce you to certain paragons of beauty from that same Oriental clime —"

"Indeed," observed Redcliffe, who was determined to glean as much as he possibly could from Madame Angelique. "I should be delighted, and you have been rightly informed that money is no object to me. But who are these paragons of beauty of whom you speak?"

"Oh, it will be no easy matter to accomplish that business," responded the milliner. "As yet scarcely any steps have been taken, but if I make up my mind to a particular enterprise, I seldom fail in accomplishing it. You must know, sir," continued the infamous woman, "that my noble and

generous patrons make it worth my while to furnish all possible rareties and varieties of female charms, and amongst these patrons I hope to include Mr. Redcliffe."

"Most assuredly," was this gentleman's response. "Now I see, my dear madam, that between you and me there need not exist any disguise. I am wealthy, and I am addicted to pleasure. I care not how large a price I pay for it. You understand me."

"I do, Mr. Redcliffe," replied Madame Angelique, "and I thank you for speaking so frankly. It is always better."

"And those Oriental beauties?"

"As yet I know nothing more of them than that they are beauties," continued the milliner. "One is comparatively fair, of ravishing loveliness; the other is of dusky complexion, and as handsome in countenance and as finely modelled in form as poet ever imagined."

"Indeed," said Redcliffe. "And where do they live, these Oriental houris of yours?"

"Ah, my dear sir," exclaimed Madame Angelique, tapping Redcliffe familiarly on the arm, "I cannot exactly tell you all my little secrets. But you who have been in India will doubtless appreciate these rareties, and you will not mind a liberal outlay if I introduce you first to one, and afterward to the other — Of course I mean beneath this roof. Doubtless the task will be a difficult one; there will be stratagem, machination, inveigling, and so forth, but once here — you understand me — for their own credit's sake they will not afterward speak of what has occurred."

"Am I to understand that they live together?" inquired Redcliffe, "because if so, the task will perhaps —"

"Be all the more difficult," Madame Angelique hastened to exclaim, purposing to exact a price commensurate with the amount of obstacle, real or imaginary, which she might eventually be enabled to boast of having overcome.

"Yes, they live together; the fairer of the two is the mistress, the darker one is the attendant, and it is in a suburb of London that they reside. But more than this you must really not expect to know for the present," added Madame Angelique, with a smile.

"Oh, I will not attempt to penetrate into your secrets, my dear madam," exclaimed Redcliffe. "By all means let

me be considered as the one who is to be fortunate enough — ”

“ It is a bargain, sir,” interrupted the milliner, “ and shall be fulfilled.”

“ But,” continued Redcliffe, “ in whatever steps you may take with regard to these Oriental paragons, remember that my name — ”

“ Good heavens, my dear sir, not for the world!” cried Madame Angelique. “ I am discretion personified. Your name shall not be mentioned. I cannot promise that success will be speedily accomplished. As yet I have learned but little more than the fact of these charming creatures' existence in London. Yes, I have satisfied myself that they are the beauties they have been represented — ”

“ But you have not as yet spoken to them?” interjected Redcliffe, as if with a careless manner.

“ Oh, no! they are all but inaccessible, and this constitutes the first difficulty that has to be encountered. Nevertheless, I am not to be frightened by such obstacles. And now, as we are speaking with frankness, Mr. Redcliffe, I must tell you something.”

“ To be sure — in all frankness,” was this gentleman's response.

“ You already know,” continued Madame Angelique, drawing her chair a little closer toward Redcliffe, and assuming an air of mysterious confidence, “ that I enjoy the patronage of some of the highest and wealthiest personages in the realm. By the bye, do you happen to be acquainted — but no! If I recollect aright, M. Bertin assured me that you are a perfect stranger in London.”

“ A perfect stranger,” replied Redcliffe.

“ I was about to observe,” continued Madame Angelique, “ that to one only of my patrons have I previously mentioned anything concerning these Oriental women, and he has charged me to keep them for him. In a word, sir, his Grace — I mean the personage of whom I speak, has promised me no less a sum than a thousand guineas.”

“ And I, Madame Angelique,” exclaimed Redcliffe, “ unhesitatingly promise you double the amount, on the mere faith of your representations in respect to the extraordinary beauty of these women. Would you have an earnest of my liberality? It is here,” and he flung a bank-note upon the table.

Madame Angelique gracefully inclined her head in acknowledgment of the retaining fee, and glancing rapidly at the note could scarcely repress a start of surprise and exultation when she saw that it was for five hundred pounds. But instantaneously recovering her self-possession, — as she did not choose to suffer her new patron to perceive that, well though she was paid by others, she was nevertheless but little accustomed to a display of such munificence as this, — she observed, “It is a compact, Mr. Redcliffe, and not to another soul will I speak of that Indian lady and her dark-eyed ayah.”

“No, there must be the strictest honour in our dealings, Madame Angelique,” responded Redcliffe, “and if you play me false, I shall never more set foot in your establishment. But what guarantee have I that you will not suffer me to be forestalled by him to whom you have previously spoken? You ere now let a word drop showing me that he is a duke, and how can I possibly hope to compete with a personage of such high rank, and no doubt of such wealth, as his Grace to whom you have alluded?”

“It is all a matter of honour, Mr. Redcliffe,” answered Madame Angelique; “no, not of honour — of self-interest. There! I put it in that light. You will pay me double what the duke has offered, and the bargain is yours, not his. Besides, the duke has gone to his country-seat in Hampshire, and will not return till the middle of February. In the meantime we may perhaps bring matters to an issue.”

From this discourse Clement Redcliffe had no difficulty in comprehending that the duke to whom the infamous woman alluded was his Grace of Marchmont.

“Well, Madame Angelique,” he said, “I put faith in your words. And now, with your permission —”

“I understand you, sir,” she interrupted him, with a meaning smile. “There are at this moment four beautiful young ladies in my house, and by the bye, one of them, a splendid creature, is going down into the neighbourhood of that very duke’s country-seat in the course of a few days. This is between you and me. You will see her presently. Her name is Lettice Rodney.”

“By all means, introduce me to your four beauties,” observed Redcliffe.

“Have the kindness to follow me, sir. They will doubtless

be in the saloon by this time; they were performing their toilet when you arrived."

Thus speaking, Madame Angelique rose from her seat, and led the way out of the boudoir. She conducted Redcliffe to the saloon, and having introduced him to Lettice, Armatine, Linda, and Eveleen, with many smiles and simperings, she retired, closing the door after her. The four girls were as elegantly dressed as when we first presented them to the reader; the table was covered with wines and refreshments, the atmosphere was warm and perfumed, every feature of the scene was but too well calculated to infuse heat into the blood of the coldest anchorite.

But Redcliffe experienced no such fervour. There was a deep sense of disgust in his mind, — a disgust at the gilded iniquities into which he was being initiated, — a disgust too at the part which circumstances had led him to perform. He nevertheless assumed the most cheerful air that he could possibly put on. He sat down in the midst of the meretricious group, and at once glided into conversation with them. He soon discovered that they were well-bred, intelligent, and accomplished, and that they were as fully able to converse on intellectual matters as to fritter away the time in vain, shallow frivolities. He spoke of his travels in far-off lands, he told them amusing anecdotes, he exerted all his powers to interest them. At first they liked not his aspect; they thought that he was haughty, stern, and severe, but they soon began to exchange rapid and significant glances amongst themselves, to the effect that they were agreeably disappointed, and that he was a most delightful and entertaining personage. They had already received a hint as to his liberality, and they therefore did their best to appear amiable on their own side.

But all the while Redcliffe was thus conversing with them, he was in reality studying their individual dispositions and characters so far as it was possible for him to do so under circumstances which threw an artificial gloss to a certain extent over them. He had a purpose to carry out, and he required one of these females as an agent. Fain would he have decided upon addressing himself to Lettice, inasmuch as he had learned that she was shortly to repair into the neighbourhood of the Duke of Marchmont's country-seat, but he saw something in her which forbade the idea of his

making this young woman his confidante. He felt assured that she was not to be trusted. Next he studied the German girl, Linda, but he saw that she was of a sensuous and luxurious temperament, and that she was therefore unfitted for the influences which he purposed to bring to bear upon the one who should be the object of his choice. He directed his attention to the French girl, Armantine, but exquisitely beautiful though she were, and delicately classical as were her features, there was nevertheless a certain flashing of the eyes which denoted insincerity, and his thoughts settled not upon her. There was but one left, and this was Eveleen the Irish girl. There was something ingenuous in her looks, — something frank and honest in the expression of her eyes; and then, too, he ever and anon observed a cloud gathering over her features at certain anecdotes which he purposely related, and which had the effect of bringing back visions of home to the memories of these lost ones. Eveleen therefore became the object of his choice.

They all sat down at the table, and Mr. Redcliffe in the course of an hour drank more wine than he had altogether done for years past. But this he was compelled to do, lest any suspicion of an ulterior intent should arise in the minds of the three who were to be excluded from his confidence. Nevertheless the libations of champagne clouded not his intellect, much less overpowered it; his own strong will was more powerful than the influence of wine. He made Eveleen sit next to him, and though courteous enough to all four, his principal attentions were devoted to her. This seemed significant, and after awhile, Lettice, Linda, and Armantine withdrew from the saloon.

Redcliffe was now alone with Eveleen. She rose and made a movement toward a door at the farther extremity, and which communicated with a voluptuously furnished chamber.

“Resume your seat,” said Mr. Redcliffe, “I wish to speak to you.”

The girl, who was for a moment astonished that he did not at once rise and follow her, naturally fancied that he wished to prolong the pleasures of the table, and returning to her chair, she was about to refill his glass.

“No, we have had enough wine,” said Redcliffe, in a kind though firm and decisive tone.

Eveleen gazed upon him with renewed astonishment, and for a few moments he remained absorbed in thought.

"Tell me," he presently said, "how long have you been here?"

"About three years, sir," she answered, and again the cloud lowered for a moment over her features, which were naturally of so sprightly and piquant an expression.

"Three years," continued Redcliffe mournfully, — "three years of sin for one who by her beauty and her intelligence, her manners and her accomplishments, might have adorned the highest sphere of society, had she remained virtuous."

"Oh, do not speak to me in this way," cried Eveleen almost petulantly, for Redcliffe's words, as well as the tone in which they were uttered, had sunk deep down into her very soul.

"It is not a reproach, much less an insult that I am addressing you," he said, in a still kinder voice. "You will perhaps live to bless the day when you thus encountered me, or I have very erroneously read your character and disposition. Tell me — and speak candidly — are there not times when your memory is carried back to a bright and happy home?"

"Good heavens, sir, why do you talk thus?" exclaimed Eveleen. "Who are you? Wherefore came you hither? Is it possible —"

"It is possible, my poor girl," responded Redcliffe, "that I may have come hither with some object very different from that which was supposed, — very different indeed from the objects which men have in penetrating into such a place as this. But before I explain myself, tell me, Eveleen, have you parents?"

The Irish girl burst into tears; she endeavoured to check them, but vainly; she could not. The more she strove, the less was her power to command her feelings; they convulsed her.

"Yes," resumed Redcliffe, "I see that you have parents, who are doubtless deploring the disappearance of a beloved daughter. Would you not like to be restored to them?"

"Oh, I would give up twenty years of my life to pass but a few in that once happy home," and the unfortunate girl sobbed bitterly.

"In me, Eveleen," said Redcliffe, "you shall find a friend,

a real friend, — a friend who will lift you up from degradation, instead of helping to plunge you farther down, a friend who will do all he can for you, if you yourself be accessible to the influences of such pure and well-meant friendship.”

By a strange but very natural revulsion of feeling, Eveleen grew calm. She wiped the tears from her eyes, and gazed upon Mr. Redcliffe with mingled amazement, gratitude, and admiration. Long was it since her ears had drunk in such language as this; long was it since such balm had been poured down into her heart.

“Do not think,” he continued, “that you are so far lost it is not worth while to return into a virtuous course. I am well aware that such is too often the fatal error to which fallen woman clings. She thinks that by the very fact of her fall, insurmountable barriers have suddenly sprung up between herself and the pathway from which she has diverged, — barriers which she may vainly attempt to climb in order to reënter it. But it is not so. True, when a coronal of purity has fallen from the brow, it can never be replaced; true, that chastity once lost cannot be regained. But this is no reason for a perseverance in sin, and so great is the merit of abandoning the path of error that it goes far toward a complete atonement for the past. The arms of parents may be opened to welcome back again a lost daughter, if she return to them in penitence and in sorrow for her misdeeds. Eveleen, you are not deficient in intelligence; am I not speaking truly?”

The poor Irish girl gave no verbal answer, but she fell upon her knees at Redcliffe’s feet, and taking his hand, gazed up at him in a manner which was expressive of a fervid gratitude for the promise he seemed to hold out, of entreaty that he would perform it, but of suspense lest it were a happiness too great for her to know. All the contrition of a Magdalen was in that look. The waters of life had not been dried up in that girl’s heart; their issue had been merely closed by the circumstances of her position, but now the rock was smitten with the magic rod which kind words can ever wield, and she felt as for three long years past she had not felt before. There was a world of sentiment in that look with which she gazed up into Redcliffe’s countenance, — a look which once beheld, never could be forgotten.

“Rise, my poor girl,” he said, profoundly affected. “I

see that I have not been deceived in you, and I will be your friend."

"But my parents, sir, — oh, my parents," exclaimed Eveleen, with an almost suffocating outburst of emotions, "how will they be brought to receive their dishonoured daughter?"

"If they possess the hearts and the feelings of parents," responded Mr. Redcliffe, "rest assured that you have nothing to fear. I will cheerfully undertake the task of seeing them; I will go to them, I will reason with them, I will entreat them, — in a word, if they be not something less or something more than human, I will procure their forgiveness for their daughter, should she be really penitent."

"My saviour! my deliverer!" cried Eveleen, with another outburst of impassioned feeling, "how can I ever sufficiently thank you? Oh, that I could do anything to testify my gratitude!"

"You can," rejoined Redcliffe.

"I can?" cried the girl, joy animating her countenance. "Oh, tell me but how, sir, and the cheerfulness with which I will obey your commands, the zeal and the fidelity with which I will execute your orders, the unasking devotion and even the very blindness with which I will be guided by your will, shall serve as the first proofs of that contrition whereof I have assured you."

"Listen, then," said Mr. Redcliffe; "listen with a calm attention. You know the Duke of Marchmont?"

"I do, sir," responded Eveleen, a blush mantling upon her cheeks; then in a hesitating voice, she added, "When I was beguiled from my home in Ireland, and brought to this house, it was he to whom I first became a victim."

"The Duke of Marchmont," continued Redcliffe, "is engaged in certain treacherous pursuits into which it deeply concerns me to obtain an insight. That infamous woman Madame Angelique is his accomplice, or at least his agent. Something is going on wherein she is mixed up. Next Tuesday evening a box is to be fetched away, under circumstances of mystery and precaution, by a young man in the Duke of Marchmont's employment. Have you an opportunity of watching the affairs which progress in this establishment? Do you consider it possible to obtain any intelligence,

no matter how slight it may be, as to the mystery connected with that box? ”

“ I will endeavour, sir,” responded Eveleen; “ rest assured that I will endeavour. Yes,” she continued thoughtfully, “ I have no doubt I can obtain some insight into what is going on. At all events, be assured, sir, that I will do my best. Oh, I should be so rejoiced to give you a proof of my gratitude — of my penitence.”

“ You must remain here for a few days longer,” observed Redcliffe. “ This is my address,” and as he thus spoke he gave Eveleen his card. “ Come to me on Wednesday morning next, under any circumstances. If in the meantime you should have discovered aught relative to the box, so much the better; but if not, you will come all the same, — you shall continue no longer within these walls. Can you leave when you choose? And will you accomplish all that I have suggested? ”

“ On Wednesday, sir,” rejoined Eveleen, “ I will be with you,” and her countenance expressed all the genuine joy which she felt at the prospect of emancipation from a mode of existence which was abhorrent to her.

“ Be it so,” said Redcliffe. “ And now, to keep up appearances, I shall leave money upon this table. Remember, I am putting faith in you. I will prove your friend, if you show yourself worthy of my confidence.”

“ No power on earth, sir, could induce me to deceive you,” responded Eveleen, with fervour.

Mr. Redcliffe threw a number of bank-notes upon the table, and shaking Eveleen by the hand, he took his departure, — the girl affording him egress by means of the mirror-contrived door. The tailor’s female adjutant Annette was waiting in the room of the adjoining house wherewith that door communicated; Redcliffe slipped a piece of gold into her hand, and in a few minutes he was retracing his way along the street toward his lodgings at Mrs. Macaulay’s.

CHAPTER XXX

THE EARL OF LASCELLES

WE are about to direct the reader's attention to a sumptuously furnished mansion in the neighbourhood of Kensington. It stood in the midst of its own grounds, which were spacious and enclosed with walls. Within that enclosure there were beautiful gardens, which even in this wintry season of which we are writing presented an aspect of verdure to the eye, on account of the numerous evergreens which were either interspersed about, or which bordered the avenues. Conservatories and hothouses, containing fruits and plants, also met the view. There were grass-plats, too, and pieces of ornamental water; and the entire aspect of the scene — buildings and grounds — indicated the wealth of the possessor.

This mansion belonged to the Earl of Lascelles, and we may at once inform our reader that he was the nobleman whom Redcliffe had seen join his beautiful wife in the arcade at Covent Garden. The earl had been married twice. By his first wife he had a son, who was now grown up to man's estate, and who bore the denomination of Lord Osmond. His mother had died some few years previously to the period of which we are writing, and it was only within the last eighteen months that the earl had espoused his second wife, the beautiful Ethel. This lady, belonging to a good family, had been left an orphan at an early age, and was brought up by an uncle and aunt, who had a large family of their own. Though tolerably well off, they found quite enough to do with their resources, and as Ethel was portionless, she had been constrained by the circumstances of her position, as well as by the earnest persuasion of her relatives, to accept the suit of the Earl of Lascelles, who offered her a title and

to make her the sharer of his fortune of sixty thousand a year. It must be added that this sacrifice of a young and lovely creature to an old and repulsive-looking man was not aggravated in its severity by any preëngagement of Ethel's affections, and it was therefore fortunate for her that in bestowing her hand where it was impossible she could love, she had not to deplore ruined hopes and a withered attachment in any other quarter. She accepted her destiny with as much resignation as possible, and perhaps with more so than if she had been born in a humbler sphere, for in that fashionable world wherein she moved, she had been by no means unaccustomed to contemplate the spectacle of young and beautiful creatures like herself sacrificed to the selfish and interested views of parents. She did not therefore stand alone in this martyrdom of marriage to which she was made a victim, and there is always a sort of solace in the reflection that one's own lot, however disagreeable, forms not a complete exception to the general rule.

The Earl of Lascelles was, however, by no means a man, either in person or in disposition, to win the love or esteem of a beautiful and intelligent young lady of Ethel's age. He was attached to her as old men usually are to wives juvenile enough to be their daughters, or indeed their granddaughters; that is to say, he doted upon her with an uxoriousness that displayed itself in a ridiculous manner, even in public, and his assiduities to please her were wearisome and obtrusive. She really had no whims or caprices, but he treated her as if she had a thousand, constantly heaping gifts upon her which she did not want or could not use. He would buy her shawls of the costliest price and of the gayest colours, jewelry which was totally incompatible with existing fashions and with the peculiar elegance of her own toilet, and then he would be annoyed because she did not wear those things. But if these were his only failings, she needed not much to repine; it was his character generally which was enough to wear out her patience and frequently inspire her with disgust. For the earl was one of the most consummate boasters and braggarts in all England, and withal too the greatest romancist. We do not mean the reader to infer that he wrote books; nothing of the sort. His ignorance on all literary matters was deplorable. But we use the term "romancist" as a more courteous expression than that of "liar,"

which might, however, be very well and properly applied, inasmuch as his lordship shot with a bow longer than even the greatest of travellers, who are accustomed to tell strange tales, are privileged to use. When quite a young man, he had served in the army, and reached the rank of captain, but the death of his father, by raising him to the earldom, led him to abandon the profession. Nothing he loved so much as to sit for hours in Ethel's society and endeavour to amuse her with his exploits when he was a military man, with the wonders he beheld when he travelled abroad, or even with the deeds of his most youthful days, and as she perfectly well understood that he was indulging in a tissue of the most egregious falsehoods, she at times experienced much trouble in concealing her disgust. It was just the same when they had company, or when they visited their friends and acquaintances; he would go on giving utterance to boast after boast, lie after lie, totally inobservant of the smiles of either contemptuous pity or downright scorn which he conjured up to the lips of his listeners. Thus Ethel frequently found herself in a most painful position, for it was bad enough to have a husband so old and so ugly, without the additional annoyance of seeing him rendering himself so supremely ridiculous. When they were alone together, he was continuously lavishing upon her his nauseating caresses, and he would often affect a childish sportiveness, talking nonsense, playing tricks, performing antics, and gambolling as if he were a little fellow of a dozen years old. The earl's was not therefore a character or a disposition to promote Ethel's happiness, to win her esteem or her love, or to compensate for his own age and his ugliness.

It was about nine o'clock in the morning of the day after Redcliffe's adventures at Madame Angelique's house that we shall find the Earl of Lascelles seated in his dressing-room, undergoing the process of shaving, which was being performed upon him by his confidential valet. This man was about forty years of age, endowed with a consummate hypocrisy, and who had obtained a complete ascendancy over his master by pandering to his vanity, listening patiently to his stories, and appearing to put the utmost faith in them. His manners were fawning, cringing, and servile; he never contradicted the earl, but invariably echoed whatsoever his lordship said, and studied to give precisely such

an answer as any question that was put might seem framed to elicit. He was bustling, active, and perfectly conversant in all the duties he had to perform. These were multifarious enough, inasmuch as they comprised all the mysteries of his noble master's toilet.

Makepeace — for this was the valet's name (and it was believed to be a feigned one, the particular nomenclature being chosen to give an additionally harmonious gloss to all his assumed attributes), — Makepeace, we say, was at once his lordship's perruquier, his barber, his doctor, and in some sense his tailor. It was Makepeace who dressed his lordship's wig in such a style that his lordship firmly believed the assurance that it looked, if anything, even more natural than his own hair would have done if he had not the misfortune to be bald. It was Makepeace who shaved his lordship so clean that his lordship's finger might pass over his chin without encountering the stubble of a single hair. It was Makepeace who caused to be made up at the chemist's, according to receipts of his own, the medicines which his lordship took to keep him in health and to sustain a juvenescent appearance. It was Makepeace who compounded washes and cosmetics to improve his lordship's complexion, and to keep away pimples. It was Makepeace, likewise, who from time to time was closeted in solemn conference with his lordship's tailor, showing where such and such padding ought to be placed, and yet throughout the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, as well as in the principality of Wales, or indeed any other part of the queen's dominions, it would be impossible to discover a worse-dressed man than the Earl of Lascelles. His lordship, however, thought otherwise; Makepeace persuaded him that it was as he thus thought, and therefore if his lordship were satisfied, nobody else had a right to find fault. As for the personal appearance of this said Makepeace, we may add that he had naturally a sharp, cunning, hypocritical look, of which he was perfectly conscious, and which he therefore endeavoured to conceal as much as possible beneath such artificial gloss as the blindest smiles, the most honied speech, and the most obsequious manners could possibly constitute.

It was, then, as we have said, at nine o'clock in the morning that the Earl of Lascelles, having emerged from the bed-chamber in his dressing-gown and slippers, and with his

white cotton nightcap on his head, sat down in his elegantly furnished dressing-room to commence the process of the toilet. We should observe that the white cotton nightcap was fringed all around with hair, of precisely the same sort and description as that of which his lordship's wigs were composed, and he actually flattered himself that his beautiful countess firmly believed he had a fine natural crop of his own hair upon his head. Indeed, Makepeace had assured him that the fringe around the nightcap was a masterpiece of art, and it was quite consistent that Makepeace should say so, inasmuch as the device was of his own invention, and it was a part of his duty to stitch the fringes inside the nightcaps when they were delivered to him by the laundress woman. The dressing-room contained numerous cupboards and chests of drawers, which were always kept carefully locked, — Makepeace retaining the keys, so that none of the other servants should penetrate into the mysteries of those receptacles. Wigs and cosmetics, nightcap fringes and medicines, anti-pimple washes and padded garments, false teeth and whisker dyes, books for the preservation of health and guides to the toilet, formed the miscellaneous contents of those drawers and cupboards, and Mr. Makepeace turned, in addition to his handsome salary, a very pretty penny indeed in his capacity of paymaster for all those things on the earl's behalf.

“How do I look this morning, Makepeace?” inquired the nobleman, as he sat opposite a full-length mirror, with his hair-fringed nightcap on his head, his short shrivelled frame enveloped in a gorgeous French silk dressing-gown, and his feet thrust into red morocco slippers.

“How strange, my lord,” exclaimed the valet, but only in a subdued voice, and in accents most harmoniously bland, “that I should have been just at the very moment thinking I had never seen your lordship look better for the last ten years.”

“Is it ten years that you have been with me, Makepeace?” inquired the nobleman, grinning like an antiquated goat at the compliment which his valet paid him.

“Yes, my lord; it is ten years,” answered Makepeace, with a profound sigh, which he purposely rendered as audible as possible.

“What makes you sigh?” asked the earl.

“It is enough to make me sigh, my lord,” rejoined the valet, “when I look at myself in the glass, and then look at your lordship. Ten years have made a wonderful alteration in me, but they really seem as if they had passed over your lordship without leaving the slightest influence behind them.”

“Hem! I think I wear well,” said the nobleman. “Time, you see, is very good to me; he forgets me.”

“Considering your lordship is close upon your forty-fifth year,” said Makepeace, who knew perfectly well that the earl would never see sixty again, “I think your lordship has some little reason to be grateful to Time.”

“Well, I think so too. But frankly speaking, Makepeace, — and I know that you will answer me with your accustomed candour, — do I look more than forty-five? Could a close observer have any reason to suspect that I am a day older? Not that I am, you know, but there are men who at my age look as if they were — what shall I say? — sixty. And then too, that *Peerage* tells such horrid lies. I shall have the author of it brought to the bar of the House of Lords for breach of privilege.”

“Let me beseech your lordship to treat the unfortunate man with the contempt he deserves,” said Makepeace, assuming an air of humane and philanthropic entreaty. “I dare say he has only put down your lordship so much older than your lordship can possibly be, because your lordship did not send him a cheque for a hundred guineas or so.”

“That’s the truth of it,” cried the earl; “so I shall let the rascal alone. Besides, a young man like me — looking even younger, too, on account of the possession of such a youthful and beautiful wife — can afford to laugh at the wretched malignity of a fellow who sets me down at sixty. And I will explain to you how the mistake has arisen, — if indeed it be a mistake, and not sheer wickedness. Did I ever tell you at what age I was first married?”

“I think I have heard it said that your lordship was married at fifteen,” answered Makepeace.

“Exactly so,” exclaimed the earl, “and I was a father at sixteen. But then, you see, I was precocious for my age. Why, I was only sixteen, three months and a half, when I had that terrible encounter with the five highwaymen on Bagshot Heath.”

"I have read the account of it, my lord, in an old newspaper," responded Makepeace. "I think, if I remember right, your lordship killed two of them, and led the other three, bound hand and foot, in triumph into Hounslow."

"Those were the very facts of the case," exclaimed the earl; "I see that you must have read them. I was only seventeen when I cut my way through the French regiment of cuirassiers, killed the trumpet major, who was seven feet high, took the colonel prisoner, and carried off the colours."

"That achievement, my lord, is duly recorded in history," answered Makepeace. "It was only the other day I was reading of it in a history of the late war. Your lordship must have been in a dreadful state of excitement after such an exploit?"

"Not a bit of it," cried the earl. "I was as cool as a cucumber, and when I got the cuirassier colonel to the camp, I challenged him —"

"To mortal combat, my lord?"

"No, to a drinking bout. I was terrible in those days for my achievements with the bottle. The colonel had the reputation of drinking more at a sitting than any other man in the French army, but I beat him. We sat down at table, piling the bottles around us as we emptied them, and we heaped them up so high in a circle roundabout us, that when the colonel dropped down dead drunk, I got up — as sober as I am now — and had literally to dash down a wall of bottles before I could get out of the place."

"Your lordship's head must have ached very much the next morning?" said Makepeace.

"Not a bit of it," ejaculated the earl. "I recollect I was up at five o'clock, and rode the celebrated steeplechase in which I beat the whole field, won the ten thousand guinea stakes, and killed that celebrated horse of mine that was sent me as a present by the pasha of Egypt for discovering the source of the Nile."

"Your lordship travelled early in life," said Makepeace, with the air of a man who was so deeply interested in his master's exploits that he anxiously sought for further information.

"Yes, I travelled early," said the earl, in a complacent and self-satisfied way. "I left college when I was thirteen,

and set off on a walking tour through Africa and Asia. Of course I could not manage my tour on the Continent of Europe, because we were at war at the time."

"The deserts of Africa, my lord, must have been unpleasant?" remarked Makepeace, inquiringly.

"Yes, for your milk-and-water travellers, who cannot bear hardships," replied the earl, "but I cared nothing for them. I caught a wild elephant, tamed him, and rode on his back, so you see that it was not altogether a walking tour. I was somewhat troubled with lions and tigers, which swarm as thick as mosquitoes in that country, but I was always on the alert in the daytime, and at night, when I chose to travel, — which I chiefly did, on account of the coolness of the night air, — I contrived a portable fire, which the elephant carried with his trunk, and so it frightened off the wild beasts."

"Exceedingly strange, my lord!" exclaimed Makepeace, "but I was reading an account of this remarkable mode of travelling the other day, and as no name was mentioned, I was at a loss to conceive who the traveller could have been. I thank your lordship for the information; it has cleared up the mystery."

"So you see," continued the earl, "that when I was very young, I encountered a great number of strange adventures. Mine has been an extraordinary life, and for comparatively a young man, I can look back upon a great deal. Did you ever hear of my first speech in the House, when I succeeded to the title?"

"I think I have heard of the wonderful effect it produced, my lord," answered Makepeace.

"Effect, indeed," ejaculated the nobleman. "It was on a very important subject: Some noble lord — I forget who he was — brought forward a motion that the Lord Chancellor, who was afraid of an apoplectic fit, should be permitted to sit without his wig. There was a crowded House, and all the first talents displayed themselves on the occasion. It was just going to a division at eleven o'clock at night, when the 'Contents' would have carried it, but I, who very well knew that the whole mystery of the British Constitution and the safety of Church and State were involved in the question, rose to say a few words."

"But I dare say they were not a few words," interjected

Makepeace, with a smirking smile, "which your lordship had to utter on so vital an occasion."

"Well, to confess the truth," answered the earl, "I did only intend to say a few words. I did not know my own oratorical powers at that time; indeed I scarcely suspected them. But when I found myself on my legs, I was hurried away as if by a tornado. I can compare it to nothing but a perfect hurricane of language, bearing along with it myriads of brilliant stars of metaphor. The very wig of the chancellor himself — that wig which was the subject of the memorable debate — stood on end. The perspiration ran down my face, so that all my clothes were saturated as if I had plunged into a hot bath, and, by the bye, I found on weighing myself next morning, that I had lost seven pounds of flesh. It was terrific. I began at eleven o'clock, and it was half-past three in the morning when I sat down, — the longest debate and the longest speech on record."

"I need not ask whether your lordship carried the day," observed Makepeace, "for history records the result."

"To be sure. The whole House became 'Non-Content' in a moment after I sat down, and the Lord Chancellor never forgave me. It was all through his vindictive machinations that the king did not send for me to be prime minister a few months afterward; but his Majesty wrote me the handsomest apology, explaining how he would rather have me at the head of his councils than any statesman in England, but that he did not dare offend the old chancellor. I have got the king's letter still; I will show it to you one of these days."

"Her ladyship ought to be very proud of such a husband," observed Makepeace.

"To be sure she ought, and I believe she is. What is your opinion?"

"It is a delicate subject, my lord," responded the valet, with a simulated hesitation, "but still I do happen to know that her ladyship is proud of the alliance which she has so happily and, I may add, so gloriously formed."

"Come, tell me, my good fellow, how do you happen to know this?"

"Why, my lord, servants will get talking together — I hope your lordship will not be angry —"

"No, no; I shall look over it. Go on. Perhaps her ladyship's maids —"

“That is exactly what it is, my lord. It was only yesterday they were telling me,” continued Makepeace, “how her ladyship speaks to them of your lordship when they are alone together.”

“Her ladyship does not suspect, does she — come, tell me the truth now — I know you would not deceive me — but does her ladyship suspect anything about this?” and the earl significantly twitched the hair fringe of his nightcap with his finger and thumb.

“Not for a moment, my lord,” ejaculated Makepeace. “On the contrary, her ladyship was telling her maids the other day — But I am afraid I shall give your lordship offence.”

“No, no, I will overlook this little gossiping. I know that it does take place amongst servants. Go on. What did her ladyship say?”

“That your lordship actually looked younger than my Lord Osmond.”

“Ah! she said that, did she?” exclaimed the earl, his wrinkled countenance expanding into one elaborate grin of satisfaction. “You know, Makepeace, there has been a great coolness between me and my son since my marriage. All the estates, as you are aware, are not entailed, and of course I have the power of leaving them to whomsoever I think fit.”

“It was very wrong of his lordship,” said Makepeace, “if I may be so bold as to offer an opinion, to show any disrespect toward your lordship, because having won the affections of a young and beautiful lady, your lordship chose to consult your own happiness by espousing her ladyship.”

“It was very wrong,” exclaimed the earl. “But between you and me, I was not sorry to have an opportunity to forbid my son the house. You see, Makepeace, it is rather an awkward thing where there is a youthful mother-in-law and an equally youthful stepson. The world is so scandalous, and then, too, it is always better to be prudent. There is another reason likewise. Lord Osmond looks older than he really is, and it makes me look older in consequence. But as for the former part of my reasoning, her ladyship, you know, is virtue personified.”

“If I might be permitted the expression, my lord,” answered Makepeace, “her ladyship can only be on this earth

by some extraordinary mistake. It is not her sphere, my lord. Her ladyship is an angel."

"Exactly so," cried the old nobleman. "Don't you think, Makepeace, I ought to be the happiest man in the world?"

"If I were to give free expression to my thoughts, my lord," rejoined the valet, "I should say that this world ought to appear a perfect paradise in your lordship's eyes."

"And so it does, Makepeace, — a perfect paradise, an Elysium of the most delicious flowers. Give me my wig."

The valet could scarcely suppress a smile for a moment, at the ludicrous transition of his lordship's ideas from the Elysium of flowers to his wig, but that smile was not caught by the earl's eye, as it instantaneously vanished from the countenance of Makepeace.

"Now, I think, I look as I ought to do," said the nobleman whose toilet, having progressed during the preceding colloquy, was by this time brought to a termination. "Are you sure that this new peruke does not look new?"

"Not at all, my lord," replied Makepeace; "it becomes your lordship admirably."

"And yet it strikes me," said the earl, dubiously, "that it is a shade lighter than the one I have been recently wearing. Put them together, and give me your opinion."

The valet did as he was desired, but purposely held the old wig in such a light against the new one that the earl's eye should not detect the difference. The latter was, however, in reality a shade or two lighter than the former, but Makepeace spoke so confidently in the opposite sense, that his lordship, who took his valet's word to be gospel in all toilet matters, was satisfied, and assuming as jaunty and debonair a demeanour as possible, he descended to the breakfast-parlour.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE COUNTESS OF LASCELLES

LET us now change the scene to another room in the same mansion, and to a much later hour in the day. It was a sumptuously furnished apartment, and the time was two o'clock.

The Countess of Lascelles sat upon a sofa in a thoughtful mood. She was alone, and the perfect immovability of her form and features for a period of several minutes indicated how completely she was absorbed in her reflections. Her exquisitely symmetrical figure was inclined toward the immense velvet-covered cushion on which her elbow rested, the hand supporting the head. The luxuriant tresses of her auburn hair, rich and glossy, floated in natural undulations over her shoulders, and a few straggling curls lay like burnished gold on her pure white throat. Exquisitely beautiful was her countenance, as we have already described it, for she was the lady, as the reader comprehends, whom Clement Redcliffe saw on his visit to Covent Garden Market, and in whose proceedings with the handsome young man he became so much interested. There was a deep pensiveness in her large clear blue eyes, and yet after the lapse of a few minutes a soft smile appeared upon the roses of the well-cut lips, partially revealing the pearly whiteness of the teeth. It would have been evident to an observer — if one were nigh — that though pensive, her thoughts were not altogether fraught with melancholy, but that there was a roseate light shining softly through.

As she sat half-reclining upon that sofa, the dark velvet covering threw out her well-defined and faultlessly symmetrical shape. The voluptuous swell of the bust, the tapering of the waist, which seemed still more slender on account of

the luxurious proportions of the bosom, the admirably sloping shoulders, the narrow sleeves, which did not altogether conceal the flowing outlines of the arms, and the sweeping length of the limbs, with two delicate feet peeping from beneath the skirt of the dress, and then, too, one exquisitely modelled hand, fair and white, with its tapering fingers, drooping listlessly and scarcely retaining the snowy cambric kerchief, a glimpse of the other hand amidst the showering masses of her auburn hair, — all constituted a protraiture calculated to ravish the senses of any one who beheld this charming creature.

Still she sat motionless, with her eyes fixed upon vacancy; but her thoughts were evidently busy, and as that soft smile appeared upon her lips, the roseate tint upon her damask cheeks gradually deepened into a crimson blush. Love was the subject of her thoughts, — but a love on which it was guilt to ponder, and she knew it. Nevertheless, love — even the guiltiest — has its pleasurable emotions, and vainly may the human heart endeavour to banish the feeling from its tabernacle. As well bid the light of the sun cease to shine in the temple to which it has penetrated, as well bid the moonbeams cease to glance kissingly on the rippling bosom of the ocean, as to bid love withdraw its soft lustre from the sanctuary of the heart into which it has succeeded in gaining admission, or to shed its light upon that heart which flutters beneath its influence.

But though Ethel was thus absorbed in reflections on a guilty love, was she herself already guilty? No, the last barrier which separated her from crime was not yet broken down; she hovered upon the brink of a precipice, but still she hovered; she might yet retreat ere she fell completely over. But would she withstand the temptation? On the one hand there was a husband whom she could not possibly love nor esteem, and whom she could scarcely prevent herself from absolutely detesting. So far as his caresses went, they were loathed as the pawings of an imp would be; his character was despised, and thus feeble indeed was the difference between the sentiment which Ethel already entertained toward him, and downright abhorrence. On the other hand, there was a young man of her own age, an Adonis of beauty, of elegant appearance, of lofty intelligence, of fascinating manners, and of captivating address. This young

man adored her, worshipped the very ground on which she trod, loved her as woman is seldom loved. This she knew — this she felt. Oh, great was the danger in which Ethel Lascelles stood!

She was in the midst of her reverie, when the door opened, and a footman, entering, said, "If you please, your ladyship, Lord Osmond has called to see the earl, who is out."

The man's eye did not catch the deepening blush on the cheeks of his mistress at the mention of that young nobleman's name, because her countenance was not immediately turned toward him. With a mighty effort she regained her self-possession, and said in a quiet way, as if influenced by no extraordinary emotion, "Lord Osmond can wait, if he think fit, until the earl's return."

"His lordship requests an interview with your ladyship," replied the footman. "His lordship bade me say that he has a particular message to be delivered to the earl, and he hopes your ladyship will not refuse to take charge of it."

Ethel hesitated for a few moments, and then she said, in the same quiet tone as before, "You can show Lord Osmond up."

The footman bowed and retired, and in a few moments the earl's son was announced.

"Good heavens, what imprudence, Adolphus!" said the countess, in a tone of half-reproach and half-anxiety, but with ineffable tenderness over all, and her hand too was immediately clasped in Lord Osmond's as those words were spoken when the footman had again retired.

"Imprudence in coming to see you, dearest, dearest Ethel!" said the young nobleman, in a voice full of masculine harmony. "Oh, how can you breathe a syllable that seems tinged with reproach?" and as his fine large hazel eyes looked tenderly down into hers of blue, he kept her fair white hand clasped in his own.

"But your father, Adolphus, — my husband," she added, with a deep, mournful sigh. "Oh, my God! if he should suspect — And what must he think of your coming hither now?"

"Listen to me, Ethel," responded Lord Osmond, as he led his beautiful mother-in-law to a seat, and placed himself by her side, — that mother-in-law who was only just his own age, "I knew that my father was out; I saw him just

now alight from the carriage at his club, but he did not observe me. I am well aware that when once amidst those with whom he can gossip after his own fashion, he will not speedily return. I came to the house under the pretext of seeing him; I sent up a message beseeching an audience of you. The servants can suspect nothing, and when my father comes home, you can tell him that I have been here. You can say that I am wearied and distressed on account of the coldness which subsists between him and me, that I seek his forgiveness, that if he will grant it, I am prepared to make any apology for whatsoever offence, real or imaginary, he may have conceived himself to have sustained at my hands — ”

“ And for what purpose, Adolphus, is all this? ” inquired Ethel, with a half-frightened look, for though she put the question, she already more than comprehended the young nobleman’s purpose.

“ Oh, can you ask me? ” he exclaimed, in a reproachful tone. “ Does not your heart tell you it is in order that we may be together, — that I may have frequent opportunities of seeing her who is dearer to me than life itself. Ethel, I shall go mad if all this be not accomplished. Conceive what I have suffered for months and months past, catching only an occasional stolen interview, having to watch your movements in order to be blessed with a few minutes of discourse. And then, too, ” he added, gently and hesitatingly, “ you promised a certain thing, and you kept not the appointment. Yesterday I awaited you there, and you came not! ”

A burning blush appeared upon the cheeks of the countess, and her eyes, which swam in the deep languor of tenderness, were bent down as she murmured, “ I thought better of it, Adolphus. My guardian angel inspired me with courage, and I resisted the temptation. For Heaven’s sake, never again propose such a thing! Never again seek to draw me away from that path of duty which I must and will pursue. ”

The reader may now comprehend that the appointment which Clement Redcliffe had rightly conjectured to have been given when he beheld the tender pair in discourse on the terrace of Covent Garden Market was not kept.

“ Ethel, ” resumed the enamoured young nobleman, “ my destiny — my life are in your hands. I know as well as you do, all the guilt which attaches itself to such a love as

ours, but I can no more struggle against it than I could breast the furious tide of the mightiest river as it rolls into the sea. Can you understand me when I tell you that if the Enemy of Mankind proffered me happiness in your arms as the price of my soul, I would sign the compact, — oh, sign it cheerfully, joyously.”

“ Good heavens, Adolphus, speak not in this dreadful manner!” murmured the countess, with a shudder sweeping over her frame, and yet with an irrepressible tenderness in the soft, melting eyes and on the passion-breathing lips.

“ Dreadful?” ejaculated Adolphus; “ is there anything dreadful in learning that you are the object of a love so devoted as mine? Oh, this love is all the world to me! Crown it with happiness, and the world becomes an Elysium. Doom me to despair, and the world is a blank, — no, a veritable hell,” he added, with frightful emphasis, “ from which I will fly as a wretched suicide!”

“ Oh, my God, my God! what words are these?” murmured Ethel, and involuntarily, so to speak, or, rather, under the influence of an irresistible impulse, she threw herself in his arms, weeping and sobbing upon his breast.

“ Dearest, dearest Ethel,” he murmured, in the harmonious tone of love which sank down into the very depths of her soul, “ you know not — oh, you know not — how very dear you are to me,” and he imprinted a thousand impassioned kisses upon her lips, her burning cheeks, and her throbbing brows.

“ Good heavens, if he should enter suddenly,” ejaculated the countess, disengaging herself from Lord Osmond’s enraptured embrace. “ No, no, we must separate — you must depart. Not for an instant must you dream of coming to take up your abode beneath this roof again. We should stand the risk of betraying ourselves a thousand times in the day. It would be fatal to my reputation, — I cannot say to my happiness, for that is gone since I learned to love you.”

“ Oh, no; in love there is happiness,” exclaimed Adolphus, in a fervid tone. “ Love banishes all considerations; it holds everything cheap and light in comparison with the power and the immensity of its own sentiment. But listen to me, dearest Ethel, while I speak seriously and without excitement. Eighteen months have elapsed since you became the Countess of Lascelles. When you returned from the

country after the honeymoon, you found me at this house. We had never seen each other before. I was in France when the marriage took place; I knew not even that it was contemplated until I received my father's letter to say that the ceremony was solemnized. He invited me not to it, and yet there was no coldness between us then."

"Wherefore recapitulate all these things," asked the countess, "which are so well known to me?"

"Because they will lead me on in a consecutive manner to what I have to explain as my purpose," responded the young nobleman. "Bear with me, Ethel; grant me your attention, I beseech you. We met, then, as I have said, for the first time when you returned from the country where the honeymoon was spent, and in this very apartment was it we looked each other in the face for that first time. I had heard that you were beautiful, but, good heavens! I had expected not to find myself in the presence of an angel. As if a lightning flash had darted in unto my soul, as if an inspiration had penetrated my brain, did the conviction strike me that it was I who should have led you to the altar, and that we were made to suit each other, though Heaven had ordained that you should become another's. I loved you at first sight; I could have fallen down and worshipped you as you stood there. No wonder, then, that for the few weeks which followed, my manner was abstracted, that I looked dull and unhappy, that I spoke petulantly to my father when he addressed me. And he, putting the worst construction on everything, thought me selfish and undutiful, fancying that my mind was occupied with ideas of filthy lucre, while it was absorbed in a devouring, maddening, frenzied passion. He taunted me with a sordid dislike to his marriage, on the ground that I feared lest some portion of his estates should pass away from me. No wonder that I was stricken dumb with the accusation, or that when I recovered the power of speech, my incoherent words, coupled with my still vacant and dismayed looks, should have seemed to justify his suspicions. But what could I tell him? Not the truth. I could not confess that I adored and worshipped his charming and beautiful wife. You know that I could not! He ordered me from the house, — this house in which he had not beheld my presence with pleasure from the first moment of his return with his bride. Since then, for more

than a year, we have been estranged, and I have known not how to act. But have you forgotten the day, sweetest Ethel, when I met you by accident seven or eight months ago, and when under the influence of my impassioned love, I avowed all I felt? Have you forgotten how by your looks rather than by your words, you suffered me to understand that you had not seen me with indifference? And then, too, on those few occasions that we have since met, in those hurried and stolen interviews which I have managed to obtain, you have confessed the love which you feel for me—”

“Again, I ask you, Adolphus,” inquired Ethel, glancing anxiously toward the door, “why all these recapitulations?”

“Listen, my beloved one, and you shall learn what I mean. I have already told you,” continued Lord Osmond, “that I cannot possibly exist in this manner. I must see you often — constantly. If it be only to gaze upon your countenance, to hear the sound of your voice, and to press your hand occasionally, — these pleasures must I have. You will not deny them? This, then, is the plan I have formed: I will humble myself to my father; I will acknowledge a selfishness and a worldly-mindedness of which I never was guilty; I will beseech his forgiveness. He cannot refuse it. With all his numerous faults, he is not a man possessing a heart that can be termed unredeemably bad. You will tell him presently that finding he was not at home, I ventured to seek an interview with you, that I besought you to deliver to his ears the assurance of my contrition — ”

“O Adolphus, it is impossible! We cannot live beneath the same roof,” interrupted the countess, with the vehemence of one who felt that all her good resolutions were rapidly melting away, and who sought to regain them.

“Surely, surely, we can be upon our guard,” said Lord Osmond, with a look and tone of the most earnest entreaty; “surely, surely, we can so control our looks, so measure our words, so bear ourselves to each other, as to defy suspicion? In my father’s presence, I will be all respectful attention toward you — ”

“O Adolphus,” murmured the countess, “this love of ours will be fatal to me; it will be my destruction — I feel that it will. There is already a terrible presentiment of evil in my soul — ”

“Banish it, Ethel, banish it, I beseech you,” and the

young nobleman grew more earnest and imploring in his pleadings. "Abandon not yourself to such groundless fears, such baseless misgivings. I tell you that we will be all circumspection in our conduct. But conceive the happiness, dearest Ethel, of living beneath the same roof, of breathing the same atmosphere —"

"No, Adolphus, it is impossible," exclaimed the countess, all her better feelings and all her fortitude suddenly reviving with greater power too than on any other occasion during this interview: "I have been standing on the brink of a precipice, and I will retreat in time. If you really love me, if you entertain the slightest spark of affection for me, impel me not over that brink, hurl me not down into the abyss beneath. No, no, it shall not be. Besides, Adolphus, it would be something shocking and revolting to think that you, the son, should live beneath the same roof with my husband, the father, and know that I am compelled to receive from him those caresses which you may not in honour bestow. My mind is made up. It will cost me many, many bitter pangs to renounce this love of yours, but it shall be done. And if I who am a woman can prove thus resolute, you, as a man, must show yourself even stronger still in the performance of a duty. Leave me, Adolphus; I entreat — I conjure — nay, I command that you leave me."

"Ethel, dearest Ethel, you are driving me to despair," and the young nobleman was frightfully distressed.

"And I too am in despair," rejoined the countess, "but my resolve is taken. It would be cruel, worse than cruel, ungenerous and unmanly for you, Adolphus, to attempt to turn me from my purpose. Leave me, I say."

"And my father?" inquired Lord Osmond, in a deep voice full of concentrated emotion, while his looks did indeed bespeak the despair which his lips had proclaimed; "what will you say to him? How will you account for my presence here to-day?"

"I will tell him all that you have suggested," was Ethel's quick and firm response, "but frankly do I inform you, Adolphus, that I shall speak in such a manner as to show that while I earnestly wish him to become friendly with you again, it is not my desire that you should return to dwell in this house."

With these words, the Countess of Lascelles rose abruptly

from the sofa, and not daring to trust herself another moment with Adolphus, she rushed from the room. A few minutes afterward the young nobleman issued from the house, with a forced serenity of aspect, but with blank despair in his heart.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE EVENING PARTY

It was now the memorable Saturday evening on which Mrs. Macaulay was to give her party in honour of the reconciliation between herself and Mrs. Sifkin, who lived over the way. The number of guests had been duly borne in mind with regard to the preparations for the entertainment, but at about six o'clock Mrs. Macaulay gave another look at the eatables and drinkables, for the purpose of satisfying herself that there would be sufficient on the one hand, as well as that there should be no undue extravagance on the other. Opening a cupboard in her own front parlor, she contemplated a little array of five decanters, — two containing port, purchased at the rate of one and threepence a bottle at the oilman's who dealt in British wines, the next two containing sherry, procured at the same place and at the same price, and the fifth decanter being two-thirds full of brandy, which Mrs. Macaulay had not purchased at all, but which were the remains of a bottle that Mr. Redcliffe had no further use for.

“ Let me see,” said Mrs. Macaulay; “ how many will there be of us altogether? ” and she proceeded to tell off the expected guests on her fingers for about the twentieth time during this particular day. “ There is the two Wanklins, Miss Spilsbury, and Captain Bluff; that's four. Then there's me and Master Ashton, for I know from what he said his sister won't come, so that makes six. Then there's Mrs. Dumpling, Mrs. Sifkin, Mr. Chubb (the sanctimonious humbug!) and Mr. Hogben; that makes ten. Then there's Mrs. Chowley and her two daughters — the conceited chits! — and that makes thirteen. Thirteen people, and four bottles of wine. Each bottle ten glasses; that's forty glasses, to

be divided by thirteen. Well, it will give three apiece, and just leave a drain at the bottom of each decanter for gentility's sake. Because then comes the brandy, the hot water and sugar — and I am not quite clear but that there's rather too much wine."

Mrs. Macaulay stood gazing dubiously for a few minutes on the little array of decanters, pondering whether she should suppress the production of one of port or one of sherry, and there was even a moment when she actually thought of keeping back one of each. But then she remembered that she had promised to do the thing handsomely and come out with a genteel little spread, so she decided upon keeping back nothing at all, and going the whole hog with her extravagance and profusion for once in a way. Having arrived at this decision, she hastened down-stairs to inspect the larder, and having cast a look over its contents, she soliloquized after the following fashion:

"Cold veal pie at the head of the table, — large enough to bear at least thirteen helps. Then there's four dozen of oysters ordered for nine o'clock — But dear me! what if the best part of the company should take a fancy to oysters? I sha'n't touch any for one, but there are twelve who might, and how many would that give to each? Four dozen is forty-eight, and twelves into forty-eight go four. That would be only four oysters apiece."

At this awful calculation the worthy lady looked somewhat blank, and she was even deliberating whether she should not send forth to order an extra two dozen of oysters, when she again plunged her looks into the larder, and went on soliloquizing.

"Fried sausages and mashed potatoes for the bottom of the table, and the oysters to go in the middle. The spread, after all, would be genteel and liberal enough. Susan," she exclaimed, turning around to one of the maids, "did Mr. Redcliffe give orders for his dinner to-morrow, as he always does on Saturday night for the Sunday?"

"Yes, ma'am," was the response. "He said, as usual, that we were to get him what we liked, so as he wasn't troubled about it, only that he didn't want any more poultry for the present."

"Then that's capital," cried Mrs. Macaulay, her countenance becoming radiant. "There's this fowl that he's only

eaten a wing of for to-day's dinner, and which he won't think of having up again. I am sure I should be the last person in the world to make use of it if I wasn't certain that he would not want it. And as for leaving it here to get as dry as a stick by Monday morning, and then be told that he didn't wish to see it brought up to table again, — it would be quite a sin. So I tell you what, Susan, cut it up; make the one wing look as much like two as possible, by dividing the pinion, and broil it all with mushroom sauce. There are some pickled mushrooms in a bottle somewhere. Yes, after all it will be a beautiful little supper, and I know Mrs. Dumpling will be ready to bite her own head off with envy and jealousy when she thinks of her own trumpery suppers of stale tarts and currant wine."

Having arrived at all these very comfortable and satisfactory conclusions, Mrs. Macaulay gave out the tea, coffee, and sugar, as well as the silver tea-spoons, which she carefully counted, and with many injunctions against breaking any of the best china tea-service, she sailed forth from the kitchen. Ascending to her chamber, which was behind the parlour, she performed her toilet, and at five minutes before seven she lighted the mould candles in the sitting-room just named. Then, in all the glory of a new black silk gown, a cap with pink ribbons, her gold watch and chain, and a large fan which she had won in a sixpenny raffle twenty-five years previously, she took her seat to await the presence of the company. At five minutes past seven there was a double knock at the door, and the servant ushered in Mr. and Mrs. Wanklin, — the former a short, sedate, sentimental-looking, pale-faced man in spectacles, the latter a tall, stately, consequential dame, and both of "a certain age." They dwelt in the neighbourhood, Mr. Wanklin keeping a circulating library on one side of a little shop, and Mrs. Wanklin a Berlin wool emporium by means of the window, shelves, and counter of the opposite side. This arrival was speedily followed by that of Miss Spilsbury, a tall, gaunt maiden lady of fifty, with a hatchet face and a demure look, a brown false front, and a slate-coloured silk dress, very scanty in the skirt. She had an independence of seventy-five pounds a year, and was therefore much thought of by her friends and acquaintances. She was followed by Mr. Chubb, the parish clerk, a stout, bald-headed, pragmatic individual,

sententious in his speech, and sepulchral in his tone. Then came Mrs. Chowley and the two Miss Chowleys, — the mamma being a young widow of fifty-six or so, and “the girls” (as she called them) being respectively thirty-two and thirty. This delightful family kept a baby-linen warehouse in the Tottenham Court Road, and as Mrs. Chowley’s brother was butler in a duke’s family, and her great-grandfather had been coachman to some other duke in the time of George II, the said delightful family was considered exceedingly aristocratic in all its connections and associations.

Scarcely were the Chowleys seated, when there was a terrific knock and violent ring at the front door, and Captain Bluff was in a few moments announced. This was a guest of whom Mrs. Macaulay had reason to be proud, on account of the prefix of “captain,” although the gallant officer himself did not wear any particular uniform, for the simple reason that none is worn by the commanders of the Gravesend steam-packets, to which service Captain Bluff was honourably attached. The captain — who was a red-faced, weather-beaten man, dressed all in blue, with a blue-checked shirt — was warmly greeted by his hostess, and duly presented to the other guests, to whom he was previously unknown. At first the Miss Chowleys — who were very ugly and very affected, and imbued with the most exquisite appreciation of everything which was aristocratic and genteel — thought it necessary to be amazingly disgusted, inasmuch as the captain brought with him an unmistakable odour of rum and strong Cubas, but their looks and their manner changed all in a moment, when Mrs. Macaulay hastily whispered to them aside, that her very particular friend Captain Bluff had a few pounds in the Funds and was a single man; so that the young ladies most amiably made room for this jolly young bachelor of eight and forty to sit between them on one side of the fireplace.

The captain’s arrival was promptly followed by that of Mrs. Dumpling, who was a stout, red-faced, important dame, very fond of mixing herself up in her neighbours’ concerns, very much given to gossiping and scandal, and equally so to strong waters, whether gin, rum, brandy, or shrub. On entering the apartment, she cast her looks around, and then fixing her gaze significantly upon Mrs. Macaulay, said, “So she has not come yet?”

"Why, I dare say," was the answer of the worthy hostess, "that Mrs. Sifkin wants you all to be assembled first, and gives you time for the purpose, so that her own appearance may have a becoming effect. And it's very right and proper on her part too, because, you know," added Mrs. Macaulay, looking around, "that Mrs. Sifkin is in duty bound to offer me her hand first when she enters the room."

Hereupon a discussion arose, — Mr. Chubb, the parish clerk, gravely and sententiously expressing his opinion that as Mrs. Macaulay was the hostess, and as she had already received an apology from Mrs. Sifkin, conveyed through Mrs. Dumpling, it was only consistent with good breeding that Mrs. Macaulay should be foremost in welcoming her late enemy. Mr. Wanklin was of the same sentiment, which he confirmed by a quotation from a novel in his own circulating library; Mrs. Chowley followed on the same side, observing that from her connections she had peculiar opportunities of laying down the law of etiquette on such a delicate point. This remark enabled the elder Miss Chowley — who had already set her cap at the captain — to seize the occasion of whispering in his ear that her uncle was butler in a duke's household, and that her great-great-grandfather had been coachman to some other duke; whereat Captain Bluff expressed his admiration by a knowing wink, and looked toward the cupboard as if he were longing to make himself acquainted with its contents. However, it was finally settled that Mrs. Macaulay should present her hand to Mrs. Sifkin whensoever that lady might make her appearance, and though Mrs. Macaulay outwardly yielded with an excellent grace, she inwardly vowed eternal animosity thenceforth to all present who had conspired to force her into such a degradation.

"I don't think we are all here yet?" said Mrs. Dumpling, in a bland whisper to Mrs. Macaulay, "for I recollect you told me —"

"No, we are not all here yet," interrupted the lady thus appealed to, as she drew herself up in a dignified manner. "There's Mr. Hogben to come, — the gentleman, you know, who was for twenty years in the service of the late king and that of her present Majesty, but who suddenly had a fortune left him."

Here it may be as well to inform the reader that Mr. Hogben, whose official services under the Crown were so magnificently paraded, had for twenty years filled the honourable though onerous, bustling, and not very lucrative situation of two-penny postman, but by a sudden windfall inheriting a few thousand pounds, he had set up as a gentleman and was now living on his means.

Scarcely had Mrs. Macaulay ceased speaking, when an unmistakable postman's knock caused the whole company to start, with the exception of Captain Bluff, who was never known to start at anything, not even when his steamer upset a wherry and drowned three people while working its way through the crowded mazes of the Pool.

"That's Mr. Hogben," cried Mrs. Macaulay. "Dear me! that a gentleman in his situation should give such a knock. But it's all the force of habit, and quite natural enough, Lord bless us!"

"Amen!" said Mr. Chubb, the parish clerk, in his deep, sepulchral voice, and the utterance of the word was another illustration of that force of habit which Mrs. Macaulay had just been commenting upon.

Mr. Hogben made his appearance, and a very remarkable one it was too. He was a thin, wiry individual, dressed out in a style which even the Miss Chowleys whisperingly declared to be the very pink of fashion, and he glided into the room with a quick, shambling gait, just as postmen are seen to adopt as they shuffle rapidly along the streets, pursuing their professional avocations from one house door to another.

"And still we are not complete," said Mrs. Dumpling to Mrs. Macaulay, when Mr. Hogben, having taken a seat next to Mrs. Chowley, began to pay very marked attention to this dashing young widow of fifty-six.

"No, not yet," responded the hostess to Mrs. Dumpling's remark; then raising her voice for the behoof of all the company, she added, "I am certain of having the pleasure of introducing to you a young gentleman — ahem! — secretary to his Grace the Duke of Marchmont, and of course the duke's very particular and intimate friend. Only conceive the pleasure and happiness of living constantly with a duke."

"As my uncle does now," said the elder Miss Chowley, thus alluding to the relative who served as a ducal butler.

“ And as our ancestor did before him,” added the younger Miss Chowley, thus, with a proud family satisfaction, referring to her great-great-grandfather who was a ducal coachman.

“ Well, I never seed a dook to my knowledge in all my life,” said Captain Bluff, who spoke in a very hoarse voice, “ except it was at the figger-head of a ship, and that was a wooden dook — old Vellington.”

The conversation was interrupted by the maid's announcement of “ Mr. Ashton,” and Christian made his appearance.

“ And where, my very dear young friend,” cried Mrs. Macaulay, when the usual compliments were exchanged, “ is that charming sister of yours. What! she couldn't come? Oh, dear me! I am so disappointed. But I suppose — ahem! — Lady Octavian Meredith couldn't spare her? Mr. Ashton's sister,” added the worthy woman, looking around upon her guests, “ is the bosom friend — ahem! — of Lady Octavian Meredith, and I am sure you are all as much disappointed as I am that she cannot come.”

Of course there was a universal expression of feeling in accordance with Mrs. Macaulay's remark, and Christian, as a duke's secretary, and having a sister who was bosom friend to a titled lady, at once became the lion of the party.

Another knock and ring now produced a greater sensation than any previous summons at the front door, for every one present felt assured that this must be Mrs. Sifkin. And Mrs. Sifkin it was who made her appearance in the shape of a little vinegar-looking, sharp-eyed, angular-featured woman, with carrot hair. She was very plainly dressed, and seemed every inch of her the griping, greedy, cheese-paring lodging-house keeper. Her thin lips were tightly compressed, and she had evidently made up her mind to treat Mrs. Macaulay with just as much civility or reserve, as the case might be, which she should experience at that lady's hands. There was a solemn silence as the two rivals stood in the presence of each other, but when Mrs. Macaulay extended her hand and bade Mrs. Sifkin consider herself to be quite at home, the guests signified their applause by what would be termed “ a sensation ” on the part of a public meeting. Then the vinegar aspect of Mrs. Sifkin relaxed, and she smiled in as honeyed a manner as such a countenance could possibly smile. Nothing then

could exceed the love and friendship, the esteem and affection, which all in a moment sprang up between the late rivals and enemies. Mrs. Macaulay thought it becoming to get up a little cry, sobbingly vowing that she had always regarded Mrs. Sifkin with a sisterly love although they were at daggers drawn; to which Mrs. Sifkin replied that as a true Christian she had never failed to remember Mrs. Macaulay in her prayers. This assertion elicited a deep, sepulchral "Amen!" from the parish clerk, a quotation from a Minerva-press novel on the part of Mr. Wanklin, the circulating-library keeper, and a subdued expression which sounded very much like "Humbug!" from the throat of Captain Bluff.

Things however were now upon a most amiable footing. Mrs. Macaulay rang for tea and coffee, and sat herself down at the table to preside over the festive scene. Plates of thin bread and butter, toast, and seed-cake (this being cut up in thirteen very small slices) were placed upon the board; the cups "which cheered without inebriating" were passed around, to the satisfaction of all present save that of Captain Bluff, who, though he tossed off a cup of coffee at one draught, had all his thoughts settled upon rum. When the tea things were cleared away, there was a round game, from which, however, Mr. Chubb, the parish clerk, requested to be omitted, on the ground that it was inconsistent with the solemnity and piety of his clerical calling, and he remembered also that he had a few baptismal certificates to fill up at home. So, having been careful to ascertain at what hour supper would be on table, he begged to be excused in the meanwhile.

The round game progressed very well without him, and was only once disturbed by an insinuation on the part of Mrs. Sifkin that Mrs. Dumpling had purloined some of her fish, but the former lady suffered herself to be appeased by the circumstance of Captain Bluff considerably giving her a handful of his own, — an act of kindness which was performed just in time to save Mrs. Dumpling from the disagreeable ordeal of having her eyes scratched out by her vixenish accuser. Christian might have made a similar accusation, and with considerable truth, too, if he had chosen, against Miss Spilsbury, for if this highly respectable maiden lady, who lived upon an independence and was considered "quite genteel," kept very quiet in respect to her tongue, she was

very busy with her fingers, and every time she thought Christian was not looking, she pilfered his fish, endeavouring to conceal the theft under a short cough and a fumbling for her pocket-handkerchief. Christian, however, suffered himself to be robbed with a most exemplary patience, — a circumstance which raised him so high in Miss Spilsbury's estimation that, when the round game was over, she whispered to Mrs. Macaulay, loud enough for him to overhear, that he was the nicest young man she had ever met in all her life.

The round game being finished, the maid entered to lay the cloth for supper, and Mr. Chubb, the parish clerk, now reappeared, smelling very strong of tobacco smoke, looking very red in the face, and having a certain watery, vacant stare about the eyes. This, however, would not have occasioned any wonder on the part of the company, if they had known that instead of retiring into the bosom of his own family to write out baptismal certificates, he had been all the time in the hot parlour of the public-house around the corner, smoking his pipe and moistening his lips with three successive pints of strong old Kennet ale, — a proceeding which the ecclesiastical gentleman doubtless regarded as far more innocent and likewise as more orthodox than joining in a round game of "commerce."

While the servant was laying the cloth, Mrs. Macaulay affected to be conversing in a perfectly calm and untroubled manner, though in reality she was watching askance every movement and arrangement of her domestic, for fear lest she should do something wrong, and she could not help interspersing her conversation with frequent hints and orders to the girl.

"Well, as I was saying," Mrs. Macaulay observed, "it would be impossible to have a nicer or better lodger than Mr. Redcliffe. He never troubles himself about — the pepper box on that side, Jane — what he is going to have for dinner, as long as his meals are served up regular. He is very quiet, — the mustard in this corner, Jane, — talks very little to anybody, — look! the cloth is all tumbled, — but is out a great deal. I am sure for the life of me I don't know what he can always be doing with himself, — do take care, Jane! — and the other night he stayed out so very late I was quite frightened — the pie at this end, Jane."

“Genelmen will stay out late sometimes,” observed Captain Bluff, and he winked knowingly at the first male countenance which met his eye at the moment, and which happened to be that of Mr. Chubb, the parish clerk, who instantaneously put on an air of indignation, which, inasmuch as it was a tipsy one, only had the effect of making Captain Bluff burst out into a shout of uproarious laughter.

“Did you mean that look and that laugh for me, sir?” inquired Mr. Chubb, in the deepest of his sepulchral tones, and endeavouring to appear very awfully solemn indeed.

“Well, I did, and that’s the truth on’t,” returned Captain Bluff; “so you can put it in your pipe and smoke it, and if so be it’s a sort of bakker you ain’t used to, you must make the best of the bargian.”

Here Mr. Chubb rose from his seat, and was either about to appeal to the company or else to make a personal assault upon Captain Bluff, when the elder Miss Chowley threw herself between them, and availed herself of the opportunity to get up a most interesting little tragedy of affright, entreaty, and hysterical symptoms, not forgetting to implore the captain to master his temper and spare her feelings.

“Oh, let him get the steam up,” vociferated Bluff; “he’s precious cranky and will soon bust his biler.”

Mr. Chubb looked around with awe-inspiring dismay. The idea that a parish clerk should be thus insulted — thus outraged. What would the world come to next? This dreadful question did Mr. Chubb’s countenance appear to ask, in default of the power of his tongue to say anything at all.

“Come, old feller,” said Bluff, who was really a very good-natured man, “I didn’t mean to offend you. If that there twenty-horse power steam-ingin which is working in your buzzum goes too fast, ease her and stop her, but don’t go for to keep down the safety-valve with the sartainty of busting outright in a minute or two. Here, tip us your paddle, and let’s sit down to mess as good friends.”

“Amen!” groaned Mr. Chubb, as he extended the hand which, figuratively described as a paddle, the gallant captain had so bluntly solicited.

Supper was now served up. The veal pie stood at the head of the table, the dish of oysters in the middle, the sausages and mashed potatoes at the bottom. The broiled fowl, with the mushroom sauce, looked very handsome as a side dish,

and in order to correspond therewith, the thoughtful servant had placed on the opposite side an apple tart, which had been made for Mr. Redcliffe's dinner on the morrow, but which the said thoughtful Jane had taken it into her head might just as well figure on her mistress's supper-table for this particular occasion. She then glanced half-smilingly and half-apprehensively at Mrs. Macaulay, to assure herself that this little prudential arrangement met the worthy lady's approbation, and the quick but scarcely perceptible nod which her mistress gave placed her perfectly at her ease.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, pray be seated," said Mrs. Macaulay. "You see I treat you without ceremony; it is merely a humble repast, but such as it is, you are quite welcome," and as she thus spoke, she glanced askance at Mrs. Dumpling to see how that lady regarded the display.

But so far from Mrs. Dumpling being ready through envy or jealousy to bite her own head off, — as Mrs. Macaulay had ere now anticipated, — the sort of readiness she did exhibit was a strong yearning to commence an attack on the sausages and mashed potatoes. The company seated themselves, and, to Mrs. Macaulay's infinite relief, the oysters, so far from being in general request, were only rendered available for the appetites of a few, so that she had no fear of an insufficiency of that particular portion of the repast.

"What for you, Mr. Chubb?" inquired Mrs. Macaulay, when she had seen that the ladies were becomingly cared for. "Shall it be pie? I can recommend it."

"Amen," responded the parish clerk, who had just emptied his tumbler of ale and had beckoned the girl to refill it.

"And you, Captain Bluff?" said Mrs. Macaulay, with her most amiable smile.

"Sassengers and meshed tateurs for me, ma'am," was the captain's response. "Always begin with the hot things and wind up with cold uns. Leave the coldest till last, 'cos why they lays easier on t'other foundation. So I'll have sassengers fust; then I'll pitch into the briled fowl, arterward I'll taste the meat pie, and I'll wind up with a dozen or so of them hoysters, with maybe a bit of the thingumbob on t'other side of the table," thus alluding to the fruit tart.

There was now a pause, of which Mrs. Macaulay took advantage to say in an impressive manner, "Jane, you have forgotten to put the port and sherry on the table."

Here the worthy hostess again looked furtively at Mrs. Dumpling, but this excellent lady was so busy with the food upon her plate that she had really no time nor thought for that envy and jealousy which Mrs. Macaulay had been anxious to provoke, and therefore the absence of those feelings on Mrs. Dumpling's part rather chagrined and annoyed Mrs. Macaulay than otherwise.

The wine was produced, and Mrs. Macaulay begged the ladies and gentlemen to take care of themselves.

"I don't know whether you like port that is fruity, Mr. Chubb," she said, "but my wine-merchant assured me that this was of the very best quality, and I don't mind whispering in your ear that it is the same which he supplies to the Duke of Wellington's table."

This whispered assurance was, however, loud enough to be caught by the ear of every one present, and Mrs. Dumpling, who was at the moment handing her plate for a third supply of sausages and mashed potatoes, had leisure to bridle up and exchange a malicious look with Mrs. Sifkin, as much as to imply that this was a mere romance of their dearly beloved and excellent hostess about her wine. Mrs. Macaulay, who saw what was passing, nevertheless affected to be perfectly innocent on the subject, though she inwardly vowed to cut Mrs. Dumpling from the very moment after their shaking hands when the hour for departure should come, and she was equally resolute to pick another quarrel with Mrs. Sifkin on the following day.

"Try the sherry, Mr. Ashton," she said, still maintaining all the winning urbanity proper to the hospitable founder of a feast. "By the bye, how very extraordinary! this is some of the identical wine which is supplied to your friend the Duke of Marchmont. You surely must recognize it? You must have tasted the same quality at his Grace's table?"

Now, in making this earnest appeal to our youthful hero, Mrs. Macaulay had two distinct objects to gain. One was to elicit such an answer as would confirm the impression she wished to convey about the excellence of her wine, and the other was to stand on a pedestal in the estimation of her guests at thus being on such intimate terms with the friend and companion of a duke. But Christian was both too honest and too inexperienced in the ways of the world to be coaxed and wheedled into a falsehood for the behoof of

Mrs. Macaulay's pride and vanity, so he answered, with great ingenuousness and naïveté, "Really I am no judge of wine, though this seems sweeter than any sherry I have ever tasted before, and as for the duke's table, of course I don't dine at it; I take my meals with the steward."

Mrs. Dumpling and Mrs. Sikfin exchanged rapid but malicious glances, and the Miss Chowleys tossed their heads, as much as to infer that Christian was nothing so very great after all, and that they were not quite sure he was anything better than their uncle who was a duke's butler, or their ancestor who had been a duke's coachman. Mrs. Macaulay, for the moment thrown into confusion by young Ashton's unsophisticated response, appeared to be suddenly seized with an inclination to dive deep into the mysteries of the pie before her, and fortunately Captain Bluff came out with something comical in the course of a minute, so that the conversation was turned and Mrs. Macaulay recovered her good spirits.

The comestibles were disposed of, and literally so, for every dish was emptied, Mrs. Dumpling eating enough for any six moderate feeders, and Captain Bluff partaking of everything, finishing the oysters, and winding up with a plate of apple tart. The brandy was now placed upon the board. The conversation grew more animated; Captain Bluff became more and more uproarious, and flung amatory glances upon the elder Miss Chowley. The consequence was that this young lady, who for the last sixteen years — indeed ever since she was sixteen — had been looking out for a husband, felt assured she was in a fair way to obtain one at last, and when the captain, under the influence of the bad wine, frequent tumblers of ale, and his second glass of brandy and water, trod accidentally with his heavy boot upon her toe, at the same time (but this was purposely done) whispering some joke about the baby-linen warehouse, Miss Chowley felt that her conquest was complete. She whispered a few words to her mamma, who in order to listen to her eldest "girl" was compelled for the moment to leave off listening to the tender whispers of Mr. Hogben, the enriched twopenny postman, and the result of the whispering between the mamma and the daughter was that the latter conveyed to the captain an invitation (also in a whisper) to tea on the following evening.

“Blow me tight,” vociferated Bluff, “if I wouldn’t come and tackle your mess-table with the greatest pleasure, but to-morrow there’s a excursion down to Margate with my boat, and I must be on the paddle-box from nine in the morning till nine at night.”

Miss Chowley blushed red as a peony at the stentorian manner in which her whispered invitation to tea was thus proclaimed to the whole company, and Miss Spilsbury — the tall, gaunt maiden lady — drew up her form with a prudishness which made it look still taller and more gaunt than it was before.

But this little incident was quickly succeeded by another which attracted general notice. Mrs. Dumpling, who had a keen eye to the spirits, saw that the brandy was so rapidly disappearing she must make haste and finish her first tumbler in order to have a chance of obtaining a second, and in doing this, some of the hot, steaming fluid went what is called “the wrong way.” So poor Mrs. Dumpling became almost convulsed with a violent fit of coughing, and looked as if she were going off in an apoplectic fit.

“Tap her on the back,” cried Mrs. Sifkin.

“Cut her stay-lace,” exclaimed Mrs. Wanklin.

“Throw water into her face,” said Mrs. Macaulay, with an air of deepest concern, and inwardly hoping that some one would at once follow out the suggestion by dashing a tumbler full of the cold fluid in the choking lady’s countenance.

“Ease her,” cried Captain Bluff, in a voice as loud and hoarse as if he were roaring from the top of the paddle-box to the boy stationed at the hatchway of the engine-room. “Stop her. Don’t let her go ahead like that ’ere. By jingo, she’s gone down starn foremost!” he vociferatingly added, as the unfortunate Mrs. Dumpling tumbled off her chair.

Mr. Chubb, the parish clerk, instantaneously endeavoured to raise the worthy dame, but he tumbled down likewise, for truth compels us to declare that this very orthodox gentleman was now excessively drunk.

“That’s all the effect of your good wine, ma’am,” roared Captain Bluff, with a shout of laughter. “Their bilers is busted, their ingins is all stopped, they’re reglarly brandy-logged. I knowed how it would be. They must ile their wheels well for theirselves afore they’ll go agin.”

At first Mrs. Macaulay was inclined to be very indignant

and to seem very much disgusted at this exhibition on the part of Mrs. Dumpling and the parish clerk, but the compliment conveyed by Captain Bluff in respect to her wine not merely appeased her in a moment, but made her look upon the scene with a complaisant and satisfied air. Mrs. Dumpling was speedily raised up in the brawny arms of Captain Bluff, while Christian performed the same kind office for Mr. Chubb.

"I'm afeard you're wery drunk, sir," said the captain, now finding leisure to address this observation with John Bull bluntness and seamanlike frankness to the discomfited parish clerk, "wery drunk indeed, sir! and I likes for to see it. Shows you've been enjoying yourself."

"Amen!" gutturally hiccoughed Mr. Chubb.

"Do, my dear young friend," said Mrs. Macaulay to Christian, "see the poor man home. He lives in Duke Street, next door, you know, to the baker's where you used to deal when you lived here."

"I will see him home with much pleasure," replied young Ashton. "But do you think he can stand?"

"Stand?" echoed Chubb, and the next moment he began rapping out such a series of profane oaths that the Miss Chowleys shrieked in dismay, and Mrs. Chowley was so much overcome that she fell into the arms of Mr. Hogben, who kindly offered to deliver her at her own door, though perhaps it would prove the weightiest letter he had ever in all his experience had so to deliver. As for Miss Spilsbury, she pursed up her mouth with supreme disgust, while Mrs. Sifkin whispered to Mrs. Wanklin that if people would cheat their guests with wine at one and three pence, making them believe it cost five shillings a bottle, it was no wonder such consequences should ensue.

In the midst of the confusion Christian managed to get the parish clerk out of the room, and anon out of the house, but scarcely had he been thus conducted into the fresh air, when Mr. Chubb seemed doggedly determined to sit down upon the front-door steps, and with sundry imprecations invoked against his own eyes and limbs, he persisted in pulling off his coat and high-lows, with the idea that he was in his own chamber and about to get into bed. Christian experienced the greatest trouble in lifting him up again, and as he led the parish clerk along, this inebriate gentleman

shouted forth a strange medley, consisting of portions of the hundredth psalm and of a bacchanalian song, so that it was fortunate indeed they encountered no policeman, or Mr. Chubb might have passed the remainder of the night in the station-house.

Ultimately our young hero succeeded in getting the parish clerk to his own door, which they thus reached as some adjacent church clock was proclaiming the hour of midnight. It was a private house, for Mr. Chubb was a schoolmaster, and his schoolroom was at the back part of the premises, with an entrance from another street. A light was burning in the front parlour, and the moment Christian knocked at the door that light disappeared, so that he knew his summons was to be at once attended to. He heard a chain let fall within, and the door was opened. But Christian was seized with amazement at the first glance which he threw upon the being who thus opened that door. She was a young creature of not more than sixteen, and of the most ravishing beauty. That same glance showed him too that there was an air of superiority about her, — a natural gentility which forbade the thought that she could be the daughter of the parish clerk. Yet she was plainly though neatly dressed, and thus so far as her apparel went, she might have belonged to the Chubb family. But Christian felt convinced she did not. There was as much difference between the clumsy vulgarity of Mr. Chubb and the exquisite gentility of this charming creature as there is between the uncouth cart-horse and the thoroughbred.

The parish clerk was leaning against the railings in front of the house, his hat cocked over his left ear, his white cravat loosened and in disorder, and his lips giving forth incoherent mutterings, in which the words "vestry," "hundredth psalm," "praise and glory," blended with an oath or two, were alone intelligible.

"I am sorry," said Christian, lifting his hat to the young creature whose beauty so ravished him, "that you should be compelled to gaze on such a spectacle as this."

The young girl advanced upon the threshold, held forward the light which she carried in her hand, and now saw more plainly than she did at first, in what condition Mr. Chubb had been brought home. Her countenance, hitherto remarkable for its softness, and characterized by the sweetest amia-

bility of look, rapidly assumed an expression of mingled astonishment, indignation, and disgust, but suddenly be-
thinking herself that some answer was due to Christian's
courteous remark, she said, with a well-bred affability,
blended with the sweetest virginal modesty, "And I on my
part, sir, am sorry that you should have had so unpleasant a
task to perform."

"What's the matter?" cried a shrill, vixenish, female
voice from the top of the staircase; "what's the matter, I
say, Miss Vincent?"

"Ah," thought Christian to himself, "she is not, then,
the daughter of these people," and he felt an indescribable
and at the moment unaccountable satisfaction at receiving
this confirmation of his previous idea upon the subject.

"It is Mr. Chubb," answered the young lady, for such
indeed did she appear to be, and she spoke with an amiable
sweetness, mingled, however, with a visible timidity and
trepidation.

"Then why doesn't Mr. Chubb come in?" demanded the
same shrill voice which had already spoken from the head
of the staircase. "And who are you a-talking to there, Miss
Vincent?"

"A young gentleman has been kind enough," she answered,
"to see Mr. Chubb home."

"Oh, I understand all about it," cried the shrill voice;
"he's drunk — the beast!"

At this coarse, though really not altogether uncalled for
remark, the countenance of the beautiful Miss Vincent
flushed again, as if the natural delicacy of her soul were
shocked at the woman's grossness, and the quick, furtive
look which she threw at Christian showed him how pained
she felt at being thus seen in any sort of connection with such
low-bred persons. The youth, however, glanced toward her
with a mingled admiration and sympathy, which proved
that he felt for her, and that so far from thinking the worse
of her for being in that house, he commiserated her on
account of the circumstances, whatsoever they might be,
which had thus thrown her in the companionship of the
Chubb family.

Mrs. Chubb now made her appearance, in the form of
a tall, gawky, lean woman, with a very sour aspect, and
indeed a forbidding look. She was only half-dressed, and

was in her nightcap, having evidently emerged from her couch.

“ I am sure if I had expected this,” she exclaimed, “ when I went to bed, ill as I was, and asked you, Miss Vincent, to have the kindness to sit up for him — But see how the drunken brute is leaning against them railings. Isn’t he a pretty feller to stand up to-morrow and ask others to jine in with him in singing to the praise and glory of God? Why, he’ll have his eyes so bleared and red and blinking that he’ll look like an owl in an ivy bush. Come along, do!” and she wound up her tiade by clutching her husband by the arm and shaking him violently.

Mr. Chubb, who evidently stood in mortal awe of his wife, was a trifle sobered by her presence and by the shaking process, so that he was enabled to stagger into the house.

“ Thank’ee, young gentleman, for your attention,” said Mrs. Chubb to our hero.

“ Good night, sir,” said Miss Vincent, in the sweet music of her soft voice.

“ Good night,” answered Christian, and as the door closed behind him, he walked slowly away, his imagination full of the beautiful creature whom he had thus seen at the parish clerk’s house.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE BOX

PRECISELY at nine o'clock on the ensuing Tuesday evening, Christian Ashton arrived in a cab at Madame Angelique's establishment. He alighted, and entering the shop, which was not as yet closed, gave his name to Madame Angelique's French deputy, who was behind the counter. The woman seemed at once to understand what she had to do, and in her broken English she informed Christian that if he would return to the cab, the box he had been sent for should be immediately brought out to him. In a few minutes this woman herself appeared, carrying the box, which was a large deal one, carefully corded, and the key was sealed up in a little parcel, which was likewise consigned to Christian's care.

The cab drove away, and as the driver had previously received his instructions from our hero, he proceeded straight to Mortimer Street. Mr. Redcliffe was at home, expecting Christian, and the youth himself carried the box up-stairs to Mr. Redcliffe's sitting apartment. He received a cordial welcome from that gentleman, who also inquired most kindly after his sister.

"I saw her this morning, sir," replied Christian, "and she was quite well. She is, however, naturally grieved at the circumstance of my leaving town, because we shall be separated for a whole month. And now, Mr. Redcliffe, I have brought the box according to your instructions, and here is a little packet containing the key."

Redcliffe took the packet, examined the seal, and found that it was a common one, impressed by a stone that had no device nor initials upon it. He unhesitatingly broke open the packet, took forth the key, and bade Christian uncord

the box. This was speedily done, and Mr. Redcliffe then said, "I have before observed to you, Christian, that we are engaged in an enterprise which will not permit us to be over-scrupulous or fastidious in the course we pursue. It is better that we should be guilty of a slight violation of the sanctity of seals and locks than tamely and quietly suffer an amiable and virtuous lady to become the victim of the most nefarious conspiracy."

Having thus spoken, Mr. Redcliffe unlocked the box, and when he raised the lid, the contents were found to consist of beautiful female dresses.

"After all," said Christian, "this box seems to furnish no such clue, sir, as you doubtless expected to discover."

But scarcely were these words spoken, when one of the servants of the house made her appearance, and Mr. Redcliffe at once closed the lid of the box, before she had an opportunity of catching a glimpse of its contents.

"If you please, sir," she said, "a young lady is inquiring for you. She gives the name of Miss Eveleen O'Brien."

"Let her be shown up," responded Mr. Redcliffe, in that curt manner with which he was frequently accustomed to issue his orders; then, the moment the door was closed behind the servant, he said to Christian, "The arrival of this young person is most opportune. I did not expect her until to-morrow, but she doubtless brings us some important intelligence."

The door again opened, and Eveleen made her appearance. She stopped short on finding that Mr. Redcliffe was not alone, but he hastened to take her hand, saying, in a hurried whisper, "Fear not! this youth is in my confidence. You have fulfilled your promise, you have left that den of infamy, and henceforth you shall find a friend in me."

Eveleen murmured her gratitude, and Mr. Redcliffe, making her sit down, said to her, "Now, Miss O'Brien, have the goodness to communicate whatsoever you may have to impart."

"I have succeeded in discovering, sir," responded the young Irish girl, "that for the last six days the establishment has been busy in making up certain elegant dresses which are exact counterparts of others previously made for the Duchess of Marchmont. As much secrecy has been observed as Madame Angelique could possibly maintain in

the matter, but as you may suppose, the affair has created no little surprise amongst the girls engaged in the work. It is very certain that the Duchess of Marchmont herself did not order these counterparts, because instructions have been issued to abstain from the slightest allusion thereto in her Grace's presence the next time her Grace visits the establishment."

"And do you happen to have seen these dresses?" inquired Mr. Redcliffe.

"Oh, yes," responded Eveleen, "for inasmuch as the hands were so busy, I volunteered to render Madame Angeline a little assistance, and it was by these means that I got amongst the workwomen and discovered what I have told you."

"There is the box, Miss O'Brien," said Mr. Redcliffe; "have the kindness to examine its contents."

Eveleen did as she was desired, and at once pronounced the dresses to be precisely the same as those which she had seen making up as the duplicates of the costumes originally fashioned to the order of the Duchess of Marchmont.

Christian was bewildered by all that he thus heard, but Mr. Redcliffe threw upon him a significant look, as much as to imply that he was not altogether so much at a loss to fathom the mystery; then again turning to Miss O'Brien, he said, "One of your companions — Lettice Rodney, I think her name is — has either left you, or is going to leave?"

"She has already left, sir," answered Eveleen; "she went away the first thing this morning. She did not say whither she was going, nor how long she should be absent."

"I know whither she is going," responded Mr. Redcliffe. "Now, Christian, you must take your departure, but before you go I have a few words to say to you." Then drawing the youth aside, he whisperingly went on to observe, "To-morrow morning you leave for Oaklands. I also shall repair into that neighbourhood in the course of to-morrow. At a distance of about two miles thence, on the Winchester road, there is a turnpike. If you can possibly manage to meet me there on Saturday next, at three o'clock in the afternoon, I shall be glad to see you. But if not, then for each successive day, at the same hour, shall I be sauntering on the spot, until you make your appearance. Take care and use all

possible circumspection; watch well the proceedings of the duke, but beware how you excite suspicion."

Having given these instructions, Mr. Redcliffe directed Christian to cord up the box again, while he himself resealed the packet containing the key, impressing it with a blank stamp which he had in his possession. Our young hero then took his departure, bearing the box with him to Marchmont House in Belgrave Square.

When he was gone, Mr. Redcliffe bade Eveleen excuse him for a few minutes, and he descended to Mrs. Macaulay's parlour. It was now about half-past nine o'clock, and the worthy woman was quietly and comfortably supping off the remainder of a pigeon pie which had been served up at Mr. Redcliffe's dinner-table. She was therefore for a moment discomfited when that gentleman, having knocked at her door, immediately entered before she had even time to say "Come in."

But Mrs. Macaulay was by no means the woman to be long thrown off her guard, and rising from her seat, she put on her very best smiles, cast a glance at the mirror to assure herself that her cap with pink ribbons sat properly on her head, and exclaimed, "Well, Mr. Redcliffe, this is an honour. It's the first time that you have entered my parlour since the day you took my lodgings. But pray sit down, sir. You see I am just picking a little bit. The fact is, my dear sir, I had two pigeon pies made, — one for you, and one for myself —"

"And I wish you a very excellent appetite, my dear madam," said Mr. Redcliffe, as he took a chair.

Here were both joy and surprise for Mrs. Macaulay. He either believed her tale of the duplicate pies, or else, with the kindest consideration, he affected to believe it, and whichever were the case, it was all the same to the worthy woman. And then, too, he had addressed her so familiarly, — "My dear madam!" It was the first time he had ever thus spoken to her; the first time he had ever used the word "dear" epithetically in respect to herself. A suspicion flashed to Mrs. Macaulay's mind. Could he possibly mean matrimony? Had the cap and pink ribbons which became her so well achieved a conquest? Well, certainly she was very lonely, and Mr. Redcliffe was enormously rich; he also was lonely, and what could be more natural than that he

should make her an offer? What more natural than that she should accept it?

All these ideas crowded one upon another through the ingenious brain of Mrs. Macaulay; she smiled and simpered, rose from her seat, produced a bottle of wine (that at one and three from the oilman's in the next street), and was even about to invite Mr. Redcliffe to sup off his own pie, when he waved his hand in deprecation of these preparatives, and proceeded to explain himself.

"The fact is, my dear madam," he said, choosing to be civil in order to conciliate her, as it was rather a delicate boon he was about to supplicate at her hands, "you can render me a service."

Here Mrs. Macaulay's countenance suddenly became grave, as the hope of matrimony vanished from her mind in an instant.

"But a service, be it understood," proceeded Mr. Redcliffe, "for which I am prepared to pay liberally."

Here Mrs. Macaulay's countenance suddenly brightened up again, for the idea of payment was always a welcome one, and the assurance of liberality in making it was at all events to a certain degree a salve for the feelings that had just been wounded by disappointment.

"I am sure," she said, "that any service I could render Mr. Redcliffe shall be cheerfully performed, and I know very well, my dear sir, that you are generous in your recompenses."

"A few words will suffice for explanation," said Mr. Redcliffe. "Accident has enabled me to rescue a young woman from a position into which villainy inveigled her. She is genteel and well educated, and I am in hopes of being shortly enabled to restore her to the bosom of her family. But in the meantime I have business of my own to attend to, and which will to-morrow take me out of town, for I know not exactly how long. Now, I must provide Miss O'Brien — for that is her name — with a home."

"And I am sure, sir," Mrs. Macaulay hastened to exclaim, "she can have a comfortable home here. I will be like a mother to her, — anything for your sake, and to give you pleasure."

"Very good, Mrs. Macaulay," observed Redcliffe: "then the matter is settled. Trust to my liberality for your recom-

pense. Watch over this young woman, let her go out as little as possible, and never alone. If her abode be discovered, attempts may be made to inveigle her away, or perhaps to carry her off by force. If when I return I find that she has gone, I shall ascribe all the fault to you, but if she be still with you, your reward shall be munificent. You understand me? Perhaps I ought to add, for your own satisfaction, that this young woman is nothing more to me than an object of sympathy and of Christian charity."

"Oh, dear me, sir," cried Mrs. Macaulay, "it is by no means necessary for you to give me such an assurance! Your character is quite sufficient as a guarantee in that respect. Let the dear creature be introduced to me, and I will treat her with the utmost kindness."

"She will want clothes and pocket-money," continued Mr. Redcliffe, "for inasmuch as she has fled from the place where she has been living, she has brought nothing with her. See that all her wants be attended to."

Thus speaking, Mr. Redcliffe flung some bank-notes upon the table, and hastening up-stairs, speedily reappeared with Eveleen, whom he presented to Mrs. Macaulay.

Meanwhile Christian Ashton had returned to Marchmont House, and according to the instructions he had received from his ducal employer, he labelled the box in his own name. His preparations for departure in the morning being made, he soon retired to rest. The image of the beautiful Miss Vincent continued uppermost in his mind, as indeed it had done ever since he beheld her a few nights previously. Three whole days had now elapsed since then, and he had longed to call at Mr. Chubb's on some pretext in order to see her again, but he had not dared to do so, inasmuch as a fitting excuse was wanting. The fact is, Christian was in love with the charming Miss Vincent, though he did not comprehend the state of his own feelings, nor for a moment suspect the real truth.

The morning dawned upon a night of dreams, in which the image of that fair girl was ever prominent, and having received a supply of money from Mr. Calvert, the duke's steward, Christian took his departure by the coach for Oaklands, the deal box being amongst his own luggage. It was about two in the afternoon that the coach set him down at the porter's lodge at the entrance of the long sweep of

avenue which led through the spacious park. The trees in this January season were denuded of their leaves, but nevertheless, to one who had just arrived from that brick and mortar wilderness which constitutes London, the aspect of the spacious domain, with the antique-looking mansion on an eminence in the centre, was cheerful and refreshing. The porter's son — a stalwart lad of about eighteen — shouldered Christian's luggage, and led the way up to the mansion, where our young hero was at once installed in the chamber which he was to occupy. Here, as at Marchmont House, he was to take his meals in the steward's room, and thus there was to be no change in the actual comforts of his position in the duke's employment.

Having notified his arrival to the Duke of Marchmont, he was sent for in the course of the afternoon into his Grace's presence, and was immediately questioned in respect to the box. He replied that he had brought it with him, and handed the duke the little packet containing the key.

"You have faithfully executed my instructions," said his Grace, "and I am well pleased with you. No questions were asked in London about the box, — I mean by the servants at Marchmont House?"

"None, my lord," replied Christian.

"Good," said the duke. "Keep the box for a day or two in your room, and I will then let you know how to dispose of it. Ah! by the bye, Christian, your time will be pretty much your own at Oaklands, for as I have come hither to enjoy myself, I do not mean to be troubled more than I can help with correspondence and so forth."

Christian bowed and withdrew. He presently learned that the Honourable Mr. Stanhope was at Oaklands, but that there were no other guests. He also learned, in a casual manner from the steward, that it was very seldom the Duke of Marchmont paid Oaklands a visit, — his Grace generally giving the preference to country-seats which he possessed in other counties.

"But this," said Mr. Purvis, the steward, "is scarcely to be wondered at, when we consider the painful impression which the tragedy that took place here seventeen or eighteen years ago was but too well calculated to make upon his Grace's mind, — an impression which could scarcely wear off altogether, even at this distance of time. You see, Mr.

Ashton," continued the steward, who was an old man and disposed to be garrulous, "it was not altogether so much the late duke's death — he was murdered, you know, poor man! — that so cruelly afflicted his present Grace, but it was the circumstance that this murder was perpetrated by his Grace's own brother."

"I have read the sorrowful account," said Christian, "and it much shocked me. Have any tidings ever been received of Mr. Bertram Vivian, who committed the murder?"

"None," answered old Purvis. "Of course Mr. Bertram went off at once with the duchess, — I dare say to America, where he had been before, and it is to be supposed they took another name, and did all they could to conceal themselves."

"Were you here at the time of the tragedy?" inquired Christian.

"Yes, I was indeed," responded the old man, shaking his head mournfully. "I was butler then, and it was me and our late duke's own valet — Leachley by name — who discovered the body of our poor master. One of these days I will take and show you the spot. Ah! Mr. Ashton, it was a shocking thing, — a very shocking thing. Of all the servants who were here at the time, I am the only one that now remains. The others have got scattered abroad in one way or another; some risen in the world, some married, — in short, I don't know how it has been, but I am the only one left. Ah! talking of Leachley, the late duke's valet, he married a farmer's daughter about a dozen miles from here, and when the old man died, he took the farm. He has got on well. I see him sometimes; he rides over to the old place to pay me a visit. It's dull enough, I can assure you, accustomed as I was, for so long a period of my life, to have the family here for at least half of every year, and such gaieties and festivities."

"And was the Duchess Eliza very beautiful?" inquired Christian.

"Beautiful?" said the old man; "it is scarcely the word. She was the loveliest creature I ever set eyes upon. But ah! how wicked of her to lose herself with Mr. Bertram, though it did appear they had loved each other before her marriage with the duke. These are sad topics to converse upon, and yet I don't know how it is, Mr. Ashton, but the

saddest topics are sometimes those which one likes to talk of most. Ah, by the bye, I forgot to tell you — speaking of the servants who were here at the time — that there was one young woman, her name was Jane, she was her Grace's principal lady's-maid, she loved her Grace dearly, and when it all took place, the poor creature showed signs of going mad. She did go mad, too, a short time after the inquest, and was sent home to her friends. I never heard what became of her, but I should have liked to know, poor thing."

Again the old butler paused and shook his head gloomily.

"But was it quite certain, after all," inquired Christian, "that the Duchess Eliza was guilty in respect to Mr. Bertram Vivian? For I remember to have read in the account which accidentally fell into my hands a little while back —"

"Ah! I think I know to what you allude, Mr. Ashton," interrupted the old steward. "Yes, the late duke did proclaim his wife's innocence, did declare that he had wronged her, and he dispersed us all about in search of her when she fled from the house. For the moment we rejoiced at the idea of her Grace's innocence, for she was beloved by us all. But then came the murder, and who could have murdered the duke but Bertram Vivian? And why should he have murdered him, if not to possess himself of his wife? And why should both have disappeared and never since have been heard of? Is it not clear that they fled together? And if that was the case, must they not have been previously too intimate? Besides, it appeared in the newspapers that the duke said he had wronged his wife, and she must have seen it, and if she was innocent would she not have come forward?"

"True," said Christian, with mournfulness of tone and look, for in the natural magnanimity of his character and in the chivalric generosity of his disposition, he would much rather have believed that the beautiful Duchess Eliza, to whose name so sad a romantic interest attached itself, was really innocent.

"Yes, yes; she was guilty," proceeded the old steward; "there can be no doubt about it. I don't know what it was that made the poor duke suddenly think otherwise, but I do know that the present duke behaved most admirably in the matter, and did all he could to soften down his uncle's feelings and effect a reconciliation. Ah! you should have

seen his Grace — I mean the present duke — when he gave his evidence at the inquest, — how he was overcome by his feelings, for he loved his brother Bertram dearly. Ah! when I think of it, it brings tears into my eyes. But the evidence was too convincing. The dog, you know, had torn off a piece of the murderer's coat, which was proved to have been that of Mr. Bertram. And then, too, there was the dagger — It is still here at Oaklands, Mr. Ashton," added the steward, in a low voice, "and one of these days I will show it to you."

When Christian was again alone, he thought to himself what a pity it was that the Duke of Marchmont should have become so changed from the admirable character he appeared to have been at the time of the tragedy. Then, as all accounts concurred in representing, he exhibited the most generous feelings and the most magnanimous disposition, but now how different was he, — darkly and treacherously compassing the ruin of the beautiful and virtuous woman whom he had sworn at the altar to love, cherish, and protect! Christian was shocked when he reflected on the contrast between the man of the time of the tragedy, and the man of the present day.

On the following morning Purvis, the steward, accompanied Christian in a ramble through the grounds. The old man had never been married, and had no relations on the face of the earth, — at least not to his knowledge. He possessed a kindly disposition, and easily attached himself to any one whom he had reason to esteem. He had already taken a fancy to Christian, was pleased with the youth's manners, and gratified by the attention with which his garrulity was listened to. Leaning on our young hero's arm, he walked with him through the grounds, pointing out particular spots of interest. He then led him along the road by the side of which the duke's corpse was discovered, and he indicated the very pond on the edge of which the unfortunate nobleman had been thus found, with his face downward, one of his hands in the water, and the dagger sticking in his back. Christian shuddered, and the steward perceived that he thus trembled with horror.

"The country people in these parts," said old Purvis, "will not, if they can avoid it, pass this spot after dusk. They say, Mr. Ashton, that a strange unearthly shape has

been seen moving roundabout the pond, and that the low howlings of a dog have been heard. Of course I don't believe it myself; I am not superstitious, and yet if ever the dead did walk, the murder of the poor duke was horrible enough to make his restless spirit return to the scene of so foul an assassination."

The old man and our young hero retraced their way slowly toward the mansion, on approaching which they perceived the Honourable Mr. Stanhope walking with the duchess in the grounds. Christian glanced toward the steward, to see whether the spectacle produced any effect upon him, but Purvis, suspecting no evil, took it quite as a matter of course, and therefore Christian made no remark.

It was about half-past ten in the evening that our hero retired to his chamber somewhat fatigued, as he had rambled about, either with the old steward or else alone, for the greater portion of the day. He was beginning to undress himself, when he heard the door gently open, and the Duke of Marchmont made his appearance.

"Ah! I am just in time," said his Grace, closing the door behind him, "to prevent you from getting to bed. I want you to do me a little service to-night. What it is I will explain presently. In about an hour I will return. Light your fire — I see that it is laid in the grate — and amuse yourself with a book till I come back to you."

Having thus spoken, the Duke of Marchmont retired, and Christian could not help associating the as yet unexplained service with the box containing the counterpart dresses. He lighted the fire. He had now no longer the least inclination for sleep; he was anxious to ascertain the next step that was to be taken in the conspiracy wherein the duke was embarked, but which he himself was secretly studying, in connection with Redcliffe, to frustrate. He took up a volume, and whiled away the time until close upon midnight, when the door again opened and the Duke of Marchmont made his appearance. His Grace was enveloped in a cloak and had his hat on; it was therefore evident he was going out somewhere.

"Now, my young friend," he said, patting Christian familiarly on the back, and speaking to him also in a more familiar manner than he had ever yet adopted toward his young secretary, "you are to do me the service I require.

I see that I can trust you in everything, as indeed I ought to be enabled to do, for a secretary, you know, is always a confidential person, and from whom an employer is not disposed to keep things secret. Besides, you displayed so much discretion in the way you managed the little business I entrusted to you previous to my departure from London that, comparatively trifling though it were, the result has been to win for you my esteem. I think I told you, Christian," continued the Duke of Marchmont, now affecting to speak in a careless, offhand manner, "that the box contains certain little presents which I am anxious to make, and they are for the principal tenants' wives and daughters on my estates. I mean to surprise some of them, so that they sha'n't know from whom the things come, It is a freak of mine, and I have my own way of carrying it out. Do you understand?"

"Yes, my lord," answered Christian, preserving his countenance as changeless as possible. "It is for your Grace to give your orders, and I am ready to obey them."

"You are going a little distance with me," proceeded Marchmont, "and I must trouble you to bring the box along with you. It is not very heavy. Indeed it only contains gown pieces of silk and muslin, a few shawls, caps, and cambric pocket handkerchiefs, and that kind of trifles that Madame Angelique can supply as tastefully as she can richer and costlier things."

Christian knew that Marchmont was giving utterance to as complete a tissue of falsehoods as ever were unblushingly poured forth. He, however, said not a word, but hastily putting on an upper coat and his hat, shouldered the box, having previously torn off the label in compliance with a hint to that effect on the part of his Grace. The duke extinguished the candle that was burning in the room, whence he led the way, and conducted Christian to the private staircase in another part of the spacious building. This they descended; the duke opened the door at the bottom, by means of a key which he had about him, and they issued forth into the grounds.

The night was dark and windy. No moon was visible on the face of heaven, no stars were twinkling, but sombre clouds were flying fast high overhead. The skeleton branches of the trees were dimly perceptible through the obscurity;

the evergreen shrubs, dotting the garden at frequent intervals, looked like human shapes. Through the grounds the duke led the way in silence, Christian carrying the box, and they soon entered upon that very road along which Mr. Purvis, the old steward, had conducted our hero in the morning, and by the side of which was the pond where the fatal tragedy was enacted.

"The night is bitter cold," said the duke, at length breaking silence. "The wind is high, too. You seem to stagger beneath the box?"

"Not at all, my lord," answered Ashton. "But how strangely the wind moans. It really seems as if it were the voice of the dead, or, rather, of the dying."

"Nonsense," ejaculated Marchmont, "the wind is natural enough in its sounds. Never give way to superstitious thoughts."

A silence again ensued, but as they approached the spot where Christian knew the pond was situated, he could not prevent a certain gloomy sensation from creeping over him. It was not that he was naturally superstitious; very far from it, but he had been told by Purvis that the country people of those parts reported strange sights to have been seen and strange noises to have been heard in the neighbourhood of that pond, and that they did not choose to pass it after dusk. But even setting aside these circumstances, Christian knew that a horrible murder had been perpetrated on the brink of that pond, and the consciousness thereof was not calculated to engender very agreeable associations. And now, too, he could not help thinking that it was indelicate to a degree, and indicative of a hardened mind on the part of the Duke of Marchmont, to be threading this very road and passing by that very spot, when evidently engaged in taking some step in the carrying out of a foully designed treachery.

While thus engaged in thought, Christian became aware, by a peculiar turning of the road, that they were now in the close vicinage of the pond, and it was not without a shudder that in a few moments he caught sight of the water which was dimly glimmering in the obscurity of the night. But he said nothing. He felt that if the duke were thus hardened enough to pass the spot when intent on deeds of evil, he himself would not be indelicate enough to make the slightest allusion

to a tragedy which ought to be so memorable in the Marchmont family. He perceived, however, that the duke quickened his pace as he passed by the pond, so that Christian had some little difficulty in keeping up with him, the box on his shoulder forming a resistance to the gushing wind which blew right against it. Marchmont, however, soon slackened his pace again, and at a distance of about a hundred yards beyond the scene of the murder, he struck into a by-lane, Christian following him. A short distance down this lane there appeared a tolerably sized farmhouse, with a little garden in front. The duke opened the gate and passed on to the entrance, with Christian close behind. The obscurity was not too great to prevent our hero from perceiving that the place had a sombre and desolate look. There was the farmyard, but quiet as the grave, and yet the gate had swung back with a din which would have aroused the cackling of geese and ducks, or the barking of a dog, if any were there.

The duke knocked at the door; it was presently opened by an old woman with tottering gait, and whose head shook as if she had the palsy. She carried a light in her hand, and evidently recognizing the duke in a moment, said something which Christian did not catch. His Grace answered her quickly, as if by the very rapidity as well as brevity of his utterance enjoining her to silence, and then he bade Christian deposit the box in the passage. This the youth did, and the duke at once hurried him away from the place.

They now retraced their steps down the lane into the road, — our hero wondering the while for what earthly reason the box could have been taken to that lonely destination. The duke said nothing, and they walked on together. Again they were approaching the pond, but when just within sight of it, an ejaculation burst from our young hero's lips, and under the influence of the sudden feeling which thus smote him, he caught the duke forcibly by the arm.

“Look, look, my lord,” he said; “that shape.”

And sure enough a dark shape was moving in the vicinage of the pond. It was no delusion; it was palpable, — a human form seen through the obscurity, darker than the darkness.

“Ah!” and the duke stopped short.

The next moment the shape thus seen moved away from

the pond around the bend of the road, and was absorbed in the obscurity of the night.

"It is nothing," said the duke, but Christian thought that his Grace spoke in a tone which was more or less troubled. "It is some wayfarer. Let us see."

His Grace proceeded onward at a rapid rate, — Christian keeping up with him. Had the traveller — if it were one — been going at anything like a moderate rate, he must have been overtaken, but no one was to be seen.

"I dare say he has cut across the fields," said the Duke of Marchmont, after awhile relaxing his pace again; then, as if stricken by a sudden thought, he demanded of Christian, "Why were you frightened? What made you clutch me as if in such terror?"

"I beg your Grace's pardon," said our young hero; "I know it was a great liberty on my part —"

"No, no, I did not allude to it in that light," said Marchmont; "you of course could not help it; you were smitten with alarm, and that is the truth of it, eh?"

"I confess that it was so, my lord," rejoined Christian. "The fact is, I walked this way in the morning, and Mr. Purvis, who was with me, pointed out the spot —"

"Ah! and I dare say," exclaimed the duke, "he told you the old gossips' tales about the place. Deeply as I revere the memory of my deceased uncle, yet I am not given, Christian, to superstitious terrors. It is weak and unmanly to yield to them. I counselled you against such influences as we were coming along the road ere now; remember my advice for the future."

A silence ensued, and in a short time the grounds of the mansion were reached.

"I need not say, my young friend," observed the duke, in a low tone, "that our midnight expedition is to be kept entirely secret. Of course you understand this much. You see that I trust you, and you must in every sense render yourself worthy of my confidence. Ah! by the bye, when I think of it, the maid who does out your room may notice the absence of the box. Should she allude to it in your presence, you can easily devise some excuse, — that you sent it back to London by the coach, or off somewhere by the carrier, for some purpose or another, — anything, in short, that comes into your head. It will be a little false-

hood that is venial enough, and will all the more effectually assist the carrying out of my freakish project."

At this moment the door of the secret staircase was reached; the duke opened it by means of the key which he had about him, and wishing Christian "good night," he retired to his own apartment, while our hero sought his chamber to ponder upon all that had occurred, for he certainly felt but little inclination to sleep.

END OF VOLUME XVI.

